

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Forest Area School District Forest County, Pennsylvania

July 2020



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Eugene A. DePasquale • Auditor General



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**EUGENE A. DePASQUALE
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mrs. Amanda E. Hetrick, Superintendent
Forest Area School District
22318 Route 62, Box 16
Tionesta, Pennsylvania 16353

Mr. Tim Korchak, Board President
Forest Area School District
22318 Route 62, Box 16
Tionesta, Pennsylvania 16353

Dear Mrs. Hetrick and Mr. Korchak:

We have conducted a performance audit of the Forest Area School District (District) for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objective, and methodology section of the report. We evaluated the District's performance in the following areas as further described in the appendix of this report:

- Bus Driver Requirements
- Transportation Operations

We also evaluated the application of best practices in the area of school safety. Due to the sensitive nature of this issue and the need for the results of this review to be confidential, we did not include the results in this report. However, we communicated the results of our review of school safety to District officials, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other appropriate officials as deemed necessary.

The audit was conducted pursuant to Sections 402 and 403 of The Fiscal Code (72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403), and in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Our audit found that the District performed adequately in the bulleted areas listed above.

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

Sincerely,

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

Eugene A. DePasquale
Auditor General

July 24, 2020

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

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Background Information

School Characteristics 2018-19 School Year ^A	
Counties	Forest, Venango & Elk
Total Square Miles	500
Number of School Buildings	2 ¹
Total Teachers	45
Total Full or Part-Time Support Staff	31
Total Administrators	3
Total Enrollment for Most Recent School Year	419
Intermediate Unit Number	6
District Career and Technical School	Venango County Technology Center

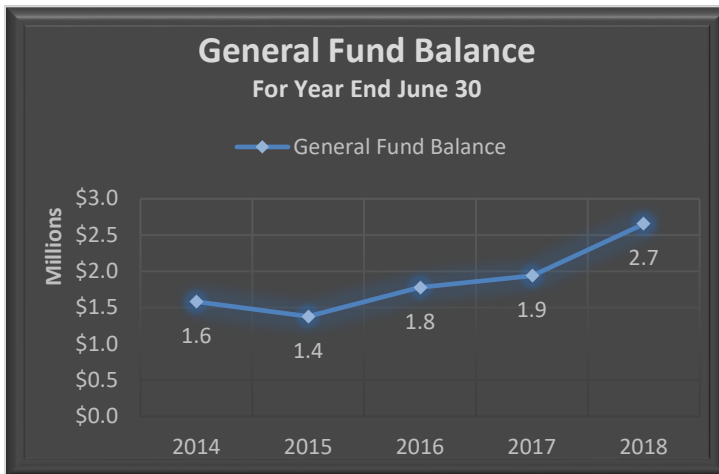
A - Source: Information provided by the District administration and is unaudited.

Mission Statement^A

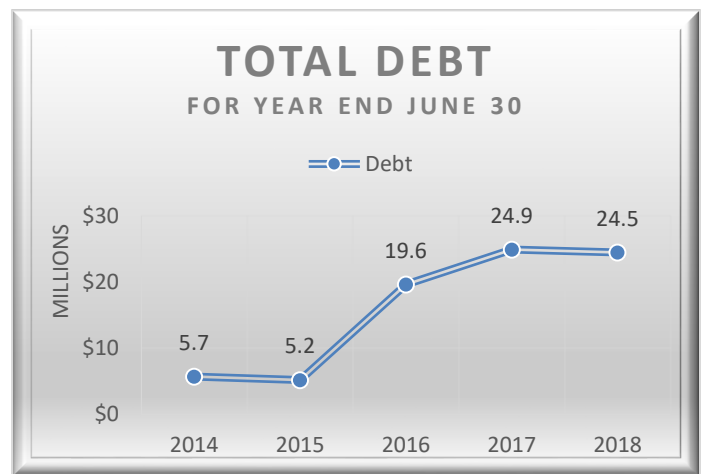
Forest Area School District creates a foundation for life-long learners prepared to excel in a diverse world. **PREPARE TO EXCEL!**

Financial Information

The following pages contain financial information about the Forest Area School District (District) obtained from annual financial data reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and available on PDE's public website. This information was not audited and is presented for **informational purposes only**.



