



# Washington State Auditor's Office

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## Special Report

## Alternative Learning Experience

# Tumwater School District No. 33

Thurston County

For the period September 1, 2014 through August 31, 2015

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## Washington State Auditor's Office

June 27, 2016

Board of Directors  
Tumwater School District No. 33  
Tumwater, Washington

### Report on Alternative Learning Experience

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you to promote accountability, integrity and openness in government. The State Auditor's Office takes seriously our role of providing state and local governments with assurance and accountability as the independent auditor of public accounts. In this way, we strive to help government work better, cost less, deliver higher value and earn greater public trust.

Independent audits provide essential accountability and transparency for District operations. This information is valuable to management, the governing body and public stakeholders when assessing the government's stewardship of public resources.

The attached comprises our report on the District's compliance with alternative learning experience enrollment reporting rules. Our independent audit report describes the overall results and conclusions for areas we examined. We appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff and we value your cooperation during the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Troy X. Kelley".

TROY KELLEY  
STATE AUDITOR  
OLYMPIA, WA

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## AUDIT SUMMARY

### Results in brief

District operations complied with applicable state laws and regulations and its own policies and procedures regarding alternative learning experience (ALE) enrollment. For the year ending August 31, 2015, the District received approximately \$37.4 million in combined enrollment and staff mix funding; \$772,606 of this was related to its ALE programs.

- Secondary Options – The program reported 91.45 average annual full-time equivalent (AAFTE). Our audit tested a sample of eight students and found 1.50 monthly FTE under reported and 1.10 monthly FTE over reported; resulting in a net .40 FTE under reported. Errors were due to not including all learning plan hours in reported enrollment, reporting a student who did not have a program change after three consecutive unsuccessful progress reviews, reporting courses that were already completed and reporting a student without a signed statement of understanding.

We estimate these errors resulted in \$230 in under funding.

- Academic Learning Lab – The program reported 42.78 AAFTE. Our audit tested a sample of nine students.

However, we noted certain matters that we communicated to the District in a management letter dated May 11, 2016 related to documentation in support of claimed FTE. We appreciate the District's commitment to resolving those matters.

### About alternative learning experience programs

ALE programs are a form of basic K-12 public school education in Washington State. While students in traditional basic education attend classes on campus and have face-to-face contact with teachers and other staff, ALE students may spend most, or even all, of their time outside of a regular classroom setting.

Districts may build Internet-based educational programs that enroll students from anywhere in the state. Besides Internet programs, ALE can be accomplished through a contract between a student and district instructors, or through a parent-partner program in which parents participate in the design and teaching of the student's courses. These programs are different from homeschooling in that students remain part of the public school system and districts claiming funding are responsible for supervision, monitoring, assessing and evaluating the student's education.

Districts may count ALE students for funding when they report enrollment to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). In order to claim ALE students for funding, ALE programs must satisfy OSPI's requirement for courses of study leading to a high school diploma. Districts must prepare detailed plans for each student, maintain regular contact with students, and evaluate student progress on a monthly basis. Districts must also keep detailed records to show they have met all of these requirements.

During the period under review, the District operated two ALE programs, which accounted for 2.16 percent of its total basic student enrollment:

- Secondary Options is a contract-based program for high school students. Students participate in classes on campus daily to support learning that occurs outside of school. Credits earned lead to a diploma through demonstrated mastery of class assignments using a variety of assessment models as well as some course work available on an independent basis. This program has operated for 22 years and non-resident students represent 15.5 percent of students reported for funding.
- Academic Learning Lab is an online learning program located at New Market Skills Center. The program serves high school students who meet their plan hours by attending on campus 15 hours per week. This program has operated as ALE for three years and non-resident students represent 77.1 percent of students reported for funding.

## About the audit

Per RCW 28A.232.010, school districts must receive biennial audits of their ALE program. This report contains the results of our independent audit of ALE enrollment at Tumwater School District No. 33 from September 1, 2014 through August 31, 2015.

Management is responsible for ensuring compliance with applicable ALE requirements. This includes the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls relevant to these objectives.

Our audit involved performing procedures to obtain evidence about the District's compliance with state laws and regulations and its own policies and procedures, and internal controls over such matters, with regard to its ALE program.

In keeping with general auditing practices, we do not examine every transaction, activity or area. Instead, the areas examined were those representing the highest risk of noncompliance.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Tumwater School District No. 33 provides educational services to approximately 6,600 students in Thurston County. The District's main objective is to provide public school services to students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The District has 12 schools: six elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and two alternative high schools. In addition, the District is host and fiscal agent for two regional programs: New Market Skills Center, which provides career and technical education to students in the region, and Tumwater West, which provides instruction to students in the Thurston County Detention Center.

An elected, five-member Board of Directors governs the District. The Board appoints a Superintendent to oversee the District's daily operations as well as its 641 employees. For the 2014-2015 school year, the District operated on an annual general fund budget of \$67.2 million.

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### Audit history

You can find current and past audit reports for the District at <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

## ABOUT THE STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The State Auditor's Office is established in the state's Constitution and is part of the executive branch of state government. The State Auditor is elected by the citizens of Washington and serves four-year terms.

We work with our audit clients and citizens to achieve our vision of government that works for citizens, by helping governments work better, cost less, deliver higher value, and earn greater public trust.

In fulfilling our mission to hold state and local governments accountable for the use of public resources, we also hold ourselves accountable by continually improving our audit quality and operational efficiency and developing highly engaged and committed employees.

As an elected agency, the State Auditor's Office has the independence necessary to objectively perform audits and investigations. Our audits are designed to comply with professional standards as well as to satisfy the requirements of federal, state, and local laws.

Our audits look at financial information and compliance with state, federal and local laws on the part of all local governments, including schools, and all state agencies, including institutions of higher education. In addition, we conduct performance audits of state agencies and local governments as well as [fraud](#), state [whistleblower](#) and [citizen hotline](#) investigations.

The results of our work are widely distributed through a variety of reports, which are available on our [website](#) and through our free, electronic [subscription](#) service.

We take our role as partners in accountability seriously, and provide training and technical assistance to governments, and have an extensive quality assurance program.

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