



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION MONITORING OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

BATON ROUGE – The state Department of Education monitored the financial performance of all 78 charter schools under its jurisdiction last year but was deficient in overseeing their academic and contractual operations, including data used to calculate school performance scores, according to a report released Monday by Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera.

The performance audit said that while the education department “monitored the financial performance of all charter schools as required” from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012, it did not perform “all required academic monitoring activities” at the schools.

It pointed out that education department officials did not verify as reliable the school-reported data used to calculate school performance scores and make proper charter school operating decisions.

A total of 45,684 students attended 99 charter schools statewide in the 2011-12 school year, but only the 78 schools monitored by the education department were included in the audit.

The education department is charged by BESE with conducting annual reviews and evaluations of its charter schools for academic, financial and legal-contractual performance. The report said the department could not prove that it “comprehensively monitored the legal-contractual performance” of the 78 schools.

The department placed eight charter schools on probation in the 2010 fiscal year. According to the department’s policy, agency officials in 2011 should have determined if the schools placed on probation the previous year “met required standards. . . to continue operation.”

Instead, the department failed to determine if any of these schools met the standards. Seven of the eight continued operations into the fiscal year 2012 without department officials determining if the charter schools were in compliance with regulations. The eighth school closed on its own.

In 2011, however, BESE repealed the requirement that the department should determine if probationary schools must meet standards to continue operation, and the eight on probation were allowed to continue operations.



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One of the findings showed that the education department was late in providing 10 charter schools a “pre-assessment index,” a baseline measure of students’ performance and test results from the previous year. The department was supposed to provide the data in the fall of 2011, but it was not provided until this April.

The audit also said:

- The education department had sufficient methods to assure testing data was reliable but did not verify school-reported data used in calculating school performance scores was also reliable. The department accepts the reports from the schools without verifying reliability because it “stopped conducting on-site audits in 2008 because of a lack of resources.” Records of 325 students at nine charter schools in the 2012 fiscal year were examined and 84 of them had attendance data that differed from the state department’s numbers. Another 130 students’ records were examined and 11.5 percent of them “did not have sufficient documentation to support” their withdrawal from the schools. The attendance and dropout numbers figure into the overall school performance scores.
- The department could not show that it “comprehensively monitored” all 78 charter schools for six required factors, including student safety, discipline, adherence to building codes and special education needs.

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