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Missouri State Auditor

St. Louis Public School
District, Patrick Henry
Downtown Academy

Enrollment and Attendance
Recording and Reporting

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CITIZENS SUMMARY

Findings in the audit of St. Louis Public School District, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy, Enrollment and Attendance Recording and Reporting

Background

The State Auditor's office received substantial, credible information alleging school attendance and enrollment data was being falsified at Patrick Henry Downtown Academy (Henry Elementary). Because of the severity of the allegations and the risk that evidence would be destroyed, the State Auditor sent the rapid response team to gather evidence and ensure its preservation. The team collected documentary evidence, conducted interviews, and took the sworn testimony of four school/district employees.

From the evidence collected, it appears enrollment and attendance data was being manipulated, which overstated attendance. This may have helped the school meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and possibly resulted in additional federal funding. Because of weaknesses in the school's computer system, the State Auditor's office was not able to determine who was responsible for the data manipulation, but one employee testified, under oath, that Principal Esperanza Veal instructed her to manipulate the data.

Attendance Data

The State Auditor's office conducted several different tests and found numerous discrepancies between manual attendance records (completed by teachers) and the official attendance data entered into the computerized Student Information System (SIS) by office personnel. Each time, the net effect of these discrepancies inflated attendance, which supports the testimony that attendance and enrollment data was intentionally manipulated.

Henry Elementary has shown significant unexplained increases in attendance, increasing over 12 percent from 2007 to 2010, and it had the district's highest elementary school attendance percentage (97.3 percent) in 2010. In addition, withdrawn students were not timely withdrawn in the SIS. Since teachers do not always mark withdrawn students absent on the manual attendance forms, withdrawn students could be shown as present in the SIS. Some withdrawn students were also counted in membership and enrollment counts, which affected federal funding.

Prior to 2011, the school did not record out-of-school suspensions in the SIS, therefore some students on out-of-school suspension were counted as present. Also, according to sworn testimony, during fiscal year 2010, the Principal told a front office employee to "clean up" attendance by identifying all students with five or more absences in the year and changing each of those absences to tardies in the SIS. The State Auditor's office confirmed for fiscal year 2010, there was a significant decrease in absences and a corresponding increase in tardies.

District-wide System Controls The SIS does not adequately limit or electronically track when or by whom changes are made in the system, leaving the data subject to unauthorized or erroneous changes.

Attendance Procedures District policy requires each teacher to enter attendance data directly into the SIS each day. At Henry Elementary, however, teachers were required to complete manual attendance forms, and a member of the office staff entered the data into the SIS. According to sworn testimony, Principal Veal directed changes be made to the data after it was entered into the SIS, without documentation to support the changes, and without teacher approval of the changes.

Henry Elementary did not document late arrivals or early departures, although district policy requires they be documented to track the total minutes a student is present each day, which affects attendance percentages.

District policy allows elementary students to be withdrawn by the principal or school official only in certain circumstances. For the 3 years ended June 30, 2011, we found 40 students withdrawn from Henry Elementary and re-enrolled in less than 3 weeks. A review of 11 of these students found 3 did not appear to be withdrawn for reasons allowed by district policy. One of these students was withdrawn due to an illness lasting only about 10 days, but policy only allows a student to be withdrawn due to extended illness if it is expected to last 3 weeks or longer and there is no expectation the student will recover in time to complete the semester. Withdrawing students for short-term absences inflates attendance percentages, because withdrawn students are not counted as absent during the time they are listed as withdrawn.

Because of the nature of this rapid response audit, no overall rating is provided.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 (Federal Stimulus) Not applicable.

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THOMAS A. SCHWEICH

Missouri State Auditor

To the Special Administrative Board
and
The Board of Education
St. Louis Public School District

The State Auditor conducted an audit of certain operations of the St. Louis Public School District, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy, Enrollment and Attendance Recording and Reporting, under authority granted in Section 29.205, RSMo. Enrollment and attendance recording and reporting recently became a concern when the State Auditor received specific credible information regarding attendance data at the Patrick Henry Downtown Academy (Henry Elementary). The State Auditor evaluated the information provided and determined the concerns met the criteria for activating the Auditor's Swift Assessment Program. The objectives of our audit were to:

1. Evaluate the accuracy of Henry Elementary's enrollment and attendance reports.
2. Evaluate Henry Elementary's internal controls over enrollment and attendance recording and reporting.
3. Evaluate Henry Elementary's compliance with certain legal provisions concerning enrollment and attendance.

For the areas audited, we identified (1) inaccurate enrollment and attendance data, (2) deficiencies in internal controls, and (3) noncompliance with legal provisions.

We conducted our audit in accordance with the standards applicable to performance audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards*, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform our audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides such a basis.



Thomas A. Schweich
State Auditor

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St. Louis Public School District, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy Enrollment and Attendance Recording and Reporting Introduction

Background

On April 24, 2011, the Office of the State Auditor received substantial, credible evidence alleging that misrepresentation, fraud, and/or violations of state or federal law had occurred and were occurring at Patrick Henry Downtown Academy (Henry Elementary) regarding the falsification of school attendance data. As a result, on May 2, 2011, the State Auditor activated the Auditor's Swift Assessment Program (ASAP) and served subpoenas on designated administrators and staff of the St. Louis Public School District to ensure the preservation of evidence and to compel testimony.¹

The State Auditor's office began conducting interviews and reviewing files immediately because the end of the school year was fast approaching and many Henry Elementary employees would be out for the summer, and because immediate action was needed to prevent the possibility of additional alterations of enrollment and/or attendance records.

