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OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL



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AUDITOR GENERAL

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– Article IV, Section 53 of the Michigan Constitution

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September 20, 2007

Mr. Michael P. Flanagan
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Department of Education
John A. Hannah Building
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Mr. Flanagan:

This is our report on our follow-up of the 2 material findings (Findings 1 and 2) and 2 corresponding recommendations reported in the performance audit of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Department of Education and Department of Treasury. That audit report was issued and distributed in June 2001; however, additional copies are available on request or at <<http://www.audgen.michigan.gov>>. Subsequent to our original audit, Executive Order No. 2003-20 transferred the responsibility for the administration of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program to the Department of Education.

Our follow-up disclosed that the Department of Education had complied with the 2 recommendations.

If you have any questions, please call me or Scott M. Strong, C.P.A., C.I.A., Deputy Auditor General.

AUDITOR GENERAL

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MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FOLLOW-UP REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report contains the results of our follow-up of the material findings and corresponding recommendations and the agency's preliminary response as reported in our performance audit* of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program* (MEAP), Department of Education and Department of Treasury (31-200-99), which was issued and distributed in June 2001. That audit report included 2 material conditions* (Findings 1 and 2) and 6 other reportable conditions*.

PURPOSE OF FOLLOW-UP

The purpose of this follow-up was to determine whether the Department of Education had taken appropriate corrective measures in response to the 2 material findings and the 2 corresponding recommendations.

BACKGROUND

First introduced in 1970, MEAP has been a Statewide testing program initiated by the State Board of Education for the purpose of determining what students know and what students are able to do, compared to standards set by the State Board of Education, at key checkpoints during the students' academic career. MEAP's goal is to provide data to school districts to use in assessing and improving their instructional programs and to provide information on the status and educational progress of Michigan's schools in specified subject areas to the Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Executive Office, local educators, students, and parents.

* See glossary at end of report for definition.

The MEAP assessment tests were developed to measure what Michigan educators believe all students should know and be able to achieve at various grade levels in five subject areas: mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and writing. These test results provide summary information on how well Michigan students and Michigan schools are doing when compared with standards established by the State Board of Education.

Effective June 30, 1999, Act 94, P.A. 1999, established the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Program (MMASP). Students meeting specific performance standards on middle school and high school MEAP assessment tests were eligible for an MMASP merit award of up to \$3,000. Merit awards were to be used to pay tuition and fees, as well as specified related costs, at approved postsecondary educational institutions. Act 479, P.A. 2006, discontinued MMASP and replaced it with the Michigan Promise scholarship. Students taking the Michigan Merit Examination* (MME) test in high school are eligible for up to a \$4,000 Michigan Promise scholarship.

Prior to January 1, 2000, the Office of Standards, Assessment, and Accreditation, Department of Education, was responsible for administering MEAP. Effective January 1, 2000, Executive Order No. 1999-12 transferred to the Department of Treasury all of the administrative statutory powers, duties, functions, and responsibilities of the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction as they related to MEAP administration. The State Board of Education retained authority to determine policies, if any, on which the administration of MEAP assessments should be based. Effective December 21, 2003, Executive Order No. 2003-20 transferred back to the Superintendent of Public Instruction all of the administrative statutory powers, duties, functions, and responsibilities of the Department of Treasury related to MEAP.

During school year 2005-06, the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA), Department of Education, administered 32 different elementary, middle, and high school MEAP assessment tests in the subjects of mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and writing. Not all grades were tested in all subjects. Elementary and middle school tests were offered in the fall, and high school tests were offered in the spring. During school year 2005-06, approximately 879,000 elementary and middle school students and 140,000 high school students took the MEAP tests.

* See glossary at end of report for definition.

Beginning in March 2007, the Department of Education replaced the MEAP's high school assessment test with the MME. The MME consists of 3 major assessment components:

1. The American College Test (ACT), which is a college entrance examination that students can use to apply to college.
2. WorkKeys job skills assessments in mathematics and reading.
3. Michigan assessments developed to cover specific areas of the Michigan curriculum that are not assessed in either the ACT or WorkKeys assessments.

The Department of Education uses elements from each of the three assessment components to determine an overall MME score for assessing school accountability. In addition, the students receive their ACT and WorkKeys scores, which they can use to apply to college, qualify for work training, or obtain a job.

OEAA develops and administers MEAP and MME as well as other standardized assessments. As of June 29, 2007, the Department of Education had 29 employees assigned to OEAA.

SCOPE

Our fieldwork was conducted from March through June 2007. We interviewed OEAA personnel, reviewed corrective action plans, and reviewed supporting documentation to determine the status of compliance with our recommendations for Findings 1 and 2 from our performance audit of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Department of Education and Department of Treasury, issued in June 2001. We reviewed new State and federal legislation to identify changes since the prior audit. We also reviewed the annual technical reports that provide information about the development procedures and technical attributes of the MEAP assessment tests. In addition, we met with the Department of Education's psychometrician* and reviewed the process for computing the reliability* of the MEAP assessment tests. We examined the Department of Education's annual guides to reports developed to assist educators in understanding

* See glossary at end of report for definition.

their MEAP results, the MEAP coordinator's manual developed to provide an understanding of the MEAP process to school coordinators, and the ethics guidelines provided to educators administering the MEAP assessment tests. Also, we reviewed contracts related to test development, reporting, and administration. In addition, we examined documentation submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) for the standards and assessment peer review process conducted under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*.

