



OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR
KERRI L. HUNTER, CPA • STATE AUDITOR

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 18, 2021

To: Colorado School District Administrators and Other Interested Parties

From: Greg Fugate, Audit Manager, Office of the State Auditor

Re: Performance Evaluation of Colorado's K-12 Education Accountability Systems

Due to the level of interest in the Office of the State Auditor's (OSA) performance evaluation of Colorado's K-12 Education Accountability Systems, we are providing this communication to school district administrators and other interested parties. This document may be distributed and shared with others.

Basis for Evaluation

During the 2021 Legislative Session, the General Assembly passed and the Governor signed [House Bill 21-1294](#), requiring the State Auditor to contract for an independent evaluation of Colorado's K-12 Education Accountability Systems.

As used in the bill's language, "statewide education accountability system" means the system for accrediting schools and school districts, and the "statewide system of standards and assessments" means the system of standards and assessments for preschool through postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Contract Award

Section 2-3-127(3), C.R.S., requires the State Auditor to contract with a public or private entity to conduct the evaluation. Through a competitive solicitation process, the OSA awarded the contract to the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO). HumRRO is a nationally recognized, independent evaluation firm with extensive experience and expertise in state assessment and accountability systems.

The OSA is the lead agency/authority for this evaluation. However, as the OSA's contracted agent, HumRRO is responsible for planning and conducting the evaluation to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence necessary to conclude on the evaluation's objectives, develop any related findings and recommendations, write the evaluation report, and present the evaluation report to the Legislative Audit Committee and, upon request, the House and Senate Education Committees and the State Board of Education.

Project Points of Contact

The OSA and HumRRO will be working with staff at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) throughout the evaluation. However, please direct questions about the evaluation to the OSA and HumRRO:

- Greg Fugate, Audit Manager, Office of the State Auditor (greg.fugate@state.co.us)
- Monica Gribben, Project Director, HumRRO (MGribben@humrro.org)

Evaluation Objectives

In passing House Bill 21-1294, the General Assembly stated that the evaluation will provide valuable information about the efficacy of Colorado's current K-12 education accountability systems, including areas in which the systems may be improved, and help to identify and inform the allocation of resources to meet the increased needs at the state and local levels, to advance public education in Colorado.

Overall, Section 2-3-127(1)(c), C.R.S., specifies that the evaluation should determine whether the current statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system:

- Meet the goals and intentions of the General Assembly, as stated in the legislative declarations set forth in Section 22-7-1002, C.R.S., and Section 22-11-102, C.R.S.
- Contain institutional or cultural biases based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, age, or economic status.
- Provide an accurate, credible, and comparable assessment of public education throughout the state.

Additionally, Sections 2-3-127(3)(a) through (o), C.R.S., specify 15 objectives that the evaluation must address. **The full list of these 15 objectives appears at the end of this document.**

Evaluation Timeline

The HumRRO team has started work on the evaluation, and work will continue over the next 13 months. In accordance with statutory deadlines [see Sections 2-3-127(4)(a) and (4)(e), C.R.S.], the evaluation will be completed no later than November 15, 2022, and the final evaluation report will be publicly released during the Legislative Audit Committee's December 2022 hearings.

Burden on School Districts and Schools

To minimize the burden on school districts and schools, Section 2-3-127(4)(a), C.R.S., requires the State Auditor and its contractor to obtain the information required for the evaluation from CDE to the greatest extent possible. Information may be requested from a public school, school district, board of cooperative services, or the State Charter School Institute only if the information is not available from CDE.

HumRRO has planned its work to leverage data already available from CDE, other state agencies, and other publicly available sources to the extent possible. However, there may be instances in which HumRRO will need to obtain data or information directly from districts or schools.

The OSA and HumRRO will work with CDE to facilitate review through the Education Data Advisory Committee (EDAC) about data collection efforts for this evaluation affecting districts and schools.