On May 5, 2011, the State Auditor and his staff met with the Superintendent and other district officials to discuss the school attendance issue. On May 17, 2011, attorneys of the State Auditor's office took the testimony of several Henry Elementary employees, including a district employee, a front office employee, and two teachers. This testimony was given under oath and was recorded by a court reporter. At the time of the depositions, these individuals provided notes, memorandums, communications, documents, and other materials related to student attendance, enrollment, discipline, absences, and transfers. The State Auditor's office also subpoenaed Ms. Esperansa Veal, Henry Elementary Principal, but she refused to provide testimony.

In her sworn deposition, a member of the Henry Elementary staff alleged, under oath, that Principal Esperansa Veal ordered the falsification of attendance data. The three other employees also testified that attendance data was falsified, but for reasons described later, they could not say who was responsible for the falsification.

¹ The State Auditor activates the ASAP when there is substantial, credible evidence to believe there is:

- (1) Fraud, violations of state or federal law, rule or regulation, or significant misappropriation, mismanagement, or waste of public resources; or
- (2) Significant risk of loss of confidence of the people in their government due to fiscal abuse or mismanagement; and
- (3) The need for immediate action to preserve relevant evidence and/or prevent continued harm.



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Henry Elementary

Henry Elementary is a pre-kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school located in downtown St. Louis. As of June 2011, Henry Elementary was staffed by approximately 20 teachers and had an enrollment of 274 students. Ms. Veal became principal of Henry Elementary in July 2007 (fiscal year 2008) and was placed on administrative leave on or about May 9, 2011.

Elected School Board

Members of the St. Louis Public School District elected board at June 30, 2011, were:

Katherine Wessling, President
David L. Jackson, Jr., Vice President
Chad Beffa, Secretary
Donna Jones
Rebecca Rogers
Emile Bradford-Taylor
Bill Haas

Special Administrative Board

Members of the St. Louis Public School District special administrative board at June 30, 2011, were:

Rick Sullivan, President/CEO
Melanie Adams, Vice President
Richard Gaines, Comprehensive Long Range Plan Chair

Superintendent

The district's superintendent at June 30, 2011, was Dr. Kelvin Adams.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of the audit included, but was not necessarily limited to, the 3 years ended June 30, 2011. The district engaged RubinBrown LLP, Certified Public Accountants & Business Consultants (CPAs), to audit the district's financial statements for the years ended June 30, 2009, 2010, and 2011. To minimize duplication of effort regarding enrollment and attendance recording and reporting, we reviewed the audit report and attendance- and enrollment-related working papers of the CPA firm for the 2 years ended June 30, 2010 and 2009; however, the 2011 audit was not yet completed.

Our methodology included reviewing the documents and testimony gathered as a result of the subpoenas to determine whether school attendance data had been falsified as alleged. In addition, we reviewed the district's written policies and procedures, procedures followed at Henry Elementary, enrollment and attendance records, and other pertinent documents, and interviewed various personnel of the district and Henry Elementary, as well as certain external parties. We also reviewed selected attendance data for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011.



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To evaluate internal controls over Henry Elementary's enrollment and attendance recording and reporting, we reviewed district policies and procedures, as well as Henry Elementary's procedures. The St. Louis Public School District utilizes the computerized Student Information System (SIS) to track various student data, including enrollment/withdrawal dates, daily attendance, grades, disciplinary actions, etc. School-level personnel enter this data into the SIS, and district central office personnel upload certain data for the entire district quarterly to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

District policies require each teacher to record student attendance in the SIS on a daily basis; however, until May 2011, most teachers at Henry Elementary manually recorded attendance on 2-week attendance sheets provided by Henry Elementary office personnel which listed each teacher's roster of students on a 2-week grid. The teachers turned these sheets into the office each day, and the School Secretary entered the attendance data into the SIS. Not until May 2011, did Henry Elementary teachers begin entering their classroom attendance directly into the SIS rather than using the manual attendance sheets. Each year, teachers at Henry Elementary also prepare a manual S-1 Attendance Record (S-1) for each student which records daily attendance, summarized by quarter and semester. The S-1s are maintained in each student's manual file in the Henry Elementary office for each year the student attends Henry Elementary. In addition, teachers manually record student absences on Report on Absence of Pupil forms (A-2 forms) for school social workers when intervention is required to improve student attendance.

To evaluate the accuracy of Henry Elementary's enrollment and attendance reports, we compared the various manual records mentioned above to the SIS to determine if absences and tardies marked on the manual records were recorded in the SIS and vice versa.

To evaluate Henry Elementary's compliance with certain legal provisions, we obtained an understanding of legal requirements related to enrollment and attendance reporting. We determined state and federal funding, as well as reporting under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* are affected by school attendance data. This Act includes annual proficiency targets, participation rates, and attendance/graduation rates to demonstrate students are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). If a school fails to meet AYP requirements for 2 consecutive years, it is placed in school improvement status and must, among other things, implement a school improvement plan, notify parents of the school improvement status, and allow students to transfer to other public or charter schools. If the school continues to fail to meet AYP requirements, additional action is required.

St. Louis Public School District, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy Enrollment and Attendance Recording and Reporting Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

1. Attendance Data

Patrick Henry Downtown Academy (Henry Elementary) attendance, enrollment, and membership data for fiscal year 2011, compiled through June 2, 2011, the end of the school year, did not appear complete or accurate and appeared to have significantly overstated actual attendance. Similar issues were noted with fiscal year 2010 and 2009 attendance data. Analysis of attendance data reported for the 4 years ended June 30, 2010, showed significant unexplained increases in attendance for Henry Elementary (see Appendix).

Schools are required to track attendance accurately. Excessive absences, late arrivals, or tardies may indicate that a student is at-risk and needs intervention, and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) uses attendance data to determine the appropriate amount of state and federal funds to give each district. The higher a district's attendance percentage, the more funds it receives. Absences and late arrivals reduce the amount of funding a district receives.² The DESE also relies, in part, upon such data to determine whether a school is complying with state and federal statutes and regulations.

