



**BENTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
COLUMBIA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT**

JULY 2014

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
EUGENE A. DEPASQUALE - AUDITOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
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EUGENE A. DePASQUALE
AUDITOR GENERAL

The Honorable Tom Corbett
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Mr. Eric LeFevre, Board President
Benton Area School District
600 Green Acres Road
Benton, Pennsylvania 17814

Dear Governor Corbett and Mr. LeFevre:

We conducted a performance audit of the Benton Area School District (District) to determine its compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements). Our audit covered the period November 30, 2011 through February 14, 2014, except as otherwise indicated in the report. Additionally, compliance specific to state subsidies and reimbursements was determined for the school years ended June 30, 2011 and June 30, 2012. Our audit was conducted pursuant to Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, 72 P.S. § 403, and in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Our audit found that the District complied, in all significant respects, with relevant requirements.

We appreciate the District's cooperation during the conduct of the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eugene A. DePasquale".

EUGENE A. DEPASQUALE
Auditor General

July 31, 2014

cc: **BENTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board of School Directors

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Executive Summary

Audit Work

The Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General conducted a performance audit of the Benton Area School District (District) in Columbia County. Our audit sought to answer certain questions regarding the District's compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures and to determine the status of corrective action taken by the District in response to our prior audit recommendations.

Our audit scope covered the period November 30, 2011 through February 14, 2014, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objectives, and methodology section of the report. Compliance specific to state subsidies and reimbursements was determined for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

District Background

The District encompasses approximately 97 square miles. According to 2010 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 5,243. According to District officials, the District provided basic educational services to 712 pupils through the employment of 58 teachers, 27 full-time and part-time support personnel, and six (6) administrators during the 2011-12 school year. The District received \$5,078,352 in state funding in the 2011-12 school year.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the District complied, in all significant respects, with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Our audit resulted in no findings or observations.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and

Observations. With regard to the status of our prior audit recommendations to the Benton Area School District (District) from an audit released on February 24, 2012, we found that the District had taken appropriate corrective action in implementing our recommendations pertaining to District personnel inaccurately reporting membership for children placed in private homes (foster children) and a lack of internal controls over membership data (see page 6).

Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

Scope

What is a school performance audit?

School performance audits allow the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General to determine whether state funds, including school subsidies, are being used according to the purposes and guidelines that govern the use of those funds. Additionally, our audits examine the appropriateness of certain administrative and operational practices at each local education agency (LEA). The results of these audits are shared with LEA management, the Governor, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, 72 P.S. § 403, is not a substitute for the local annual audit required by the Public School Code of 1949, as amended. We conducted our audit in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Our audit covered the period November 30, 2011 through February 14, 2014, except for the verification of professional employee certification, which was performed for the period October 19, 2011 through January 15, 2014.

Regarding state subsidies and reimbursements, our audit covered the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

While all districts have the same school years, some have different fiscal years. Therefore, for the purposes of our audit work and to be consistent with Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) reporting guidelines, we use the term *school year* rather than fiscal year throughout this report. A school year covers the period July 1 to June 30.

Objectives

What is the difference between a finding and an observation?

Our performance audits may contain findings and/or observations related to our audit objectives. Findings describe noncompliance with a statute, regulation, policy, contract, grant requirement, or administrative procedure. Observations are reported when we believe corrective action should be taken to remedy a potential problem not rising to the level of noncompliance with specific criteria.

Performance audits draw conclusions based on an evaluation of sufficient, appropriate evidence. Evidence is measured against criteria, such as laws and defined business practices. Our audit focused on assessing the District's compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. However, as we conducted our audit procedures, we sought to determine answers to the following questions, which serve as our audit objectives:

- ✓ Were professional employees certified for the positions they held?
- ✓ In areas where the District received state subsidies and reimbursements based on pupil membership (e.g., basic education), did it follow applicable laws and procedures?

