

# PERFORMANCE AUDIT

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## Woodland Hills School District Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

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July 2018



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Eugene A. DePasquale • Auditor General



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EUGENE A. DePASQUALE  
AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Licia Lentz, Assistant Superintendent  
Woodland Hills School District  
531 Jones Avenue  
North Braddock, Pennsylvania 15104

Ms. Jamie L. Glasser, Board President  
Woodland Hills School District  
531 Jones Avenue  
North Braddock, Pennsylvania 15104

Dear Ms. Lentz and Ms. Glasser:

Our performance audit of the Woodland Hills School District (District) evaluated the application of best practices in the areas of finance and school safety. In addition, this audit determined the District's compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements). This audit covered the period July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2016, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objective, and methodology section of the report.

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 applied best practices in the areas listed above and complied, in all significant respects, with relevant requirements, except as detailed in our two findings noted in this audit report. A summary of our results is presented in the Executive Summary section of the audit report.

Our audit findings and recommendations have been discussed with the District's management, and their responses are included in the audit report. We believe the implementation of our recommendations will improve the District's operations and facilitate compliance with legal and relevant requirements. We appreciate the District's cooperation during the course of the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eugene A. DePasquale".

Eugene A. DePasquale  
Auditor General

June 7, 2018

cc: **WOODLAND HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board of School Directors

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## Executive Summary

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### **Audit Work**

The Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General conducted a performance audit of the Woodland Hills School District (District). Our audit sought to answer certain questions regarding the District's application of best practices and compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, and administrative procedures.

Our audit scope covered the period July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2016, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objectives, and methodology section of the report (see Appendix). Compliance specific to state subsidies and reimbursements was determined for the 2012-13 through 2015-16 school years.

### **Audit Conclusion and Results**

Our audit found that the District applied best practices and complied, in all significant respects, with relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, and administrative procedures, except for two findings.

**Finding No. 1: The District Did Not Adequately Maintain Safety Plans.** The District failed to comply with certain provisions of Pennsylvania's "Safe Schools Act" (Act) and its associated regulations in that it did not provide sufficient and ongoing planning for disaster response and emergency preparedness, pursuant to the state's Emergency Management Services Code, and it failed to timely execute Memoranda of Understanding with local law enforcement agencies under the Act. The District also did not review and update its numerous safety policies (e.g., "Students

and Police Policy"). Finally, the District failed to implement bullying prevention procedures to support compliance with the Act's bullying prevention requirements and its own policy. All of these issues could have put District students and personnel at risk of harm in the event of a disaster or an emergency situation (see page 9 of this report).

**Finding No. 2: The District Failed to Obtain Certification Determinations from PDE for Locally-Titled Positions.** Our review of the District's professional employees' certification status for the period July 1, 2012 through February 1, 2018, identified nine individuals employed as "behavioral specialists" with possible certification deficiencies. Seven of the nine individuals identified are currently employed without the required certifications, and one of those nine has been employed without proper certification since the 2009-10 school year. Problems such as this may put the District at risk of employing personnel who interact routinely with students but are not qualified to perform their duties (see page 17).

**Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations.** There were no findings or observations in our prior audit report.

## Background Information

School Characteristics 2015-16 School Year <sup>A</sup>	
County	Allegheny
Total Square Miles	13.2
Number of School Buildings	5
Total Teachers	327
Total Full or Part-Time Support Staff	103
Total Administrators	52
Total Enrollment for Most Recent School Year	3,815
Intermediate Unit Number	3
District Vo-Tech School	Forbes Road CTC

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

## Mission Statement<sup>A</sup>

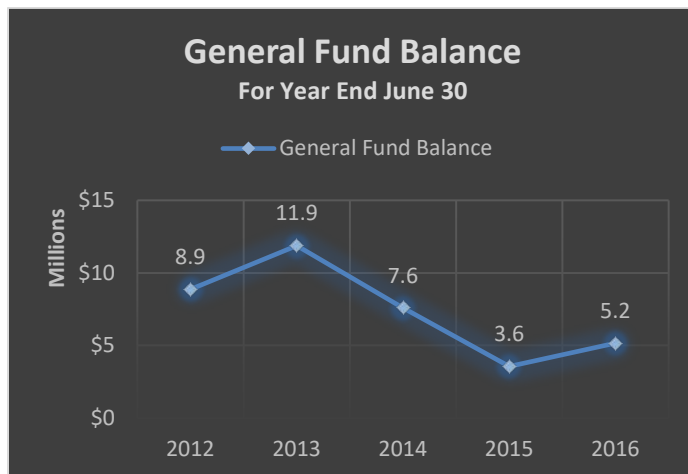
Woodland Hills School District makes students its first priority. The District provides each student with an excellent educational experience that is driven by the highest expectations and prepares students for meaningful participation in all facets of society.

### WHSD Core Values

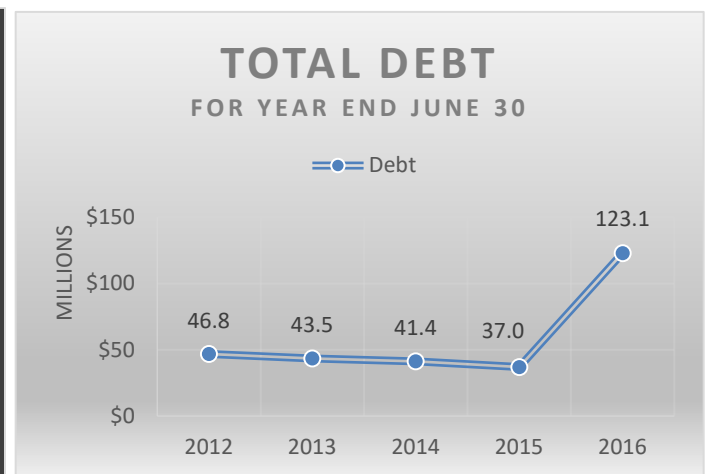
- Safe and secure environment
- Challenging curriculum
- Permission to dream

## Financial Information

The following pages contain financial information about the Woodland Hills 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**.