Analytical analysis

An analysis of Henry Elementary attendance data for the 5 years ended June 30, 2011, showed significant unexplained fluctuations, as follows:

	2011		2010		2009		2008		2007	
	Attendance Percentage	Change	Attendance Percentage							
Elementary Schools	94.6	-2.70%	97.3	3.80%	93.5	4.10%	89.4	4.20%	85.2	
District Average	92.9	-0.10%	93.0	0.40%	92.6	0.30%	92.3	0.30%	92.0	

In fiscal year 2010, Henry Elementary reported a 97.3 attendance percentage, enabling it to rank first among district elementary schools and meet its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is part of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

As of the end of the 2011 school year, Henry Elementary's attendance percentage had dropped to 94.6, which is still well above the district average of 92.9 for elementary schools. Because the district did not provide us with detailed daily attendance data for fiscal year 2011, we could not determine when the daily attendance percentages began to decrease.

Between fiscal year 2007 and 2010, Henry Elementary experienced annual increases in attendance percentage of over 3 percent, or a total increase of

² Late is defined as arriving late by 30 minutes or more, while tardy is arriving late by less than 30 minutes and does not affect funding.



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more than 12 percent from 2007 to 2010. Part of the increases during fiscal years 2008 through 2010 at Henry Elementary can be attributed to virtual students participating in courses from their homes via computer; however, virtual students represented less than 20 percent of Henry Elementary students for fiscal year 2010 and did not significantly affect overall attendance percentages. Over this same timeframe, only 2 of the approximately 40 other elementary schools in the district experienced a greater than 3 percent increase in attendance percentage for the period from 2007 to 2010 (see Appendix).

Manual records vs. SIS

We compared several different manual attendance records maintained at Henry Elementary to attendance data recorded in the computerized Student Information System (SIS) and noted numerous unexplained or undocumented discrepancies between manual records and the SIS. We noted absences and tardies marked on the manual records that were not in the SIS, as well as absences and tardies marked in the SIS that were not on the manual records. However, there were significantly more absences and tardies recorded on the manual records that were not in the SIS than there were the other way around. This fact suggests manipulation of the data to reflect better than actual attendance.

In her sworn deposition, a Henry Elementary front office employee stated, under oath, that the Principal instructed her to make changes to attendance data in the SIS. On several occasions, the Principal told her after the daily preliminary attendance report was run that specific children marked absent were actually present and to change their absences to tardies prior to finalizing the daily attendance each day. In addition, she stated the Principal often instructed her to change individual student attendance records after finalizing the daily student attendance. She indicated that she did not believe these changes were accurate or appropriate.

In order to test the accuracy of such testimony, we performed various tests using the Henry Elementary attendance data. Due to the nature of these tests, some students were included in more than one test. The following are the detailed tests we performed:

- We selected 60 Henry Elementary student manual files for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011, and noted numerous discrepancies between the manual S-1 attendance records and the SIS. The results are as follows:

	2011	2010	2009
Absences or tardies on S-1, but not in the SIS	96	100	51
Absences or tardies in the SIS, but not on S-1	53	67	27



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During our interviews with Henry Elementary staff, five students were specifically identified to us as likely to have incorrect attendance data in the SIS, so we compared the manual S-1 Attendance records and the SIS for these five students also. For these five students, we noted 34 absences and tardies on S-1s that were not recorded in the SIS, and 17 absences and tardies recorded in the SIS that were not on the S-1s during fiscal year 2011.

- In a sworn deposition, a district employee indicated she and her supervisor were asked by the district Central Office in May 2011 to verify Henry Elementary student attendance for fiscal year 2011 by comparing manual attendance records (S-1s or 2-week attendance sheets) obtained from Henry Elementary teachers to data recorded in the SIS. Although they had not completed their review at the time of the deposition, they found numerous discrepancies between the manual attendance records and the SIS for the students they reviewed. We re-tested approximately 30 of the 160 students they reviewed and selected another 56 students to test which they had not reviewed. In total, for the 86 students we reviewed for fiscal year 2011, we noted 355 absences and tardies on the teacher records that were not recorded in the SIS, and 52 absences and tardies recorded in the SIS that were not on the teacher's manual records, which suggests manipulation of the data to inflate attendance percentages.
- A Henry Elementary employee also provided 53 manual Report on Absence of Pupil forms (A-2 forms) to us. These forms are used by teachers to record student absences and are subsequently forwarded to the social worker when, for example, the student has accumulated three consecutive unexcused absences and early intervention is required to improve student attendance. We compared all 53 of the A-2 forms to the SIS data. In total for fiscal year 2011, we noted 119 absences and tardies on the A-2 forms that were not recorded in the SIS, and 18 absences and tardies recorded in the SIS that were not on the A-2 forms, again suggesting the manipulation of attendance data to inflate attendance percentages.
- In a sworn deposition, a Henry Elementary teacher indicated she began to compare her manual 2-week attendance sheets for fiscal year 2011 to data recorded in the SIS after she started to note some discrepancies. The teacher indicated she was only able to complete a review of 22 of her 28 students prior to our subpoena. We verified her analysis for 5 of the 22 students she reviewed and determined her analysis was accurate. We also tested the remaining six students which she had not reviewed. For the 28 students analyzed in her class, a total of 232 absences and tardies were noted on her 2-week attendance sheets that were not recorded in the SIS, and 44 absences and tardies recorded in the SIS were not on her manual 2-week



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attendance sheets. In addition, she noted 32 instances in which someone else changed absences to tardies on her 2-week attendance sheets, which may have overstated attendance.

- We selected an additional 10 of the 45 completed manual 2-week attendance sheets from fiscal year 2011 provided to us from various sources. For the 10 manual 2-week attendance sheets reviewed, attendance for approximately 130 students was tracked on these sheets for the respective 2-week period. In total, our review of these 130 students noted 54 absences and tardies on the 2-week attendance forms that were not recorded in the SIS and 10 absences and tardies recorded in the SIS that were not on the 2-week attendance forms, suggesting attendance data percentages were overstated.

