

Dooly County Middle School On-Site Audit Report

December 5, 2016

Conducted by:

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Background

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) conducts academic audits and investigations to maximize the integrity of student achievement data and to ensure that LEAs implement Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) assessment policies and procedures with fidelity, so that achievement data can be utilized in making critical decisions and reporting of student outcomes.

Through an enrollment verification audit, GOSA reviews school reporting data and other school records reported to the State to confirm accuracy of that data and to ensure that systems and schools throughout Georgia are funded appropriately.

Authority

GOSA conducts FTE/SR data audits in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), pursuant to the Official Code of Georgia Annotated as set forth in Section 20-14-26 (a)(2):

To audit and inspect or cause to be audited or inspected for the purpose of verification, research, analysis, reporting, or for other purposes related to the performance of its powers and duties as provided in this article and for the purposes of auditing pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle grades, and secondary education, postsecondary education, and education work force programs and schools, local school systems, institutes, colleges, universities, regional education service agencies, and other public education programs and entities as defined by the council.

Audit Objective and Methodology

The Georgia Department of Education flagged a high number of discrepancies between FTE (mid-year) and Student Record (year-end) reporting at Dooly County Middle School for the 2015-2016 school year. Dooly County Middle School had one of the highest number of error counts with 44 students affected under the E262 error code.

E262: A REMEDIAL EDUCATION SUBJECT CODE must be reported for all students with an FTE PROGRAM CODE of 'J'. *To determine FTE weight a subject code must be provided to determine the level of services provided to a student. Student records serve to validate a student's active status for funding purposes.*

Due to the number of students affected by these errors relative to other schools in the state, GOSA initially requested information on district data collection policy and information related to these errors through an online inquiry form. Dooly County School District submitted this form on September 16, 2016.

After review of the online inquiry form, GOSA determined it was necessary to make a site visit to Dooly County Middle School in Dooly County to gain more information through an enrollment verification audit. The intent of this audit was to determine the reason for the errors and gain insight into how data is collected, reported, and stored at the school and district office.

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On October 19, 2016, GOSA visited Dooly County Middle School to collect information via interviews of administrators at the district and school level. GOSA has reviewed the information collected during this audit in conjunction with state-level data and the LEA's inquiry form. It has the following findings.

Findings

- REP students were not identified at the beginning of the school year in the LEA scheduling software, Infinite Campus. As a result, the middle school assistant principal had to gather hard copy lists from teachers to identify students as receiving REP services. The school-level data coordinator during last year's FTE-1 count is no longer employed by the school system, and other staff members do not know how those students were flagged during the data collection. As a result, there was not a record of REP students when the current staff entered Student Record program enrollment during summer 2016, resulting in discrepancies. In addition, there was not a clear chain of custody for data reporting for much of the 2015-2016 school year.
- In recent years, there has been high turnover in school- and district-level data collections staff. Currently, LEA has no official data collections coordinator at the system level. Per the superintendent, her recommendation for hiring a full-time data collections coordinator has been voted down by the school board twice. As a result, the superintendent reported that the IT Specialist is providing interim oversight of FTE and SR reporting to increase data accuracy.
- For 2016-2017, the middle school registrar reported she has not been instructed to code EIP or REP students for FTE 1, even though they have been coded at the LEA level. Since the FTE 1 window was open during the audit visit, students may have been reported by the end of the window.
- Training provided to data collections staff, particularly school-based registrars, has been intermittent, inconsistent, or nonexistent. The current registrar, who held the position in prior years and was recently moved back into that position, stated that she had not received training on data collections or Infinite Campus since moving back into that position.
- Several data collections staff members did attend the FY17 GADOE Data Conference in August 2016.
- During the course of conversations, staff members also indicated that the LEA incorrectly coded students participating in an alternative education program as participating in a separate alternative education school during the FTE-1 count in 2015-2016. As a result, these students were incorrectly withdrawn from the middle school after the school year began, resulting in underreporting on the FTE-1 count. Another staff member was responsible for FTE-2 in March 2016 and ensured that those students were reported with the proper program code for the alternative program.
- LEA personnel do not have a system procedures manual that outlines the steps for data collections and sign off, but they mentioned the need to develop one soon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based upon a review of the personnel interviews, student records, and documentation, the reasons for the errors appear to have occurred because of a combination of personnel changes, events, and omissions.

- The high turnover in data collections staff led to a lack of knowledge regarding FTE and SR reporting to GaDOE.
- Intermittent and non-existent training for data collections staff also led to a lack of knowledge regarding FTE and SR reporting.
- Having no centralized staff person designated to oversee FTE counts and SR end of year reporting allowed errors in reporting to occur without being detected.
- At the beginning of the 2015-2016 year, REP students were not flagged in the Infinite Campus student information system, and the LEA had no mechanism to track EIP or REP students from FTE 1 through to SR reporting, causing an inaccurate count at year end. While the processes for reporting data appear to be more stable than last year, at the time of the visit, there still was lack of clarity between the registrar and other staff concerning REP reporting.
- For 2016-2017, it has been reported that middle school and high school students participating in the alternative education program will be coded as participating in an alternative education program, while attending their school of record. GOSA recognizes this as an appropriate action by the LEA.