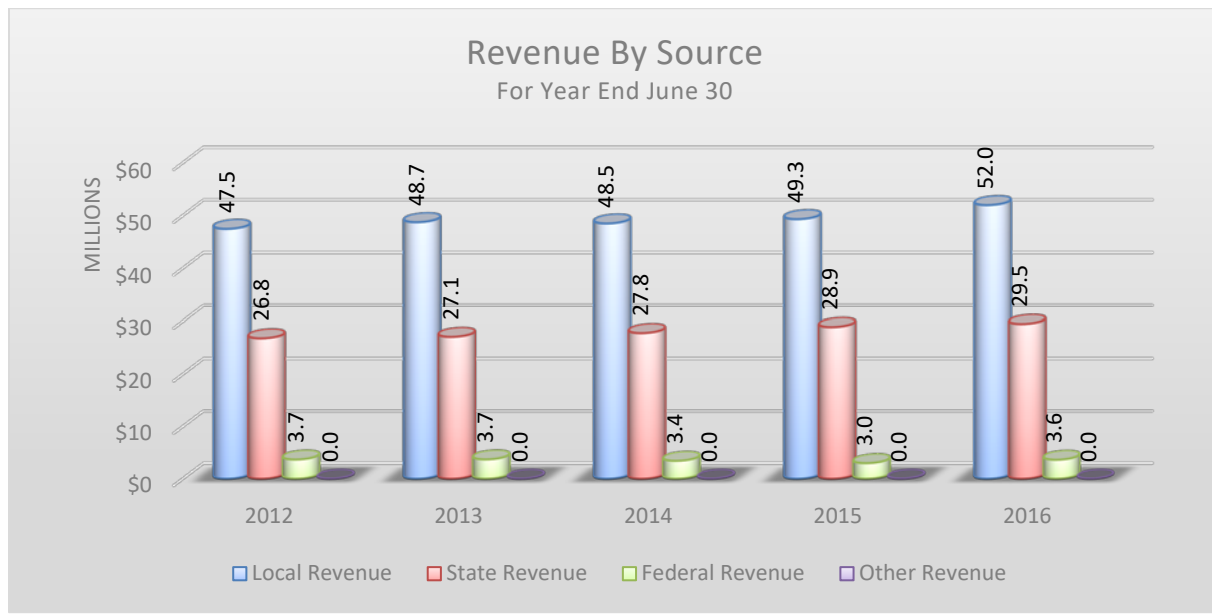
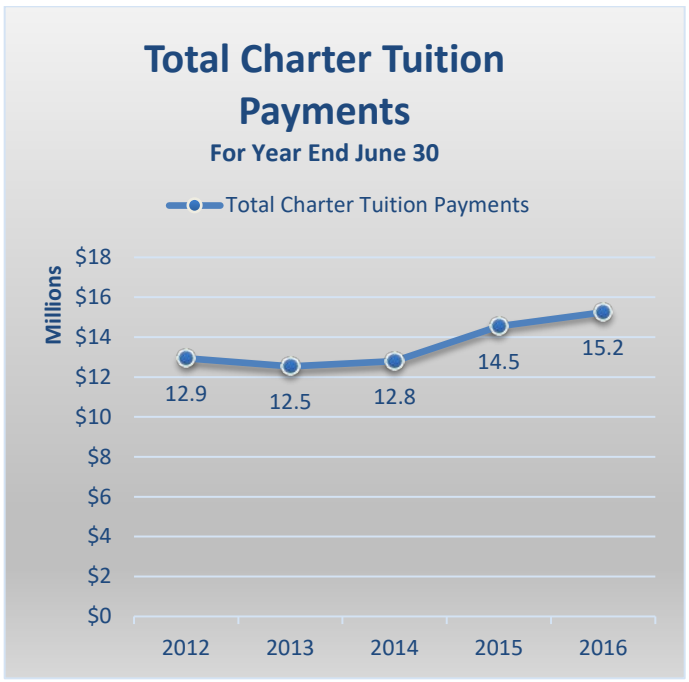
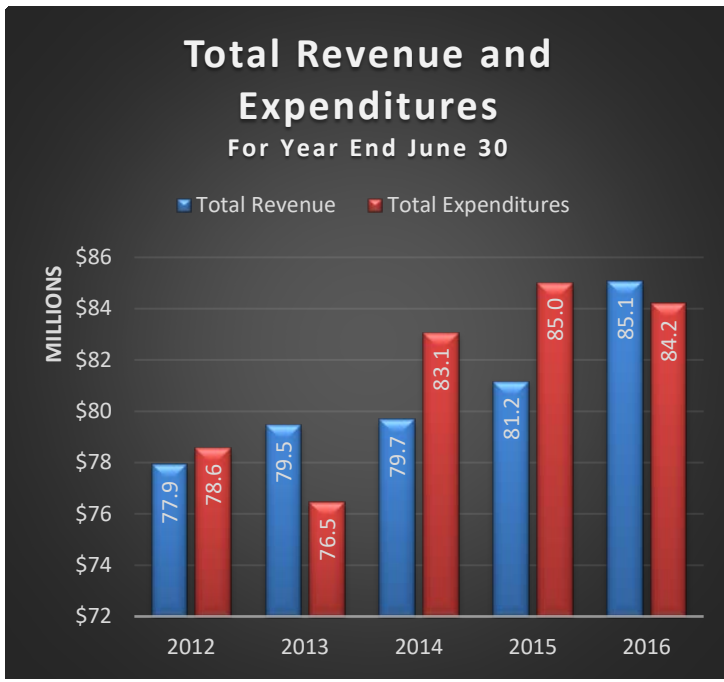


**Note:** General Fund Balance is comprised of the District's Committed, Assigned and Unassigned Fund Balances.



**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 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 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.<sup>1</sup> These scores are provided in the District's 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 chart.<sup>2</sup> Finally, 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.<sup>3</sup>

### **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 using a 0-100 scale for all school buildings in the Commonwealth annually, 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.

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 schools were put on hold due to changes with PSSA testing.<sup>4</sup> PDE resumed issuing a SPP score for all schools for the 2015-16 school year.

### **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 and Math. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> PDE is the sole source of academic data presented in this report. All academic data was obtained from PDE's publically available website.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> According to PDE, SPP scores for elementary and middle schools were put on hold for the 2014-15 school year due to the state's major overhaul of the PSSA exams to align with state Common Core standards and an unprecedented drop in public schools' PSSA scores that year. Since PSSA scores are an important factor in the SPP calculation, the state decided not to use PSSA scores to calculate a SPP score for elementary and middle schools for the 2014-15 school year. Only high schools using the Keystone Exam as the standardized testing component received a SPP score.

The 2014-15 school year marked the first year that PSSA testing was aligned to the more rigorous PA Core Standards.<sup>5</sup> 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 at least 2020. 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.

