

State Auditor releases risk review of charter school support

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Finds lack of tracking, accountability for \$20 million

SANTA FE – State Auditor Tim Keller released a “Risk Review of Administrative Support of Charter Schools” Aug. 29. The report from the Office of the State Auditor reveals a lack of transparency and accountability for funds withheld from charter schools intended to provide administrative support to safeguard education dollars at those schools and help them succeed. Over a five-year period, nearly \$20 million was withheld from charter schools, much of it which cannot be tracked to specific expenditures to support those schools.

Charter schools in New Mexico are overseen by the Public Education Department, or the school district in the area. The OSA used a sample from PED and school districts that varied in size and geographic location. Chartering authorities may withhold two percent of each charter schools’ school-generated program cost to provide assistance. While the total dollar amounts withheld were consistent with state law, the OSA found that the chartering authorities did not consistently track how they were using the funds.

“The specifics about what training and support charter schools are receiving for their withheld funds are about as clear as mud,” stated State Auditor Tim Keller. “We found an unfortunate lack of transparency and accountability, which makes it difficult to see if these dollars are being used effectively. As the number of charter schools in our state steadily increases, the Public Education Department needs to step up and take responsibility for its oversight and provide the tools these schools need.”

To address these problems, the OSA calls on PED to revise outdated guidance on how the funds should be budgeted for, provide training to districts to strengthen the tracking of expenditures, and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of whether the funds are being allocated efficiently and effectively.

The OSA will presented this information to the Legislative Education Study Committee Aug. 30.