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Hillsborough Township Public Schools

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New Jersey K to 12 Education

Collaborative Monitoring Report
July 2023

District: Hillsborough Township Public Schools
County: Somerset
Dates Monitored: May 2, 3, 4 and 5, 2023
Case Number: CM-05-23

Funding Sources:

Program	Funding Award
Title I, Part A	216,392
Title I SIA	0
Title II, Part A	178,522
Title III	59,269
Title III Immigrant	0
Title IV, Part A	0
IDEA Part B, Basic and Preschool	2,285,672
CRRSA ESSER II (includes all subgrants)	600,178
ARP ESSER (includes all subgrants)	1,896,326
Perkins V	0
Total Funds	<hr/> 5,236,359 <hr/>

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Background

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other Federal education laws require local education agencies (LEAs - school districts and charter schools) to provide programs and services to schools within their local jurisdiction. The provision of these programs and services is based on the pertinent authorizing statutes specified in each of the Federal education laws.

The laws further require that state education agencies, in this case, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to monitor the implementation and execution of Federal programs by the subrecipients. The monitors thereby determine whether the funds are being properly used by the district for their intended purposes and achieving the overall objectives of the funding initiatives.

Introduction

The NJDOE visited the Hillsborough Township Public Schools (HTPS or district) virtually, except where noted, to monitor the district's use of Federal funds. The NJDOE also examined related program plans, as applicable, to determine whether the district's programs are meeting the intended purposes and objectives, as specified in the current year's applications and authorizing statutes.

The goal of the monitoring is to determine whether the funds were spent in accordance with the requirements of each program, Federal and state laws, and applicable regulations. The monitoring of HTPS included staff interviews, as well as the review of documents and records related to the requirements of these programs:

- Title I, Part A (Title I);
- Title II, Part A (Title II-A);
- Title III, Part A (Title III);
- IDEA Part B - Basic and Preschool;
- Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations ESSER Fund (CRRSA ESSER II) and applicable subgrants; and
- American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER and applicable subgrants.

The scope of work performed included the review of records and documentation which included:

- accounting records
- annual audits
- board of education (board) meeting minutes
- grant applications program plans and needs assessments

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- grant awards
- payroll records
- purchase orders
- student records

The scope of work performed also included interviews with:

- instructional staff to verify implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- child study team members and speech-language specialists
- the program administrator regarding the IDEA grant

In addition, a sampling of computing devices/equipment and musical instruments purchased with Federal funds were selected and physically examined without exception.

Expenditures Reviewed

The grants and programs reviewed included Title I, Title II-A, Title III, IDEA Basic and Preschool from July 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023. In addition, CRRSA ESSER II and ARP ESSER and all applicable subgrants were reviewed from commencement of the related project periods through March 31, 2023. A sampling of purchase orders and/or salaries and wages was selected from each program and reviewed for examination.

General Overview of Uses of Federal Funds

Title I, Part A Projects

The purpose of the Title I is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. HTPS is a K—12 school district and operates targeted assistance programs in its four (4) Title I-funded schools. During the 2022-2023 school year, the district utilizes its Title I allocation on extended day/year programs for Title I students.

Title II-A Projects

The purpose of Title II-A is to:

1. increase student achievement consistent with the challenging State academic standards;
2. improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principal and other school leaders;

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3. increase the number of teachers, principal and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools; and
4. provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principal and other school leaders.

HTPS uses their Title II-A funds to provide high-quality, personalized professional development, curriculum writing for social studies and Frontline training for school leaders.

Title III Projects

The purpose of Title III is to:

1. help ensure that English learners, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English;
2. assist all English learners, including immigrant children and youth, to achieve high levels in academic subjects so that all English learners can meet the same challenging, State academic standards that all children are expected to meet;
3. assist teachers (including preschool teachers), principals and other school leaders, State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools in establishing, implementing, and sustaining effective language instruction educational programs designed to assist in teaching English learners, including immigrant children and youth;
4. assist teachers (including preschool teachers), principals and other school leaders, State educational agencies, and local educational agencies to develop and enhance their capacity to provide effective instructional programs designed to prepare English learners, including immigrant children and youth, to enter all English instructional settings; and
5. promote parental, family, and community participation in language instruction educational programs for the parents, families, and communities of English learners.

HTPS uses their Title III funds to: implement a summer program for English learners; obtain instructional supplies such as curricula software and host literacy-based workshops for parents to help them gain practical strategies to assist their children with homework.

