



Washington State Auditor's Office

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Special Report
Alternative Learning Experience
Richland School District No. 400
Benton County

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

Published December 27, 2016

Report No. 1018240





Washington State Auditor's Office

December 27, 2016

Board of Directors
Richland School District No. 400
Richland, 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,

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, 2016, the District received approximately \$79 million in combined enrollment and staff mix funding; approximately \$3.29 million of this was related to its ALE programs.

- River's Edge High School Contract Learning – The program reported 59.8 average annual full-time equivalent (AAFTE). Our audit of this program tested 4.8 AAFTE (eight students) and found a net 0.11 AAFTE under-reported. Errors occurred when reported FTE did not reflect the hours identified in student learning plans, when needed FTE adjustments were made for incorrect months, when reporting students without required monthly two-way contact, monthly progress reviews and/or intervention plans, and not reporting students with all reporting requirements in place.

We estimate the program was under-funded approximately \$694 based on our testing.

- Three Rivers HomeLink - The program reported 448.51 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.
- Graduation Alliance - The program reported 12.42 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 three ALE programs, which accounted for 4.2 percent of its total basic student enrollment:

- River's Edge High School Contract Learning is an onsite and online program that provides a web-based opportunity for high school students desiring an alternative to traditional schooling. Students meet learning plan hours by accessing courses both on and off school campus. This program has operated for roughly 17 years and nonresident students represent 9.6 percent of the program's total enrollment.
- Three Rivers HomeLink is a remote and onsite program that includes a variety of learning opportunities for students in grades K-12. There are courses and workshops available on campus daily as well as a variety of online courses to support learning that occurs outside a regular classroom setting. This program has operated for 10 years and nonresident students represent 42.4 percent of the program's total enrollment.
- Graduation Alliance is an online program that provides a web-based opportunity for high school students desiring an alternative to traditional schooling. The program has operated for four years and serves only resident students.

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 Richland School District No. 400 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

Richland School District No. 400 provides educational services to approximately 13,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade in Benton County. The District encompasses approximately 504 square miles including the cities of Richland, West Richland and a portion of the city of Kennewick. The District operates 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, an alternative high school and a parent partnership program.

An elected, five-member Board of Directors governs the District. The Board appoints management to oversee the District's daily operations as well as its approximately 1,650 employees. For the 2015-2016 school year, the District operated on an annual General Fund budget of approximately \$140.3 million.

Contact information related to this report

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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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