*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Gina Brown. I’m a manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Risk-Based Monitoring of Special Education Services.”

This report provides the results of our evaluation of the Louisiana Department of Education’s – or LDOE’s – risk-based monitoring of special education services provided to students with disabilities.

This is the second in a series of reports examining LDOE’s oversight of students with disabilities who receive special education services.

Overall, we found LDOE needs to improve its monitoring process to ensure that all students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education and that school systems follow the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act – or IDEA – and state law.

Specifically, we found LDOE did not conduct desk or on-site reviews for 43 of 100 school systems for at least seven years to help ensure certain fundamental rights of students with disabilities were protected. Instead, LDOE required 41 of the 43 systems to complete a self-assessment.

In addition, between fiscal years 2012 and 2019, LDOE reduced the number of its employees dedicated to special education and entered into a Consent Judgment in Orleans Parish. We found both actions may have contributed to LDOE’s inability to conduct on-site and desk reviews in a timely manner and provide support to school systems. For example, during academic years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022, LDOE conducted a total of 262 desk or on-site reviews, with 166 – or 63.4 percent – of the reviews in Orleans Parish even though Orleans Parish only had 7.2 percent of the students with disabilities in Louisiana.

We also found LDOE’s process to select students for a desk or on-site review did not ensure the department looked at all applicable federal and state requirements in its monitoring protocol.

Additionally, LDOE did not develop policies and procedures or guidance for school systems to follow for informal removals, including how to document the removals. Informal removals, such as routinely calling a parent to pick up a student because of behavior issues, may negatively affect students with disabilities by disrupting their required IDEA supports and services.

We found as well that LDOE did not follow federal regulations when it calculated significant disproportionality related to discipline. As a result, the department may not have identified school systems that disproportionately discipline minority students who receive special education services.

As a result of our report, we developed 11 recommendations.

We recommended thatLDOE ensure all school systems receive at least a desk review or an on-site visit in the time frame suggested by the federal Office of Special Education Programs.

We also recommended thatLDOE increase the percentage of on-site reviews it conducts and incorporate parent, teacher, and other staff feedback into its desk-review process.

In addition, we recommended that LDOE give school systems less time to prepare documentation for desk reviews and work with the Legislature to ensure the department has enough resources to sufficiently monitor school systems outside of Orleans Parish.

We recommended as well that LDOE ensure all staff paid with IDEA funds meet the federal requirements for use of the funds.

Additionally, we recommended thatLDOE follow its procedures for selecting student files to review during desk and on-site reviews to make sure the reviews meet all applicable federal and state requirements.

We recommended, too, that LDOE use existing special education data during its desk and on-site reviews and develop policies and procedures or guidance for school systems related to informal removals.

Finally, we recommended thatLDOE use data and monitor the use of informal removals as part of its desk and on-site reviews and that the department implement an alternative risk ratio to calculate significant disproportionality when the student population is not large enough to use its typical risk ratio.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, LDOE agreed with three of the recommendations and partially agreed with eight of the recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*