### **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.<sup>6</sup>

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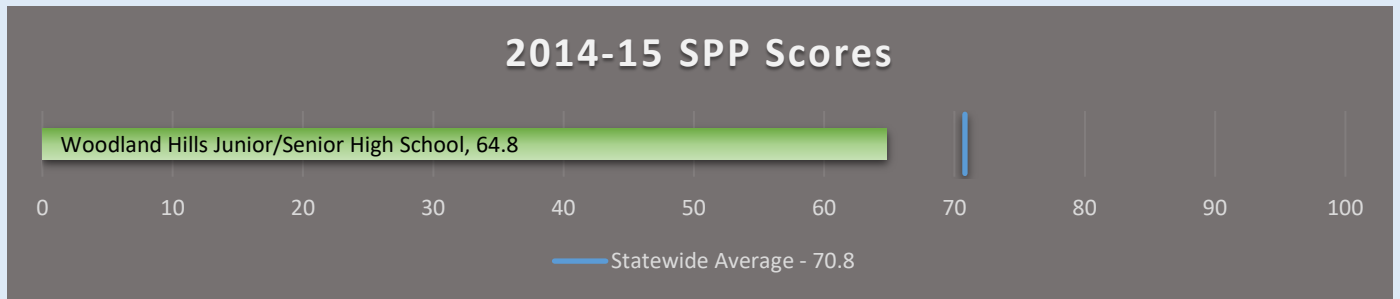
<sup>5</sup> PDE has determined that PSSA scores issued beginning with the 2014-15 school year and after are not comparable to prior years due to restructuring of the exam. (Also, see footnote 4).