Evaluation Methodology

HumRRO has developed a work plan for the evaluation that is data-driven and relies on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The final report, which will be a public document, will include information about the work performed, data obtained, methodologies used, etc.

In accordance with confidentiality provisions in state statute [see Sections 2-3-103(2) and (3), C.R.S., and Section 2-3-103.7(1), C.R.S.], the OSA does not publicly provide details, updates, or briefings about audits/evaluations while they are being conducted.

Focus Groups/Surveys

Obtaining stakeholder input is a critical part of the evaluation process. HumRRO plans to use structured focus groups/interviews (conducted via remote meeting technology) and online surveys to obtain information and input from key stakeholder groups such as district administrators, school leaders, educators, and parent/family groups related to a number of the evaluation's objectives.

Affected stakeholders will receive additional communication about these activities directly from the HumRRO team. If you are contacted for participation in a focus group, interview, or survey, we value and appreciate in advance your willingness to participate. The HumRRO team will select a variety of days and times to accommodate different schedules and will minimize the time needed to participate.

As mentioned previously, the OSA and HumRRO will work with CDE to facilitate review through the Education Data Advisory Committee (EDAC) about data collection efforts such as focus groups and surveys for this evaluation affecting districts and schools.

Remote Work

HumRRO will conduct the work on this engagement remotely using email, phone, and remote meeting technologies. No on-site work will take place at the district or school levels.

Right of Access to Data and Information

The OSA has broad statutory authority to access documents, records, data, and information, including records or information required to be kept confidential or exempt from public disclosure, maintained by state departments, institutions, and agencies [see Section 2-3-107(2)(a), C.R.S.].

In passing House Bill 21-1294, the General Assembly granted the OSA and its contractor specific statutory authority to access data and information for purposes of conducting this evaluation [see Section 2-3-107(2)(a)(F), C.R.S., and Sections 2-3-127(4)(a) and (4)(c), C.R.S.]:

- a. The State Auditor and its contractor have access to all of the non-financial books, accounts, reports, vouchers, or other records or information, including records or information required to be kept confidential or exempt from public disclosure, submitted to CDE by a public school, school district, board of cooperative services, or the State Charter School Institute.
- b. The State Auditor and its contractor are authorized to access any non-financial books, accounts, reports, vouchers, or other records or information, including records or information required to be kept confidential or exempt from public disclosure, that are not available from CDE or from good-faith efforts to obtain them from other sources, directly from a public school, school district, board of cooperative services, or the State Charter School Institute.

Data Privacy

As required by Section 2-3-127(4)(b), C.R.S., the OSA, HumRRO, and CDE will enter into a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) for audit purposes in compliance with the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended. DSAs with individual districts will be pursued with individual districts on a case-by-case basis, if needed.

Section 2-3-127(4)(c), C.R.S., requires that the State Auditor and its contractor comply with all federal and state laws that protect the privacy of student information that may be accessed as part of this evaluation.

The OSA's audit/evaluation reports are public documents. However, Section 2-3-107(2)(b), C.R.S., states that no information required to be kept confidential pursuant to any other law shall be released in connection with an audit/evaluation. The OSA ensures

that the results of data analysis are sufficiently aggregated and masked, as appropriate, to avoid disclosure of protected information when publicly reporting.

General OSA FAQs

Who is the OSA?

The State Auditor is a constitutionally established position, appointed by the General Assembly without regard to political affiliation to a 5-year term. The OSA is a nonpartisan staff agency in Colorado's Legislative Branch whose executive director is the State Auditor. The OSA's performance, financial, and IT audits and evaluations promote accountability in government by providing the General Assembly, agencies, and the public with independent, objective, thorough, and credible information, analyses, and assessments about the operation of state agencies and programs and the use of taxpayer resources.

More information about the OSA is available at www.colorado.gov/auditor.

What is the role of the Legislative Audit Committee?

