

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Leechburg Area School District Armstrong County, Pennsylvania

March 2020



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Eugene A. DePasquale • Auditor General



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018
Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General
Twitter: @PAAuditorGen
www.PaAuditor.gov**

**EUGENE A. DePASQUALE
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Ms. Tiffany Nix, Superintendent
Leechburg Area School District
210 Penn Avenue
Leechburg, Pennsylvania 15656

Mr. Neill Brady, Board President
Leechburg Area School District
210 Penn Avenue
Leechburg, Pennsylvania 15656

Dear Ms. Nix and Mr. Brady:

We have conducted a performance audit of the Leechburg Area School District (District) for the period July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2018, 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:

- Transportation Operations
- Administrator Separations
- Bus Driver Requirements

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

March 24, 2020

cc: LEECHBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT Board of School Directors

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Background Information

School Characteristics 2018-19 School Year ^A	
Counties	Armstrong/Westmoreland
Total Square Miles	20
Number of School Buildings	3
Total Teachers	62
Total Full or Part-Time Support Staff	31
Total Administrators	9
Total Enrollment for Most Recent School Year	790
Intermediate Unit Number	28
District Career and Technical School	Lenape Technical School

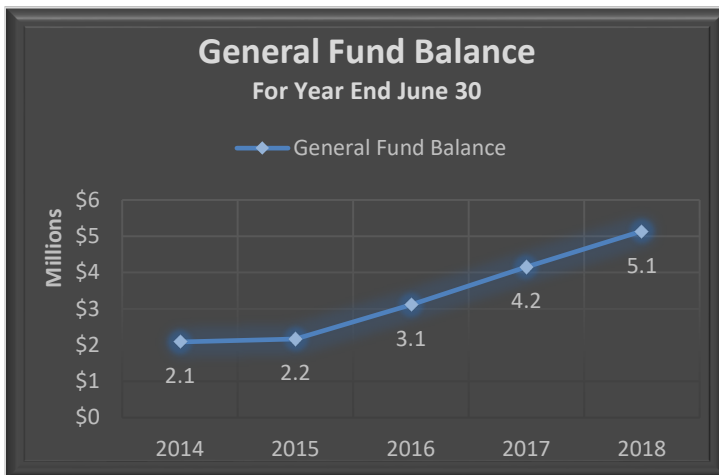
A - Source: Information provided by the District administration and is unaudited.

Mission Statement^A

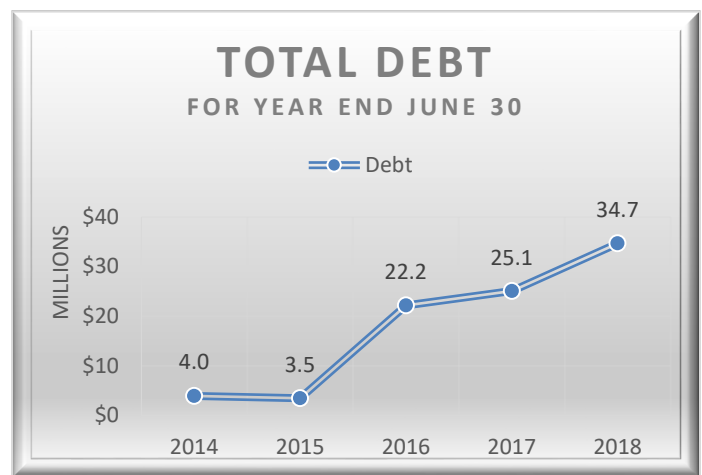
To maximize student learning and achievement by increasing high quality educational opportunities for all students.

Financial Information

The following pages contain financial information about the Leechburg 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**.

