Office of the Washington State Auditor

Pat McCarthy

Special Report
Alternative Learning Experience

North Mason School District No. 403

Mason County

For the period September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2016

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Office of the Washington State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

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Board of Directors
North Mason School District No. 403
Belfair, 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,

Pat McCarthy

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, 2016, the District received approximately $13.2 million in combined enrollment and staff mix funding; approximately $345,000 of this was related to its ALE programs.

- James A Taylor High School – The program reported 38.04 average annual full-time equivalent (AAFTE). Procedures performed over this program were limited to considering internal controls the district has in place to assure compliance with reporting requirements. Nothing came to our attention to cause us to believe the district did not comply with reporting requirements.

- Homelink – The program reported 16.64 average annual full-time equivalent (AAFTE). Procedures performed over this program were limited to considering internal controls the district has in place to assure compliance with reporting requirements. Nothing came to our attention to cause us to believe the district did not comply with reporting requirements.

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 2.7 percent of its total basic student enrollment:

- James A Taylor High School is a site based program serving students in grades 9-12. Students are on the district campus for most of their courses. The program has operated for 15 years and non-resident students represent 11.2 percent of students reported for funding.
- Homelink is an online program serving students in grades 7-12. Students are online for most of their courses. The program has operated for 15 years and non-resident students represent 12.2 percent of students reported for funding non-resident student enrollment.

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 North Mason School District No. 403 from September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2016.

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

North Mason School District No. 403 serves approximately 2,100 students in kindergarten through 12th grade in Mason County. The District operates one high school, one alternative high school, one middle school and two elementary schools.

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 approximately 250 employees. The District had an operating budget of $24.6 million for 2015-16 School Year.

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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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