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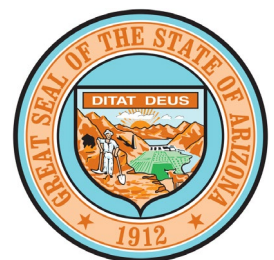
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

602-364-4036

Average Daily Membership Audit Report Payson Unified School District Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021

Report Number—22-29

March 15, 2022



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Arizona Department of Education

Audit Unit

March 15, 2022

Linda Gibson, Superintendent
Payson Unified School District
902 W Main St
Payson, AZ 85541

Dear Superintendent Gibson:

The Arizona Department of Education Audit Unit has conducted an audit of the Payson Unified School District (District) Average Daily Membership (ADM) for Fiscal Years 2019, 2020 and 2021. The purpose of the audit was to address whether the District properly reported student enrollment, and to determine if it received the correct amount of Basic State Aid.

Auditors determined that the District incorrectly reported the enrollment data of 148 students, which resulted in its ADM being overstated by 23.33. Furthermore, auditors determined that the District incorrectly reported the AOI data of 109 students, which resulted in an ADM understatement of 3.96. In total, the District had an ADM overstatement of 19.37. The District did not receive Basic State Aid for grade 9 through 12 ADM, but did receive Basic State Aid for grades PS through 8. As a result, the District was overfunded by \$19,471.59 which the District must repay to ADE. Additionally, auditors determined that the District failed to properly maintain some required documentation in student cumulative files.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by the District's administration during the course of the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Melissa Moreno".

Melissa Moreno,
Chief Auditor

Kathy Hoffman, Superintendent of Public Instruction

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Audit Unit has conducted an Average Daily Membership (ADM) audit of the Payson Unified School District (District) pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 15-239. This audit focused on whether the District properly reported enrollment data to ADE and received the correct amount of Basic State Aid for Fiscal Years (FY) 2019 through 2021.

Average Daily Membership audits of district and charter holder funding—Pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-239, ADE may conduct ADM audits, which help ensure the appropriate distribution of Basic State Aid provided annually to school districts and charter schools. School districts and charter schools receive Basic State Aid based on several factors related to student enrollment and attendance. To receive funding, school districts and charter schools report enrollment and attendance data to ADE. ADE processes that data, determines payment amounts according to the relevant statutory funding formulas and distributes payments to schools up to twelve times each year.

The ADM audit process determines whether payments were correct or if an adjustment is needed. The audit process compares the school district's or charter school's information reported to ADE's student data system to information found on the original records kept at the school. If auditors find that the school district's or charter school's reported information does not match the original documentation, the audit will calculate and report the funding adjustment needed to the school district's or charter school's Basic State Aid. These funding adjustments can be positive or negative, depending upon the audit findings. The audit findings are written and compiled into a report that is then issued to the audited entity.

Superintendent's legal notice links the audit and appeals processes—In addition to the report, the audited entity receives The Notice of Audit Findings and Required Reimbursement (Notice) that details the audit findings and determination of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Superintendent) regarding adjustments to be made to the school district or charter school pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-915. The audited entity may appeal the Superintendent's decision in the Notice.

Opportunity to appeal the audit—A.R.S. § 41-1092.03 provides the audited school district or charter school that disagrees with the Superintendent's decision in the Notice with the opportunity to file a formal appeal within thirty (30) days after the report was issued. If an appeal is filed, the school district or charter school and ADE may reach agreement in an informal settlement conference. If an agreement is not reached at the informal settlement conference, the appeal will be adjudicated by the Office of Administrative Hearings.

Funding adjustment process and timeframes—When the Notice is finally settled or adjudicated, if ADE has determined that a school district or charter school received an incorrect amount of Basic State Aid, A.R.S. § 15-915 directs that corrections to schools' funding be made in the current budget year. In case of hardship, schools may request that the Superintendent

allow a correction to be made partly in the current budget year and partly in the following budget year.