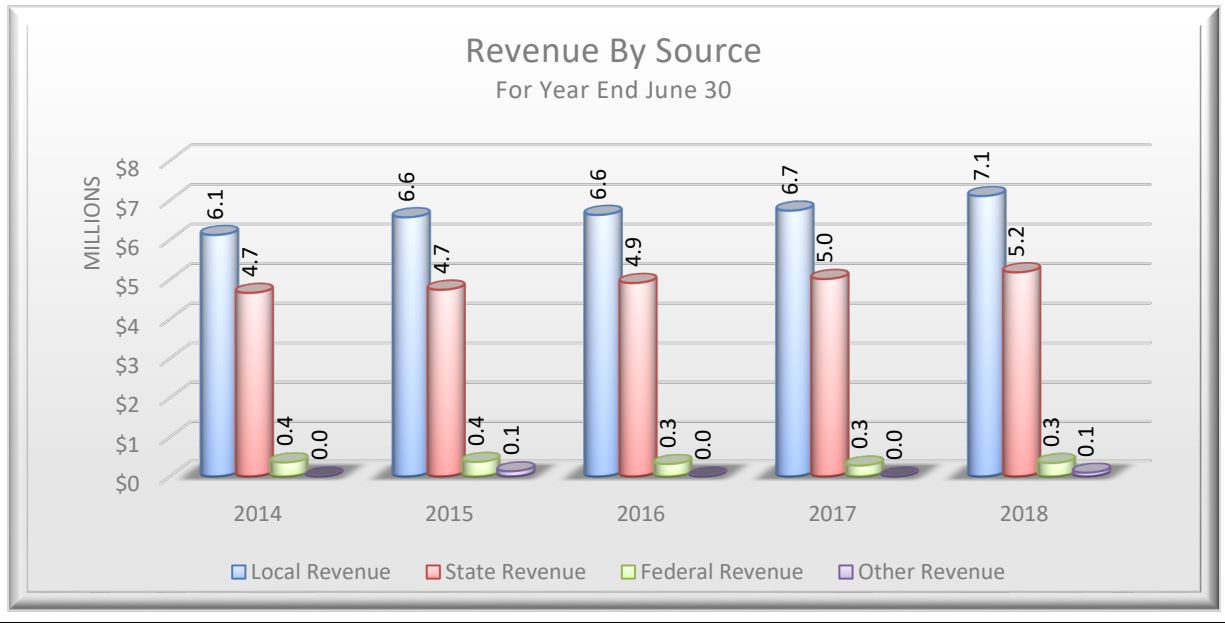
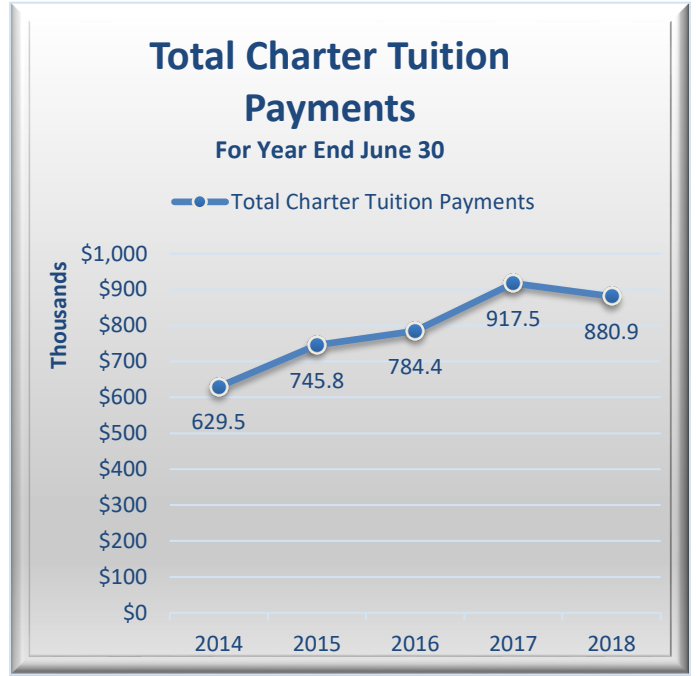
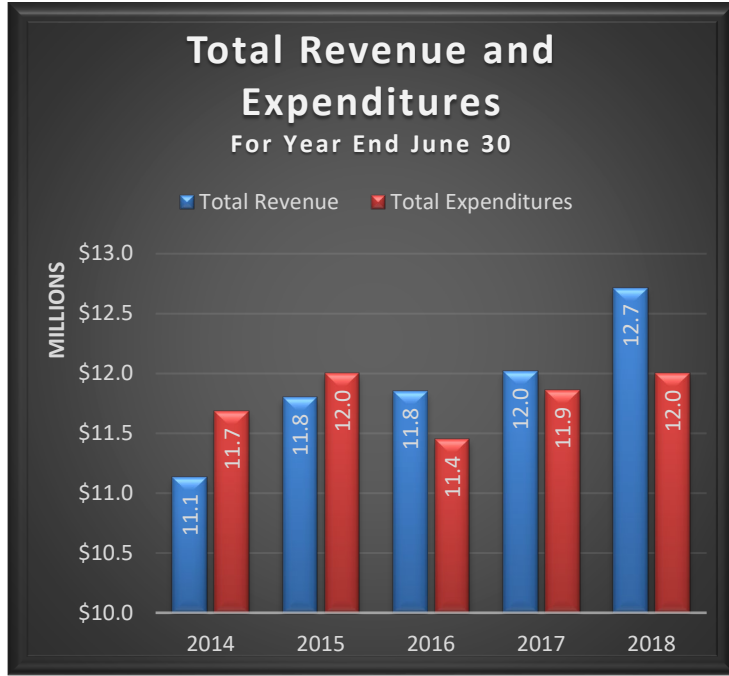
Note: General Fund Balance is comprised of the District's Committed, Assigned and Unassigned Fund Balances.



Note: Total Debt is comprised of Short-Term Borrowing, General Obligation Bonds, Authority Building Obligations, Other Long-Term Debt, Other Post-Employment Benefits, Compensated Absences and Net Pension Liability.

¹ The Forest Area School District is comprised of two buildings (East Forest and West Forest), each building houses grades K through 12. However, academic information in the appendix section of this report is presented as elementary and junior/senior high school for each building.