We were given only 45 manual 2-week attendance forms for fiscal year 2011 that appeared complete, and we were not given any of these forms for prior years. Henry Elementary teachers told us that normally the folders used to carry the manual forms back and forth from the office to the classrooms contained all of the manual forms for the entire year; however, sometime in the spring of 2011, someone removed the manual forms from earlier in the year and left only the most current manual forms in the folders. In May 2011, current Henry Elementary office personnel told us they did not know what happened to these forms.

- We also scanned all 2011 manual attendance records (S-1s or 2-week attendance sheets) available to us to identify students who had been recorded as absent three or more consecutive days. We noted 125 instances of three or more consecutive absences recorded in the manual records. When we compared the manual records for these students to the information entered in the SIS, we noted 176 individual absences on the manual attendance records that were not recorded in the SIS or were recorded as tardies, and 5 individual absences recorded in the SIS that were not on the manual attendance records, which suggests manipulation of the data to overstate attendance.
- In his sworn deposition, a Henry Elementary teacher told us his manual attendance records disappeared from his classroom during the school year, and were not available for us to review. This teacher said his classroom door was, "kicked out," and his attendance records were missing from his desk.



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We combined the results of the above-described tests and removed any duplicate students. The combined results are as follows:

	2011	2010	2009
Students tested	214	24	16
Error rate for students tested	68%	83%	94%
Absences or tardies on manual records but not in the SIS	803	100	51
Absences or tardies in the SIS, but not on manual records	187	67	27

Due to the lack of controls, particularly the inability to track changes and who made them in the SIS (See MAR finding number 2), we cannot state with certainty who altered the Henry Elementary attendance records. But, it appears that attendance records were altered, overstating actual student attendance, and the sworn testimony we obtained suggests the Principal directed these changes.

Withdrawn students

Henry Elementary did not consistently record students as withdrawn on a timely basis, so students stayed active in the SIS longer than appropriate. Since the SIS automatically counts an enrolled student as present unless an absence is entered, if a student withdraws from school and is no longer being marked absent by the teacher but the SIS is not updated to show the student as withdrawn, the student will be counted as present in the SIS. This artificially inflates the school's attendance. Likewise, because the SIS reports did not include the attendance data for some students prior to their withdrawal dates, Henry Elementary's attendance was misstated for these days.

Based on sworn depositions taken from three Henry Elementary employees, students remained on class rosters long after they stopped attending classes. A district employee had discussions with the teachers, parents, and other schools in which the students were enrolled, and verified these students no longer attended Henry Elementary, but the SIS still listed many as enrolled. After the employee raised this issue, these students were changed to withdrawn in the SIS; however, the withdrawal dates entered for many of the students did not agree with information provided by other sources. Ultimately, more appropriate withdrawal dates were entered for many of these students, but the attendance data in the SIS from the final withdrawal date to the current date was erased. As such, we were unable to determine if Henry Elementary improperly reported any of these students as present for any days after the final withdrawal date entered into the SIS.

In addition to reviewing the provided documents and sworn testimony, we scanned Henry Elementary attendance data for withdrawn students. Our analysis of attendance data recorded through June 2, 2011, revealed 38 students in fiscal 2011, 4 students in fiscal year 2010, and 2 students in fiscal year 2009 enrolled and later withdrew, but no enrollment or



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attendance data was reflected in the SIS reports. Upon further investigation, we determined that, because the students had been dropped from the SIS attendance module, their enrollment and attendance data was not shown on the SIS reports; however, we noted the withdrawal dates entered into the SIS were later than the recommended withdrawal dates, which may need to be corrected so that attendance for these students is accurately reflected in the SIS reports (see additional discussion in the enrollment/membership counts section below).

Enrollment/membership counts

Some students were included in enrollment and membership counts and then later listed in the SIS as withdrawn on a date before the counts occurred. If the students had already withdrawn by the date of the counts, they should not have been included in the counts, because this would overstate enrollment and/or membership for the count dates and could improperly increase federal funding for Henry Elementary.

In conjunction with our review of withdrawn students, we reviewed the accuracy of Henry Elementary enrollment and membership counts reported to the DESE for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011. Enrollment counts are used to determine the number of resident and nonresident students enrolled which affects the amount of federal funding a school receives, while membership counts determine, by grade, how many resident students are enrolled and in attendance at least 1 of the 10 previous school days. An enrollment count and a membership count are performed the last Wednesday of September, and another membership count is performed on the last Wednesday of January.

Enrollment and membership count discrepancies noted in fiscal year 2011 involved withdrawn students. For January 2011, we noted 11 students counted whose withdrawal dates were later backdated to dates prior to the count day. We also noted three students counted who had no enrollment or attendance reflected in the SIS reports. For September 2010, we noted five students counted whose withdrawal dates were backdated to dates prior to the count day. We also noted 34 students counted who had no enrollment or attendance recorded in the SIS reports. In addition, we noted two more students counted who appeared to have been enrolled in August and September 2010, then withdrew in September, but no attendance was reflected in the SIS reports.

In analyzing the September 2010 counts, we also noted approximately 20 students who were included in the counts and then withdrawn on September 30, 2010, the day after counts were taken. Each student appears to have been dropped from the SIS attendance module, so their enrollment or attendance was not shown on the SIS reports. District staff reattached a student to see what his attendance data would show. This student was recorded in the SIS as attending August 16, 2010, thru September 30, 2010.



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Within this timeframe two absences were also recorded. This may explain why this student shows up on the September enrollment and membership counts.