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

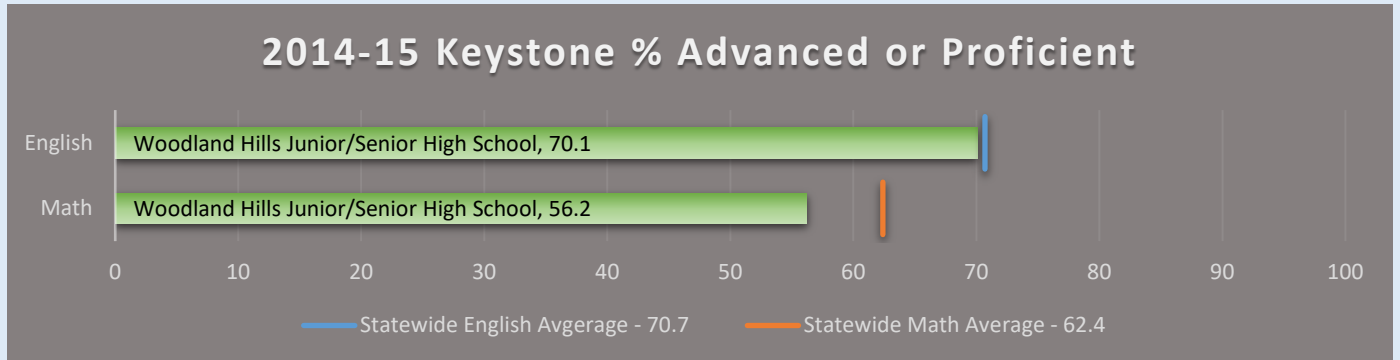


**2014-15 Academic Data**  
**School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages**

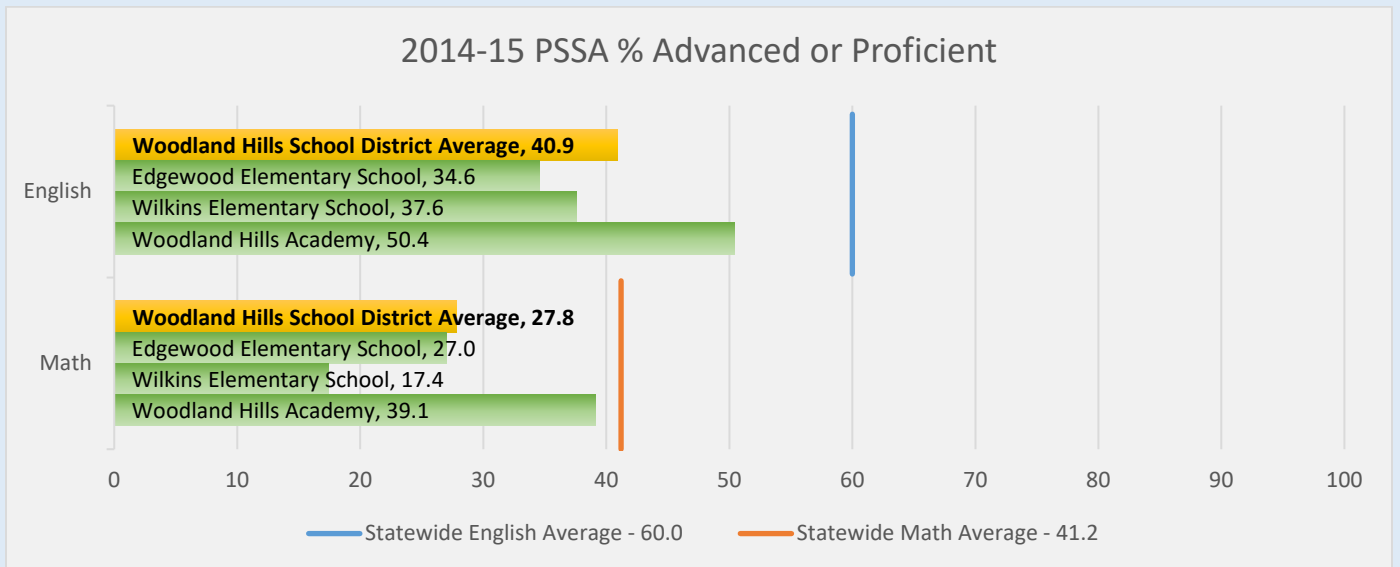
**2014-15 SPP Scores**



**2014-15 Keystone % Advanced or Proficient**

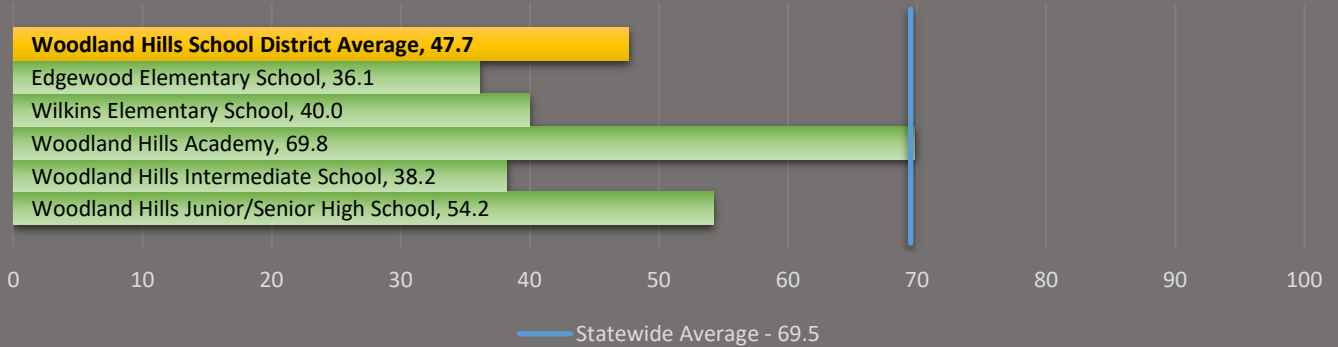


**2014-15 PSSA % Advanced or Proficient**

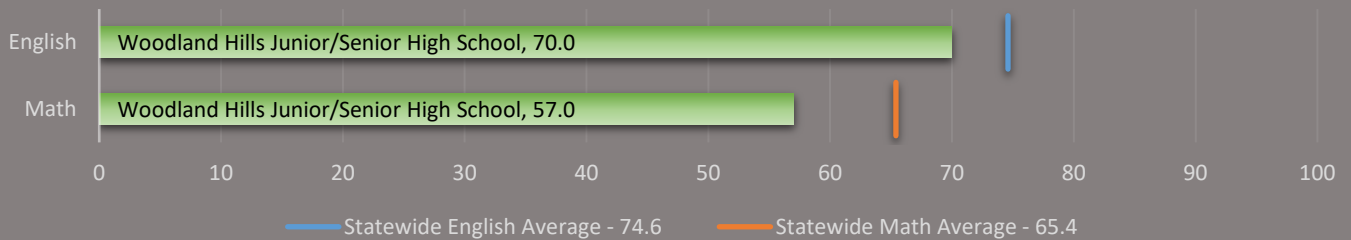


**2015-16 Academic Data**  
**School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages**

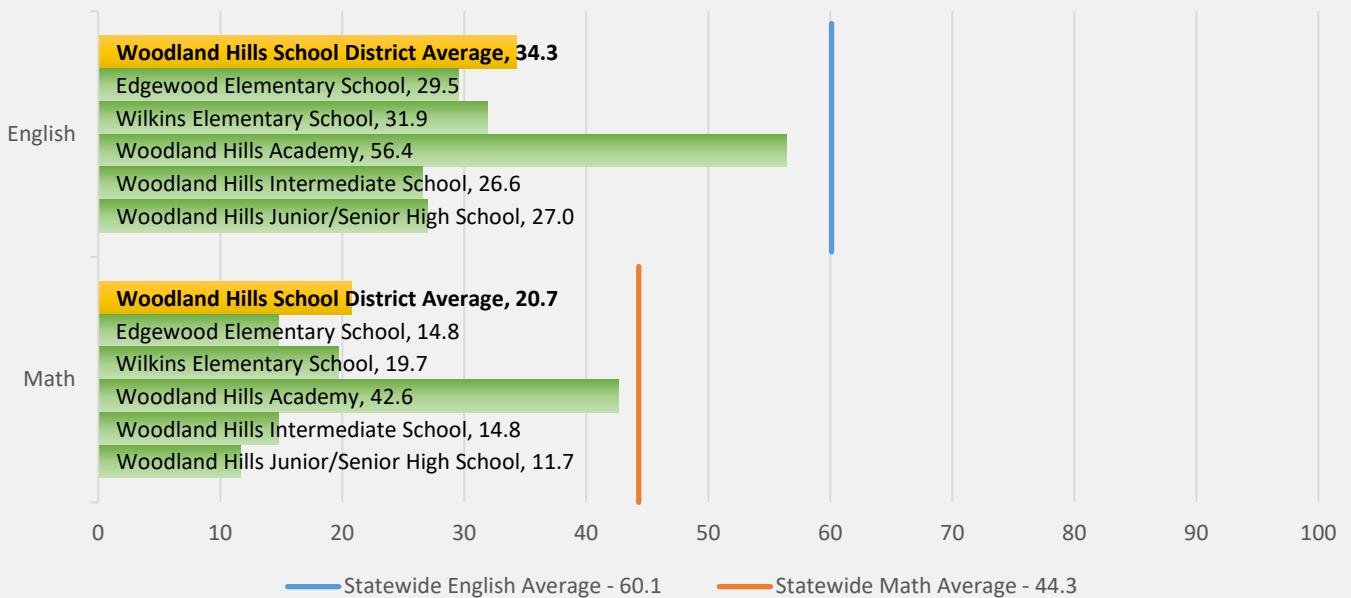
### 2015-16 SPP Scores



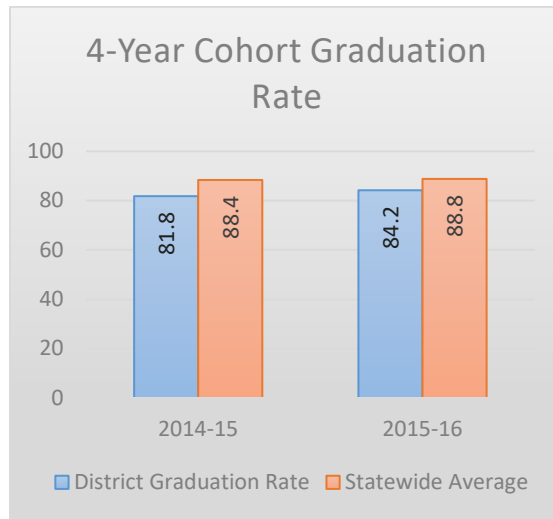
### 2015-16 Keystone % Advanced or Proficient



### 2015-16 PSSA % Advanced or Proficient



### **4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate**



## Finding(s)

### Finding No. 1

### The District Did Not Adequately Maintain Safety Plans

#### *Criteria relevant to the finding:*

Subsection (g) (regarding “Plans”) of Section 7701 of the Emergency Management Services Code provides, in part:

“Every school district [and any other school entity] and custodial child care facility, in cooperation with the local Emergency Management Agency and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, shall develop and implement a comprehensive disaster response and emergency preparedness plan consistent with the guidelines developed by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and other pertinent State requirements. The plan shall be **reviewed annually** and modified as necessary. A copy of the plan shall be provided to the county emergency management agency.” (Emphasis added.) See 35 Pa.C.S. § 7701(g).

