

SOUTHERN HUNTINGDON SCHOOL DISTRICT
HUNTINGDON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2010

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

Mr. Robert Kough, Board President
Southern Huntingdon County School District
RR #2, Box 1124
Three Springs, Pennsylvania 17264

Dear Governor Rendell and Mr. Kough:

We conducted a performance audit of the Southern Huntingdon County School District (SHCSD) to determine its compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements and administrative procedures. Our audit covered the period February 25, 2008 through December 2, 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 SHCSD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures, except as detailed in the finding noted in this report. A summary of these results is presented in the Executive Summary section of the audit report.

Our audit finding and recommendations have been discussed with SHCSD's management and their responses are included in the audit report. We believe the implementation of our recommendations will improve SHCSD's operations and facilitate compliance with legal and administrative requirements. We appreciate the SHCSD's cooperation during the conduct of the audit and their willingness to implement our recommendations.

Sincerely,

/s/

JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

September 8, 2010

cc: **SOUTHERN HUNTINGDON COUNTY 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 Southern Huntingdon County School District (SHCSD). Our audit sought to answer certain questions regarding the District's compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures.

Our audit scope covered the period February 25, 2008 through December 2, 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 SHCSD encompasses approximately 221 square miles. According to 2000 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 8,030. According to District officials, in school year 2007-08 the SHCSD provided basic educational services to 1,358 pupils through the employment of 113 teachers, 67 full-time and part-time support personnel, and 8 administrators. Lastly, the SHCSD received more than \$9.3 million in state funding in school year 2007-08.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the SHCSD complied, in all significant respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures, except for one compliance-related matter reported as a finding.

Finding: Errors in Reporting Nonresident Membership Resulted in an Overpayment of \$21,765 in Tuition for Children Placed in Private Homes. Our audit of pupil membership reports submitted to the Department of Education found that resident and nonresident students were misclassified, resulting in an overpayment of \$21,765 in tuition for children placed in private homes (see page 6).

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations. There were no findings or observations issued in our audit for the school years 2005-06 and 2004-05.



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 February 25, 2008 through December 2, 2009, except for the verification of professional employee certification which was performed for the period July 1, 2008 through June 30, 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 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 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.

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 SHCSD'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:

- ✓ Were professional employees certified for the positions they held?
- ✓ 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?

- ✓ Is the District's pupil transportation department, including any contracted vendors, in compliance with applicable state laws and procedures?
- ✓ Does the District ensure that Board members appropriately comply with the Public Official and Employee Ethics Act?
- ✓ 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 use an outside vendor to maintain its membership data and if so, are there internal controls in place related to vendor access?

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, regulations, 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 and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

SHCSD 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.

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 pupil transportation, bus driver qualifications, professional employee certification, state ethics compliance, and financial stability.
- Items such as Board meeting minutes, pupil membership records, and reimbursement applications.
- Tuition receipts and deposited state funds.

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

Findings and Observations

Finding

Errors in Reporting Nonresident Membership Resulted in an Overpayment of \$21,765 in Tuition for Children Placed in Private Homes

Criteria relevant to the finding:

24 P.S. 25-2503(c) of the Public School Code provides that the Commonwealth will pay tuition to districts providing education to nonresident children placed in private homes. The payments are based on the membership days reported for such children.

Our audit of pupil membership reports submitted to the Department of Education (DE) for the 2007-08 school year found nonresident membership for children placed in private homes was overstated by 177 days for elementary students and by 364 days for secondary students. The errors resulted in an overpayment of \$21,765 in tuition for children placed in private homes.

District personnel incorrectly classified one resident student and four nonresident children placed in a private home in a neighboring district as nonresident children placed in private homes in the Southern Huntingdon County School District.

We have provided DE with reports detailing the nonresident membership errors for use in recalculating the District's tuition payment. The errors did not significantly affect other subsidies and reimbursements based on resident membership.

Recommendations

The *Southern Huntingdon County School District* should:

1. Review membership data thoroughly to ensure students are properly classified prior to submitting reports to DE.
2. Review reports submitted subsequent to the years audited and submit revised reports to DE if errors are found.

The *Department of Education* should:

3. Adjust the District's allocations to recover the \$21,765 overpayment of tuition for children placed in private homes.

Management Response

Management stated the following:

For the 2007-08 school year, the District claimed nonresident foster children as 1305b [foster children within the District] students and also billed the sending district tuition. These students should have been recorded as 1305c students [foster children in other districts].

Effective immediately, the District will review all DE enrollment submissions for accuracy. The SHCSD Board Secretary will verify all DE 1305 submissions.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Southern Huntingdon County School District for the school years 2005-06 and 2004-05 resulted in no findings or observations.

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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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.

