

Audit Highlights



Department of Education

Summary

The Office of Educator Licensure plays a critical role, along with school districts, in ensuring teachers and other educators in Nevada schools are qualified. We found the Office needs to strengthen its processes for revoking licenses, issuing provisional licenses, and tracking and reviewing criminal history reports. Improvements to these processes will help ensure timely action for criminal cases involving licensees. In addition, increased monitoring is needed to help ensure licensing applications are processed timely. Nevertheless, the Office has taken steps to address legislative concerns regarding customer service, document security, and other operational issues.

The Department could improve its controls over the class-size reduction program. We found the Department's oversight of class-size reduction plans and other class-size reduction information submitted by the school districts was not adequate. Better oversight would provide more accurate information to decision makers and stakeholders. Further, the process for distributing class-size reduction funds needs strengthening.

Key Findings

The Office does not have an adequate revocation process for licensees convicted of crimes. Specifically, the Office did not adopt regulations to help ensure it was notified timely when a licensee had been arrested. As a result, our testing of 13 revocation cases found the number of days from the arrest date to when the Office became aware of the arrest ranged from 1 to 1,200 days, with an average of 367 days. Further, once the Office was notified of an arrest, it did not always monitor such cases and revoke licenses in a timely manner. (page 6)

The Office did not properly issue or monitor provisional licenses. We found provisional licenses were issued for 1 year instead of the 120-day maximum allowed under state regulations. Further, the information systems used to track the status of provisional licenses were not reliable and criminal history reports were not always reviewed timely. As a result, the process to invalidate a license when an applicant has a criminal history is not always timely or effective. (page 9)

The Office has not exercised its authority to invalidate or revoke a license when a crime involving moral turpitude has been committed. The Office's practice during the audit was to invalidate a provisional license upon learning that a licensee has been convicted of a felony. However, state law also authorizes the Office to take licensing action against persons convicted of non-felony crimes involving moral turpitude. Our review of NRS identified several examples of non-felony crimes (gross misdemeanors and misdemeanors) that could be considered crimes of moral turpitude. (page 13)

The Department's oversight of class-size reduction (CSR) plans can be enhanced. Our review found the Department did not receive sufficient information from the school districts regarding their CSR plans. Further, the Department did not require districts to provide plans that included items required by statute. For example, all school districts are required to demonstrate how they will reduce pupil-teacher ratios within the limits of available funding. We found the Department did not receive such information from any of the school districts. Without proper monitoring of CSR plans, there is an increased risk that districts will not maximize progress towards achieving class-size reduction. (page 19)

The Department did not effectively monitor quarterly class-size reduction reports and variance requests submitted by school districts. These reports aid the Department in overseeing the CSR program and are required to be posted on districts' websites. Further, Department staff summarize this information and submit it to the State Board of Education and the Interim Finance Committee. We found instances when reports had errors and did not include all required information. Inaccurate reports submitted to decision makers reduce accountability over the State's CSR program. (page 22)

The Department's process for distributing class-size reduction funds has control weaknesses. Specifically, the Department needs written policies and procedures for calculating how CSR funds are distributed to the school districts. The Department is responsible for distributing \$381 million in CSR funds during fiscal years 2014 and 2015. Determining the amount distributed to each school district involves a very large number of calculations and data from many different sources, but the calculations are not reviewed and lack supporting documents. Additionally, the Department did not communicate its funding expectations to the school districts, such as the minimum number of teachers they were expected to employ with CSR funds. This increases the risk that funds will not be used as intended. (page 25)

Highlights of performance audit report on the Department of Education issued on December 2, 2014. Legislative Auditor report # LA14-22.

Background

The mission of the Department of Education is to improve student achievement and educator effectiveness by ensuring opportunities, facilitating learning, and promoting excellence.

For fiscal year 2014, the Department had total approved funding of about \$1.9 billion, which includes about \$1.25 billion in General Fund appropriations. Much of the Department's funding passes through the Distributive School Account to the school districts. Operating expenditures for the Department were about \$25 million in fiscal year 2014. For fiscal year 2014, the Department had 168 legislatively approved positions.

The Office of Educator Licensure (Office) is responsible for the issuance and renewal of educator licenses based on standards adopted by the Commission on Professional Standards. Prior to April 2014, the Office was known as the Office of Teacher Licensure.

The state's class-size reduction (CSR) program is administered by the Department's Business and Support Services Office. The CSR program was first funded by the Legislature in fiscal year 1991. In fiscal year 2014, program funding was about \$177 million.

Purpose of Audit

The purpose of this audit was to: (1) evaluate the operational processes of the Office of Educator Licensure, and (2) evaluate controls over the class-size reduction program. Our audit focused on the Department's educator licensing and class-size reduction activities from July 2012 through March 2014.

Audit Recommendations

This audit report contains nine recommendations to improve operational processes of the Office of Educator Licensure. In addition, there are nine recommendations to enhance controls over the class-size reduction program.

The Department accepted the 18 recommendations.

Recommendation Status

The Department's 60-day plan for corrective action is due on March 2, 2015. In addition, the six-month report on the status of audit recommendations is due on September 2, 2015.