

# STATE OF FLORIDA AUDITOR GENERAL

## Operational Audit

Report No. 2024-060  
November 2023

### OKEECHOBEE COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



Sherrill F. Norman, CPA  
Auditor General

## **Board Members and Superintendent**

During the 2022-23 fiscal year, Ken Kenworthy served as Superintendent of the Okeechobee County Schools and the following individuals served as School Board Members:

	<u>District No.</u>
Dr. Christine Bishop from 11-22-22	1
Joe Arnold through 11-21-22, Vice Chair	1
Malissa Morgan, Vice Chair from 11-22-22	2
Melisa Jahner, Chair	3
Amanda Riedel	4
Jill Holcomb	5

The team leader was Mark D. Kenny, CPA, and the audit was supervised by Clare Waters, CPA.

Please address inquiries regarding this report to Edward A. Waller, CPA, Audit Manager, by e-mail at [tedwaller@aud.state.fl.us](mailto:tedwaller@aud.state.fl.us) or by telephone at (850) 412-2887.

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# OKEECHOBEE COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

## SUMMARY

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This operational audit of the Okeechobee County School District (District) focused on selected District processes and administrative activities and included a follow-up on the finding noted in our report No. 2021-034. Our operational audit disclosed the following:

**Finding 1:** District controls over school resource officer services could be enhanced.

**Finding 2:** As similarly noted in our report No. 2021-034, the District did not comply with State law by posting on its Web site all required graphical representations of summary financial efficiency data and fiscal trend information.

## BACKGROUND

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The Okeechobee County School District (District) is part of the State system of public education under the general direction of the Florida Department of Education and is governed by State law and State Board of Education rules. Geographic boundaries of the District correspond with those of Okeechobee County. The governing body of the District is the Okeechobee County District School Board (Board), which is composed of five elected members. The appointed Superintendent of Schools is the Executive Officer of the Board. During the 2022-23 fiscal year, the District operated ten elementary, middle, high, and specialized schools; and reported 6,404 unweighted full-time equivalent students.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Finding 1: School Resource Officer Services

State law<sup>1</sup> requires the Board and Superintendent to partner with local law enforcement agencies or security agencies to establish or assign one or more safe-school officers, such as school resource officers (SROs), at each school facility. SROs must be certified law enforcement officers and, among other things, complete mental health crisis intervention training using a curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in mental health crisis intervention. In addition, effective school safety measures include documented verification that an SRO is present at each school facility during school hours and has completed required training.

For the 2022-23 fiscal year the District contracted with the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office and the City of Okeechobee to provide an SRO at each of the ten District schools. The contracts with the Sheriff's Office and the City stipulated that each SRO would be assigned to a designated school for 8 hours each day that the school was in session. However, we found that District controls over SROs services could be improved as:

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1006.12, Florida Statutes.

- District records did not document SRO attendance, either through the school staff log<sup>2</sup> or by other means, to facilitate the monitoring of SRO services.
- The contracts did not require confirmation that each SRO had completed the required mental health crisis intervention training and District procedures did not require documented verification that each SRO had completed the required training. In response to our request, District records were provided that indicated 10 of the 13 SROs completed the crisis intervention training before the 2022-23 school year and 2 SROs did not complete the required training until February 2023 and April 2023. District personnel were unable to provide evidence that 1 SRO completed the training.

According to District personnel, the District relied on the Sheriff's Office and the City to ensure that an SRO was present at each school facility during school hours and that the SROs completed the required training before service was provided. However, such reliance provides the District limited assurance of SRO attendance and required training. Absent effective monitoring procedures over attendance and training, the District cannot demonstrate compliance with State law or that all appropriate measures were taken to promote student and staff safety.

**Recommendation: The District should enhance procedures to ensure and demonstrate compliance with State school safety laws. Such procedures should include:**

- **Documented verification that at least one SRO is present at each school during school hours.**
- **Contract provisions requiring confirmation that each SRO completed the required mental health crisis intervention training.**
- **Documented verification that each SRO had completed the required training.**

## **Finding 2: Fiscal Transparency**

To promote responsible spending, more citizen involvement, and improved accountability, it is important for the District to provide easy access to its budget and related information. Pursuant to State law,<sup>3</sup> the District must post on its Web site, for each public school within the District and for the District, certain graphical representations of summary financial efficiency data and fiscal trend information for the previous 3 years. Specifically, the District Web site must show fiscal trend information for the previous 3 years on the:

- Ratio of full-time equivalent (FTE) students to FTE instructional personnel.
- Ratio of FTE students to FTE administrative personnel.
- Total operating expenditures per FTE student.
- Total instructional expenditures per FTE student.
- General administrative expenditures as a percentage of total budget.
- Rate of change in the General Fund's ending fund balance not classified as restricted.