Subsection (c) of Section 1303-A (relating to Reporting) of the “Safe Schools Act” (Act) states, in part:

“...each chief school administrator shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with police departments having jurisdiction over school property of the school entity. Each chief school administrator shall submit a copy of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) to the office by June 30, 2011, and biennially update and re-execute a MOU with local law enforcement and file such memorandum with the office on a biennial basis....” See 24 P.S. § 13-1303-A(c).

The Woodland Hills School District (District) failed to comply with certain provisions of the “Safe Schools Act” (Act) and its associated regulations.<sup>7</sup> The District also did not provide sufficient and ongoing planning for disaster response and emergency preparedness pursuant to the Emergency Management Services Code.<sup>8</sup>

Among other deficiencies, the District failed to:

- Ensure proper planning for its disaster response and emergency preparedness, including conducting a risk and vulnerability assessment internally or by an outside entity.
- Timely execute Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with local law enforcement agencies under the Act.<sup>9</sup>
- Review and update its numerous safety policies (e.g., “Students and Police Policy”).
- Implement bullying prevention procedures to support compliance with the Act’s bullying prevention requirements and its own policy.<sup>10</sup>

All of these issues could have put District students and personnel at risk of harm in the event of a disaster or an emergency situation.

#### **Background on Disaster Response and Emergency Preparedness Plans**

Every Pennsylvania school district is required to develop and implement a comprehensive disaster response and emergency preparedness plan (Plan). The Plan is supposed to be developed in cooperation with local emergency management agencies, as well as with the Pennsylvania

<sup>7</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1301-A *et seq.* and the State Board of Education’s Safe Schools regulations, 22 Pa. Code §§ 10.1-10.25.

<sup>8</sup> 35 Pa.C.S. § 7101 *et seq.*

<sup>9</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1303-A(c); 22 Pa. Code § 10.11 and Appendix A. Model Memorandum of Understanding.

<sup>10</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A.

*Criteria relevant to the finding  
(continued):*

N.B.: The initial MOUs were required to be filed with the “office” by June 30, 2011, and biennially updated and re-executed thereafter. The “office” refers to the Office for Safe Schools within the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The term “biennial” means an event that occurs every two years.

Subsection (b) of Section 1303.1-A (relating to Policy relating to bullying) of the Act states:

“Each school entity shall make the policy available on its publicly accessible Internet website, if available, and in every classroom. Each school entity shall post the policy at a prominent location within each school building where such notices are usually posted. Each school entity shall ensure that the policy and procedures for reporting bullying incidents are reviewed with students within ninety (90) days after their adoption and thereafter at least once each school year.” *See 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A(b).*

Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).<sup>11</sup> In the District’s case, a Plan should have been shared with PEMA, the Allegheny County Emergency Management Agency, local law enforcement agencies, local fire departments, and any other local first responders.

The Plan, when properly written and executed, serves as the primary directive in the event of a disaster or emergency situation. According to Pennsylvania’s *All Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit*, a guide for assisting districts with the development of such plans, “Schools should use this plan to form a reference document that can be used in training, exercising and collaboration with responders, and as a reference during an incident.” The Plan should be customized to meet local needs and capabilities.<sup>12</sup>

The Plan should address the four phases of an emergency: prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.<sup>13</sup> A well-detailed comprehensive plan should include, but not be limited to the following:<sup>14</sup>

- Organization and assignment of responsibilities
- Direction, control, and coordination
- Information collection, analysis, and dissemination
- Training and exercises
- Plan development and maintenance

In addition, the Plan should address the following functions, at a minimum:<sup>15</sup>

- Communications
- Evacuation
- Shelter-in-place
- Lockdown
- Reunification
- Continuity of Operations
- Security
- Recovery

<sup>11</sup> *See* 35 Pa.C.S. § 7701(g).

<sup>12</sup> The webpage for the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Safe Schools provides a link to the Pennsylvania *All Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit*, which provides guidance to districts, charter schools, and other LEAs in developing safety plans.

<http://www.pema.pa.gov/planningandpreparedness/communityandstateplanning/Pages/All-Hazards-School-Safety-Planning-Toolkit.aspx>. Accessed March 29, 2018. Chapter I, Introduction, 0010 Purpose and Guidance.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter III, Basic School District/School Plan Format.

<sup>14</sup> The webpage for the Office of Safe Schools provides a link to “new federal guidance for developing Emergency Operations Plans.” The webpage entitled, Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS), Technical Assistance Center provided a link to a PDF document, Guide for Developing School Emergency Operations Plans, developed by the U.S. Department of Education and various federal emergency and law enforcement agencies. 2013. *See* Figure 2, page 18. <https://rems.ed.gov/>. Accessed March 29, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

*Criteria relevant to the finding (continued):*

Criteria regarding board policies:

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association issued its *PSBA Standards for Effective School Governance* in 2006. It states that an effective school board “models responsible governance and leadership by,” among other things, “Regularly reviewing and, as necessary, revising and adopting board policy.” One of the benchmarks for measuring this standard asks, “What process does the board use to ensure regular review and revision of existing policies and adoption of new policies? Is it working effectively?” Pages 3-5. Please note that we cite this source as a best practice for boards to regularly review and update their policies.

- Accounting for all persons
- Health and Medical

All Pennsylvania school entities are also required to annually review and modify the Plan, as necessary, and a copy of the Plan must be provided to the respective county emergency management agency.<sup>16</sup>

### **Weaknesses Identified in District’s Planning Efforts**

Our review of the District’s planning efforts regarding disaster response and emergency preparedness identified several areas of concern. Although we found some specific elements of planning to be adequate, others were not. However, due to the *sensitive nature* of the District’s efforts we confidentially shared the specific results of our review with the District’s Superintendent and will distribute them via an encrypted confidential email to PDE and appropriate law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction over the District and its school buildings.<sup>17</sup>

We also found that the District never conducted a risk and vulnerability assessment. Such assessments can be used in the development of a district’s disaster response and emergency preparedness plan.<sup>18</sup> These assessments can be conducted internally or by an outside organization. They are offered to all Commonwealth school districts free of charge by the Pennsylvania State Police to “provide comprehensive examinations of physical facilities and operational procedures; identify critical assets, threat potential and vulnerabilities; and offer recommendations to improve security.”<sup>19</sup> This type of assessment should be conducted to optimize the District’s planning for disaster response and emergency preparedness.

