

HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT
ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

JANUARY 2012

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

Mrs. Debbie Beale, Board President
Highlands School District
1330 Eleventh Avenue
P.O. Box 288
Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania 15065

Dear Governor Corbett and Mrs. Beale:

We conducted a performance audit of the Highlands School District (HSD) to determine its compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Our audit covered the period March 21, 2008 through December 8, 2010, 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 HSD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures.

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

Sincerely,

/s/

JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

January 25, 2012

cc: **HIGHLANDS 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 Highlands School District (HSD). Our audit sought to answer certain questions regarding the District's compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures; and to determine the status of corrective action taken by the HSD in response to our prior audit recommendations.

Our audit scope covered the period March 21, 2008 through December 8, 2010, 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 HSD encompasses approximately 22 square miles. According to 2000 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 21,974. According to District officials, in school year 2007-08 the HSD provided basic educational services to 2,852 pupils through the employment of 234 teachers, 160 full-time and part-time support personnel, and 8 administrators. Lastly, the HSD received more than \$15.8 million in state funding in school year 2007-08.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the HSD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, 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 HSD from an audit we conducted of the 2005-06 and 2004-05 school years, we found the HSD had taken appropriate corrective action in implementing our recommendations pertaining to teacher aide qualifications (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 March 21, 2008 through December 8, 2010.

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 reporting guidelines, we use the term school year rather than fiscal year throughout this report. A school year covers the period July 1 to June 30.

Objectives

What is the difference between a finding and an observation?

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

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

- ✓ 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

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, contracts, grant requirements and administrative procedures.

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

HSD management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the District is in compliance with applicable laws, 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.

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, pupil transportation, and comparative financial information.

Our audit examined the following:

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

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

Lastly, to determine the status of our audit recommendations made in a prior audit report released on April 1, 2009, we performed additional audit procedures targeting the previously reported matters.

Findings and Observations

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

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Highlands School District (HSD) for the school years 2005-06 and 2004-05 resulted in one reported finding. The finding pertained to a teacher's aide's qualifications. As part of our current audit, we determined the status of corrective action taken by the District to implement our prior recommendations. We performed audit procedures, and questioned District personnel regarding the prior finding. As shown below, we found that the HSD did implement recommendations related to the teacher's aide's qualification deficiencies.

School Years 2005-06 and 2004-05 Auditor General Performance Audit Report

Finding: **Teacher's Aide Qualification Deficiencies**

Finding Summary: Our prior audit of qualifications of teacher's aides for the 2007-08 school year found a lack of documentation.

Recommendations: Our audit finding recommended that the HSD:

1. Obtain and maintain state and federal criminal clearances for all teacher's aides.
2. Obtain and maintain child abuse clearances for all teacher's aides.
3. Assign responsibility to a coordinator to review each teacher aide's qualifications prior to hire.
4. Maintain files for all teacher's aides to ensure that the District's files are up-to-date and complete.

Current Status: During our current audit procedures, we found that the HSD implemented the recommendations.



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:

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