In addition, ADE will adjust the District’s budget capacity if required. ADE School Finance Memorandum 13-011 summarizes the budget capacity adjustment authorized by statute:

A.R.S. §15-915, as amended by Laws 2012, Chapter 357, Section 3, requires the superintendent of public instruction, when it is determined that state aid or budget limits have been calculated in error, within the prior 3 years, to make corrections to budget limits and state aid in the current year. (Hardship application may be approved by the superintendent). Effective for audits initiated during FY2013 and continuing in subsequent years, corrections for audit findings to both budget capacity and state aid (when applicable) will be made.

District information—The District, located in Payson, Arizona, offered instruction in grades Preschool through 12 during FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. The District operated two high schools, one middle school, and two elementary schools. Table 1 presents the District’s unaudited student, staffing and financial information for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 1

**Payson Unified School District
Total students, revenues and expenditures
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021
(Unaudited)**

	2019	2020	2021
Students enrolled	2,361	2,446	2,139
Number of teachers	114	115	120
Revenue			
Local	\$ 14,750,558	\$ 17,145,183	\$ 13,039,454
Intermediate	\$ 337,471	\$ 394,991	\$ 320,550
State	\$ 6,973,527	\$ 8,474,447	\$ 7,924,715
Federal	\$ 2,408,535	\$ 2,840,247	\$ 4,362,874
Total revenues	<u>\$ 24,470,091</u>	<u>\$ 28,854,869</u>	<u>\$ 25,647,593</u>
Total expenditures	<u>\$ 21,843,983</u>	<u>\$ 23,566,159</u>	<u>\$ 24,419,115</u>

Source: Annual Report of the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The audit focused on whether the District accurately reported its data to ADE and received the correct amount of Basic State Aid in accordance with statutes, the Uniform System of Financial Records for Arizona School Districts (USFR) and its own policies and procedures for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

To conduct this audit, auditors used a variety of methods, including examining District and ADE records to review 1,229 of 7,710 students over FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. Adjustments to ADM are based solely on those identified students that the auditors evaluated further and are not extrapolated to create findings for the entire student population. Auditors also reviewed state statutes and District policies and procedures, and interviewed District management and staff. Specifically:

- **Enrollment data** – Auditors reviewed student schedules, enrollment histories and attendance data to determine if the enrollment data reported to ADE was correct. Auditors compared the entry and exit dates to determine if an adjustment was necessary. Auditors also reviewed absences to ensure that they were reported correctly, and made adjustments if they were needed.
- **FTE calculations** – Auditors reviewed the bell schedules and student schedules to determine whether the District reported the correct full-time enrollment (FTE) data to ADE. Auditors calculated the FTE based on the classes and time a student was enrolled in the District, and compared the FTE to what was reported to ADE. When the FTE was incorrect, auditors made an adjustment.
- **AOI data** – Auditors compared 100% of the Arizona Online Instruction data that was reported to ADE to the AOI data from the School. Auditors reviewed instructional time reported as well as the full or part time status that was reported for each student. When the data reported to ADE was incorrect, an adjustment was determined.
- **Student files** – Auditors reviewed student files to ensure that they maintained required documentation such as birth certificates, immunization records, and supporting residency documentation. Auditors identified files that did not contain all the documentation that was required to be kept in them by statute and ADE guidelines.
- **Instructional hours** – Auditors reviewed the bell schedules and calendars for the District for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. The total instructional hours offered for each grade met the minimum required by statute for each of the three fiscal years audited.

- ***Distance Learning Plans*** – Auditors reviewed the Distance Learning Plans (DLP) for FY2021 that were used to provide education to students. In addition, auditors reviewed the percentage of learning that was distance learning or in person to determine if this was reported correctly. No findings were identified for this area.
- ***SPED data*** – Auditors determined whether an adjusted student had also been funded for a special education (SPED) category. When students with a special education category also had an adjustment, auditors made an adjustment to the special education weight as well.
- ***Limiting*** – Auditors reviewed the total ADM for each enrolled student to ensure that they were appropriately limited by ADE’s system. No findings were identified for this area.

