

Solomon Elementary School District

CONCLUSION: In fiscal year 2017, Solomon Elementary School District's (District) student passage rates on State assessments were similar to or higher than the peer districts' averages, and the District's operations were reasonably efficient overall for its small size. Despite its reasonably efficient operations, the District needs to strengthen some of its accounting and computer controls, help ensure student and employee health and safety by implementing a plan to prevent bat infestations, and improve transportation program oversight.

Student achievement and operational efficiency

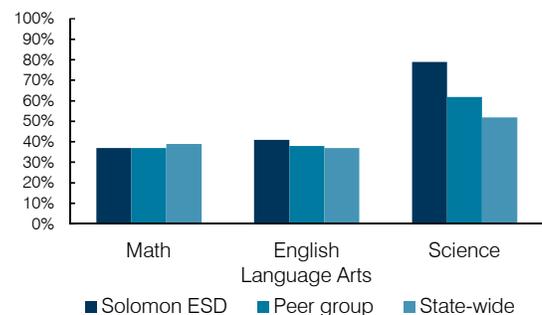
Student achievement similar to peer districts'—For very small districts such as Sentinel ESD, year-to-year changes in student populations can greatly impact year-to-year student test scores. In fiscal year 2017, Solomon ESD's student passage rates on State assessments were similar to or higher than the peer districts' averages in all 3 tested areas.

District's operations reasonably efficient overall—In fiscal year 2017, the District's administrative costs per pupil were lower than the peer districts' average because it served about twice as many students as the peer districts, on average, and therefore, fixed costs such as the superintendent's salary were spread across more students when calculating administrative costs per pupil. Compared to peer districts' averages, the District's fiscal year 2017 plant operations costs were much lower than the peer districts' averages both per square foot and per pupil because it made efficient use of its building space. The District's food service program was reasonably efficient, with a lower cost per meal than the peer districts' average because its 2 regular food service workers also worked as bus drivers when not performing food service duties. Finally, the District's transportation costs were mixed, with higher per mile costs but lower per rider costs primarily because it drove 79 percent fewer miles per rider than the peer districts, on average.

District's inadequate controls increased risk of errors and fraud

Inadequate purchasing and payroll controls—The District had an increased risk of errors and fraud because it did not sufficiently separate responsibilities related to its purchasing and payroll processes. One District employee, with limited review, was responsible for performing the entire purchasing and payroll processes. Allowing an individual to initiate and complete purchasing and payroll transactions could allow the processing of false payments to vendors or employees. In addition, the District did not always maintain adequate documentation showing approval for some employee payments, and during our review of payroll records for 30 District employees, we found that 3 employees were paid incorrect amounts.

Percentage of students who passed State assessments Fiscal year 2017



Comparison of cost measures Fiscal year 2017

Cost measure	Solomon ESD	Peer group average
Administrative cost per pupil	\$2,258	\$3,137
Plant operations cost per square foot	3.85	6.96
Plant operations cost per pupil	950	2,644
Food service cost per meal	3.70	5.79
Transportation cost per mile	2.42	1.87
Transportation cost per rider	476	1,459

Performance pay—Although mandated by statute, in fiscal year 2017, the District did not require the superintendent to meet performance-based goals to receive a portion of his salary. In addition, the District did not retain documentation showing that its teachers met a performance goal, which earned them 25 percent of available Classroom Site Fund performance pay.

Computer controls—The District lacked adequate controls over its computer network and information technology (IT) systems, which exposed it to an increased risk of unauthorized access to these critical systems and potential data loss. Specifically, the District assigned some employees too much access to its accounting system, and some of the District's network-connected servers were using outdated operating systems, including operating systems that will become unsupported within the next year. Further, the District lacked adequate password requirements for access to its accounting and student information systems as well as a written, up-to-date IT contingency plan to help ensure continued operations in the event of a system or equipment failure or interruption.

Recommendations

The District should:

- Implement stronger controls over its purchasing and payroll processes.
- Require the superintendent to meet performance goals to earn a portion of his pay and ensure it retains adequate documentation to demonstrate that teachers' performance pay goals were met.
- Implement stronger controls over its computer network and systems.

Bat infestations created potential health and safety concerns

In fiscal year 2000, the District experienced a bat infestation in the attic spaces over its classroom building and contracted with an environmental consultant to assess and remediate the bat infestation, including removing bats and bat guano and sealing the building. At that time, the consultant advised the District to reassess the attic spaces again in 5 years to address any further bat issues and create and incorporate a bat prevention plan into its overall building preventative maintenance plan. However, the District failed to reassess the attic and develop a bat prevention plan. In fiscal year 2017, another bat infestation occurred in the attic spaces over several of the District's classrooms, and the District had to once again undertake remediation efforts. Developing and following a bat prevention plan that includes periodic assessment and remediation of bats and bat guano is an important component in facilities management and would help protect the District's facilities, minimize costly emergency cleanup and repairs, and help protect the health and safety of students and employees.



Bat guano above classroom ceilings

Recommendation

The District should ensure it addresses any potential health and safety hazards related to its fiscal year 2017 bat infestation and develop and implement a bat prevention plan.

District needs to improve transportation program oversight

The District lacked documentation showing that it met all requirements of the State's *Minimum Standards for School Buses and School Bus Drivers* (Minimum Standards). Specifically, the District did not ensure that bus preventative maintenance and pretrip inspections were consistently performed as required by the Minimum Standards. In addition, the District incorrectly reported its miles and riders for State funding purposes and lacked adequate controls over the fuel cards it used to purchase fuel from a local vendor, increasing its risk of fraud or misuse of the fuel cards.

Recommendations

The District should:

- Ensure it meets all requirements regarding bus preventative maintenance and pretrip inspections to comply with the Minimum Standards and help ensure a safe transportation program.
- Correct errors it made in reporting its miles and riders.
- Strengthen fuel card controls.