Discipline incidents

Based upon sworn testimony of a district employee, Henry Elementary does not accurately record discipline incidents in the SIS. In April 2011, this employee sent an e-mail message to the School Secretary and Principal informing them the SIS attendance needed to be updated to show out-of-school suspensions. Until then, some students on out-of-school suspension were reflected in the SIS as being present. Appropriate changes were eventually made for most students for 2011, but it appears this was the first time Henry Elementary recorded out-of-school suspensions in the SIS; our analysis of the SIS data for fiscal years 2010 and 2009 showed Henry Elementary recorded no suspensions.

Out-of-school suspensions are the equivalent of an absence when calculating a student's average daily attendance percentage reported to, and used by, the DESE for funding and oversight purposes.

Attendance clean up

Absences were incorrectly changed to tardies in the SIS during fiscal year 2010, thereby overstating Henry Elementary's attendance data. In her sworn deposition, a Henry Elementary front office employee explained that during fiscal year 2010 the Principal told her to "clean up" attendance based on an e-mail message from the superintendent related to the district's "Student Attendance Review and Clean-Up Process." At the Principal's direction, she identified students with five or more absences and changed each of those absences to tardies in the SIS, although she did not believe these changes were accurate or appropriate.

To test the accuracy of this testimony, we analyzed fluctuations in absences and tardies for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011, in the table below:

	Year Ended June 30,					
	2011		2010		2009	
	Students	Days	Students	Days	Students	Days
5 or more absences	218	2,341	115	949	155	2,446
5 or more tardies	32	449	102	1,090	21	247

In fiscal year 2010, there was a significant decrease in absences and a corresponding increase in tardies, which supports the testimony that attendance records were manipulated to overstate attendance. The district's "Student Attendance Review and Clean-Up Process" is intended to review and validate attendance for all students and ensure accurate withdrawal



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dates for withdrawn students; it does not instruct schools to change absences to tardies for any students with five or more absences.

Conclusion

According to sworn testimony, Henry Elementary attendance data was falsified resulting in overstated attendance. In every one of the many tests described above, the auditors discovered differences between manual attendance records and the SIS, and every time the net effect of the discrepancies was to increase attendance percentages, not decrease them. This suggests that the sworn testimony was correct and attendance data was manipulated to inflate attendance percentages.

If school attendance is not accurately recorded, at-risk students may not receive needed intervention and/or referral for additional services. In addition, attendance records may be relied upon in legal proceedings, such as cases of truancy or domestic matters, and inaccuracies in these could undermine the integrity of such proceedings.

Enrollment and attendance data also provide the DESE with basic data used to generate various state and federal payments and to determine compliance with state and federal statutes and regulations, including Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Overstating attendance may result in the district receiving more funding than it is entitled to and/or may impair the ability of the DESE to monitor the school's performance effectively. As of the end of the school year, discrepancies discussed throughout the report had not been corrected. Schools have up to 5 years to correct attendance data in the DESE computer system. However, since DESE funding is based on the weighted average daily attendance for the previous 3 years, the changes should be made as soon as possible to ensure funding is allocated appropriately.

Recommendations

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board:

- Address discrepancies between manual records and the SIS records, including unusual fluctuations in Henry Elementary student attendance, procedures for student withdrawals, recording of out-of-school suspensions, and absences being changed to tardies.
- Determine whether any students were improperly counted in enrollment counts and/or membership counts and report any corrections to the counts.
- Investigate allegations Principal Veal directed that unverified and/or invalid changes be made to data entered in the SIS.



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- Investigate allegations that records were stolen, destroyed, or altered.
- Update and correct the attendance data submitted to the DESE as appropriate.

Auditee's Response

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board provided the following written response:

It is the written policy of the St. Louis Public School District ("District") that all schools maintain accurate data relating to student attendance, enrollment, and discipline. In addition, the District has policies and procedures in place describing how and when such data should be recorded in the District's Student Information System ("SIS"). The findings of this audit regarding the manner in which attendance and enrollment data were recorded and reported at Patrick Henry Downtown Academy ("Henry") raise several important concerns that the District will address more fully below. Notwithstanding these concerns, the District is encouraged by one aspect of the audit relating to the attendance data as described in the Appendix. In general, the attendance data set forth in the Appendix is consistent with the findings of the District's May 2011 internal review of attendance and enrollment procedures utilized at multiple District school sites. Consistent with the data contained in the Appendix of this report, the District's review did not produce information suggesting that the findings set forth herein relating to Henry are indicative of a District-wide pattern of school sites failing to follow District attendance and enrollment data collection procedures and/or purposely inflating attendance figures.

In May 2011, in response to the State Auditor's announced audit of the attendance and enrollment practices at Henry, the District initiated a "Process Follow Through" review of the procedures being utilized at various school sites throughout the District concerning standardized testing, attendance, enrollment, discipline and the recording of student grades. The District provided an Executive Summary of the results of the Process Follow Through to the State Auditor's Office. The Process Follow Through involved central office staff conducting on-site visits at thirty (30) school sites and interviews of eighty-seven (87) individuals regarding the actual procedures utilized at each location (12 Elementary; 11 Middle Schools; 7 High Schools). In general, the results of the Process Follow Through indicated overall compliance with District attendance and enrollment procedures. However, consistent with some of the findings of this audit report, the Process Follow Through did assist in identifying current practices and procedures the District can update or revise that will increase the accuracy and reliability of student data collection.



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The District considers the findings and conclusions of the State Auditor's Office regarding the operations at Henry significant. The Auditor's report repeatedly references sworn testimony alleging that attendance data from the Henry school site was falsified and that District procedures for recording attendance and enrollment were not followed. In addition, the audit report cites sworn deposition testimony in which individuals state they were instructed to record information they did not believe was accurate or appropriate into the SIS. The District considers the issues raised in the report to be of grave concern and fully intends to follow-up on the testimony and findings referenced herein as they relate to operations at Henry. As described more fully in the District's responses set forth in Sections 2 and 3 below, the District is implementing additional processes and procedures to increase the District's ability to detect such activity in the future.

