

PALMERTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
CARBON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

JANUARY 2010

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Mr. Barry Scherer, Board President
Palmerton Area School District
680 Fourth Street
Palmerton, Pennsylvania 18071

Dear Governor Rendell and Mr. Scherer:

We conducted a performance audit of the Palmerton Area School District (PASD) to determine its compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Our audit covered the period January 9, 2009 through November 4, 2009, except as otherwise indicated in the report. Additionally, compliance specific to state subsidy and reimbursements was determined for the school years ended June 30, 2008 and June 30, 2007. Our audit was conducted pursuant to 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 PASD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. We appreciate the PASD's cooperation during the conduct of the audit and their willingness to implement our recommendations.

Sincerely,

/s/
JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

January 26, 2010

cc: **PALMERTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board Members



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Executive Summary

Audit Work

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

Our audit scope covered the period January 9, 2009 through November 4, 2009, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objectives, and methodology section of the report. Compliance specific to state subsidy and reimbursements was determined for school years 2007-08 and 2006-07.

District Background

The PASD encompasses approximately 56 square miles. According to 2000 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 12,791. According to District officials, in school year 2007-08 the PASD provided basic educational services to 2,090 pupils through the employment of 136 teachers, 35 full-time and part-time support personnel, and 9 administrators. Lastly, the PASD received more than \$8.6 million in state funding in school year 2007-08.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the PASD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. We report no findings or observations in this report.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

With regard to the status of our prior audit recommendations to the PASD from an audit we conducted of the 2005-06 and 2004-05 school years, we found the PASD did take appropriate corrective action in implementing our recommendations pertaining to its student accounting applications (see page 7).



Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

Scope

What is a school performance audit?

School performance audits allow the 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 PA Department of Education, and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of 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 January 9, 2009 through November 4, 2009.

Regarding state subsidy and reimbursements, our audit covered school years 2007-08 and 2006-07.

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 Department of Education (DE) 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

Performance audits draw conclusions based on an evaluation of sufficient, appropriate evidence. Evidence is measured against criteria, such as, laws, regulations, and defined business practices. Our audit focused on assessing the PASD's compliance with applicable 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:

- ✓ In areas where the District receives state subsidy and reimbursements based on pupil membership (e.g. basic education, special education, and vocational education), did it follow applicable laws and procedures?
- ✓ Did the District follow applicable laws and procedures in areas dealing with pupil membership and ensure that adequate provisions were taken to protect the data?

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 law, regulation, 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.

- ✓ Is the District’s pupil transportation department, including any contracted vendors, in compliance with applicable state laws and procedures?
- ✓ Are there any declining fund balances which may impose risk to the fiscal viability of the District?
- ✓ Did the District pursue a contract buyout with an administrator and if so, what was the total cost of the buy-out, reasons for the termination/settlement, and do the current employment contract(s) contain adequate termination provisions?
- ✓ Were there any other areas of concern reported by local auditors, citizens, or other interested parties which warrant further attention during our audit?
- ✓ Is the District taking appropriate steps to ensure school safety?
- ✓ Did the District take appropriate corrective action to address recommendations made in our prior audits?

Methodology

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

PASD management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the District is in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Within the context of our audit objectives, we obtained an understanding of internal controls and assessed whether those controls were properly designed and implemented.

Any significant deficiencies found during the audit are included in this report.

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 applicable laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements and administrative procedures.

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/reimbursement, pupil membership and pupil transportation.

Our audit examined the following:

- Records pertaining to bus driver qualifications and financial stability.
- Items such as Board meeting minutes and pupil membership records.

Additionally, we interviewed selected administrators and support personnel associated with PASD operations.

Lastly, to determine the status of our audit recommendations made in a prior audit report released on April 24, 2009. We reviewed the PASD's response to DE dated June 15, 2009. We then performed additional audit procedures targeting the previously reported matters.

Findings and Observations

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

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Palmerton Area School District (PASD) for the school years 2005-06 and 2004-05 resulted in one observation. As part of our current audit, we determined the status of corrective action taken by the District to implement our prior recommendations. We analyzed the PASD Superintendent’s written response provided to the Department of Education performed audit procedures, and questioned District personnel regarding the prior observation. As shown below, we found that the PASD did implement recommendations related to its student accounting applications.

| <i>School Years 2005-06 and 2004-05 Auditor General Performance Audit Report</i> | | |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Prior Recommendations</i> | <i>Implementation Status</i> | |
| <p><u><i>I. Observation: Unmonitored IU System Access and Logical Access Control Weaknesses.</i></u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish separate information technology (IT) policies and procedures for controlling the activities of the Carbon Lehigh Intermediate Unit #21(IU) and have the IU sign this policy, or the District should require the IU to sign the District’s Acceptable Use Policy. 2. Develop policies and procedures to require written authorization when adding, deleting or changing a userID. 3. Maintain documentation to evidence that terminated employees are properly removed from the system in a timely manner. 4. Implement a security policy and system parameter settings to require all users, including the IU, to change their passwords on a regular basis (i.e., | <p>Background:</p> <p>Our prior audit found that the PASD used software purchased from the IU for its critical student accounting applications (membership and attendance). The IU had remote access into the District’s network servers.</p> | <p>Current Status:</p> <p>Based on interviews with the information technology director and other personnel and backup documentation provided by the District, we determined that manual compensating controls are adequate. Therefore, the District <u>did</u> take corrective action by implementing our recommendations.</p> |

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| <p>every 30 days).</p> <p>5. Implement a security policy and system parameter settings to maintain a password history that will prevent the use of a repetitive password (i.e., last ten passwords).</p> <p>6. Only allow access to their system when the IU needs access to make pre-approved changes/updates or request assistance. This access should be removed when the IU has completed its work. This procedure would also enable the monitoring of IU changes.</p> <p>7. Generate monitoring reports (including firewall logs) of the IU and employee access and activity on their system. Monitoring reports should include the date, time and reason for access, change(s) made and who made the change(s). The District should review these reports to determine that the access was appropriate and that data was not improperly altered. The District should also ensure it is maintaining evidence to support this monitoring and review.</p> | | |
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Distribution List

This report was initially distributed to the superintendent of the school district, the board members, our website address at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us, and the following:

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell
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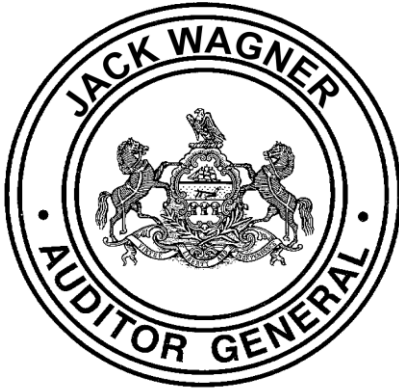
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