Financial Information Continued

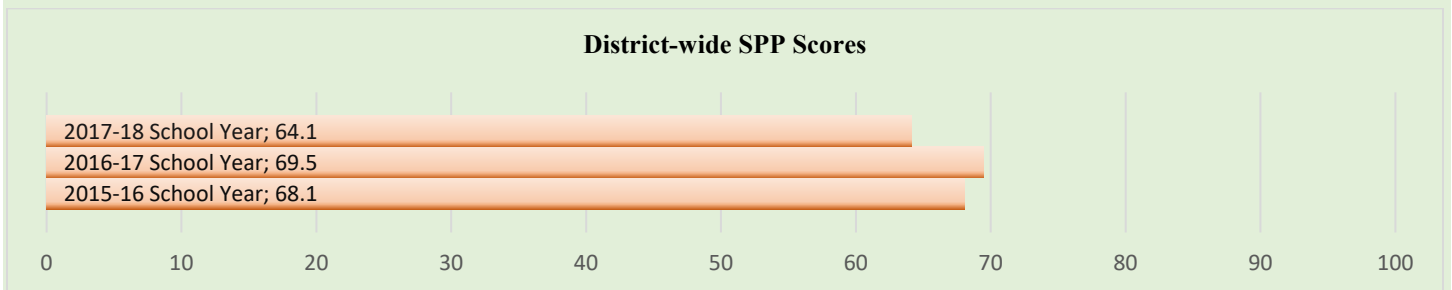


Academic Information

The graphs on the following pages present the District-wide School Performance Profile (SPP) scores, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores, Keystone Exam results, and 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates for the District obtained from PDE's data files for the 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 school years.² The District's individual school building scores are presented in Appendix B. These scores are provided in this audit report for **informational purposes only**, and they were not audited by our Department. Please note that if one of the District's schools did not receive a score in a particular category and year presented below, the school will not be listed in the corresponding graph.³

What is a SPP score?

A SPP score serves as a benchmark for schools to reflect on successes, achievements, and yearly growth. PDE issues a SPP score annually using a 0-100 scale for all school buildings in the Commonwealth, which is calculated based on standardized testing (i.e., PSSA and Keystone exam scores), student improvement, advance course offerings, and attendance and graduation rates. Generally speaking, a SPP score of 70 or above is considered to be a passing rate.⁴



² PDE is the sole source of academic data presented in this report. All academic data was obtained from PDE's publicly available website.

³ PDE's data does not provide any further information regarding the reason a score was not published for a specific school. However, readers can refer to PDE's website for general information regarding the issuance of academic scores.

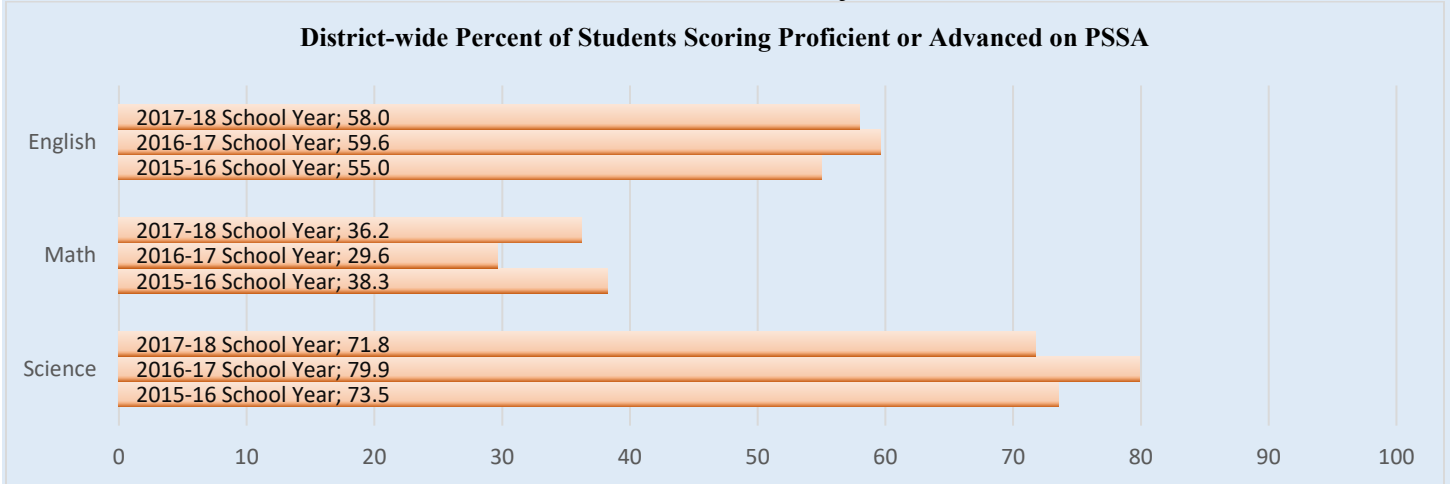
⁴ PDE started issuing a SPP score for all public school buildings beginning with the 2012-13 school year. For the 2014-15 school year, PDE only issued SPP scores for high schools taking the Keystone Exams as scores for elementary and middle scores were put on hold due to changes with PSSA testing. PDE resumed issuing a SPP score for all schools for the 2015-16 school year.

Academic Information Continued

What is the PSSA?

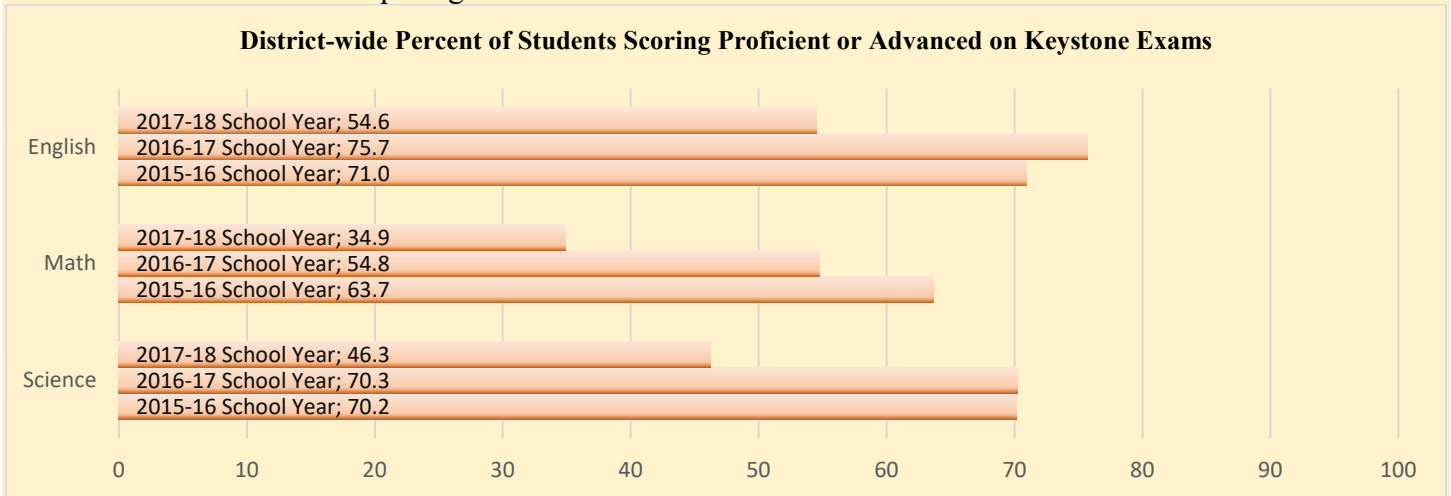
The PSSA is an annual, standardized test given across the Commonwealth to students in grades 3 through 8 in core subject areas, including English, Math and Science. The PSSAs help Pennsylvania meet federal and state requirements and inform instructional practices, as well as provide educators, stakeholders, and policymakers with important information about the state's students and schools.