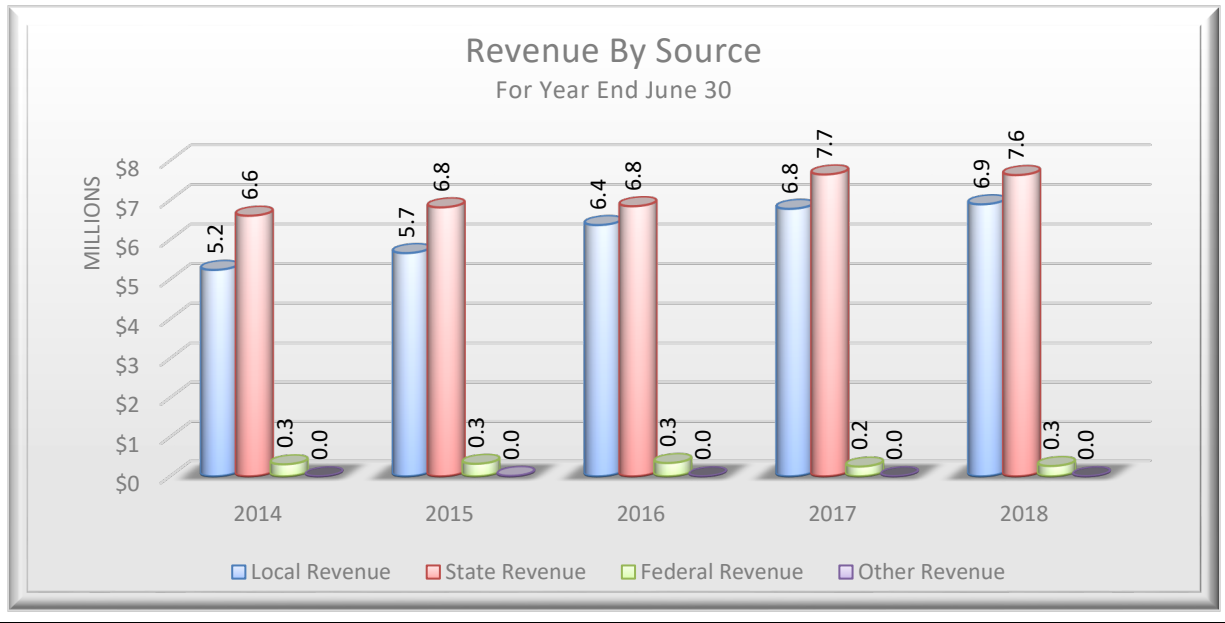
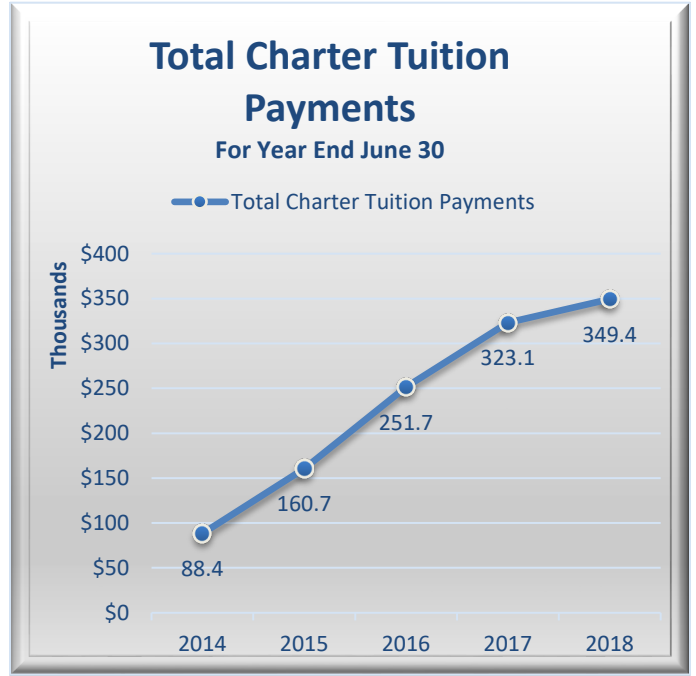
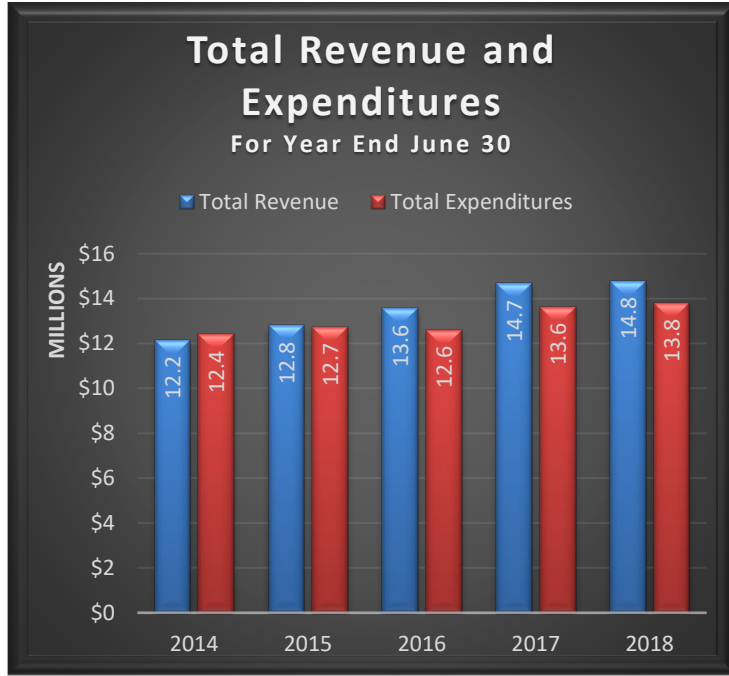


Note: General Fund Balance is comprised of the District's Committed, Assigned and Unassigned Fund Balances.



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.