In addition, the District will undertake the following data reconciliation actions to ensure the accuracy of the Henry data:

Henry School - Data Reconciliation

- Review and update student enrollment and withdrawal data as needed for Henry School (3 years)*
- Review and update student attendance history for all Henry School students (3 years)*

Obtain copies of all manual enrollment and attendance documents (including S-1, A-2, manual rosters, forms from teachers, others)

Reconcile enrollments and withdrawals

Reconcile absences, late arrivals, early dismissals, out of school suspensions, etc.

- Generate updated enrollment counts and attendance percentages (3 years)*
- Provide report containing updated data; show impact/actual results of reconciliation process*
- Submit appropriate changes/updates to DESE/MOSIS*

2. District-wide System Controls

The SIS does not adequately limit or electronically track when or by whom changes are made in the system, nor does it track the reason the changes are made. Without tracking or limiting changes in the SIS or requiring teachers to approve any changes to attendance recorded for their classroom, the data is subject to unauthorized or erroneous changes which may significantly



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affect attendance reported to the DESE or school social workers for further follow up and possible student intervention.

District policies state daily student attendance is to be recorded in the SIS by each teacher. A preliminary attendance report is run each day by each school's office personnel and reviewed by school officials for accuracy before finalizing the daily attendance. If any changes need to be made to attendance before finalizing the daily attendance, or at a later date when a correction needs to be made, the changes can be made by each school's office personnel. However, the SIS does not track changes and does not require the reasons for any changes be documented. In addition, the teachers are not required to verify the attendance changes that affect the students in their classrooms or to approve final daily attendance reports.

Making legitimate changes to attendance data in the SIS is necessary if a student arrives late or leaves early. In addition, it is a necessary step in the reporting process and must be done before attendance can be certified to the DESE. However, changes should be tracked and approved to ensure their accuracy, and therefore, the accuracy and reliability of the attendance data.

Recommendation

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board implement additional controls and procedures to ensure student attendance data is accurately recorded and reported, including requiring teachers to verify any attendance changes. If changes are necessary, the board should ensure the changes are adequately documented and approved.

Auditee's Response

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board provided the following written response:

According to the audit report, the evidence and data compiled and reviewed by the Auditor's Office suggests that the testimony indicating attendance data was purposefully manipulated to inflate attendance percentages was correct. The District notes that it cannot prevent every instance of purposeful violation of District policies and procedures; however, the District is prepared to implement controls and processes that will aid in detecting and investigating anomalies in student attendance and enrollment data as soon as possible. Toward this goal, the District is:

- 1. reviewing current attendance and enrollment related policies and procedures to increase accountability controls by developing a policy establishing a management approval process for making changes to the SIS that will include consequences for any person making an unauthorized change in the SIS;*



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2. *reviewing and considering additional controls and procedures to improve its ability to manage employee access to the SIS, including developing mechanisms to track changes to student data;*
3. *consulting with the SIS software developers to create an automated audit trail system within SIS to automatically record the date, time, and user identification whenever data is entered or changed in the SIS;*
4. *implementing a policy requiring all users to manually record this information whenever they enter or change data in the SIS until this information can be recorded by the SIS automatically; and,*
5. *consulting with the SIS software developer to create a procedure for regularly scheduled automated backups of the SIS database to allow the District to preserve "point in time" data at regular intervals to enhance the District's ability to track changes in the SIS over a given period of time.*

In conjunction with the upgrades to the SIS described above, the District is also reviewing the efficacy of implementing a system of mandated periodic data reviews that will include quarterly student level attendance data review and certification of the data by building level administrators.

3. Attendance Procedures

3.1 Daily attendance

Henry Elementary did not follow district procedures regarding daily student attendance, late arrival/early departure, or short-term withdrawals, which resulted in inflated attendance percentages.

Changes made to attendance data in the SIS were not adequately documented or approved. At the end of each day a Henry Elementary front office employee prepared a preliminary attendance report and provided it to Principal Veal for approval before finalizing daily attendance. According to sworn testimony of the employee responsible for unlocking the main door to admit students who were tardy or late, Principal Veal directed changes to the attendance record for specific children marked absent because she said they were actually present that day, even though the employee had not admitted these children on the days in question. The employee made the changes to the attendance data as directed by the Principal.

There was no mechanism in place to verify the accuracy of such changes. Instead, changes directed by the Principal were made without asking teachers to verify any discrepancies between the SIS data and their manual records. As noted above, during our comparison of Henry Elementary manual attendance records to data recorded in the SIS, we noted numerous discrepancies for which there was no documentation or explanation (see MAR finding number 1).



Moreover, district policy requires teachers to enter daily student attendance in the SIS directly. This policy was not followed at Henry Elementary. Instead, manual 2-week attendance sheets (printed by school office personnel) were completed by most teachers and forwarded to the front office daily for entry into the SIS. When asked why attendance was not entered by the teachers, one front office employee indicated the Principal said that is how she wanted it done. Allowing teachers to enter data directly into the SIS removes one opportunity for data to be manipulated.

District attendance procedures should be followed at the school-level to help ensure the accuracy of attendance data entered into the SIS.

3.2 Late arrival/early departure

District procedures regarding the recording of late arrivals and early departures were not followed at Henry Elementary. Our analysis of Henry Elementary attendance data for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011, showed no late arrivals or early departures recorded in the SIS.

The SIS student attendance procedures indicate late arrivals or early departures are to be recorded to track the number of minutes a student is not present. This would then be reflected in the student's average daily attendance percentage reported to, and used by, the DESE for funding purposes.

In sworn depositions and subsequent interviews performed, many of the Henry Elementary teachers indicated students were either recorded as present or absent for the full day and there was nothing in between (i.e. if the student arrived late or left early, the student was credited as being present the full day). In addition, in a sworn deposition, the Henry Elementary front office employee responsible for issuing admission slips indicated they were not consistently used to document late arrivals; therefore, there would be no record showing these students were not at school the entire day.