### **Lack of Timely Updates of MOUs with Local Law Enforcement Agencies**

The MOUs with local law enforcement agencies establish agreed-upon procedures and responsibilities to be followed by District staff and local law enforcement in the event of

<sup>16</sup> 35 Pa.C.S. § 77-7701(g) and Pennsylvania *All Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit. Chapter I. “Introduction.”* “Purpose and Guidance” which references “schools.” Page 1 of 2.

<sup>17</sup> This is consistent with the Department’s standard distribution method for our Safe Schools results.

<sup>18</sup> Pennsylvania *All Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit*. 2013. Chapter IV. “Prevention and Mitigation.” Page 2 of 9.

<sup>19</sup> Center for Safe Schools, Risk and Vulnerability Assessments. <http://www.safeschools.info/emergency-management/emergency-management/254-risk-and-vulnerability-assessments>. Accessed March 29, 2018.

an actual or potential threatening situation.<sup>20</sup> The Act and its regulations clearly mandates districts to update and biennially re-execute MOUs with all local law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction over any school property in the District. These MOUs must also be filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) Office of Safe Schools.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the Pennsylvania's Toolkit further advises:

It is suggested that the documents be reviewed on an annual basis or when a significant change has happened in the school district/school, such as a new facility being built or an existing one being demolished. . . . These memorandums will result in clarifying the actions and responsibilities of each agency before an incident happens reducing the unexpected.<sup>22</sup>

The District was required to execute MOUs with six local law enforcement agencies, and as of June 30, 2016, all six MOUs were still valid as they had been properly re-executed in accordance with the Act's requirements. However, by the end of the following fiscal year, June 30, 2017, none of the six MOUs, which had expired in April 2017, had been re-executed. Two MOUs were re-executed five months late in September 2017, a third MOU was re-executed nine months late in January 2018, and a fourth was re-executed ten months late in February 2018. As of March 2018, two MOUs had not yet been re-executed by both parties. According to the District's administration, those two MOUs were still being evaluated by the respective law enforcement agencies' solicitors.

The District's non-compliance with the MOU requirements of the "Safe Schools Act" and the State Board of Education's Safe Schools' regulations was also cited in findings in our previous audits of the District. The MOUs are an important component of a District's overall safety

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<sup>20</sup> According to the Model MOU promulgated by the State Board of Education, the purpose of the MOU is to "...establish...procedures to be followed when certain incidents [as specified in the MOU]...occur on school property, at any school sponsored activity, or on a conveyance as described in the Safe Schools Act (such as a school bus) providing transportation to or from a school or school sponsored activity. This Memorandum does not cover incidents that are outside of those school settings and create no substantial disruption to the learning environment." See 22 Pa. Code 10, APPENDIX A, Part I, Subsection (B).

<sup>21</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1303-A(c).

<sup>22</sup> Pennsylvania's *All Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit*. 2013. Chapter III. "Basic School District School Plan Format." Page 5 of 7.

plan, and the District should immediately take steps to ensure consistent compliance with the Act and its associated regulations regarding the MOUs.

### **Weaknesses in Bullying Prevention Procedures**

Although the District had a board-approved bullying prevention policy in compliance with the Act, officials acknowledged that they had not developed administrative procedures aimed at increasing awareness of the problems and effects of bullying. The District also had no standardized, written procedures for the investigation of bullying complaints. We also found that the District did not provide annual training to its students on bullying prevention.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the bullying policy was not posted in prominent locations throughout the District's school buildings and was not available in classrooms, as required by the Act and state regulations.<sup>24</sup>

### **Outdated and Deficient School Safety Policies**

Several of the District's board policies governing school safety had not been updated for decades. One policy was adopted 35 years ago and never updated. Another was adopted 24 years ago and never updated. Two more policies were last updated more than 20 years ago. The outdated policies are listed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

<b>Woodland Hills School District Outdated Board Policies</b>		
<b>Policy No.</b>	<b>Policy Title</b>	<b>Date Adopted (Revised)</b>
<b>218.2</b>	Metal/Weapon Detection System or Device Policy	April 9, 1997 (rev.)
<b>220.1</b>	Gang Policy	April 13, 1994
<b>225</b>	Students and Police Policy	June 29, 1983
<b>225.A</b>	Students and Law Enforcement Policy	May 11, 1994 (rev.)

It is a vital responsibility of the Board of School Directors, with assistance from school administrators, to routinely review and revise their adopted policies to ensure that these policies remain relevant not only to comply with possible changes to federal and state regulations, but also to provide

<sup>23</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A(b).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



an optimally safe school environment for District students.<sup>25</sup>

## Recommendations

The *Woodland Hills School District* should:

1. Immediately take steps to rectify the specific concerns expressed confidentially by the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General with regard to the District's planning efforts regarding disaster response and emergency preparedness.
2. Internally conduct, or contact the Pennsylvania State Police to arrange for, a risk and vulnerability assessment, which will ultimately provide useful information for the District in developing and maintaining its overall safety plans. This assessment should be reviewed annually and updated, as necessary.
3. Establish standard, written procedures to ensure consistent compliance with the "Safe Schools Act" and its associated regulations regarding the required biennial update and re-execution of MOUs with all appropriate law enforcement agencies.
4. Follow up with the two local law enforcement agencies to obtain re-executed MOUs.
5. Establish standard, written procedures regarding bullying prevention to ensure consistent compliance with its own policy and the "Safe Schools Act" and its associated regulations.
6. Review and update all District policies governing school safety, and communicate these updates to the school community so that students, parents, teachers, and administrators are aware of them.

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<sup>25</sup> The Pennsylvania School Boards Association issued its *PSBA Standards for Effective School Governance* in 2006. It states that an effective board "models responsible governance and leadership by," among other things, "[r]egularly reviewing and, as necessary, revising and adopting board policy." Further, the PSBA's guide for *How to Run for School Board* notes the following, in part: "Legislating – The policies adopted by a school board put planning into action, guiding not only the board's own activities as well as the day-to-day operation of the school system, but also communicating standards and expectations for how the board's vision will be achieved. This legislative role often is viewed as the most important aspect of how a school board governs." See <https://www.psba.org/advocacy-and-news/resources/run-school-board-guide-school-board-candidates-pennsylvania/> Accessed May 29, 2018.

## **Management Response**

District management provided the following response:

“Management disagrees with the determination that no Safety Plans were maintained. We have and produced several documents that address safety concerns. We produced a large format 'flip chart' that contained specific instructions for staff members on proper steps to be taken in the event of a variety of emergency and exigent circumstances. We believe that the breadth of issues addressed in this manual constituted a basic master safety plan.