Financial Information Continued

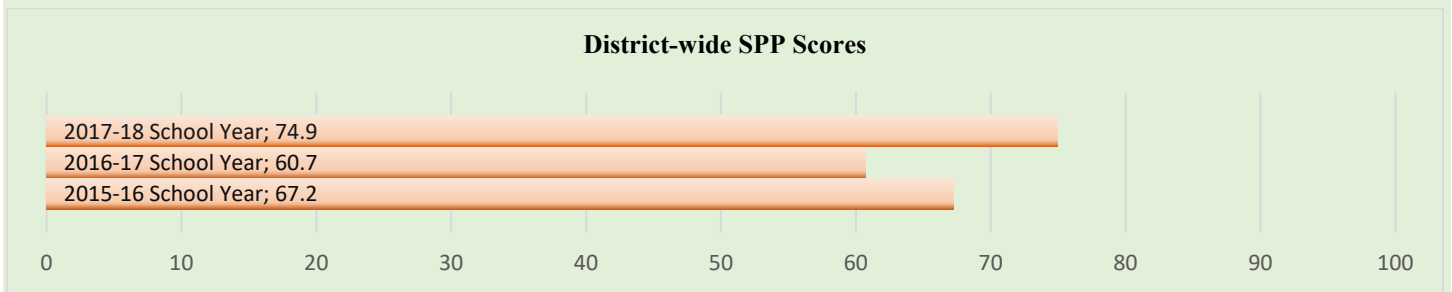


Academic Information

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.¹ 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.²

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.³



¹ PDE is the sole source of academic data presented in this report. All academic data was obtained from PDE's publicly available website.

² 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.

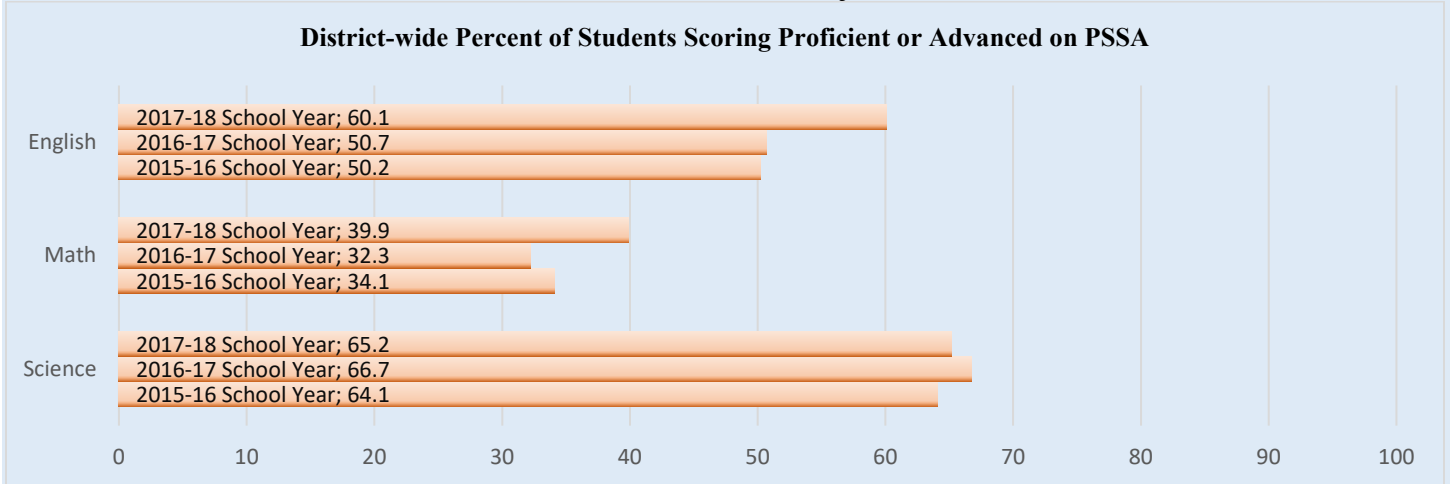
³ PDE started issuing a SPP score for all public school buildings beginning with the 2012-13 school year. For the 2014-15 school year, PDE only issued SPP scores for high schools taking the Keystone Exams as scores for elementary and middle scores were put on hold due to changes with PSSA testing. PDE resumed issuing a SPP score for all schools for the 2015-16 school year.

Academic Information Continued

What is the PSSA?