Title IV-A Projects

HTPS transferred their Title IV-A funds to its Title I programs.

IDEA

The purpose of the IDEA grant is to provide federal entitlement funds to assist with the excess costs of providing special education and related services to students with disabilities. The FY 2023 IDEA Basic funds are used to reduce district tuition cost for students receiving special

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education services in approved private schools for the disabled. Basic funds are also used for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities, supplies and materials for students with disabilities, child study team consultants, IEP software and adaptive playground equipment. Preschool funds are used for the salary and benefits of a full-time teacher for students with disabilities.

CRRSA ESSER II

The purpose of CRRSA ESSER II funding is to provide money to LEAs to assist in: safely reopening schools; measuring and effectively addressing significant learning loss; and testing, repairing, and upgrading projects to improve air quality in buildings.

HGPS used its CRRSA ESSER II funds primarily for the replacement a boiler at Hillsborough E.S., heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) repairs to improve air quality, supplies/furniture for social distancing, compensation for computer setup and distribution, and power adapters for computing devices.

In addition, CRRSA Learning Acceleration (CLA) funds are being used for student instruction in Mathematics and English Language Arts, and professional development. CRRSA Mental Health funds are being expended for an online mental and behavioral health subscription service for school year 2023 and the related implementation costs.

ARP ESSER II

The purpose of ARP ESSER funding is to assist LEAs in preparing for and responding to the impact of COVID-19 on educators, students, and families. Additional uses of funds include, but are not limited to:

1. hiring new staff and avoiding layoffs; and
2. addressing learning loss through summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs.

HGPS uses its ARP ESSER funds mainly for educational technology, such as Chromebooks, musical instruments in order to stop the sharing of instruments among students; instructional supplies and summer learning payroll costs. ARP ESSER funds are also budgeted for HVAC repairs to improve air quality and to provide professional mental health services for students and staff.

ARP ESSER subgrant funds are budgeted for uses including, but not limited to:

1. online tutoring service and virtual professional development workshop for staff;
2. stipends paid to Teachers for "peer-to-peer" mentoring sessions;
3. mental health first aid training; and

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4. one-on-one tutoring and/or small group student services.

Detailed Findings and Recommendations

The Detailed Findings and Recommendations are disaggregated into the following sections:

1. Multiple Grants Section — findings necessitating the reversal of charges for multiple grants due to the lack of adequate supporting documentation.
2. Grant Specific Programmatic and Fiscal Section — findings directly attributable to the Federal awards covered during the monitoring. The programmatic findings precede the fiscal findings unless otherwise denoted by an asterisk (*).
3. Administrative Section – crosscutting administrative findings may be found in this section.

Multiple Grants Section

There are no findings which warrant mention in this section.

Grant Specific Programmatic and Fiscal Section

Title I, Part A

Finding 1:

The district provided evidence of its district-level and school-level parent and family engagement policies; however, they contained a reference to an ESEA citation from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), rather than current ESEA legislation. In particular, the policies (last revised and/or adopted October 10, 2022) referenced NCLB, Section 1114(b)(2). While the section reference is correct under the current legislation, the use of the term NCLB is outdated.

Citation(s):

ESEA §1116(a)(2) Parent and Family Engagement: Local Educational Agency Policy — Written Policy and ESEA §1116(b)(1) School Parent and Family Engagement Policy

Required Action(s):

Annually, the district must actively engage parents and families, along with district representatives, in the ongoing monitoring, implementation, and revision of its district-level and school-level parent and family engagement policies. The district must ensure the policies contain the dates on which the policies were board approved, as well as maintain records to show the date on which the policies were widely distributed to parents and families. As part of the submission of its corrective action plan (CAP), the district must submit a copy of its updated district-level and school-level parent and family engagement policies.

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Recommended Action(s):

To further enhance knowledge regarding the language and content of meaningful and timely parent and family engagement, it is recommended the district's administrators and staff review the parent and family engagement resources available on the NJDOE website at [Title I, Part A Parent and Family Engagement](#). For additional assistance, please contact the Office of Supplemental Educational Programs at titleone@doe.nj.gov.

Finding 2:

While the district did provide evidence of board approved school-parent compacts for each of its four (4) Title I-funded schools, the compacts seemed to include all the same elements, even though the four served schools had unique needs and demographics. A school-parent compact outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the challenging, State academic standards. Consequently, a school-parent compact that does not address the needs and demographics unique to each school does not meet ESEA legislative requirements.

