



Arizona Department of Education

The Audit Unit

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Average Daily Membership Audit Report New School for the Arts and Academics Fiscal Years 2019, 2020 and 2021

Report Number—23-10

September 23, 2022



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Arizona Department of Education

Audit Unit

September 23, 2022

Katy Cárdenas, Executive Dean
New School for the Arts and Academics
1216 East Apache Blvd
Tempe, AZ, 85281

Dear Executive Dean Cárdenas:

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

Auditors determined that the School incorrectly reported the enrollment data of four students, which resulted in its ADM being overstated by 0.49. As a result, the School was overfunded by \$4,123.59 which the School must repay to ADE. Additionally, auditors determined that the School failed to properly maintain some required documentation in student cumulative files.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by the School'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 New School for the Arts and Academics (School) pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 15-239. This audit focused on whether the School 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.

School information—The School, located in Tempe, Arizona, offered instruction in grades 9 through 12 during the fiscal years audited. The School operated one high school. Table 1 presents the School’s unaudited student, staffing and financial information for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 1

**New School for the Arts and Academics
Total students, revenues and expenditures
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021
(Unaudited)**

	2019	2020	2021
Students enrolled	173	179	164
Number of teachers	16	16	24
Revenue			
Local	\$ 277,647	\$ 282,089	\$ 229,125
Intermediate	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
State	\$ 1,615,870	\$ 1,752,775	\$ 1,707,961
Federal	\$ 28,043	\$ 27,962	\$ 140,919
Total revenues	<u>\$ 1,921,560</u>	<u>\$ 2,062,826</u>	<u>\$ 2,078,005</u>
Total expenditures	<u>\$ 1,832,094</u>	<u>\$ 1,914,627</u>	<u>\$ 1,898,329</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 School 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 Charter Schools (USFRCS) and its own policies and procedures for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

To conduct this audit, auditors used a variety of methods, including examining School and ADE records to review 150 of 568 students over the three fiscal years audited. 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 School policies and procedures, and interviewed School 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 School 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 School, and compared the FTE to what was reported to ADE. When the FTE was incorrect, auditors made an adjustment.
- **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 School 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 material findings were identified for this area.
- **SPED data** – Auditors determined whether an adjusted student had also been

funded for a special education (SPED) category. No findings were identified for this area.

- **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 School’s administration and staff members for their cooperation and assistance during the course of the audit.

FINDING 1: THE SCHOOL DID NOT ACCURATELY REPORT SOME STUDENT DATA, RESULTING IN AN OVERPAYMENT OF \$4,123.59

Auditors determined that the School inaccurately reported the student data for four students for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021. Specifically, auditors found that two students had an incorrectly reported FTE and two students had 10 consecutive unexcused absences. As a result of these errors, the School's ADM was overreported by 0.49 and the School was overfunded by \$4,123.59 in Basic State Aid. According to A.R.S. § 15-915, ADE needs to recover these monies from the School.

The School inaccurately reported some student data

The School inaccurately reported four student's enrollment data to ADE, which resulted in the School's ADM being overstated by 0.49.

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, A.R.S. § 15-901 states that a student with 10 consecutive unexcused absences must be withdrawn. However, the School did not always adhere to these requirements. Specifically, for the students that were sampled:

- 2 students had an incorrect FTE reported. As a result, the ADM for the School was overreported by 0.32.
- 2 students had 10 consecutive unexcused absences and should have been withdrawn. As a result, the ADM for the School was overreported by 0.17.

As shown in Table 2 (see page 6), data reporting errors resulted in an ADM overstatement of 0.49 for the three fiscal years audited.

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.

Table 2

**New School for the Arts and Academics
ADM adjustments due to enrollment data errors
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019	2020	2021	Total
FTE	0.09	-	0.23	0.32
Absence	0.08	0.09	-	0.17
Total	0.17	0.09	0.23	0.49

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

The School failed to comply with statute and ADE guidelines

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

Auditors determined that two of the School's students did not meet the statutory and ADE guideline requirements for full time enrollment (FTE). The FTE that was reported for these students was not correct based on the annual instructional hours the students were enrolled in. As a result, the School overreported the FTE for two students.

Additionally, the School misreported the enrollment data of two students. According to ARS § 15-901, a student with 10 consecutive unexcused absences must be withdrawn. The School did not withdraw two students with 10 or more absences.

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

The School was overfunded by \$4,123.59

Auditors determined that the School 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 School resulted in its ADM being overstated by 0.49. As a result, the School was overfunded by \$4,123.59 in Basic State Aid, which ADE must recoup from the School. Table 3 (see page 7) shows the ADM and funding adjustments required for the School for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 3

**New School for the Arts and Academics
ADM and funding adjustments
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	ADM adjustment	Total
2019	0.17	\$1,352.12
2020	0.09	\$735.72
2021	0.23	\$2,035.75
Total	0.49	\$4,123.59

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

Recommendations:

1. The School must repay to ADE \$4,123.59 in Basic State Aid due to incorrectly reported student data.
2. The School must ensure that it properly reports students' FTE pursuant to statute and ADE guidelines.
3. The School must ensure students with 10 consecutive unexcused absences are withdrawn pursuant to A.R.S. § 15-901.

FINDING 2: THE SCHOOL DID NOT PROPERLY MAINTAIN SOME STUDENT RECORDS AS REQUIRED BY STATUTE AND GUIDELINE

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

The School did not properly maintain student file documentation

Auditors determined that the School 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 School 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 an affidavit explaining the inability to provide a birth certificate, or a letter from an authorized agency with custody of the student.

In addition, auditors determined that the School failed to maintain immunization documentation for some students as required by statute. According to A.R.S. § 15-872, "A pupil shall not be allowed to attend school without submitting documentary proof to the school administrator unless the pupil is exempted from immunization pursuant to section 15-873."

The School did not maintain the proper documentation required by statute and ADE's residency guideline. Of the 75 student files sampled, 31 did not have proper residency documentation, 23 did not have the residency reaffirmed annually, 12 did not have birth certificate documentation and 18 did not have immunization record documentation in their file. Table 4 (see page 9) lists the student file documentation maintained by the School for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 4

**New School for the Arts and Academics
Student cumulative file documentation
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	Total sampled	Missing residency documentation	Residency not reaffirmed	Missing birth certificate	Missing immunization
2019	25	5	10	2	4
2020	25	16	6	7	9
2021	25	10	7	3	5
Total	75	31	23	12	18

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

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

Recommendation:

1. The School must comply with statute by collecting and maintaining in each student's cumulative file copies of verifiable residency, birth certificate and immunization 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.

Basic State Aid adjustment of \$4,123.59 required to be paid to ADE—Auditors identified an overall funding adjustment of \$4,123.59 for the three fiscal years audited due to inaccurate student enrollment data.

Table 5 lists the ADM adjustments and the associated Basic State Aid adjustments for the School for FY2019, FY2020 and FY2021.

Table 5

**New School for the Arts and Academics
ADM and funding adjustments
Fiscal years 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019	2020	2021	Total
ADM adjustment	0.17	0.09	0.23	0.49
Funding adjustment	\$1,352.12	\$735.72	\$2,035.75	\$4,123.59

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