The Legislative Audit Committee is a bipartisan committee with equal numbers of representatives and senators from each of the two major political parties. The Legislative Audit Committee is not involved in the conduct of audits/evaluations. Rather, the Legislative Audit Committee releases and discusses reports prepared by the State Auditor during a public hearing. During the hearing, the audit/evaluation team presents the report and answers committee members' questions about the report's conclusions, findings, and recommendations. The agency is also present at the hearing and responds to committee members' questions as well as any formal recommendations made to the agency in the audit/evaluation report.

All Legislative Audit Committee hearings are open to the public and live audio of the hearing is broadcast on the Internet via the [General Assembly's website](#).

Are draft reports publicly available for review?

No. Sections 2-3-103(2) and 2-3-103.7(1), C.R.S., prohibit the public disclosure of information contained in any reports prepared by the State Auditor until the report is released by a majority vote of the Legislative Audit Committee. Until the final report is publicly released, it remains a confidential document.

Detailed Evaluation Objectives

Sections 2-3-127(3)(a) through (o), C.R.S., require that the OSA's evaluation of Colorado's K-12 Education Accountability Systems address the following 15 objectives:

- a. The effectiveness of the statewide education accountability system in objectively measuring the performance of public schools and school districts in delivering a thorough and uniform public education for all groups of students.

- b. Whether and to what extent the statewide education accountability system effectively identifies success and drives effective support for improvement at each level of the statewide system of public education.
- c. Whether and to what extent unintended barriers or obstacles exist that inadvertently impact the performance of students from different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or disability communities, as measured by the statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide accountability system, including how these systems are implemented by schools and school districts.
- d. Whether and to what extent interventions implemented under the statewide education accountability system are effective in supporting and improving outcomes for schools that serve predominantly low-income students, students of color, or students with disabilities, including interventions that focus primarily on increasing students' performance on statewide standardized tests in lieu of other non-testing-related courses and activities within a school.
- e. Whether and to what extent interventions, including interventions identified by the statewide education accountability system, effectively support students who are in poverty or students with disabilities and schools and districts serving high percentages of students in poverty or students with disabilities.
- f. Whether and to what extent the outcomes identified and measured by the system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system reflect inequities and correlate to the level of poverty present within, and concentration of students with disabilities within, the student populations enrolled in the public schools, school districts, and boards of cooperative services.
- g. Whether and to what extent low-income students and students with disabilities enrolled in public schools, school districts, and boards of cooperative services are given access to learning opportunities that will allow them to achieve the same levels of attainment that their higher-income peers achieve on the preschool through elementary and secondary education standards adopted pursuant to Section 22-7-1005, C.R.S.
- h. Whether and to what extent, and how, in response to the system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system, school districts shift educational resources and interventions, change their instructional practices, and target assistance to students who are close to achieving grade-level scores or modify their instructional practices and target particular cohorts of students.
- i. Whether and to what extent variations in the size of student populations have a disproportionate impact on the accuracy and comparability of results achieved through the statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system.
- j. Whether and to what extent the outcomes measured by the statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system

accurately correlate to a school's effectiveness in helping students develop the skills and capacities that are relevant to families and employers, including but not limited to innovation, academic rigor, career and technical education, and workforce readiness and essential skills.

- k. Whether and to what extent participation rates on statewide standardized tests affect the results achieved through the statewide system of standards and assessment and the statewide education accountability system.
- l. Whether the Colorado growth model continues to meet the requirements specified in Section 22-11-202(1)(b), C.R.S.
- m. Whether the statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system provide a credible basis for comparison between and among public schools and between and among school districts, boards of cooperative services, and the State Charter School Institute.
- n. Whether and to what extent information regarding assessments and accountability is accessible to educators, parents, and families, and communicated in a language parents and families can understand, with clear guidance on actions to support student learning.
- o. Whether and to what extent the statewide system of standards and assessments and the statewide education accountability system identify schools and school districts that are not meeting the academic needs of under-represented groups of students, including groups based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, age, and economic status, and whether interventions to serve the students in these groups are successful in increasing academic achievement for students in these groups.