The 2014-15 school year marked the first year that PSSA testing was aligned to the more rigorous PA Core Standards. The state uses a grading system with scoring ranges that place an individual student's performance into one of four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The state's goal is for students to score Proficient or Advanced on the exam in each subject area.



What is the Keystone Exam?

The Keystone Exam measures student proficiency at the end of specific courses, such as Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. The Keystone Exam was intended to be a graduation requirement starting with the class of 2017, but that requirement has been put on hold until the 2020-21 school year.⁵ In the meantime, the exam is still given as a standardized assessment and results are included in the calculation of SPP scores. The Keystone Exam is scored using the same four performance levels as the PSSAs, and the goal is to score Proficient or Advanced for each course requiring the test.

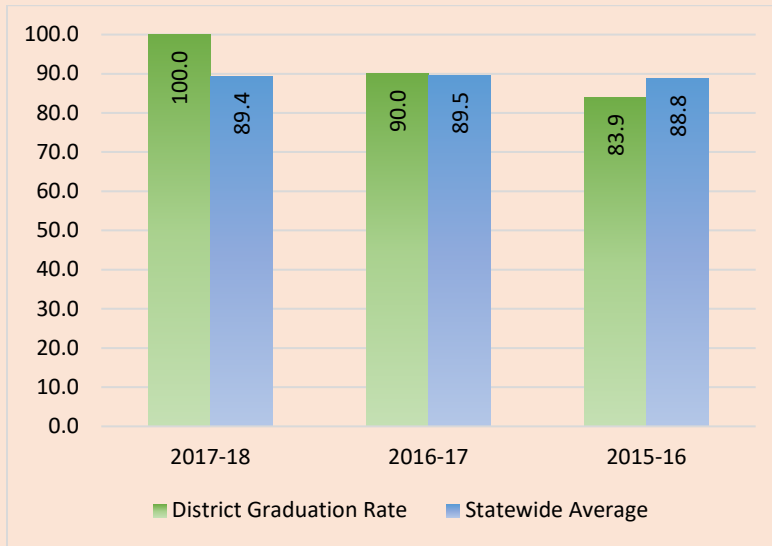


⁵ Act 158 of 2018, effective October 24, 2018, amended the Public School Code to further delay the use of Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement until the 2021-22 school year. See 24 P.S. § 1-121(b)(1).

Academic Information Continued

What is a 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate?

PDE collects enrollment and graduate data for all Pennsylvania public schools, which is used to calculate graduation rates. Cohort graduation rates are a calculation of the percentage of students who have graduated with a regular high school diploma within a designated number of years since the student first entered high school. The rate is determined for a cohort of students who have all entered high school for the first time during the same school year. Data specific to the 4-year cohort graduation rate is presented in the graph below.⁶



⁶ PDE also calculates 5-year and 6-year cohort graduation rates. Please visit PDE's website for additional information:
<http://www.education.pa.gov/Data-and-Statistics/Pages/Cohort-Graduation-Rate.aspx>.

Finding

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

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior Limited Procedures Engagement of the Forest Area School District resulted in no findings or observations.

Appendix A: Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

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 (PDE), and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of Sections 402 and 403 of The Fiscal Code,⁷ is not a substitute for the local annual financial 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. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit.

Scope

Overall, our audit covered the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019. In addition, the scope of each individual audit objective is detailed on the next page.

The Forest Area School District's (District) 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, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements).⁸ In conducting our audit, we obtained an understanding of the District's internal controls, including any information technology controls, if applicable, that we considered 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.

⁷ 72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403.

⁸ 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; and compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, and administrative procedures.

Objectives/Methodology

In order to properly plan our audit and to guide us in selecting objectives, we reviewed pertinent laws and regulations, board meeting minutes, annual financial reports, annual budgets, new or amended policies and procedures, and the independent audit report of the District's basic financial statements for the fiscal years July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019. We also determined if the District had key personnel or software vendor changes since the prior audit.