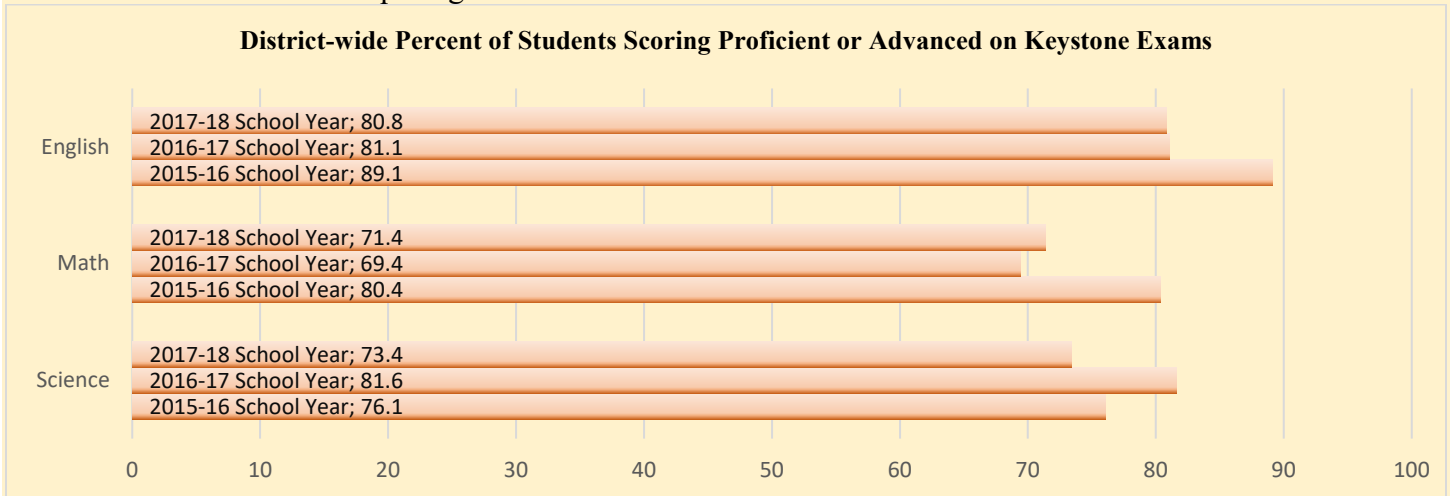
The PSSA is an annual, standardized test given across the Commonwealth to students in grades 3 through 8 in core subject areas, including English, Math and Science. The PSSAs help Pennsylvania meet federal and state requirements and inform instructional practices, as well as provide educators, stakeholders, 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.⁴ 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.

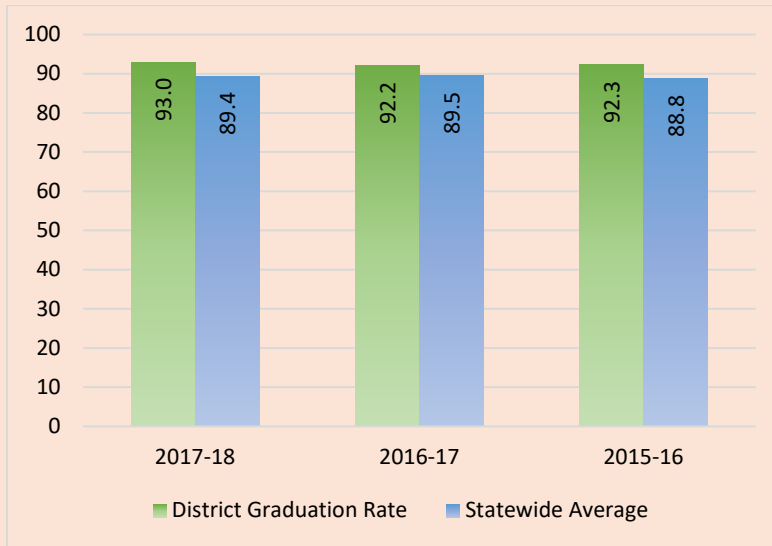


⁴ Act 158 of 2018, effective October 24, 2018, amended the Public School Code to further delay the use of Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement until the 2021-22 school year. See 24 P.S. § 1-121(b)(1).

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.⁵



⁵ 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 Leechburg Area School District resulted in no findings.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Leechburg 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,⁶ 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, 2014 through June 30, 2018. In addition, the scope of each individual audit objective is detailed on the next page.

The Leechburg 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).⁷ 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.

⁶ 72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403.

⁷ 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, 2014 through June 30, 2018. 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:

- ❖ Transportation Operations
- ❖ Administrator Separations
- ❖ Bus Driver Requirements
- ❖ 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 compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing transportation operations, and did the District receive the correct regular transportation reimbursement from the Commonwealth?⁸
 - ✓ To address this objective, we randomly selected 5 of the 15 vehicles reported to PDE as transporting students during the 2016-17 school year.⁹ For the vehicles selected, we obtained odometer readings to verify the accuracy of miles with and without students reported to PDE. We also obtained District school calendars and vehicle invoices to ensure that the number of days that vehicles were used to transport students was accurately reported to PDE. The results of our review of this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.
- Did the District ensure that all individually contracted employees who separated employment from the District were compensated in accordance with their contract? Also, did the District comply with the Public School Code¹⁰ and the Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) guidelines when calculating and disbursing final salaries and leave payouts for these contracted employees?
 - ✓ To address this objective, we reviewed the contracts, board meeting minutes, board policies, and payroll records for the two administrators who separated employment from the District during the period July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2018. We reviewed the final payouts to determine that they were calculated correctly. We verified that leave payouts were not reported as eligible wages to PSERS. The results of our review of this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.