The auditors demurred from this view and made the assessment that what we considered as a plan was, at most, an adjunctive support for overall safety planning. We can appreciate that view. The plans we maintain, while encompassing in their breadth of coverage, lack the elements of internal coordination and also do not address some detailed specifics such as contingent locations for evacuations and identification of specific individuals who would take on Incident Commander and other key roles in a manner consistent with the standards established in the Incident Command System. On a more day to day basis we also need to formalize and memorialize our use of the ALICE (Alert, Locate, Identify, Counter, and Escape) protocols within our schools. We have trained extensively in the use of ALICE but we have failed to properly note that and make it part of our safety and security policies. Likewise we have done extensive work on bullying and bullying prevention but this too is not noted as part of our master security plans. More generally, we do a good deal of safety and security related training so one of our main tasks is to make sure that the work we do is recorded and made part of the frameworks that are in use in all buildings. This would include active shooter drills, evacuation drills and more.

The issue, as management understands it, is that there is a subjective difference of opinion on what constitutes a 'plan'. Having stated that however, management does agree that extant conditions locally, regionally and nationally are such that a more formal safety plan, written in conformance with the Incident Command System protocols, is needed for the District. Management has budgeted funds for the 18-19 school year and will recommend that the Board of School

Directors engage the services of a qualified individual or company who can assist the District in rewriting a comprehensive master safety plan that meets the conditions set forth by the auditor while also adhering to incident command standards as well as the protocols enshrined in the ALICE system.”

### **Auditor Conclusion**

While we are encouraged that the District will recommend the creation and implementation of a comprehensive master safety plan, we continue to stress the importance of having a complete comprehensive plan in place that documents and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all involved in school safety. As we stated in the finding, the District has various components of a plan, but is missing key elements of a comprehensive plan. We also continue to stress that, once a comprehensive plan is created and in place, this plan must be reviewed and updated regularly, and shared with all appropriate safety agencies.

We also note that while the District has obtained the two outstanding MOUs at the time of this report, procedures need to be in place to ensure the timeliness of the required biannual updates to help protect students and staff. We will review the completion and effectiveness of the comprehensive safety plan created by the District, as well as any other corrective actions taken, as part of our next audit of the District.

## Finding No. 2

## The District Failed to Obtain Certification Determinations from PDE for Locally-Titled Positions

### *Criteria relevant to the finding:*

Section 1202 (relating to State certificates) of the Public School Code (PSC) provides, in part:

“No teacher shall teach, in any public school, any branch which he has not been properly certificated to teach.” *See* 24 P.S. § 12-1202.

Section 2518 (relating to Forfeitures for employing improperly certified individuals) of the PSC provides, in part:

“... [A]ny school district, intermediate unit, area vocational-technical school or other public school in this Commonwealth that has in its employ any person in a position that is subject to the certification requirements of the Department of Education but who has not been certificated for his position by the Department of Education...shall forfeit an amount equal to six thousand dollars (\$6,000) less the product of six thousand dollars (\$6,000) and the district’s market value/income aid ratio....” *See* 24 P.S. § 25-2518.

PDE’s Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines (CSPG) state, in part:

“Certification is not required of a person assigned to a locally-titled non-educational school position, provided the assignment includes no duty or function reserved to a public school certificate or Letter of Eligibility issued by PDE.”

Our review of the District’s professional employees’ certification status for the period July 1, 2012 through February 1, 2018, identified nine individuals employed as “behavioral specialists” with possible certification deficiencies. Seven of the nine individuals identified are currently employed without the required certifications, and one of those nine has been employed without proper certification since the 2009-10 school year.<sup>26</sup> Problems such as this may put the District at risk of employing personnel who interact routinely with students but are not qualified to perform their duties.

While these certification deficiencies could cost the District over \$59,000 in basic education subsidy forfeitures, the more important concern is that the District is employing individuals who may not be qualified to perform their duties and responsibilities of their positions. The employees who lacked the proper certification were employed with the job title *Behavior Specialist*, a position that by their job description requires employees to interact with students providing “direct service” and “counseling.”

After we brought the possible deficiencies regarding the Behavior Specialist position to the attention of District officials, the District contacted PDE’s Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality to inquire if persons employed in this position were required to be certified or licensed. PDE responded to the inquiry via an email to the District dated January 26, 2018, in which PDE provided a preliminary determination that based on the Behavior Specialist job description, employees assigned to this position are required to be certified or licensed.

<sup>26</sup> Seven employees are still employed by the District as of March 19, 2018.

### **Failure to Obtain Certification Determinations for Locally-Titled Positions**

The positions held by the nine employees who lacked certification were “locally-titled positions,” meaning that they were not positions that were governed by PDE’s CSPG. However, the District should have sought guidance from PDE to determine whether certifications or licenses should have been required based on the duties specified in the job descriptions. Without seeking such a determination from PDE, the District exposed itself to employment of uncertified, unlicensed, and/or possibly unqualified personnel.

### **Potential Subsidy Forfeitures**

Since PDE has provided preliminary notification to the District that the Behavioral Specialist position should require certification or licensure, the District may be subject to the following basic education subsidy forfeiture.

<b>Woodland Hills School District Subsidy Forfeitures</b>		
<b>School Year</b>		<b>Forfeiture<sup>27</sup></b>
<b>2012-13</b>		\$ 7,463
<b>2013-14</b>		9,794
<b>2014-15</b>		11,027
<b>2015-16</b>		12,852
<b>2016-17</b>		18,010
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$59,146</b>

### **Conclusion**

The District failed to obtain an official certification determination from PDE for its locally-titled Behavior Specialist position. As a result, nine employees were employed from the 2012-13 through 2017-18 school years in positions that PDE preliminarily determined required a certificate or license. According to the District, it did not realize that a certificate may be needed for the duties and responsibilities detailed in the job description.

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<sup>27</sup> Forfeiture calculations are based on Section 2518 of the PSC, 24 P.S. § 25-2518.

## **Recommendations**

The *Woodland Hills School District* should:

1. Submit to PDE for final determination all employees working in locally-titled positions and, after PDE's determination, ensure all employees working in these positions are certified or licensed in accordance with PDE's determination.
2. Ensure that, going forward, all locally-titled positions are submitted to PDE for review and determination of the appropriate certification or licensure prior to hiring individuals to fill those positions.
3. Implement standardized, written procedures to routinely monitor and ensure that all professional employees obtain proper and valid certificates prior to being hired or reassigned to new positions and to ensure employees' certifications remain active and valid.