The Audit Unit expresses its appreciation to the District’s administration and staff members for their cooperation and assistance during the course of the audit.

FINDING 1: THE DISTRICT DID NOT ACCURATELY REPORT SOME STUDENT DATA, RESULTING IN AN OVERPAYMENT OF \$24,840.20

Auditors determined that the District inaccurately reported the student data for 148 students for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. Specifically, auditors found that 43 students had an incorrect FTE reported, 39 students were reported with incorrect enrollment dates, 25 students were reported as attended but did not actually attend the District, 22 students were enrolled in subjects at Payson Center for Success that did not meet 123 annual instructional hours, 13 students had 10 consecutive unexcused absences and should have been withdrawn, two students were funded through ADM reporting and attended a private facility without tuition, two students did not receive sufficient homebound instruction or did not have medical certification and two students had excessive absences which resulted in a non-fundable period. In addition, 21 of these students that had data reported incorrectly were also funded with a SPED category. As a result of these errors, the District's ADM was overreported by 23.33. As a result, the District was overfunded by \$24,840.20 in Basic State Aid. According to A.R.S. § 15-915, ADE needs to recover these monies from the District.

The District inaccurately reported some student data

The District inaccurately reported 148 students' enrollment data to ADE, which resulted in the District's ADM being overstated by 23.33.

According to A.R.S. § 15-901, for a high school student to be reported as a 1.0 FTE, the student must be enrolled in at least four subjects which meet at least 123 hours annually each and total at least 720 instructional hours for the year. A student who does not meet these requirements is considered a part-time student and their FTE status must be reduced based on the number of actual instructional hours provided and courses enrolled.¹ In addition, according to ADE External Guideline and Procedures GE-17 and A.R.S. § 15-901, with the exception of pre-enrolled students, the enrollment dates for a student are the first day of actual attendance and the last day of actual attendance or excused absence. A.R.S. § 15-901 also states homebound students must have medical certification and must receive at least 4 hours of instruction per week to be considered full-time. Finally, A.R.S. § 15- 901 states that a student with 10 consecutive unexcused

¹ Pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-901, a full time student (1.0 FTE) in grades 9 through 12 must be scheduled for and attending at least 720 hours of instruction and at least four subjects each of which meets for at least 123 hours annually; a 0.75 FTE student must be scheduled for at least 540 hours of instruction and at least three subjects each of which meets for at least 123 hours annually, a 0.50 FTE student must be scheduled for at least 360 hours of instruction and at least two subjects each of which meets for at least 123 hours annually and a 0.25 FTE student must be scheduled for at least 180 hours of instruction and at least one subject which meets for at least 123 hours annually.

absences must be withdrawn and beginning in FY2019, School Finance Manual (G) states that students who have reached the 10% threshold for cumulative absences (excused or unexcused) based on the number of instructional calendar days at their school and incur 10 or more consecutive absences will generate non-fundable ADM intervals. However, the District did not always adhere to these requirements. Specifically, for the students that were sampled:

- 43 students had an incorrect FTE reported. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 0.09.
- 39 students were reported with incorrect enrollment dates. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 2.92.
- 25 students were reported as attended but did not actually attend the District. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 1.73.
- 22 students were enrolled in subjects at Payson Center for Success that did not meet 123 annual instructional hours and these subjects did not count towards FTE. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 11.60.
- 13 students had 10 consecutive unexcused absences and should have been withdrawn. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 1.80.
- 2 students were funded through ADM reporting and attended a private facility, but no tuition was paid and attendance documentation was not provided. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 1.38.
- 2 students did not receive sufficient homebound instruction or did not have medical certification. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 0.62.
- 2 students had excessive absences which resulted in a non-fundable period. As a result, the ADM for the District was overreported by 0.41.
- 21 of the students that had data reported incorrectly were also funded with a SPED category. As a result, the weighted SPED ADM for the District was overreported by 2.78.