Citation(s):

ESEA §1116(d) Parent and Family Engagement: Shared responsibilities for High Student Academic Achievement

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure that each Title I-funded school has a written school-parent compact that is board approved, annually. As part of the submission of its CAP, the district must submit a copy of the processes and/or procedures the district established to ensure parents and families are involved in the development of the written school-parent compacts, as well as informed of the ways in which they can participate further in the academic performance and achievement of their children. Additionally, the processes and/or procedures must address the ways in which the district will ensure each school-parent compact is issued to parents at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year in multiple languages and in understandable formats. These school-parent compacts for each school must be posted on the district website.

Finding 3:

In the comprehensive needs assessment, the district listed professional development (PD) as a Title I need, but did not program PD as an allowable use or budget any Title I funds for PD. In addition, the district indicated it used the needs assessment in the FY 2023 ESEA Consolidated Subgrant Application to identify the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, the needs assessment did not contain any information specific to such needs, but the district did budget \$100 for homeless services. Identified needs always must align to allowable uses and associated budgeted costs.

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Citation(s):

ESEA §1112(c)(6) Local Educational Agency Plans: Plan Provisions

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure that each identified need aligns to allowable uses and associated budgeted costs. As part of the submission of its CAP, the district must submit a copy of the processes and/or procedures the district established to ensure that all identified needs are aligned to allowable uses and associated budgeted costs.

Finding 4:

The district did not provide sufficient evidence of its outreach to parents of English learners to inform them of the ways they can become involved in their children's education by:

- helping their child attain English proficiency;
- assisting their child to achieve at high levels within a well-rounded educational environment; and
- enabling their child to meet the challenging State academic standards.

The district provided a copy a Parents Right-to-know letter that did not include all required elements as articulated in ESEA. The entry and exit criteria for ESL/Bilingual services was omitted. Pursuant to ESEA legislation, LEAs using Title I or Title III funds to provide a language instruction educational program as determined under Title III shall, not later than thirty (30) days after the beginning of the school year, inform parents and families of an English learner (EL) identified for participation or participating in such program of specific requirements.

Citation(s):

ESEA §1112(e)(3)(A)&(B) Parents Right-to-Know: Language Instruction

Required Action(s):

For FY 2024, the district must develop and distribute a Parents Right-to-Know letter for Language Instruction, provided in the language of the home, as well as English, to all parents and families of EL students. The notice must be properly dated (DD/MM/YYYY) in order to ensure compliance with the required timeframe. Notifications may include, but are not limited to: mailed letters/notifications, email notifications, notifications sent home with students, etc. The district must keep documentation on file of the date of issuance of this letter/notification, as well as the methods of distribution to parents and families of ELs. The district must submit a copy of the notice as part of the submission of its CAP.

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Additional Title I Recommendations

1. The district must ensure that all letters for the Title I Annual Meeting clearly articulate the meeting is to inform parents of the district’s Title I program. In some cases, the letters simply indicated the meetings were to inform parents of programs and services offered to students.
2. The district must review all district policies to ensure they do not contain any outdated references to NCLB.
3. When preparing the FY 2024 ESEA Consolidated Subgrant Application, the district must ensure the Educational Stability upload link works. The link in the prior year application opened to an error message.
4. The required military opt-out notification for FY 2024 must indicate that students’ email addresses will be provided, as well.

Title II-A

The review of the district’s 2022-2023 Title II-A programs yielded no findings.

Title III

Finding 1:

The district provided incomplete evidence of students who exited the program. The list included students who were exited from English language learner status before meeting the State’s criteria for exit, receiving a 4.5 composite cut score on an English language proficiency assessment and a completed English language observation form indicating readiness to exit.

Pursuant to ESEA, a district may not exit an EL from EL status unless the student has demonstrated proficiency on a valid and reliable assessment that includes the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There is an exception for an EL with a disability whose disability makes it impossible for the student to be assessed in a particular domain because there is no appropriate accommodations for assessing the student in that domain. Such an EL can be exited from EL status based on the student’s score on the remaining domains in which the student was assessed meeting the State’s cut score consistent with Code of Federal Regulations Title 34 §200.6(h)(4)(ii).

District staff may not exit an EL who has not met the requirements set forth in ESEA.

Citation(s):

ESEA §3121 Monitoring of Exited ELs and 34 C.F.R. §200.6(h)(4)(ii) Assessing English language proficiency of English learners

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Required Action(s):

As part of the CAP, the district must provide additional evidence to demonstrate that all ELs exited with a score below 4.5 were:

- assessed in all four domains; or
- have a documented disability which precludes the student from a particular domain; and
- have accommodations documented in the EL's 504 plan or IEP which state the exemption from a specific domain; and
- have an alternate composite score of 4.5 or higher with the remaining domains in which the student was assessed.