Performance audits draw conclusions based on an evaluation of sufficient, appropriate evidence. Evidence is measured against criteria, such as laws, regulations, third-party studies, and best business practices. Our audit focused on the District's efficiency and effectiveness in the following areas:

- ❖ Bus Driver Requirements
- ❖ Transportation Operations
- ❖ School Safety

As we conducted our audit procedures, we sought to determine answers to the following questions, which served as our audit objectives:

- Did the District ensure that bus drivers transporting District students had the required driver's license, physical exam, training, background checks, and clearances⁹ as outlined in applicable laws?¹⁰ Also, did the District have written policies and procedures governing the hiring of new bus drivers that would, when followed, provide reasonable assurance of compliance with applicable laws?
 - ✓ To address this objective, we assessed the District's internal controls for monitoring and reviewing required bus driver requirements and procedures for being made aware of who is transported students daily. We determined if all drivers were Board of School Directors approved by the District. We randomly selected 10 of the 55 bus drivers transporting District students as of March 12, 2020.¹¹ We reviewed documentation to ensure the District complied with the requirements for bus drivers. Our review of this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.
- Did the District accurately report nonpublic and charter school students transported to PDE, and did the District receive the correct amount of supplemental transportation reimbursement for transporting these students?¹²
 - ✓ To address this objective, we interviewed District personnel to gain an understanding of the District's procedures for obtaining and reporting supplemental transportation data to PDE. We evaluated the District's internal controls over the inputting, processing, and reporting transportation data. We reviewed all 127 charter school students and all 56 nonpublic school students reported by the District as transported during the 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 school years to determine if this data was accurately reported to PDE. We obtained

⁹ Auditors reviewed the required state, federal and child abuse background clearances that the District obtained from the most reliable sources available, including the FBI, the Pennsylvania State Police and the Department of Human Services. However, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of this information, we were unable to assess the reliability or completeness of these third-party databases.

¹⁰ 24 P.S. § 1-111, 23 Pa.C.S. § 6344(a.1), 24 P.S. § 2070.1a *et seq.*, 75 Pa.C.S. §§ 1508.1 and 1509, and 22 Pa. Code Chapter 8.

¹¹ While representative selection is a required factor of audit sampling methodologies, audit sampling methodology was not applied to achieve this test objective, accordingly, the results of this audit procedure are not and should not be projected to the entire population.

¹² See 24 P.S. §§ 13-1361(a), 25-2509.3.

student rosters, individual requests for transportation, and District created student lists to ensure charter school and nonpublic school students were reported accurately and that the District was reimbursed accurately for these students. Our review of this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.

- Did the District comply with requirements in the Public School Code and the Emergency Management Code related to emergency management plans, bullying prevention, memorandums of understanding with local law enforcement, and fire drills?¹³ Also, did the District follow best practices related to physical building security and providing a safe school environment?
 - ✓ To address this objective, we reviewed a variety of documentation including, safety plans, evidence of physical building security assessments, anti-bullying policies, safety committee meeting minutes, and fire drill reporting data. Due to the sensitive nature of school safety, the results of our review of this objective area are not described in our audit report, but they were shared with District officials, PDE's Office of Safe Schools, and other appropriate law enforcement agencies deemed necessary.¹⁴

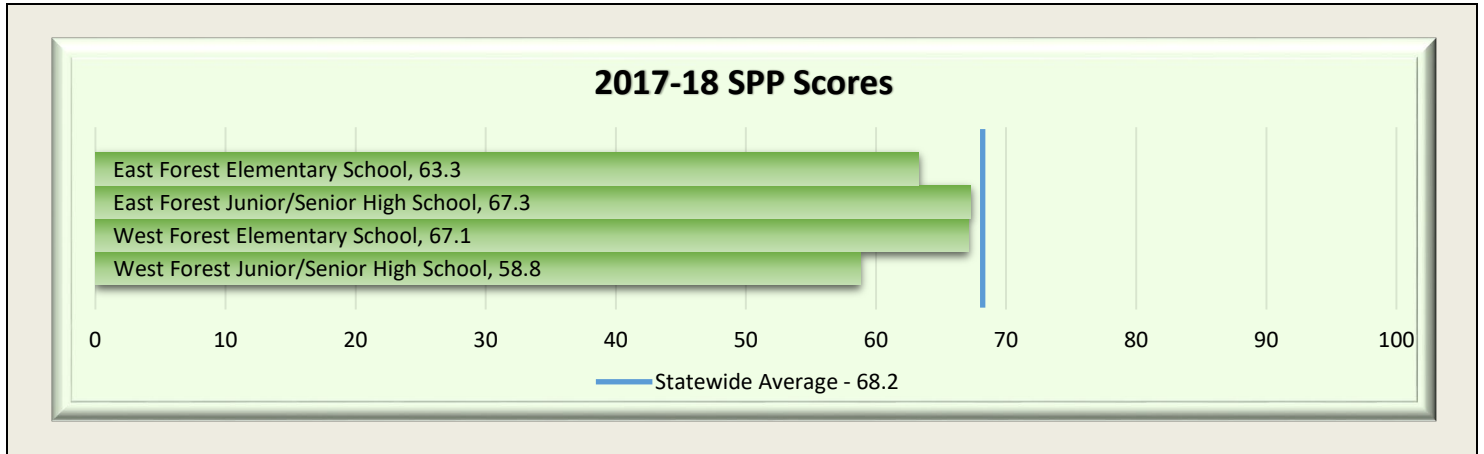
¹³ 24 P.S. § 13-1301-A *et seq.*, 35 Pa.C.S. § 7701, and 24 P.S. § 15-1517.

¹⁴ Other law enforcement agencies include the Pennsylvania State Police, the Attorney General's Office, and local law enforcement with jurisdiction over the District's school buildings.