⁸ See 24 P.S. §§ 13-1301, 13-1302, 13-1305, 13-1306; 22 Pa. Code Chapter 11.

⁹ While representative selection is a required factor of audit sampling methodologies, audit sample 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 population.

¹⁰ 24 P.S. § 10-1073(e) (2) (v).

- Did the District ensure that bus drivers transporting District students had the required driver’s license, physical exam, training, background checks, and clearances¹¹ as outlined in applicable laws?¹² 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 reviewed all 100 of the bus drivers transporting District students as of January 7, 2020. We reviewed documentation to ensure the District complied with the requirements for bus drivers. We also determined if the District had written policies and procedures governing the hiring of bus drivers and if those procedures, when followed, ensure compliance with bus driver hiring requirements. The results of our review of this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.

- Did the District take actions to ensure it provided a safe school environment?¹³
 - ✓ To address this objective, we reviewed a variety of documentation including, safety plans, training schedules, anti-bullying policies, fire drill documentation and after action reports to assess whether the District had implemented basic safety practices.¹⁴ Due to the sensitive nature of school safety, the results of our review of this objective area are not described in our audit report. The results of our review are shared with District officials, PDE, and other appropriate agencies deemed necessary.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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*.

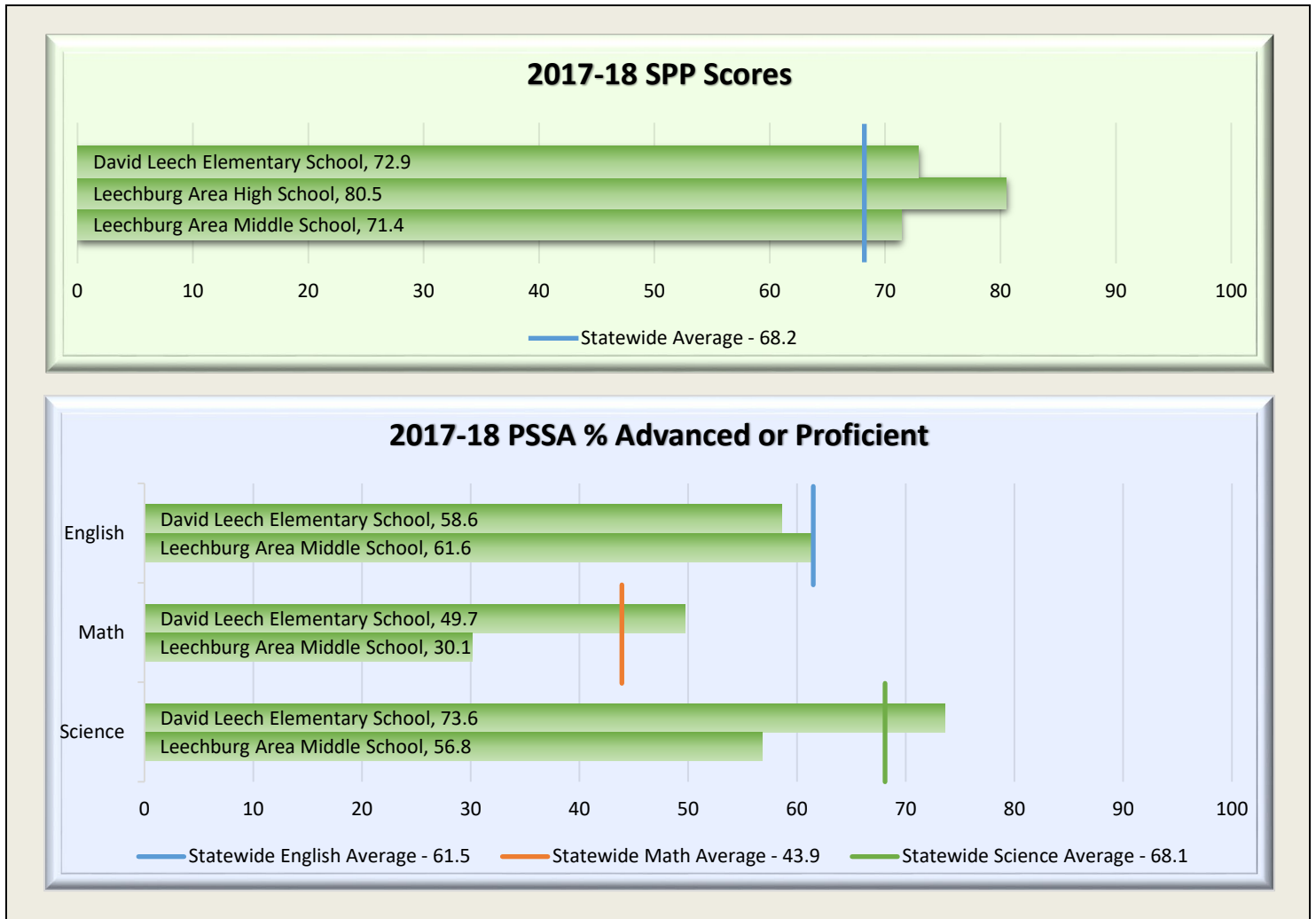
¹³ 24 P.S. § 13-1301-A *et seq.*

¹⁴ Basic safety practices evaluated were building security, bullying prevention, visitor procedures, risk and vulnerability assessments, and preparedness.

Appendix B: Academic Detail

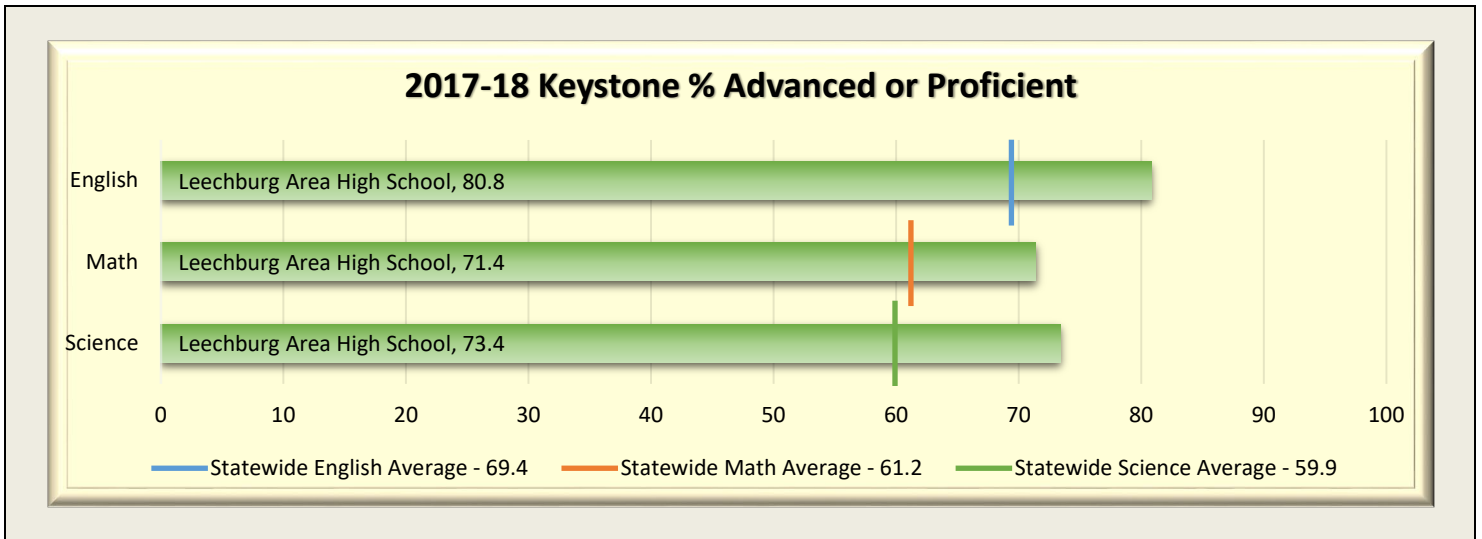
Benchmarks noted in the following graphs represent the statewide average of all public school buildings in the Commonwealth that received a score in the category and year noted.¹⁵

2017-18 Academic Data School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages



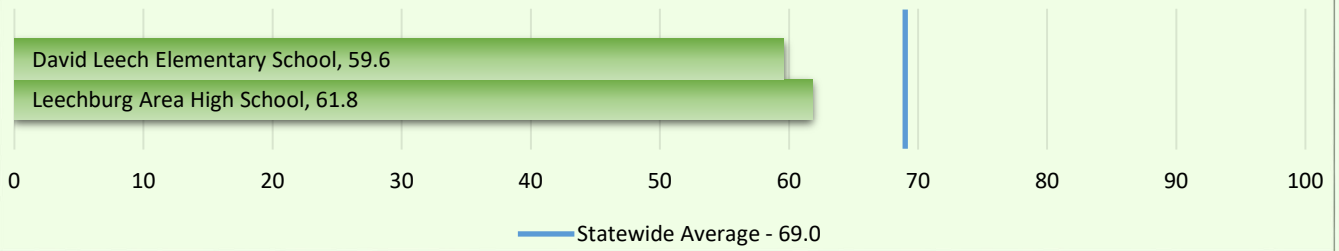
¹⁵ Statewide averages were calculated by our Department based on individual school building scores for all public schools in the Commonwealth, including district schools, charters schools, and cyber charter schools.