Recommended Action(s):

For any student whose records indicate that the district exited the student from EL status without meeting the State's cut score, the district shall:

- administer the Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas, Measure of Developing English Language (WIDA MODEL) by September 30, 2023, and evaluate the student in all four domains;
- for students who receive a composite score of 4.5 or higher on the WIDA MODEL and the English Observation form indicates they are ready for exit, no further action is required;
- for students who receive a composite score of 4.4 or lower on the WIDA MODEL, the district shall re-identify the student as an EL;
- notify the parent by written communication in a language comprehensible to the parent, and, if necessary, schedule a meeting to discuss the re-identification; and
- place the student in a language assistance program within 20 school days of the assessment and:
 - maintain documentation for record keeping for all students; and
 - develop a plan to ensure ELs are not exited from EL status before meeting the required cut score and English language Observation form.

In addition, the district must develop a plan to ensure ELs are not exited from EL status before meeting the required cut score. The plan must establish a policy and processes for:

- training staff on the exit procedures for ELs and the requirements set forth in ESEA;
- cross-training English language specialists and Child Study Teams to identify ELs who also receive special education and may need a domain waived; and

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- review EL's annual ACCESS scores and complete the English Observation Form only for ELs who meet the 4.5.

The district shall resubmit to the Department, as part of the CAP, a list of students who were exited with a score below 4.5 and include the following information:

- students' WIDA MODEL scores;
- students who are not ELs;
- students who were re-identified as ELs; and
- evidence of communication with parents for students who are re-identified as ELs.

IDEA Program

Finding 1:

The district did not consistently provide parents of students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech-language services notice of a meeting for identification, eligibility, reevaluation, and annual review meetings.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-2.3 Parental consent, notice, participation and meetings

Required Action(s):

The district must provide parents with notice of a meeting early enough to ensure they have an opportunity to attend. In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for child study team members and speech-language specialists and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citation listed above.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review copies of notices of meetings conducted between November 2023 and March 2024
- review oversight procedures

Finding 2:

The district did not consistently provide parents written notice that contains all required components, within fifteen (15) calendar days following identification, eligibility, reevaluation planning and annual review meetings of students referred and/or eligible for special education and related services.

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Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-2.3(f) and 2.3(g)1-7 Parental consent, notice, participation and meetings

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure that parents are provided written notice of a meeting that contains all required components within 15 calendar days of the meeting. In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for child study team members and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citations listed above.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review copies of written notice provided to parents following meetings held between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

Finding 3:

The district did not consistently conduct all required sections of the functional assessment as a component of initial evaluations for students referred for special education and related services. Specifically, initial evaluation reports did not contain observations in non-testing setting.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(f)4(i-vi) Evaluation

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure all components of the functional assessment are conducted as part of the initial evaluation process. In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for child study team members and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citation listed above.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review initial evaluation reports for students evaluated between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

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Finding 4:

The district did not consistently conduct multidisciplinary initial evaluations for students referred for speech-language services by obtaining an educational impact statement from the general education classroom teacher.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-2.5(b)6 Protection in evaluation procedures and N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.6(b) Determination of eligibility for speech-language services

Required Action(s)

The district must ensure that a multidisciplinary evaluation is conducted for students referred for speech-language services by obtaining a statement from the general education teacher that details the education impact of the speech problem on the student's progress in general education. In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for speech-language specialists and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citation listed above.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review initial evaluation reports for students referred for speech-language services whose eligibility meetings were held between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

Finding 5:

The district did not consistently conduct meetings within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt of a written request for a speech-language evaluation to determine if an evaluation is warranted.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-3.3(e) Location, referral and identification and N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(j) Evaluation

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure identification meetings are conducted within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt of a written request for evaluation and that required participants are in attendance. In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for speech-language specialists and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirement in the citations listed above.

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A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review documentation from identification meetings conducted between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

Finding 6:

The district did not consistently document all required considerations and statements in the IEPs of students eligible for special education and related services and for students eligible for speech-language services. Specifically, IEPs did not consistently include documentation of the location of related services, documentation of the liaison to postsecondary resources, or a statement of consultation from agencies providing services for individuals with disabilities.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(c) 1-11, (e) 1-17 Individualized Education Program

Required Action(s):

The district must ensure each IEP for students eligible for special education and related services and for students eligible for speech-language services contain the required considerations and statements.