Appendix B: Academic Detail

Benchmarks noted in the following graphs represent the statewide average of all public school buildings in the Commonwealth that received a score in the category and year noted.¹⁵ Please note that if one of the District's schools did not receive a score in a particular category and year presented below, the school will not be listed in the corresponding graph.¹⁶

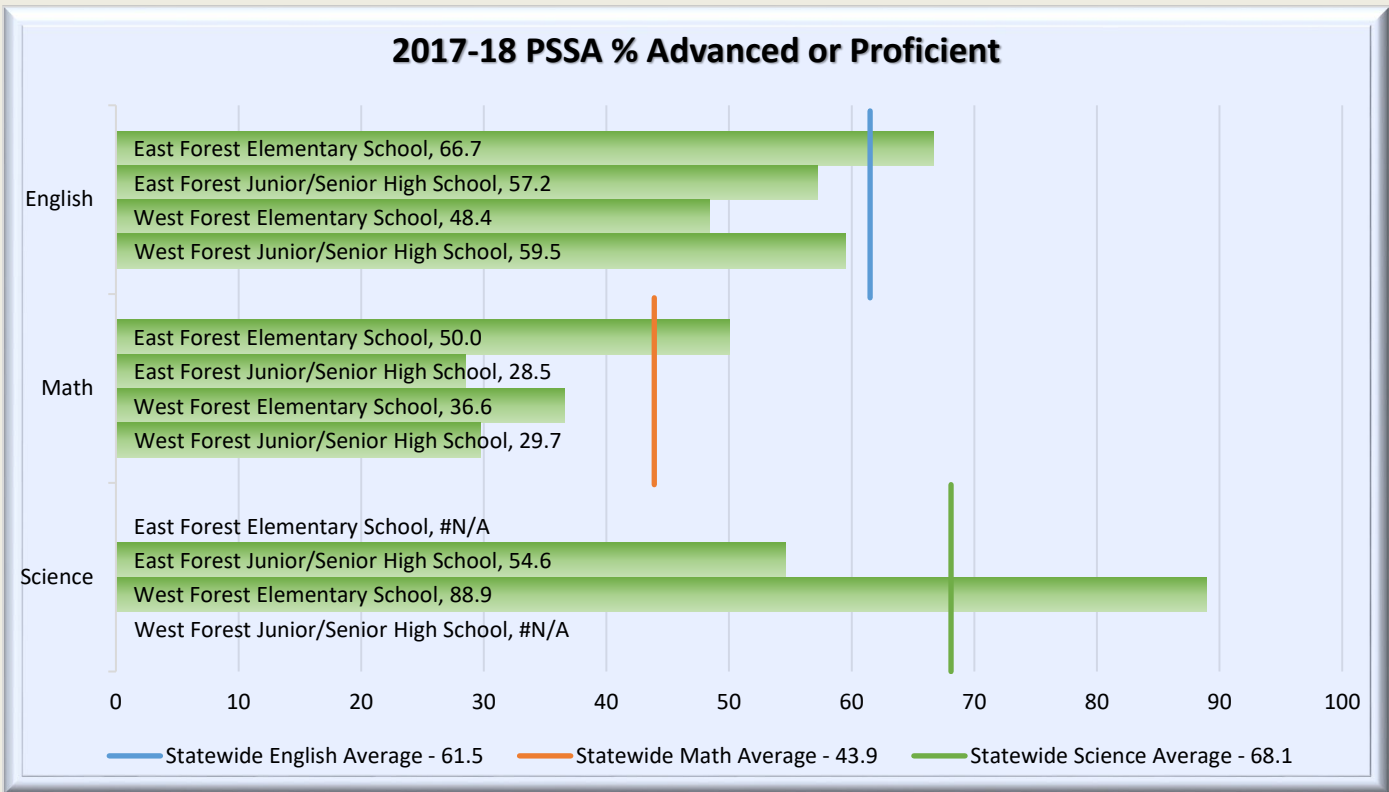
2017-18 Academic Data School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages



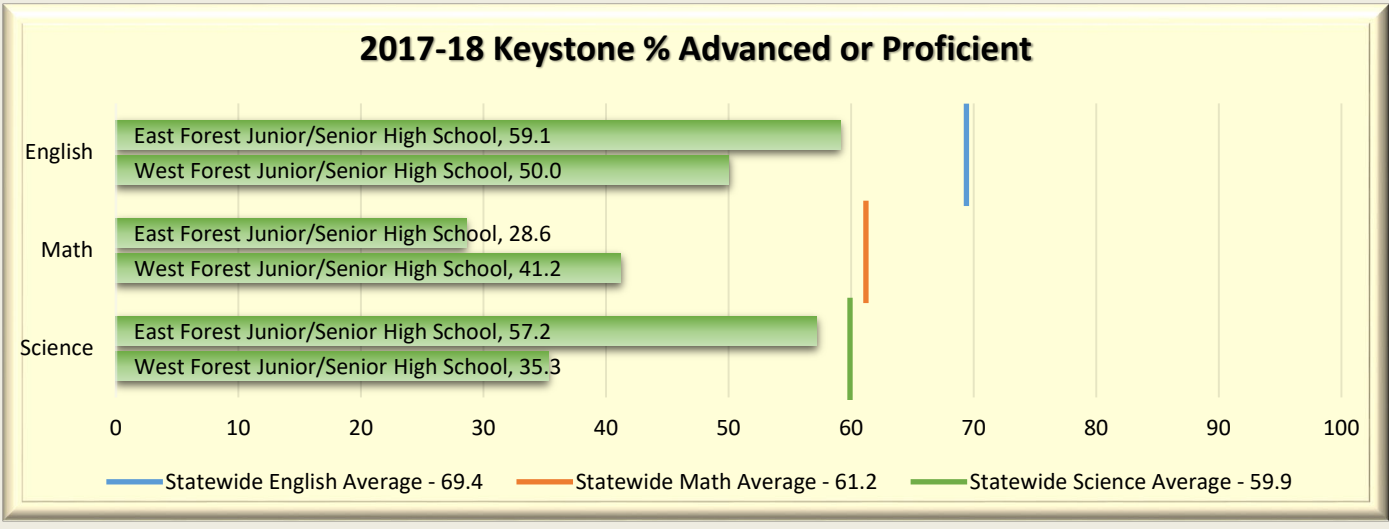
¹⁵ Statewide averages were calculated by our Department based on individual school building scores for all public schools in the Commonwealth, including district schools, charters schools, and cyber charter schools.