At the time of our review in August 2023, the District Web site included the graphical representations for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 fiscal years; however, the Web site lacked the graphical representations for

<sup>2</sup> The District uses a physical sign in/sign out log for school staff to record arrival and departure times.

<sup>3</sup> Section 1011.035(2), Florida Statutes.

the 2021-22 fiscal year required by State law. In response to our inquiry, District personnel indicated that the 2021-22 fiscal year graphical representations were not posted due to an oversight.

Subsequent to our inquiry, in August 2023 District personnel posted all required graphical representations on the Web site. Providing the required financial efficiency data and fiscal trend information in a timely manner enhances citizen involvement and the ability to analyze, monitor, and evaluate fiscal outcomes. A similar finding was noted in our report No. 2021-034.

**Recommendation:** The District should continue efforts to comply with statutory transparency requirements by timely posting all required information on the District Web site.

## ***PRIOR AUDIT FOLLOW-UP***

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The District had not taken corrective action for the finding included in our report No. 2021-034 as noted in Finding 2.

## ***OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY***

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The Auditor General conducts operational audits of governmental entities to provide the Legislature, Florida's citizens, public entity management, and other stakeholders unbiased, timely, and relevant information for use in promoting government accountability and stewardship and improving government operations.

We conducted this operational audit from May 2023 through September 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings 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.

This operational audit focused on selected District processes and administrative activities. For those areas, our audit objectives were to:

- Evaluate management's performance in establishing and maintaining internal controls, including controls designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse, and in administering assigned responsibilities in accordance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, contracts, grant agreements, and other guidelines.
- Examine internal controls designed and placed in operation to promote and encourage the achievement of management's control objectives in the categories of compliance, economic and efficient operations, reliability of records and reports, and safeguarding of assets, and identify weaknesses in those controls.
- Determine whether management had taken corrective actions for the finding included in our report No. 2021-034.
- Identify statutory and fiscal changes that may be recommended to the Legislature pursuant to Section 11.45(7)(h), Florida Statutes.

This audit was designed to identify, for those areas included within the scope of the audit, weaknesses in management's internal controls significant to our audit objectives; instances of noncompliance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, contracts, grant agreements, and other guidelines; and instances of

inefficient or ineffective operational policies, procedures, or practices. The focus of this audit was to identify problems so that they may be corrected in such a way as to improve government accountability and efficiency and the stewardship of management. Professional judgment has been used in determining significance and audit risk and in selecting the particular transactions, legal compliance matters, records, and controls considered.

As described in more detail below, for those programs, activities, and functions included within the scope of our audit, our audit work included, but was not limited to, communicating to management and those charged with governance the scope, objectives, timing, overall methodology, and reporting of our audit; obtaining an understanding of the program, activity, or function; identifying and evaluating internal controls significant to our audit objectives; exercising professional judgment in considering significance and audit risk in the design and execution of the research, interviews, tests, analyses, and other procedures included in the audit methodology; obtaining reasonable assurance of the overall sufficiency and appropriateness of the evidence gathered in support of our audit findings and conclusions; and reporting on the results of the audit as required by governing laws and auditing standards.

Our audit included the selection and examination of transactions and records, as well as events and conditions, occurring during the 2022-23 fiscal year audit period, and selected District actions taken prior and subsequent thereto. Unless otherwise indicated in this report, these records and transactions were not selected with the intent of statistically projecting the results, although we have presented for perspective, where practicable, information concerning relevant population value or size and quantifications relative to the items selected for examination.

An audit by its nature does not include a review of all records and actions of management, staff, and vendors, and as a consequence, cannot be relied upon to identify all instances of noncompliance, fraud, waste, abuse, or inefficiency.

In conducting our audit, we:

- Reviewed applicable laws, rules, Board policies, District procedures, and other guidelines, and interviewed District personnel to obtain an understanding of applicable processes and administrative activities and the related requirements.
- Reviewed Board information technology (IT) policies and District procedures to determine whether the policies and procedures addressed certain important IT control functions, such as security, systems development and maintenance, network configuration management, logging and monitoring, system backups, and disaster recovery.
- Evaluated District procedures for maintaining and reviewing employee access to IT data and resources. We examined District records supporting the access privileges of the 63 IT users to District enterprise resource planning system finance and human resources applications to determine the appropriateness and necessity of the access privileges based on employee job duties and user account functions and whether the access privileges prevented the performance of incompatible duties.
- Inquired whether the District had expenditures or entered into any contracts under the authority granted by a state of emergency declared or renewed during the audit period.
- From the population of expenditures totaling \$1.5 million for the period July 2022 through May 2023 from nonvoted capital outlay tax levy proceeds, examined documentation supporting

selected expenditures totaling \$1.1 million to determine District compliance with Section 1011.71(2), Florida Statutes.