- ✓ In areas where the District received transportation subsidies, was the District, and any contracted vendors, in compliance with applicable state laws and procedures?
- ✓ Did the District, and any contracted vendors, ensure that current bus drivers were properly qualified, and did they have written policies and procedures governing the hiring of new bus drivers?
- ✓ Were votes made by the District's Board of School Directors free from apparent conflicts of interest?
- ✓ Did the District have sufficient internal controls to ensure that the membership data it reported to PDE through the Pennsylvania Information Management System was complete, accurate, valid, and reliable?
- ✓ Were there any declining fund balances that may pose a risk to the District's fiscal viability?
- ✓ Did the District take appropriate steps to ensure school safety?
- ✓ Did the District have a properly executed and updated Memorandum of Understanding with local law enforcement?
- ✓ Were there any other areas of concern reported by independent auditors, citizens, or other interested parties?
- ✓ Did the District take appropriate corrective action to address recommendations made in our prior audit?

Methodology

Government Auditing Standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our results and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our results and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The District's management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the District is in compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant

What are internal controls?

Internal controls are processes designed by management to provide reasonable assurance of achieving objectives in areas such as:

- Effectiveness and efficiency of operations.
- Relevance and reliability of operational and financial information.
- Compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures.

requirements, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements). In conducting our audit, we obtained an understanding of the District's internal controls, including any information technology controls, as they relate to the District's compliance with relevant requirements that we consider to be significant within the context of our audit objectives. We assessed whether those controls were properly designed and implemented. Any deficiencies in internal controls that were identified during the conduct of our audit and determined to be significant within the context of our audit objectives are included in this report.

In order to properly plan our audit and to guide us in possible audit areas, we performed analytical procedures in the areas of state subsidies and reimbursements, pupil transportation, pupil membership, and comparative financial information.

Our audit examined the following:

- Records pertaining to pupil transportation, pupil membership, bus driver qualifications, professional employee certification, state ethics compliance, financial stability, reimbursement applications, tuition receipts, and deposited state funds.
- Items such as board meeting minutes and policies and procedures.

Additionally, we interviewed select administrators and support personnel associated with the District's operations.

To determine the status of our audit recommendations made in a prior audit report released on February 24, 2012, we performed additional audit procedures targeting the previously reported matters.

Findings and Observations

For the audited period, our audit of the Benton Area School District resulted in no findings or observations.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Benton Area School District (District) released on February 24, 2012, resulted in one (1) finding. The finding pertained to District personnel inaccurately reporting membership for children placed in private homes (foster children) and a lack of internal controls over membership data. As part of our current audit, we determined the status of corrective action taken by the District to implement our prior audit recommendations. We performed audit procedures and interviewed District personnel regarding the prior finding. As shown below, we found that the District did implement our recommendations related to the membership reporting errors and lack of internal controls.

Auditor General Performance Audit Report Released on February 24, 2012

Finding: **Membership Reporting Errors and a Lack of Internal Controls Resulted in the District Not Receiving Its Entitled Reimbursement**

Finding Summary: Our prior audit of the District's pupil membership reports submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for the 2009-10 school year found reporting errors as well as a lack of internal controls. District personnel inaccurately reported the membership for children placed in private homes (foster children). The lack of internal controls resulted in the District failing to reconcile preliminary data reports from PDE, which resulted in incorrect data being reported on the District's Final Summary of Child Accounting Membership Report.

Membership days for children placed in private homes (foster children) were understated by 282 days for full-time kindergarten students and by 282 days for elementary students. The errors resulted in the District being underpaid \$27,584 in Commonwealth-paid tuition for children placed in private homes (foster children).

Recommendations: Our audit finding recommended that the District should:

1. Establish internal controls that include reconciliations of the data that is uploaded into the Pennsylvania Information Management System.
2. Verify that the preliminary reports from PDE are correct, and if they are incorrect, revise and resubmit child accounting data so that the final reports from PDE are correct.

We also recommended that PDE should:

3. Revise all membership reports that have been incorrectly completed and adjust any of the District's reimbursements affected by the errors.

Current Status:

During our current audit, we found that the District did implement our prior recommendations.

As of our current fieldwork completion date, February 14, 2014, PDE had not yet adjusted the District's allocations to resolve the underpayment.

Distribution List

This report was initially distributed to the Superintendent of the District, the Board of School Directors, our website at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us, and the following stakeholders:

The Honorable Tom Corbett
Governor
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Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Carolyn Dumaesq
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This report is a matter of public record and is available online at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us. Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 231 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: news@auditorgen.state.pa.us.