¹⁶ PDE's data does not provide any further information regarding the reason a score was not published for a specific school. However, readers can refer to PDE's website for general information regarding the issuance of academic scores.

2017-18 Academic Data
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages (continued)

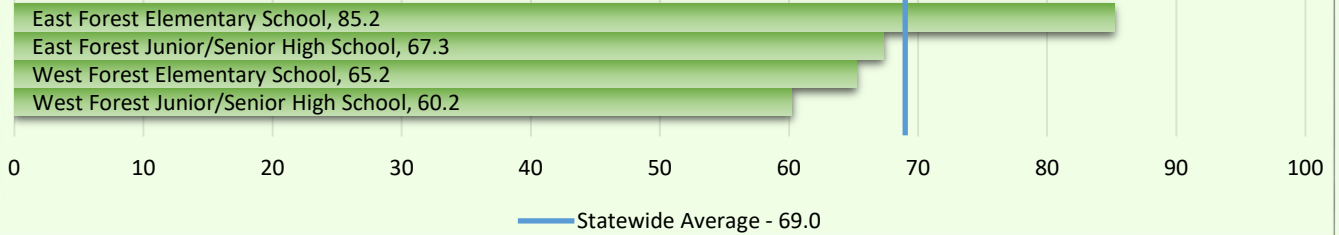


#N/A: No score was given due to the fact that less than 10 students took the test.