The *Pennsylvania Department of Education* should:

1. Recover subsidy forfeitures after the calculations for the 2017-18 school year are determined.

## **Management Response**

District management provided the following response:

“The position of Behavior Specialist has been present in the District since at least 2007 and well before any of the current central office administration or even Board members were in office. The District has been through extensive state audits at least three times since the positions were created and staffed. This issue has never been brought to the attention of administration in any of those previous audits. So we believe that we can defensibly say that we were acting under the reasonable assumption that the positions were legitimately created and staffed.

We also believe that we could defend the position descriptions if given the opportunity. However we also believe that the issue can be resolved without the need for further due process. An examination of the position description reveals that the areas that were highlighted as causes for required certification (counseling, IEP team

participation etc.) are also duties that are performed relatively infrequently. We believe that if we distill out the peripheral functions we will have a reduced set of duties that would be appropriately performed by persons without certification.

At the close of the current school year the District intends to eliminate the positions as currently constituted. A new position description that focuses on physical security, quick de-escalation skills and restorative practices will be developed and submitted for approval to the Bureau of Certification.”

### **Auditor Conclusion**

We are pleased that the District has decided to eliminate the positions as currently constituted and, at the close of the school year, will begin the process of developing a new position description for the current behavior specialists. The District has stated that these new position descriptions will be completed and implemented at the close of the current school year.

While the District may have been through three prior state audits, the review of administrator certifications was not performed in those audits. The fact that this issue was never previously reviewed and detected certainly does not alleviate the District’s direct responsibility to ensure that all certifications and requirements are met by all of its employees.

We continue to recommend that the District submit these new job descriptions to PDE for review prior to implementation.

## **Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations**

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Our prior audit of the Woodland Hills School District resulted in no findings or observations.



## Appendix: Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

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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, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of Sections 402 and 403 of The Fiscal Code,<sup>28</sup> 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, 2012 through June 30, 2016. In addition, the scope of each individual audit objective is detailed on the next page.

The Woodland Hills 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).<sup>29</sup> In conducting our audit, we obtained an understanding of the District's internal controls, including any information technology controls, which 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.

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<sup>28</sup> 72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403.

<sup>29</sup> 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, academic performance data, 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, 2012 through June 30, 2016. 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:

- ✓ School Safety
- ✓ Professional Certification
- ✓ Administrator Contract Buy-outs
- ✓ Bus Driver Requirements
- ✓ Contracted Retiree Health Benefits
- ✓ Leasing of District Facilities

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

- ✓ Did the District take actions to ensure it provided a safe school environment?<sup>30</sup>
  - To address this objective, we reviewed a variety of documentation including, safety plans, incident reports, training schedules, anti-bullying policies, and fire and emergency drills after action reports. We conducted on-site reviews at three out of the District's five school buildings (one from each education level) to assess whether the District had implemented basic safety practices.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, we reviewed the District's Memorandum of Understanding with local law enforcement to ensure compliance with the Public School Code.<sup>32</sup> A portion of the results of our review of this objective can be found in Finding No. 1 (page 9) of this report. Due to the sensitive nature of the safe schools review, the full results of our review are confidential but were shared with the appropriate District personnel and law enforcement entities, as well as with PDE.

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<sup>30</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1301-A *et seq.*

<sup>31</sup> Basic safety practices evaluated were building security, bullying prevention, visitor procedures, risk and vulnerability assessments, and emergency preparedness.

<sup>32</sup> 24 P.S. § 13-1303-A (c).

- ✓ Did the District ensure that professional employees obtained the appropriate certification required for their assignment?<sup>33</sup>
  - To address this objective, we obtained a personnel listing of all administrators employed by the District during the 2012-13 through 2017-18 school years. We reviewed a variety of documentation including, professional certifications, job descriptions, and employment letters to determine if proper and valid certification was obtained and maintained for all 23 administrators employed by the District during this time period. The results of our review of this objective can be found in Finding No. 2 (page 17) of this report.
- ✓ Did the District pursue a contract buy-out with an administrator and if so, what was the total cost of the buy-out, what were the reasons for the termination/settlement, and did the employment contract(s) comply with the Public School Code<sup>34</sup> and the Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) guidelines?
  - To address this objective, we reviewed documentation for all four administrative employees who separated employment from the District during the period of June 1, 2017 through September 1, 2017. We verified the reasons for these separations and whether these separations were approved at the public Board of School Directors' (Board) meetings. We reviewed the employment contracts and settlement agreements to ensure that they complied with the Public School Code regarding termination, buy-out, and severance provisions, and to ensure that payments were made in accordance with the agreements. Finally, we reviewed payroll records to ensure that these payments were correctly reported to PSERS. Our review of this objective did not result in any reportable issues.
- ✓ Did the District ensure that bus drivers transporting District students had the required driver's license, physical exam, training, background checks, and clearances as outlined in applicable laws?<sup>35</sup> 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 randomly selected 5 of the 92 bus drivers employed by the District's bus contractors and transporting District students during the 2017-18 school year. 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 ensure compliance with bus driver hiring requirements.<sup>36</sup> Our review of this objective did not result in any reportable issues.

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<sup>33</sup> See 24 P.S. § 12-1202 and 25-2518.

<sup>34</sup> 24 P.S. § 10-1073(e)(2)(v).

<sup>35</sup> 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*.

<sup>36</sup> 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 population.

- ✓ Did the District ensure that its Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) with the Woodland Hills Education Association were current and properly obtained, and did the District have adequate procedures and controls in place to ensure medical insurance premiums paid for retirees were timely and accurate?
  - To address this objective, we reviewed board meeting minutes to ensure that the District had a Board approved Collective Bargaining Agreement for the audit period. Additionally, we reviewed all 30 members of the Woodland Hills Education Association who retired during the period covering May 31, 2012 through June 30, 2016, and reviewed documentation to ensure the District implemented their respective CBA retirement benefit stipulations. We interviewed District personnel to determine the process for tracking health insurance premium payments made on behalf of retirees, the collection of retiree contributions to health care, as well as the process for the removal/termination of health benefits for the selected retirees. Our review of this objective did not result in any reportable issues,
- ✓ Did the District comply with its board policy when leasing District facilities?
  - To address this objective, we obtained and reviewed the District's policy concerning leasing District facilities. We interviewed responsible District officials concerning this policy and obtained the District's procedures regarding the implementation of District policy. We reviewed both lease agreements that the District entered into during our audit period. We verified that these lease agreements were Board approved and that the District followed their policy in regard to obtaining, executing, and monitoring these leases. Our review of this objective did not result in any reportable issues.

## **Distribution List**

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

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Harrisburg, PA 17120

**The Honorable Pedro A. Rivera**

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