



Report Highlights

Louisiana Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired

Special School District

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Why We Conducted This Audit

We evaluated the Louisiana Special School District's (SSD) oversight of the Louisiana Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired (LSDVI). SSD became a stand-alone educational service agency, overseen by the Board of Directors of the SSD ("Board") in July 2021. SSD's mission is to foster a learning community that is student-oriented and dedicated to excellence by providing child-specific instruction and residential services to all children. We conducted this audit in response to a legislative request for a performance audit on SSD.

What We Found

- **Staff survey results and interviews indicate that SSD needs to address issues with its organizational culture, including restoring trust in leadership, improving employee morale, increasing transparency, and clearly communicating with staff.** According to our survey, 76.6% (82 of 107) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that morale is high within SSD, and 81.3% (87 of 107) of staff listed employee morale as one of SSD's biggest challenges. Staff expressed concern about low pay, lack of appreciation, poor communication and lack of transparency from SSD management.
- **SSD faces staffing difficulties due to organizational changes, turnover, vacancies, and inconsistencies in performance evaluations and pay raises.** As of January 12, 2023, SSD had 10 additional full-time positions overall than it did as of July 1, 2021; however, it had fewer teacher and direct service positions, while the number of SSD administrative positions increased. In addition, as of February 2023, LSD elementary school turnover was at 70% (seven of 10 employees), and LSD Administration had 100% turnover (two of two employees).
- **During fiscal years 2021 through 2023, SSD did not resolve all grievances, and it does not have a process to track grievances throughout the process.** In addition, distrust in how grievances will be handled may deter SSD employees from filing grievances. In staff survey responses and interviews, staff expressed concern that they would face retaliation for filing a grievance. In addition, of the 14 individuals that filed grievances, eight (57.1%) resigned, and one (7.1%) was terminated.

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What We Found (Cont.)

- **Since SSD became a stand-alone educational service agency in July 2021, it has not developed comprehensive policies and procedures for the district or schools.** Since SSD became a stand-alone educational service agency, it has only developed four policies including an Americans with Disabilities Act policy, a grievance policy, a telework policy, and a video monitoring of school property policy. Clear policies and procedures can help agencies communicate expectations to employees and ensure that staff are treated fairly and consistently.
- **Providing Board members with orientation and ongoing training on their roles and responsibilities, meeting procedures, and SSD operations could help Board members better fulfill their role.** In addition, the Board should develop performance metrics for evaluating the superintendent and include staff and stakeholder feedback as part of the annual evaluation.
- **SSD needs to strengthen its philosophy of deaf education and improve staff credentials at LSD. For example, LSD does not have a clear implementation plan for its ASL/English bilingual philosophy, and staff do not always meet ASL proficiency requirements as outlined in their job descriptions.** We found that 94 (63.5%) of 148 LSD employees during fiscal years 2021 through 2023 met ASL proficiency levels, while 54 (36.5%) did not. In addition, the number of teachers with hearing impaired certifications has decreased.
- **During fiscal years 2021 through 2023, SSD did not always provide speech therapy services outlined in student Individual Education Programs (IEPs).** In our sample of 30 student IEPs, 20 (66.7%) did not receive any speech language pathology services in fiscal year 2023. The IEPs of these 20 students required approximately 33,840 minutes of speech pathology services, with most students to receive 45 to 60 minutes a week. According to SSD, it could not provide all speech pathology services because two of the three speech therapist positions were vacant. In addition, SSD could better maintain documentation of service delivery to ensure services are provided.
- **During fiscal year 2022, SSD did not spend \$746,909 (36.1%) of \$2.1 million of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds available for use for LSDVI.** As of April 2023, SSD had not spent \$787,558 (51.8%) of its \$1.5 million budget for fiscal year 2023. SSD could have used IDEA funds in a variety of ways to improve school services, such as to provide supplemental pay for teachers, assist in filling vacant positions, or financial assistance to help teachers obtain teacher certifications or hearing or visually impaired certifications.