Daily attendance for each student should be tracked by hours present to ensure attendance totals are accurate.

3.3 Short-term withdrawals

District procedures regarding the short-term withdrawal of students for illnesses were not always followed at Henry Elementary, resulting in inflated attendance percentages.

The district policy on withdrawal of students from school allows elementary students to be withdrawn by action of the principal or other school official only in the following circumstances: 1) death of the student, 2) absence of the student from school for 3 weeks or longer where after investigation the school is unable to determine the reason for the absence, 3) absence of the student from school for 3 weeks or longer due to extended illness where there is no basis for expecting the student to recover in time to complete the



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semester, except where home teacher is being provided, 4) departure of the student from the city, loss of status as a resident, etc., or 5) enrollment of the student in a private school, parochial school, or public school outside the city.

Our analysis of Henry Elementary enrollment and withdrawal data for the 3 years ended June 30, 2011, showed approximately 40 students withdrawn and reenrolled less than 3 weeks apart. We selected 11 of these students to review. Eight students appeared to have been withdrawn as allowed by the district policy, either they transferred to a different school or moved out of the district. However, 3 of the 11 did not appear to be withdrawn for reasons allowed by the policy. In one example, the student was apparently withdrawn and reenrolled due to an illness lasting approximately a week and a half, which is not allowed by the district policy. As a result, this student was not recorded as absent on the days he/she was out sick, which artificially inflated the school's attendance percentage.

The district policy on withdrawal of students from school should be followed to help ensure the attendance data entered into the SIS is accurate and consistent between schools in the district.

Recommendations

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board:

- 3.1 Ensure all schools in the district comply with district attendance policies and procedures.
- 3.2 Ensure all schools in the district comply with district policies and procedures regarding late arrival and early departure.
- 3.3 Ensure all schools in the district comply with district policies and procedures regarding withdrawal of students.

Auditee's Response

The St. Louis Public School District Special Administrative Board provided the following written response:

The recommendations set forth in Section 3 of the report instruct the District to ensure compliance with various District policies and procedures regarding student attendance and enrollment recording and reporting. The District notes that the activities at Henry as described in this report were not in compliance with current policies and procedures. Instead, the report repeatedly concludes that the issues associated with student attendance and enrollment at Henry are likely the result of a purposeful attempt to circumvent District policies. It is impossible to create a set of policies and procedures, or a system of controls that a determined individual cannot violate; however, the District believes that providing additional training programs will facilitate earlier detection of student data anomalies.



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The District is reviewing the current procedures regarding enforcement of the attendance and enrollment policies and procedures. In addition to the changes and improvements to the SIS already identified in the responses set forth in Section 2 above, the District is developing a Professional Development Plan to provide annual and on-going training regarding student attendance and enrollment data collection policies and procedures. In conjunction with the previously described improvements to the District's ability to monitor changes made in the SIS, the professional development program will also include training on identifying "red flags" or problem indicators to provide early identification of anomalies in student attendance and enrollment data. These changes, along with ensuring dissemination of the District's policies and procedures for reporting student data concerns will be part of the District's ongoing effort to ensure compliance with all student data related policies.

Appendix

St. Louis Public School District
Comparative Statement of Elementary School Attendance Percentages