As shown in Table 2 (see page 7), data reporting errors resulted in an ADM overstatement of 23.33 for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 2

**Payson Unified School District
ADM adjustments due to enrollment data errors
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019	2020	2021	Total
Incorrect FTE	1.35	(1.73)	0.47	0.09
Incorrect enrollment dates	0.72	0.83	1.37	2.92
Did not attend	0.22	0.47	1.04	1.73
123 hours	8.42	-	3.18	11.60
10-day absence	-	0.14	1.66	1.80
Should not have been reported	1.38	-	-	1.38
Homebound	-	0.62	-	0.62
Excessive absences	-	0.41	-	0.41
SPED	0.01	2.28	0.49	2.78
Total	12.10	3.02	8.21	23.33

Source: Auditor analysis of District records, ADE data for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

The District failed to comply with statute and ADE guidelines

The District did not follow statute and ADE guidelines when calculating and reporting student FTE or student enrollment data.

Auditors determined that 65 of the District's students did not meet the statutory and ADE guideline requirements for full time enrollment (FTE). According to A.R.S. § 15-901, for a high school student to be reported as a 1.0 FTE, the student must be enrolled in at least four subjects which meet at least 123 hours annually each and total at least 720 instructional hours for the year. However, some subjects did not meet 123 annual instructional hours for 22 students and the FTE that was reported for some students was not correct based on the number of subjects or annual instructional hours the students were enrolled in for 43 students. As a result, the District overreported the FTE for 65 students.

Additionally, the District misreported the enrollment data of 81 students. According to ARS § 15-901 and ADE guidelines, ADM is based on the first 100 days and the first day of membership for continuing or pre-enrolled students, shall be defined as either the first day a student physically attends school or the first day that classroom instruction is offered, provided that such students physically attend school within the first ten school days. For all other students, the first day of membership shall be defined as the first day a student physically attends school. The District incorrectly reported enrollment dates for 39 students, 25 students were reported as attended but did not actually attend the District, 13 students had 10 consecutive unexcused absences and should have been withdrawn, two students were funded through ADM reporting and attended a private facility without tuition and two students had excessive absences which resulted in a non-fundable period.

The District also misreported two homebound students. According to ARS § 15-901, a homebound student must be certified by a medical doctor as being unable to attend regular classes for a period of not less than three school months during a school year. A homebound student can be counted as in attendance for each day in a week where at least four hours of instruction were provided. However, the District incorrectly reported one student as being homebound without the proper certification and did not provide at least four hours of instruction for one student.

In the future, the District must ensure it complies with statute and ADE guidelines to properly report FTE, student enrollments and homebound students.

The District was overfunded by \$24,840.20

Auditors determined that the District did not receive the correct amount of Basic State Aid due to the inaccurate student data reported to ADE for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. The student data incorrectly reported by the District resulted in its ADM being overstated by 23.33. However, the District did not receive Basic State Aid for grade 9 through 12 ADM reported and grade 9 through 12 ADM adjustments only affected the elementary and high school ADM funding percentages and budget capacity. As shown in Table 3, the District was overfunded by \$24,840.20 in Basic State Aid for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021 which ADE must recoup from the District pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-915.

Table 3

**Payson Unified School District
ADM and funding adjustments
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	ADM adjustment	Total
2019	12.10	\$(3,694.53)
2020	3.02	\$13,074.36
2021	8.21	\$15,460.37
Total	23.33	\$24,840.20

Source: Auditor analysis of District and ADE records for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Recommendations:

1. ADE must recoup from the District \$24,840.20 in Basic State Aid due to incorrectly reported student data.
2. The District must ensure that it properly calculates and reports student FTE pursuant to statute and ADE guidelines.