- Examined the District Web site to determine whether the 2022-23 fiscal year proposed, tentative, and official budgets were prominently posted pursuant to Section 1011.035(2), Florida Statutes. In addition, we determined whether the District Web site contained, for each public school within the District and for the District, the required graphical representations of summary financial efficiency data and fiscal trend information for the previous 3 years, and a link to the Web-based fiscal transparency tool developed by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE).
- From the population of tangible personal property items with recorded costs totaling \$11.7 million at June 30, 2023, selected and inspected 23 property items with recorded costs totaling \$147,464 to determine whether the District had appropriately marked the items.
- Examined District records for the audit period supporting the teacher salary increase allocation received pursuant to Chapter 2022-156, Laws of Florida, Specific Appropriation 86, totaling \$1.6 million and records supporting related payments totaling the same amount to 377 instructional personnel and 42 non-classroom instructional personnel to determine whether the District submitted required reports (salary distribution plan and expenditure report) to the FDOE and used the allocation in compliance with Section 1011.62(14), Florida Statutes (2022).
- Evaluated Board policies and District procedures addressing the ethical conduct of school personnel, including reporting responsibilities related to employee misconduct which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student, and the investigation responsibilities for all reports of alleged misconduct to determine whether those policies and procedures were effective and sufficient to ensure compliance with Section 1001.42(6) and (7)(b), Florida Statutes.
- Evaluated the effectiveness of Board policies and District procedures for reporting personnel subject to the disqualification list to the FDOE in accordance with State Board of Education (SBE) Rule 6A-10.084, Florida Administrative Code.
- For the Okeechobee High School Project (OHS Project), which was the only significant construction project during the audit period, with a guaranteed maximum price contract totaling \$8.8 million for Phase 1 and expenditures totaling \$855,000 during the audit period, examined documentation supporting all OHS Project expenditures to determine compliance with Board policies, District procedures, and applicable provisions of State law and rules. Specifically, we examined District records to determine whether:
  - The construction manager was properly selected pursuant to Section 255.103, Florida Statutes.
  - District personnel properly monitored subcontractor selections and licensures.
  - The architect was adequately insured.
  - Appropriate Board policies and District procedures addressing the negotiation and monitoring of general conditions costs had been established.
  - Documentation supporting the payments was sufficient and complied with the contract provisions.
- Examined District records to determine whether the Board had adopted appropriate school safety policies and the District implemented procedures to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of students and compliance with Sections 1006.07 and 1006.12, Florida Statutes; and Section 1011.62(12), Florida Statutes (2022).
- Examined District records to determine whether the Board had adopted appropriate mental health awareness policies and the District had implemented procedures to promote the health, safety, and welfare of students and ensure compliance with Section 1012.584, Florida Statutes;

Section 1011.62(13), Florida Statutes (2022); and SBE Rule 6A-1.094124, Florida Administrative Code.

- Communicated on an interim basis with applicable officials to ensure the timely resolution of issues involving controls and noncompliance.
- Performed various other auditing procedures, including analytical procedures, as necessary, to accomplish the objectives of the audit.
- Prepared and submitted for management response the findings and recommendations that are included in this report and which describe the matters requiring corrective actions. Management's response is included in this report under the heading **MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE**.

## **AUTHORITY**

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Section 11.45, Florida Statutes, requires that the Auditor General conduct an operational audit of each school district on a periodic basis. Pursuant to the provisions of Section 11.45, Florida Statutes, I have directed that this report be prepared to present the results of our operational audit.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrill F. Norman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Sherrill F. Norman, CPA  
Auditor General



# MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

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**Superintendent**  
Ken Kenworthy



## Okeechobee County School Board

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**Chairperson**  
Malissa Morgan  
**Vice Chairperson**  
Jill Holcomb

**Members**

Dr. Christine B. Bishop  
Melisa Jahner  
Amanda Riedel

November 15, 2023

Mrs. Sherrill F. Norman  
Auditor General, State of Florida  
Claude Pepper Building, Suite G74  
111 West Madison Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1450

Re: Response to Preliminary and Tentative Findings

Dear Auditor General:

The following information is supplied in response to the Preliminary and Tentative Findings from the operational audit of the Okeechobee County School Board.

Finding 1: School Resource Officer Services

Response: *On Tuesday, November 14, 2023, the Okeechobee County School Board approved amendments to the Okeechobee City Police Department and the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Department SRO agreements to require SROs to sign in daily at the school site and complete the necessary crisis intervention training. For the record, there was never a time when school was in session that an SRO or Guardian has not been present on each school campus as required.*

Finding 2: Fiscal Transparency

Response: *This finding has been corrected and the data has been posted. The Director of Finance will calendar this topic and timely post all required documents in the future.*

Please let us know if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ken Kenworthy".

Ken Kenworthy  
Superintendent of Schools

cc: School Board Members  
Tom Conely, School Board Attorney  
Janet Pineda, Director of Finance

**Together, Achieving Excellence: Putting Students First**