For future FTE counts and SR reporting, the Dooly County School District should take the following steps:

1. Ensure that there is someone from the central office staff with oversight of FTE and SR reporting to ensure data accuracy and timely reporting.
2. Develop a data collections procedure manual to train and refresh data collections staff on LEA data collections procedures. Update the manual annually or when new data reporting requirements are issued by GaDOE.
3. Provide annual training on local and state policies and procedures for all data collections staff. In addition, provide regular training on the Infinite Campus student information system to the appropriate staff members.
4. Participate in all webinars offered by GaDOE data collections and reporting personnel to increase knowledge and expertise in data collections and reporting procedures.
5. Participate in the New Data Coordinator training offered by GaDOE before each annual data conference in August. During such trainings, dedicated time can be set aside to address Dooly County's specific needs. Participation should continue annually until Dooly County data personnel are confident and consistent in their roles and duties as it relates to state data collections and reporting.
6. Work with Infinite Campus to develop a tracking mechanism for the program involvement of EIP and REP students.

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As outlined in the audit letter, GOSA requested that Dooly County provide an official response to the audit report and provide a corrective action plan for each of the seven recommendations outlined above. This response has been included as Attachment A to this report.

GOSA will follow-up with the superintendent six months and twelve months after receipt of this report in order to verify the implementation status of these recommendations for Dooly County Middle School and the school district at large. Failure to implement the corrective action plan, or a continuation/increase of errors, may lead to a future investigation. This audit will remain open until these recommendations are effectively implemented.

GOSA Point of Contact:

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Attachment A: Dooly County Response Letter and Corrective Action Plan



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Governor's Office of Student Achievement
Academic Auditing Program
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE
952 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334

RE: Dooly County Middle School Enrollment Verification On-Site Audit

Dear Executive Director Todd:

In connection with your on-site audit conducted at Dooly County Middle School on October 19, 2016 and the subsequent draft audit report received on November 17, 2016, we conclude the following in regard to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's enrollment verification audit (select only one option):

We have reviewed a draft copy of GOSA's audit findings report of Dooly County Middle School, and concur that the findings and conclusions are fairly presented. We are responsible for the findings and conclusions contained within the report and for establishing and maintaining adequate records and effective internal control over data collections and reporting, providing appropriate training and the hiring of qualified staff, and the safeguarding of accurate records.

We have reviewed a draft copy of GOSA's audit findings report of Dooly County Middle School for the on-site audit conducted on October 19, 2016 and believe the findings and conclusions contained within GOSA's audit report are not fairly presented for the following reasons:

Please be specific and attach appropriate documentation:

Along with this letter, we have attached a Corrective Action Plan to address the recommendations stated in the audit report.

Respectfully,


Interim Superintendent

Dooly County School District

Dooly County Schools Corrective Action Plan

Recommendation Number 1: Ensure that there is someone from the central office staff with oversight of FTE and SR reporting to ensure data accuracy and timely reporting.

We concur with this finding. The District will ensure that an appropriate central office staff member with oversight of FTE and SR reporting will be put in place to ensure data accuracy and timely reporting. The District anticipates that this staff member will be in place between February 1st and March 17th.

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Recommendation Number 2. Develop a data collections procedure manual to train and refresh data collections staff on LEA data collections procedures. Update the manual annually or when new data reporting requirements are issued by GaDOE.

We concur with this finding. The District will ensure that a data collections procedure manual to train and refresh data collections on LEA data collections procedures will be developed and updated annually, as needed, in accordance with GaDOE. The district anticipates Data Collections manual completion between January 1st and January 31st.

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Recommendation Number 3. Provide annual training on local and state policies and procedures for all data collections staff. In addition, provide regular training on the Infinite Campus student information system to the appropriate staff members.

We concur with this finding. The District will ensure that all appropriate data collections staff attend all annual training sessions on local and state policies and procedures. The District will ensure that regular training on the Infinite Campus student information system is provided to all appropriate staff members. The District anticipates annual training will be in place between August 10th and August 30th and regular training on the Infinite Campus student information system will be in place between December 1st and December 15th.

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Recommendation Number 4. Participate in all webinars offered by GaDOE data collections and reporting personnel to increase knowledge and expertise in data collections and reporting procedures.

We concur with this finding. The District will ensure that all appropriate staff members attend all pertinent Department of Education Data Collections and reporting webinars and a minimum of one in-person Data Collections Training event each year. The District anticipates that webinar training attendance will occur as training is offered by GaDOE.

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Recommendation Number 5. Participate in the New Data Coordinator training offered by GaDOE before each annual data conference in August. During such trainings, dedicated time can be set aside to address Dooly County's specific needs. Participation should continue annually until Dooly County data personnel are confident and consistent in their roles and duties as it relates to state data collections and reporting.

We concur with this finding. The District will ensure that appropriate staff will participate in the New Data Coordinator training offered by GaDoe. The District will also ensure that dedicated time will be set aside to focus on the specific needs of Dooly County Middle School. This participation will occur annually until all data personnel are confident and consistent in their roles and duties as it relates to state data collections and reporting. The district participation will occur before August 1st.

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Recommendation Number 6. Work with Infinite Campus to develop a tracking mechanism for the program involvement of EIP and REP students.

We concur with this finding. The District will work with K12 Solutions/Infinite Campus to develop a tracking mechanism for the program involvement of EIP and REP students. The district anticipates this tracking mechanism to be developed between January 1st and January 31st.

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