3. The District must reconcile to ensure that enrollment data is reported accurately pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-901.
4. The District should ensure that students with 10 consecutive unexcused absences are properly withdrawn and that excused and unexcused absences be reported correctly.
5. The District must collect required medical certification documentation and provide education services to homebound student for a minimum of four hours per week for students certified as Homebound pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-901.
6. The District must adjust its budget capacity for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. Budget capacity adjustment calculations for the District will be made by ADE once the audit is finalized.

FINDING 2: THE DISTRICT DID NOT ACCURATELY REPORT AOI DATA RESULTING IN AN UNDERPAYMENT OF \$5,368.61

The District did not accurately report enrollment data for 109 of its AOI students to ADE for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. Specifically, auditors found that 48 students had been reported as part time but were full time, 37 students were reported to ADE's system with incorrect minutes, 21 students had been reported as full time but were part time and three students were reported but did not attend. As a result, the District's weighted AOI ADM was understated by 3.96. This led to the District being underfunded by \$5,368.61 which ADE must pay to the District according to A.R.S. § 15-915.

The District inaccurately reported some AOI data

Auditors determined that student data for 109 of its AOI students was inaccurate, which resulted in the District's weighted AOI ADM being understated by 3.96 for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. According to A.R.S. § 15-808, AOI ADM is based on the number of minutes a student participates in the AOI during the year. In addition, SF-0003 states that full time AOI students must enroll in and participate in four or more classes during the year. If a student is enrolled in fewer than four classes, they should be reported as part time. However, the District did not always meet these requirements as follows:

- 48 students were incorrectly reported as part time and should have been reported as full time.
- 37 students were reported to ADE's system with incorrect AOI minutes.
- 21 students were incorrectly reported as full time and should have been reported as part time.
- 3 students were reported to ADE, but documentation showed they did not actually attend the District.

As shown in Table 4 (see page 11), AOI data reporting errors resulted in a net weighted ADM understatement of 3.96 for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 4

**Payson Unified School District
Weighted AOI ADM Adjustments
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

Adjustments	2019	2020	2021	Total
Full time	(8.22)	(6.48)	(4.95)	(19.65)
Part time	6.04	4.69	4.96	15.69
Total	(2.18)	(1.79)	0.01	(3.96)

Source: Auditor analysis of District records and ADE data for fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The District must properly reconcile its enrollment data with ADE data

The District can likely avoid errors in the future by ensuring it regularly and correctly reconciles its data to the data contained in ADE's system. The District should review its reconciliation practices to ensure that its staff properly review the reports produced by ADE and reconcile them to the District's AOI SMS data to identify any discrepancies that would affect funding and correct any errors identified. The District must comply with the requirements of A.R.S. § 15-808 and SF-0003 when calculating and reporting AOI students.

The District was underfunded by \$5,368.61

Auditors determined that the District did not receive the correct amount of Basic State Aid due to the inaccurate student data reported to ADE for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. The student data incorrectly reported by the District resulted in its ADM being understated by 3.96. However, the District did not receive Basic State Aid for grade 9 through 12 ADM reported and grade 9 through 12 ADM adjustments only affected the elementary and high school ADM funding percentages and budget capacity. As shown in Table 5, the District was underfunded by \$5,368.61 in Basic State Aid for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021 which ADE must pay to the District pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-915.

Table 5

**Payson Unified School District
ADM and funding adjustments due to AOI data errors
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019	2020	2021	Total
ADM	(2.18)	(1.79)	0.01	(3.96)
Total funding adjustments	\$(5,785.86)	\$(325.10)	\$742.35	\$ (5,368.61)

Source: Auditor analysis of District records, A.R.S. § 15-901.

Recommendations:

1. ADE must pay to the District \$5,368.61 in Basic State Aid for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021 for incorrect AOI enrollment data.
2. The District must comply with the requirements of A.R.S. § 15-808 and SF-0003 when calculating and reporting AOI students.

