

SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX PROGRAM • FISCAL YEAR 2024

Thomas County Board of Education

Thomasville, Georgia

Compliance and Performance Audit Report

Greg S. Griffin | State Auditor

DOAA
Georgia Department of Audits & Accounts

Thomas County Board of Education

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Dr. Lisa Williams, Superintendent and Members of the
Thomas County Board of Education

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have audited the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) records and operations of the Thomas County Board of Education (School District) for the year ended June 30, 2024. Management of the School District is responsible for the School District's compliance with the specified requirements. Our responsibility is to determine the School District's compliance with the specified requirements based on our audit objectives.

Audit Summary

Our performance audit of the School District's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024 found the following:

- The School District has appropriately designed internal control procedures over the SPLOST expenditure transaction cycle and those controls have been placed into operation and are being followed.
- The School District has spent the SPLOST funds in accordance with O.C.G.A. §20-2-491 and the SPLOST resolutions passed March 1, 2016 and March 16, 2021 by the voters of Thomas County.

Introduction

Georgia Code Section §20-2-491 requires public school systems to obtain continuing performance audits for expenditure of sales tax for capital outlays if the tax generates $5 million or more annually. The independent performance audit shall:

1. Include a goal of ensuring, to the maximum extent possible, that the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically so as to ensure that the School District receives maximum benefit from the dollars collected.
2. Provide for issuance of periodic reports, not less than once annually, with respect to the extent to which tax funds are expended efficiently and economically as described in item 1 above.
3. Provide for issuance of periodic public recommendations, not less than annually for improvements in meeting the goal specified in item 1 above.

The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is a referendum voted and approved by the Thomas County voters in which one percent is added to the local sales tax for the purpose of funding building and renovation projects that would otherwise require financing through increased property taxes. SPLOST funds are also available for retiring general obligation bond debts incurred with respect only to capital outlay projects and to issue new general obligation bonds for specific capital outlay projects.

The School District works under the direction of the School Board and its superintendent. Projects selected for SPLOST funding are approved by the School Board. During fiscal years 2016 and 2021, the SPLOST IV and SPLOST V referendums were passed by the voters of Thomas County. The maximum amount approved to be raised from the SPLOST IV and SPLOST V referendums are $28,140,000.00 and $36,882,000.00, respectively. SPLOST IV funds will be used for the following purposes as outlined in the referendum:

> "for the purposes of renovations, new construction, improvements to and equipment for the Hand-in-Hand Primary, Garrison Pilcher Elementary, Cross Creek Elementary, Thomas County Middle, and Thomas County Central High Schools; renovations and/or new construction of facilities for specials schools and programs including Bishop Hall Charter School, GNETS/Pathways, the PREP Academy, the Renaissance Center, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs; renovation or new construction of facilities for central services including physical plant, administrative and support buildings, maintenance facilities, central storage facilities and warehousing; renovations, additions, and/or modifications to classrooms, multi-purpose rooms, storage areas, lab spaces, playgrounds, and other facilities to support new programs and to accommodate growth in enrollment; acquisition of school buses, maintenance and fleet vehicles, system-wide communication to include all buses, maintenance vehicles, the board of education office, and all schools, improvements to bus parking area including fuel pumps and tanks, HVAC system, improvements and tools/equipment to the bus garage; acquisition of system-wide classroom and administrative technology including computers, printers, and other technology and upgrades to camera, telephone, intercom, security and fire alarm systems; new textbooks and/or new/upgraded digital content; renovations, construction, and/or improvements to athletic facilities and equipment to include new baseball/softball fields, new lighting, construction of new dugouts, new tickets booths for softball and baseball games, a support/storage building, seating at baseball and soccer fields, football stadium improvements, new scoreboard and improvements to athletic fields; drainage improvements; support facilities; other equipment; and landscaping; and property acquisitions."

SPLOST V will be used for the following purposes as outlined in the referendum:

> "(a) Provide instructional resources, materials, and equipment including print and digital textbooks, lab equipment, instruments, and furniture; (b) Modernize instructional and administrative technology by refreshing and updating technology devices, software, and infrastructure at all schools and administrative offices; (c) Renovate, modernize, and improve schools and other facilities system-wide by providing new heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems; roof systems, plumbing and electrical systems and upgrades; paint and floor covering; windows and doors, storm water management, landscaping, signage, and other building additions and renovations; (d) Construct and equip a new multi-purpose classroom and student activities support building at Thomas County Central High School to include classrooms, fine arts and athletic practice and support facilities, and a new National Defense Cadet Corp/Junior ROTC center; (e) Purchase new school buses and fleet vehicles and make capital improvements to vehicles; (f) Equip schools, administrative, and other support facilities with new furniture, playground equipment, and other equipment as needed; (g) Renovate, modernize, and improve the school district's transportation facility; (h) Build, repave, and/or otherwise improve parking lots, lighting, and driveways at all schools and facilities; (i) Build and improve athletic facilities to include bleachers, athletic fields, lighting and the construction of a new athletic track; (j) Purchase maintenance vehicles

and equipment including lawn mowers and other tools; (k) Upgrade security to include alarm and communication systems, lock systems, fencing, and other safety items; (1) Provide athletic, band, and NDCC/JROTC equipment and uniforms; (m) Acquire land for the expansion or construction of schools, support facilities, and athletic facilities; (n) Improve and modernize energy management and supply systems to include installing generators and more energy efficient fixtures and equipment; and (o) Complete other additions, new construction, renovations, and/or modifications as may be needed to improve, support, or equip existing, new, or expanded schools or programs."

