

NORTH HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT
ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

JUNE 2012

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

Mr. Timothy Burnett, Board President
North Hills School District
135 Sixth Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15229

Dear Governor Corbett and Mr. Burnett:

We conducted a performance audit of the North Hills School District (NHSD) to determine its compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Our audit covered the period June 25, 2009 through July 29, 2011, except as otherwise indicated in the report. Additionally, compliance specific to state subsidy and reimbursements was determined for the school years ended June 30, 2010 and June 30, 2009. 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 NHSD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures.

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

Sincerely,

/s/

JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

June 19, 2012

cc: **NORTH HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board Members



Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	1
Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology	3
Findings and Observations	6
Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations	7
Distribution List	9



Executive Summary

Audit Work

The Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General conducted a performance audit of the North Hills School District (NHSD). 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 NHSD in response to our prior audit recommendations.

Our audit scope covered the period June 25, 2009 through July 29, 2011, 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 2009-10 and 2008-09.

District Background

The NHSD encompasses approximately 15 square miles. According to 2000 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 39,828. According to District officials, in school year 2009-10 the NHSD provided basic educational services to 4,357 pupils through the employment of 369 teachers, 754 full-time and part-time support personnel, and 8 administrators. Lastly, the NHSD received more than \$13.4 million in state funding in school year 2009-10.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the NHSD 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 NHSD from an audit we conducted of the 2007-08, 2006-07, 2005-06 and 2004-05 school years, we found the NHSD had taken appropriate corrective action in implementing our recommendations pertaining to Memoranda of Understanding that were not updated timely, but did not implement all of our recommendations pertaining to unmonitored vendor system access (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 June 25, 2009 through July 29, 2011, except for the verification of professional employee certification which was performed for the period June 25, 2009 through July 8, 2011.

Regarding state subsidy and reimbursements, our audit covered school years 2009-10 and 2008-09.

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

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 NHSD'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:

- ✓ Were professional employees certified for the positions they held?
- ✓ 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 buy-out 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 use an outside vendor to maintain its membership data and if so, are there internal controls in place related to vendor access?
- ✓ 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.

NHSD 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, professional employee certification, and financial stability.
- Items such as Board meeting minutes.

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

Lastly, to determine the status of our audit recommendations made in a prior audit report released on June 25, 2010, we reviewed the NHSD's response to DE dated July 20, 2011. We then performed additional audit procedures targeting the previously reported matters.

Findings and Observations

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

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the North Hills School District (NHSD) for the school years 2007-08, 2006-07, 2005-06 and 2004-05 resulted in two reported observations. The first observation pertained to Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) not being updated timely, and the second observation pertained to unmonitored vendor system access. 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 NHSD Superintendent's written response provided to the Department of Education, performed audit procedures, and questioned District personnel regarding the prior observations. As shown below, we found that the NHSD did implement our recommendations related to the MOUs, but did not implement all of the recommendations related to unmonitored vendor system access.

School Years 2007-08, 2006-07, 2005-06 and 2004-05 Auditor General Performance Audit Report

Observation No. 1: Memoranda of Understanding Not Updated Timely

Observation

Summary:

Our prior audit found that the MOUs between the District and two local law enforcement agencies were signed April 13, 2005 and May 27, 2003, and had not been updated.

Recommendations:

Our audit observation recommended that the NHSD:

1. Review, update and re-execute the current MOUs between the District and the two local law enforcement agencies.
2. Adopt a policy requiring the administration to review and re-execute the MOUs every two years.

Current Status:

During our current audit procedures we found that the NHSD did implement our recommendations. Both MOU's were updated September 8, 2010.

Observation No. 2: Unmonitored Vendor System Access and Logical Access Control Weaknesses

Observation

Summary:

The NHSD uses software purchased from an outside vendor for its critical student accounting applications (membership and attendance). The software vendor has remote access into the District's network servers. During our prior audit we determined that a risk existed that unauthorized

changes to the District's data could occur and not be detected because the District was unable to provide supporting evidence that it was adequately monitoring all vendor activity in its system.

Recommendations: Our audit observation recommended that the NHSD:

1. Include in its Acceptable Use Policy provisions for authentication (password security and syntax requirements). Further, all employees should be required to sign this policy.
2. Establish separate information technology (IT) policies and procedures for controlling the activities of vendors/consultants and have the vendor sign this policy, or require the vendor to sign the District's Acceptable Use Policy.
3. Implement a security policy and system parameter settings to require all users, including the vendor, to change passwords on a regular basis (i.e., every 30 days). Passwords should be a minimum length of eight characters and include alpha, numeric and special characters. Also, the District should log users off the system after a period of inactivity (i.e., 60 minutes maximum).
4. Require the vendor to assign unique userIDs and passwords to vendor employees authorized to access the District system. Further, the District should obtain a list of vendor employees with remote access to its data and ensure that changes to the data are made only by authorized vendor representatives.
5. Allow access to its system only when the vendor needs access to make pre-approved changes/updates or requested assistance. This access should be removed when the vendor has completed its work. This procedure would also enable the monitoring of vendor changes.

Current Status:

During our current audit procedures we found that the NHSD has implemented some of our recommendations. Every time an employee logs onto their computer the Acceptable Use Policy is displayed on the screen and the employee must click "ok" to close the screen. The District now has separate IT policies and procedures to follow. The District does require the vendor to have its own unique userID and passwords. The vendor is now required to get approval before changes are made to the District's data, but the vendor still has access into the District's system.

The District should implement the system parameter settings recommended in our prior audit recommendation number 3 regarding passwords and logging users off the system after a period of inactivity.

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 Tom Corbett
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Ronald J. Tomalis
Secretary of Education
1010 Harristown Building #2
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

The Honorable Robert M. McCord
State Treasurer
Room 129 - Finance Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Ms. Nichole Duffy
Director, Bureau of Budget and
Fiscal Management
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

Dr. David Davare
Director of Research Services
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
P.O. Box 2042
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

This report is a matter of public record. Copies of this report may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 318 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120. If you have any questions regarding this report or any other matter, you may contact the Department of the Auditor General by accessing our website at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us.