Elementary School Name	Fiscal Year Ended June 30,										
			2011		2010		2009		2008		2007
	Variance from 2007 to 2011	Variance from 2007 to 2010	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage
Adams Elementary School	0.90%	1.50%	93.0	-0.60%	93.6	0.00%	93.6	0.70%	92.9	0.80%	92.1
Ames Visual and Performing Arts Elementary School	1.30%	1.90%	93.4	-0.60%	94.0	0.90%	93.1	0.10%	93.0	0.90%	92.1
Ashland Elementary School	2.00%	1.90%	90.5	0.10%	90.4	1.10%	89.3	0.20%	89.1	0.60%	88.5
Bryan Hill Elementary School	1.70%	0.70%	92.6	1.00%	91.6	1.30%	90.3	-0.90%	91.2	0.30%	90.9
Buder Elementary School	-0.80%	-0.90%	93.3	0.10%	93.2	-0.40%	93.6	0.70%	92.9	-1.20%	94.1
Clay Community Education Full Service School	2.50%	2.60%	92.1	-0.10%	92.2	0.00%	92.2	1.70%	90.5	0.90%	89.6
Cole eMINTS Academy School	0.20%	1.00%	92.4	-0.80%	93.2	-3.90%	97.1	1.60%	95.5	3.30%	92.2
Columbia Elementary School	3.80%	2.40%	93.2	1.40%	91.8	1.50%	90.3	1.10%	89.2	-0.20%	89.4
Cote Brilliante Elementary School	1.00%	0.90%	92.4	0.10%	92.3	0.20%	92.1	1.00%	91.1	-0.30%	91.4
Dewey International Studies Elementary School	-0.20%	-0.30%	94.9	0.10%	94.8	0.30%	94.5	-0.60%	95.1	0.00%	95.1
Paul Laurence Dunbar Elementary School	-1.10%	-0.30%	91.7	-0.80%	92.5	0.70%	91.8	0.60%	91.2	-1.60%	92.8
Farragut Elementary School	1.60%	2.40%	92.7	-0.80%	93.5	3.80%	89.7	-1.70%	91.4	0.30%	91.1
Ford Elementary Community Education Full Service School	1.50%	0.80%	92.0	0.70%	91.3	-0.20%	91.5	0.90%	90.6	0.10%	90.5
Froebel Elementary School	1.70%	0.60%	93.7	1.10%	92.6	-0.50%	93.1	-0.60%	93.7	1.70%	92.0
Gallaudet School for the Deaf	-	0.30%	*	-	91.3	1.60%	89.7	0.30%	89.4	-1.60%	91.0
Gateway Elementary Math, Science, and Technology Magnet School	-1.20%	-1.10%	94.3	-0.10%	94.4	-0.10%	94.5	-0.40%	94.9	-0.60%	95.5
Gateway Michael Elementary School	-2.00%	-1.40%	88.8	-0.60%	89.4	-0.50%	89.9	-0.20%	90.1	-0.70%	90.8
Hamilton eMINTS Academy Community Education Full Service School	2.90%	2.20%	90.6	0.70%	89.9	1.00%	88.9	0.70%	88.2	0.50%	87.7
Patrick Henry Downtown Academy	9.40%	12.10%	94.6	-2.70%	97.3	3.80%	93.5	4.10%	89.4	4.20%	85.2
Herzog Pilot Academy	1.50%	1.30%	94.2	0.20%	94.0	0.20%	93.8	0.40%	93.4	0.70%	92.7
Hickey Elementary School	2.80%	3.10%	91.6	-0.30%	91.9	1.00%	90.9	0.00%	90.9	2.10%	88.8
Hodgen Elementary College Bound Academy	-1.00%	-1.00%	92.7	0.00%	92.7	-0.30%	93.0	-0.50%	93.5	-0.20%	93.7
Jefferson Elementary School	1.70%	1.60%	92.1	0.10%	92.0	2.10%	89.9	0.20%	89.7	-0.70%	90.4
Kennard Classical Junior Academy	-0.40%	-0.80%	96.7	0.40%	96.3	0.50%	95.8	-0.30%	96.1	-1.00%	97.1
Pierre Laclède Elementary School	-0.20%	-0.10%	91.7	-0.10%	91.8	-1.70%	93.5	1.00%	92.5	0.60%	91.9
Lexington Elementary School	1.70%	2.90%	91.3	-1.20%	92.5	1.90%	90.6	0.10%	90.5	0.90%	89.6
Lyon at Blow	-0.80%	-1.20%	93.3	0.40%	92.9	2.20%	90.7	-1.70%	92.4	-1.70%	94.1
Mallinckrodt Elementary School	1.10%	1.10%	95.6	0.00%	95.6	0.90%	94.7	-0.20%	94.9	0.40%	94.5
Horace Mann Elementary School	-0.10%	0.20%	93.9	-0.30%	94.2	0.40%	93.8	-0.10%	93.9	-0.10%	94.0
Mason School of Academic and Cultural Literacy	1.10%	2.20%	93.7	-1.10%	94.8	1.30%	93.5	0.70%	92.8	0.20%	92.6
Meramec Elementary School	-0.20%	-0.80%	90.7	0.60%	90.1	-1.40%	91.5	1.10%	90.4	-0.50%	90.9
Monroe eMINTS Academy	2.70%	3.80%	92.4	-1.10%	93.5	1.30%	92.2	1.50%	90.7	1.00%	89.7
Mullanphy Investigative Learning Center	0.30%	0.50%	94.9	-0.20%	95.1	0.10%	95.0	0.20%	94.8	0.20%	94.6
Earl Nance Sr. Elementary School	-0.80%	-0.20%	92.6	-0.60%	93.2	0.00%	93.2	-0.90%	94.1	0.70%	93.4

Appendix

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Comparative Statement of Elementary School Attendance Percentages

Elementary School Name	Fiscal Year Ended June 30,										
	Variance from 2007 to 2011	Variance from 2007 to 2010	2011		2010		2009		2008		2007
			Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage	Variance	Attendance Percentage
Oak Hill Elementary School	0.70%	0.50%	93.2	0.20%	93.0	-0.20%	93.2	0.20%	93.0	0.50%	92.5
Peabody eMINTS School	2.80%	2.40%	93.5	0.40%	93.1	0.60%	92.5	1.60%	90.9	0.20%	90.7
Shaw Visual Performing Arts Community Education Center	0.20%	0.40%	94.5	-0.20%	94.7	0.20%	94.5	-0.30%	94.8	0.50%	94.3
Shenandoah Elementary School	1.00%	1.70%	92.0	-0.70%	92.7	0.30%	92.4	0.50%	91.9	0.90%	91.0
Sherman Elementary School	-1.50%	-1.30%	92.6	-0.20%	92.8	0.10%	92.7	-1.80%	94.5	0.40%	94.1
Sigel Elementary Community Education Full Service School	2.00%	1.90%	92.3	0.10%	92.2	0.10%	92.1	0.30%	91.8	1.50%	90.3
Stix Early Childhood Center	-1.20%	-1.10%	93.9	-0.10%	94.0	-0.30%	94.3	-1.00%	95.3	0.20%	95.1
Walbridge Community Education Full Service School	1.50%	1.50%	90.5	0.00%	90.5	-1.00%	91.5	-0.30%	91.8	2.80%	89.0
Washington Montessori School	-0.60%	-0.20%	93.9	-0.40%	94.3	-0.20%	94.5	1.00%	93.5	-1.00%	94.5
Wilkinson Early Childhood Center Mission	0.00%	0.50%	93.8	-0.50%	94.3	0.50%	93.8	1.20%	92.6	-1.20%	93.8
Woerner Elementary School	0.40%	-0.10%	94.4	0.50%	93.9	0.40%	93.5	-0.60%	94.1	0.10%	94.0
Woodward Elementary School	0.10%	-0.50%	93.8	0.60%	93.2	0.20%	93.0	0.30%	92.7	-1.00%	93.7
Average for all elementary schools	0.90%	1.00%	92.9	-0.10%	93.0	0.40%	92.6	0.30%	92.3	0.30%	92.0

* This school closed after fiscal year 2010.

Source: The 2007-2010 data was obtained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website. The 2011 data was obtained from the St. Louis Public School District as of June 2, 2011.