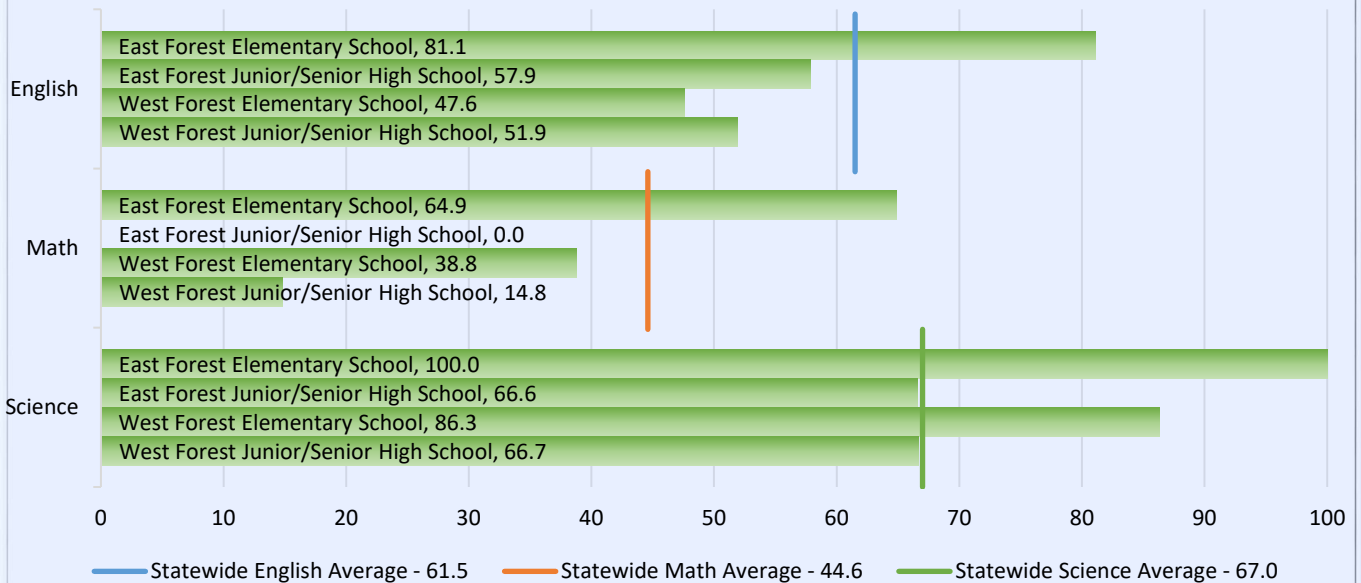


2016-17 Academic Data
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages

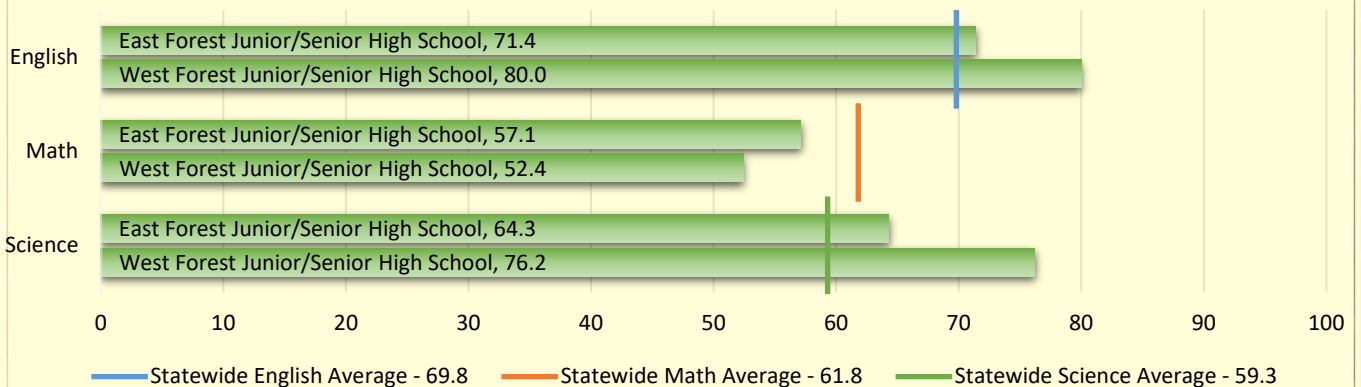
2016-17 SPP Scores



2016-17 PSSA % Advanced or Proficient

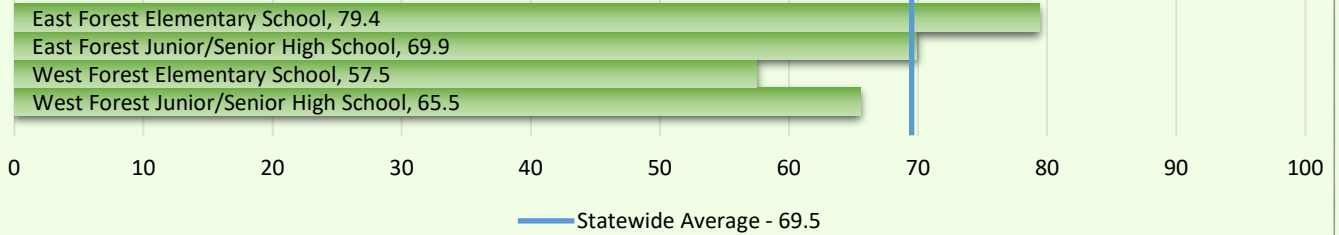


2016-17 Keystone % Advanced or Proficient

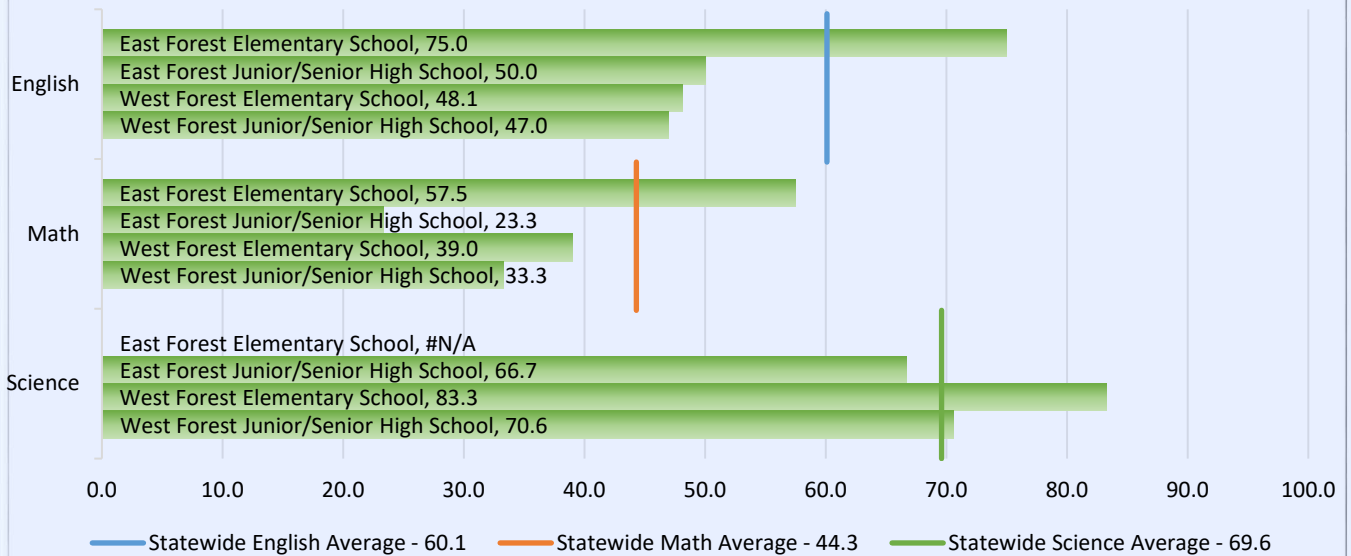


2015-16 Academic Data
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages

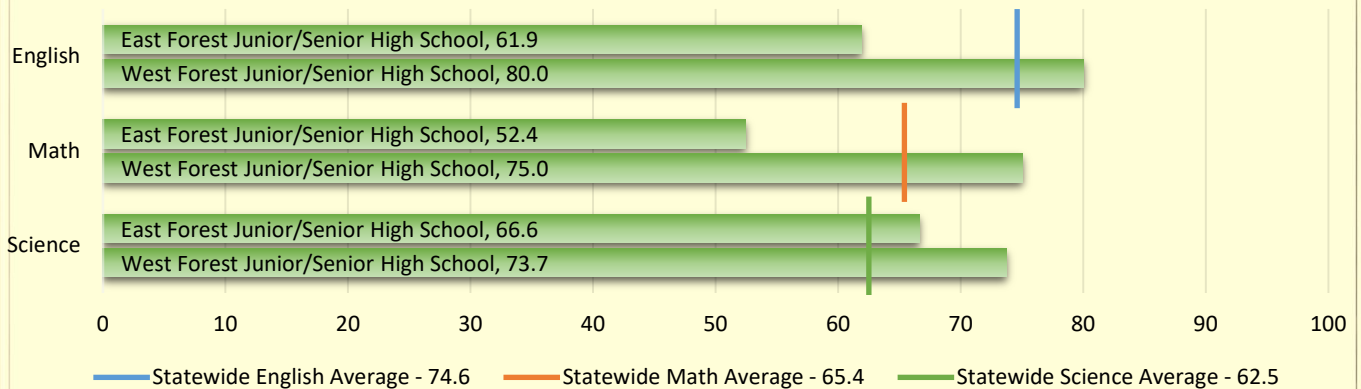
2015-16 SPP Scores



2015-16 PSSA % Advanced or Proficient



2015-16 Keystone % Advanced or Proficient



Distribution List

This report was initially distributed to the Superintendent of the District, the Board of School Directors, and the following stakeholders:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf

Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Pedro A. Rivera

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The Honorable Joe Torsella

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Mr. Nathan Mains

Executive Director
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
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Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

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