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

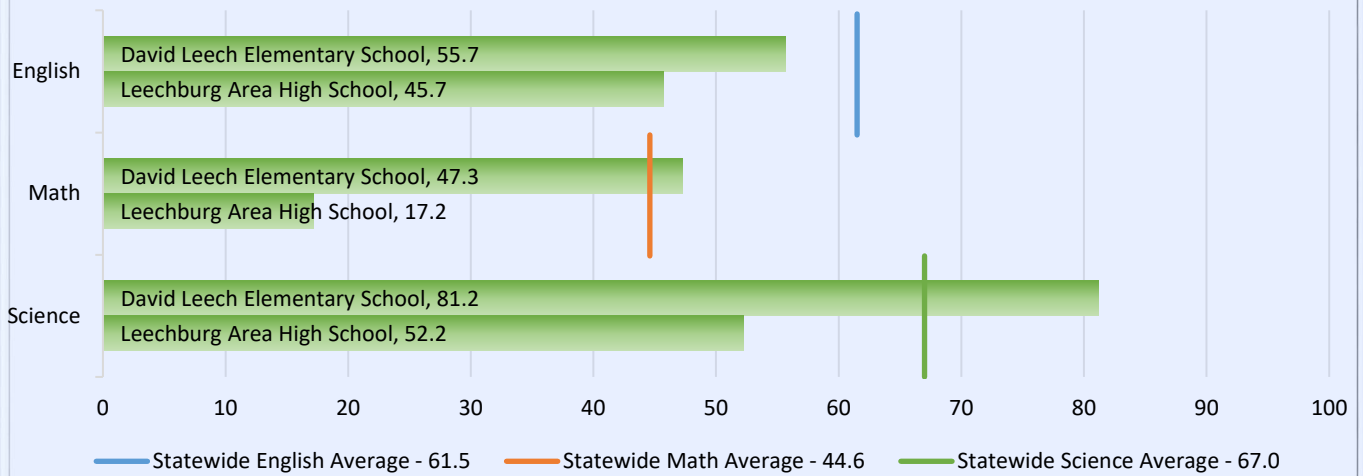


2016-17 Academic Data
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages

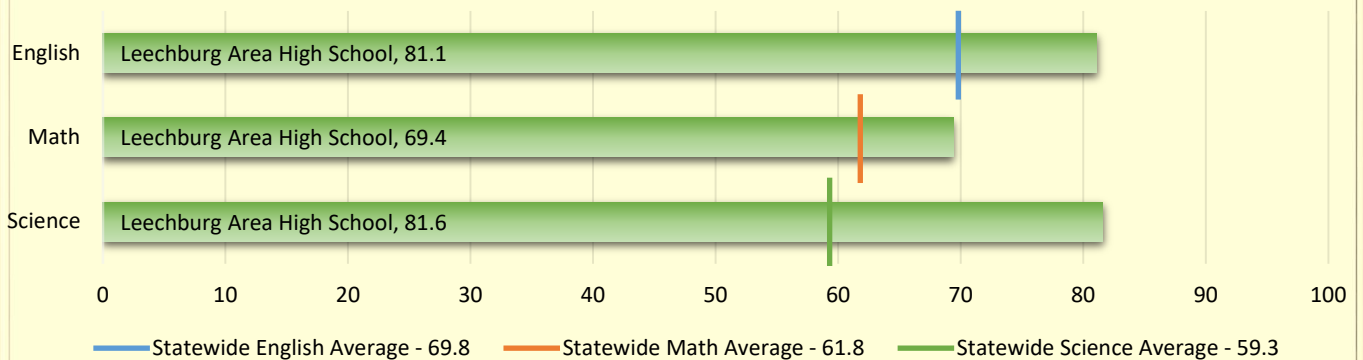
2016-17 SPP Scores



2016-17 PSSA % Advanced or Proficient

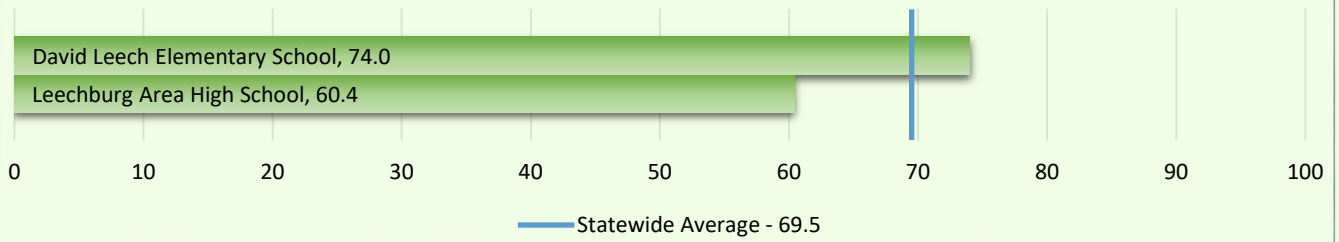


2016-17 Keystone % Advanced or Proficient

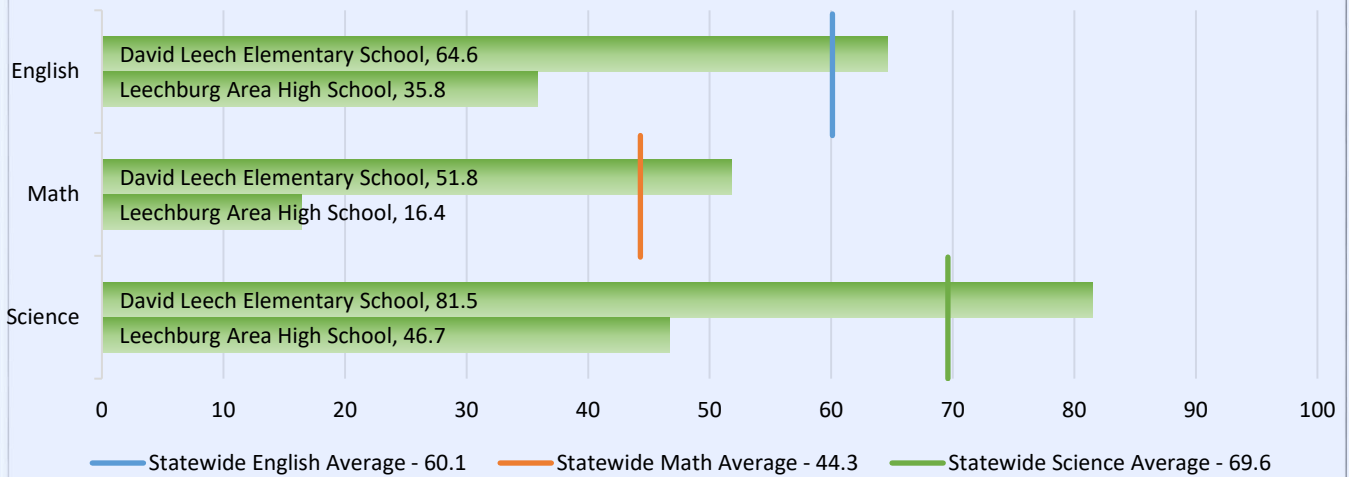


2015-16 Academic Data
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages

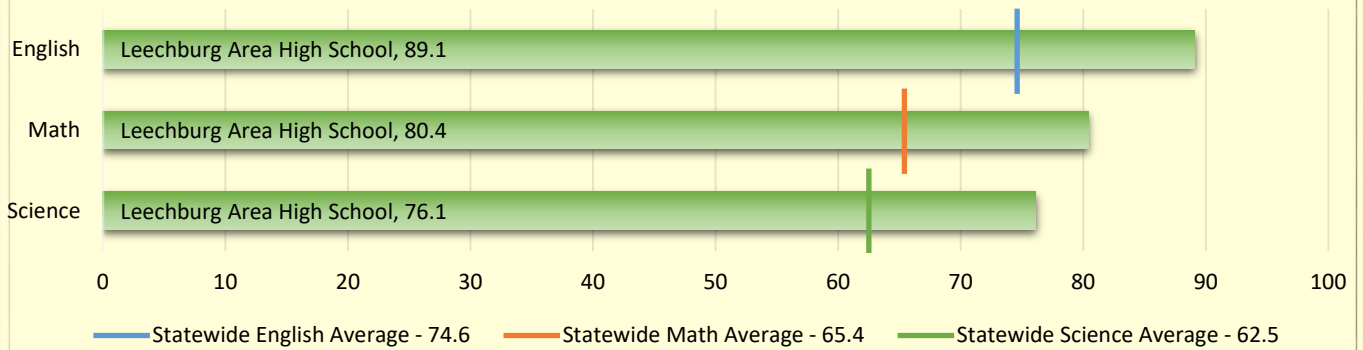
2015-16 SPP Scores



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

Secretary of Education
1010 Harristown Building #2
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

The Honorable Joe Torsella

State Treasurer
Room 129 - Finance Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Mrs. Danielle Mariano

Director
Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management
Pennsylvania Department of Education
4th Floor, 333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dr. David Wazeter

Research Manager
Pennsylvania State Education Association
400 North Third Street - Box 1724
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Mr. Nathan Mains

Executive Director
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
400 Bent Creek Boulevard
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

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