In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for child study team members and speech-language specialists and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citation listed above.

To demonstrate that the district has corrected the individual instances of noncompliance, the district must conduct annual review meetings and revise the IEPs for specific students with IEPs that were identified as noncompliant. Names of the students whose IEPs were identified as noncompliant will be provided to the district by the special education monitor.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review the revised IEPs
- review a sample of IEPs for students whose annual review meetings were conducted between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

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Finding 7:

The district did not consistently document in the IEPs of students removed from the general education setting for more than twenty percent of the school day, including students placed in separate settings, consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment. Specifically, IEPs did not consistently include for those students placed in separate settings, district activities to transition the student to a less restrictive environment.

Citation(s):

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.2 Placement in the least restrictive environment

Required Action(s)

The district must ensure that when determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, the IEP team considers the general education class first and that all required decisions regarding the placement are documented in the IEP for each student removed from general education for more than twenty (20) percent of the school day. The district must ensure that, for students placed in separate settings, the IEP team identifies activities to transition the student to a less restrictive environment and document them in the IEP.

In order to demonstrate correction of noncompliance, the district must conduct training for child study team members and develop an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with the requirements in the citation listed above. To demonstrate that the district has corrected the individual instances of noncompliance, the district must conduct annual review meetings and revise the IEPs for specific students with IEPs that were identified as noncompliant. Names of the students whose IEPs were identified as noncompliant will be provided to the district by the special education monitor.

A monitor from the NJDOE will conduct a site visit to:

- interview staff
- review the revised IEPs
- review a random sample of IEPs for students attending out of district schools that will be developed at meetings conducted between November 2023 and March 2024
- review the oversight procedures

CRRSA ESSER II

The review of the district's CRRSA ESSER II grant and all applicable subgrants yielded no findings.

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Administrative Section

Finding 1:

The district submitted board policies for examination which address certain Uniform Grant Guidance provisions. The board policy for debarment and suspension did not mention the dollar amount of covered transactions and the requirement for maintaining copies of written documentation.

Other board policies were provided for review absent copies of the requisite *written procedures* to implement such policies. Examples include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- determining the allowability of costs in accordance with Federal cost principles and the terms and conditions of the Federal award; and
- the mandatory disclosure of all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud (pertinent information relating to fraud follows), bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award.

Pursuant to ESEA legislation, each recipient of a grant or subgrant under ESEA must display, in a public place, the hotline contact information of the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Education (USDEOIG) so that any individual who observes, detects, or suspects improper use of taxpayer funds can easily report such improper use.

Federal guidance relating to the prevention of fraud is accessible from [USDEOIG Brochures](#); scroll past multiple tables to the Brochures, Flyers & Posters (Download Free) section. Use this link, [For K-12: Preventing Fraud and Corruption in Federal Education \(2021\)](#), to access a video training presentation.

Citation(s):

ESEA §9203 Preventing Improper Use of Taxpayer Funds; Uniform Grant Guidance, 2 C.F.R. §200.214 Suspension and debarment, 2 C.F.R. §§200.302(b)(6)-(7) Financial management and 2 C.F.R. §§200.400 – 200.476 Subpart E - Cost Principles; and §200.113 Mandatory disclosures

Required Action(s):

The district must develop, revise, adopt and implement board policies and written procedures which address the requirements of the Uniform Grant Guidance, and include relevant citations and references to current legislation, where appropriate. The district may opt to utilize a vendor for the preparation and revision of the requisite board policies and procedures.

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Finding 2:

The district charged a number of expenditures to incorrect line items (also referred to as expenditure categories). For example, computing devices were charged to 100-500 and should be recorded under line item 100-600. Musical instruments were allocated to 200-600 instead of the appropriate line items of 100-600 or 400-731.

Citation(s):

Uniform Grant Guidance, 2 C.F.R. §200.302 Financial Management, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-16.2 Principles and directives for accounting and reporting and Uniform Minimum Chart of Accounts (UMCOA)

Required Action(s):

The district must follow N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-16.2.1 et. seq. and UMCOA when charging expenditures in the general ledger.

The NJDOE thanks you for your time and cooperation during the monitoring visit and looks forward to a successful resolution of every finding and implementation of all required actions and recommendations contained in this report.

If you have any questions, please contact Lisa D. McCormick via phone at (609) 376-3608 or via email at lisa.mccormick@doe.nj.gov .