* See glossary at end of report for definition.

FOLLOW-UP RESULTS

EFFECTIVENESS IN ASSESSING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

RECOMMENDATION AND RESPONSE AS REPORTED IN JUNE 2001:

1. MEAP High School Test* (HST) Reliability

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that MEAP formally establish the necessary numerical degree of reliability that the MEAP HST should achieve in relation to statutory requirements and routinely compare test results with that degree of reliability.

AGENCY PRELIMINARY RESPONSE

The Department of Treasury agreed with this recommendation and informed us that it will formally establish predetermined reliability levels. It is understood that the actual reliability of the assessments is not at issue, but rather the development of predetermined objectives.

FOLLOW-UP CONCLUSION

We concluded that the Department of Education had complied with this recommendation.

The Department established target measures of reliability of .90 or higher for each assessment test. The Department prepared an annual technical report that summarized information about the development procedures and technical attributes of the MEAP assessment tests, including the reliability statistics for each MEAP assessment test. The Department annually reviewed test reliability against its established target of .90.

We reviewed reliability statistics for MEAP HST subjects of mathematics, reading, science, and writing for school years 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06 as computed by the Department's psychometrician. We verified that the Department published test reliability statistics and information in interpreting the reliability in the

* See glossary at end of report for definition.

annual technical report and provided this information to the Technical Advisory Committee.

In addition, in 2005, OEAA participated in the USDOE's standards and assessment peer review process under the NCLB Act. The peer review included a review of the MEAP tests for compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements. On September 13, 2006, the USDOE approved the Department's NCLB assessments. We determined that the USDOE's review included OEAA's process for establishing test reliability.

EFFECTIVENESS IN PROVIDING MEAP DATA AND TEST RESULTS TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

RECOMMENDATION AND RESPONSE AS REPORTED IN JUNE 2001:

2. MEAP HST Results

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that MEAP increase the usefulness of MEAP HST results provided to school districts for assessing and improving their instructional programs and include all appropriate student results in the data reported to school districts.

AGENCY PRELIMINARY RESPONSE

The Department of Treasury agreed with this recommendation and informed us that the Michigan Merit Award has reduced the nonparticipation rate significantly and it is anticipated that this issue will be virtually eliminated within the next two years. Test item analyses are being provided to the schools, effective with the Class of 2000. Also, efforts are being made in cooperation with contractor and school district personnel to improve the efficiency of the MEAP test administration process. In addition, MEAP test exemption and exclusion policies and practices are being reviewed and clarified.

FOLLOW-UP CONCLUSION

We concluded that the Department of Education had complied with this recommendation.

During school year 2005-06, approximately 96% of the enrolled students took the MEAP assessment tests.

To increase the usefulness of the MEAP assessment tests, the Department informed us that it annually releases the operational questions along with responses for all elementary and middle school tests, provides a guide to assist school districts in reviewing their MEAP test results, and provides test results electronically to school districts.

We verified that beginning with school year 2005-06, the Department has annually released all operational multiple choice and constructed response questions and appropriate answers for the elementary and middle school mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and writing MEAP tests. The released questions and responses are available on the Department's Web site.

We verified that the Department provided assessment information to assist elementary, middle, and high school educators in understanding and using the MEAP test results and school district level reports and provided performance and scoring guidelines for the various tests.

We examined the Department's secure Web site, which allows school districts to access their respective individual and aggregate assessment test data electronically. The Department is able to provide school districts with earlier access to test item results by electronically providing the information on a secure Web site.

Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

ACT	American College Test.
material condition	A reportable condition that could impair the ability of management to operate a program in an effective and efficient manner and/or could adversely affect the judgment of an interested person concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.
MEAP High School Test (HST)	Title of the high school MEAP assessment administered after 1997 (subsequent to the High School Proficiency Test [HSPT]).
Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)	Statewide standardized curricula-specific tests given to students in certain grade levels designed to measure selected essential performance objectives.
Michigan Merit Examination (MME)	The State assessment test administered to all students enrolled in grade 11 in March of each year. It consists of three major components: the ACT (a college entrance examination), the WorkKeys job skills assessments, and Michigan assessments covering areas of the Michigan curriculum that are not assessed in either the ACT or WorkKeys assessments. The combined MME test measures student learning of the Michigan high school standards, benchmarks, and core content expectations.
MMASP	Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Program.
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001	The federal law that authorizes funding and contains the current requirements for Title I and other federal educational programs.
OEAA	Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability.

performance audit	An economy and efficiency audit or a program audit that is designed to provide an independent assessment of the performance of a governmental entity, program, activity, or function to improve public accountability and to facilitate decision making by parties responsible for overseeing or initiating corrective action.
psychometrician	A person skilled in the administration and interpretation of quantitative tests for the measurement of psychological variables, including intelligence.
reliability	A measure that indicates whether a specific test, when administered on different occasions, will produce the same test results.
reportable condition	A matter that, in the auditor's judgment, represents either an opportunity for improvement or a significant deficiency in management's ability to operate a program in an effective and efficient manner.
USDOE	U.S. Department of Education.