FINDING 3: THE DISTRICT DID NOT PROPERLY MAINTAIN SOME STUDENT RECORDS AS REQUIRED BY STATUTE AND GUIDELINE

Auditors determined that the District failed to properly maintain residency and birth certificate documentation for some students as required by statute and ADE guidelines. The District did not properly maintain required documentation in some of its student cumulative files. In the future, the District should properly maintain these documents to ensure compliance with statute and ADE guidelines.

The District did not properly maintain student file documentation

Auditors determined that the District failed to maintain residency documentation for some students as required by statute and ADE guidelines. According to A.R.S. § 15-823 and the ADE Arizona Residency Guideline, school districts and charter schools are required to maintain verifiable documentation of Arizona residency in the student's cumulative file. This documentation must be provided each time a student enrolls in a school district or charter school, and reaffirmed during the annual registration process. The ADE Arizona Residency Guideline identifies an approved list of options a parent or legal guardian may provide to the school district or charter school to meet these requirements.

Auditors also determined that the District failed to maintain birth certificate documentation for some students as required by statute. According to A.R.S. § 15-828, the student file must contain a photocopy of the student's birth certificate, other reliable proof of the student's identity and age and affidavit explaining the inability to provide a birth certificate, or a letter from an authorized agency with custody of the student.

The District did not maintain the proper documentation required by statute and ADE's residency guideline. Of the 150 students sampled, 7 of the student files did not have the proper residency documentation, 6 of the student files did not have the residency reaffirmed annually and 3 did not have a birth certificate in their file. Table 6 (see page 14) lists the student file documentation maintained by the District for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 6

**Payson Unified School District
Student cumulative file documentation
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	Total sampled	Missing or unapproved residency documentation	Residency not reaffirmed	Missing birth certificate
2019	50	2	4	0
2020	50	1	0	1
2021	50	4	2	2
Total	150	7	6	3

Source: Auditor analysis of District records for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

In the future, the District must ensure that it complies with statute by collecting and maintaining in each student's cumulative file copies of verifiable residency and birth certificate documentation as required by law.

Recommendation:

1. The District must comply with statute and collect and maintain in each student's cumulative file copies of verifiable residency and birth certificate documentation as required by law.

ADM AND FUNDING ADJUSTMENTS

A.R.S. § 15-915 requires that ADE makes corrections for audit findings to both budget capacity and state aid. ADE’s School Finance Unit’s Memo 13-011 informs LEAs of these statutory requirements:

A.R.S. §15-915, as amended by Laws 2012, Chapter 357, Section 3, requires the superintendent of public instruction, when it is determined that state aid or budget limits have been calculated in error, within the prior 3 years, to make corrections to budget limits and state aid in the current year. (Hardship application may be approved by the superintendent). Effective for audits initiated during 2013 and continuing in subsequent years, corrections for audit findings to both budget capacity and state aid (when applicable) will be made.

Budget capacity adjustment required—The District must adjust its budget capacity for the three fiscal years audited. Budget capacity adjustment calculations for the District will be made by ADE once the audit is finalized.

Basic State Aid adjustment of \$19,471.59 required to be paid to ADE—Auditors identified an overall funding adjustment of \$19,471.59 for the three fiscal years audited due to inaccurate student enrollment and AOI.

Table 7 lists the ADM adjustments and the associated Basic State Aid adjustments for the District for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 7

**Payson Unified School District
ADM and funding adjustments
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019		2020		2021		Total	
	ADM	Funding	ADM	Funding	ADM	Funding	ADM	Funding
Inaccurate enrollment data	12.10	\$(3,694.53)	3.02	\$13,074.36	8.21	\$15,460.37	23.33	\$24,840.20
AOI	(2.18)	\$(5,785.86)	(1.79)	\$(325.10)	0.01	\$742.35	(3.96)	\$(5,368.61)
Total funding adjustment	9.92	\$(9,480.39)	1.23	\$12,749.26	8.22	\$16,202.72	19.37	\$19,471.59

Source: Auditor analysis of ADE and District student and financial data for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.