Audit Objectives

The overall objective of the performance audit was to evaluate whether the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically so that the School District is receiving the maximum benefit from the dollars collected. The specific audit objectives were:

- Determine whether the schedule of projects adheres to the approved resolutions adopted by the School District.
- Determine if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed March 1, 2016 and March 16, 2021.
- Determine whether there is an effective means of monitoring program performance within a projected timeline, to evaluate the validity of expenditures, and to evaluate the timely completion of each project.
- Determine whether management of the School District is following Board approved procurement policies and procedures and ensuring to the maximum extent possible that the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically.
- Provide for the issuance of periodic reports at least annually with respect to the extent to which expenditures are meeting the goals described in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.
- Provide for the issuance of public recommendations at least annually for improvements in meeting the goals described in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.
- Determine that all SPLOST revenue is properly recorded.

Audit Scope and Methodology

We were engaged to conduct a performance audit of the SPLOST program. The audit focused on the School District's compliance with state and local laws and mandates and the receipts and expenditure of sales tax proceeds for allowable SPLOST purposes. This audit covers the year of the SPLOST program from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. From a listing of disbursements made during the specified time frame, we tested 31 individually significant items totaling $10,283,844.37. In addition, of the remaining population we sampled 42 totaling $337,239.53. In total, we tested $10,621,083.90 or 87% of the total SPLOST disbursements for the audit period.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Planning

Prior to conducting the audit, we determined mutual expectations in performing the engagement and meeting timelines. We discussed policies and procedures, methodologies, and other relevant aspects of the School District's SPLOST program with relevant staff. We requested various schedules from the School District's staff and discussed with them the date the fieldwork was expected to begin.

Preliminary Analytical Review

The preliminary analytical review (PAR) provided direction to our audit approach. In this analysis, we developed expectations related to projects, program documentation, key personnel, program organization, and account balances and relationships among those account balances. During the audit, tests were designed to confirm the expectations developed during our PAR. We also performed a PAR to analyze the laws governing SPLOST funds and to identify in advance the critical audit risk areas.

Risk Assessment

Our audit approach is risk-based, whereby we assess risk for each identified objective. Depending on the risk assessment, we performed substantive or analytical procedures, or a combination of both, to test the related objectives. These assessments were made during the planning process and throughout the engagement.

Understanding the Control Environment and Test Key Controls

We examined the School District's internal controls related to the SPLOST program, focusing on formulating comments and suggestions for improving operations. We used a discussion memorandum format to document the relevant accounting cycles and processes from start to finish. Utilizing our understanding of the control environment, we walked through certain internal controls to provide further support for the audit.

Preparation of a Tailored Audit Program

Based upon preliminary analytical review, control documentation and walk-through procedures, audit programs were designed in order for conclusions to be reached for each audit objective.

Audit Results

Based on the results of our audit, we conclude that the Thomas County School District's SPLOST program is operating in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and the referendums approved by the County's citizens. The following are the specific results of our audit:

Objective #1: Determine whether the schedule of projects adheres to the approved resolutions adopted by the School District.

Procedures:
We obtained a copy of the SPLOST Resolutions as approved by the Board of Education of the School District and the voters of the county. Using a listing of disbursements for the test period, we tested 31 individually significant expenditures and a nonstatistical random sample of 42 of the remaining 416 in order to ensure that spending of SPLOST funding was compliant with the approved activity in the resolutions. We tested each transaction to supporting documentation such as vendor invoices.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #2: Determine if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed on March 1, 2016 and March 16, 2021.

Procedures: We obtained a copy of the SPLOST Resolutions as approved by the Board of Education of the School District and the voters of the county. Using a listing of disbursements for the test period, we tested 31 individually significant items and a nonstatistical random sample of 42 of the remaining 416 items in order to ensure that spending of SPLOST funds was compliant with the approved activity in the resolutions. We tested each transaction to supporting documentation such as vendor invoices to ensure expenditures were in accordance with the SPLOST resolutions and were spent efficiently and economically.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #3: Determine whether there is an effective means of monitoring program performance within a projected timeline, to evaluate the validity of expenditures, and to evaluate the timely completion of each project.

Procedures: We obtained an understanding of the monitoring and budget procedures and how the School District ensures projects are completed within project specifications, timelines, and approved budgets. We tested disbursements to ensure that the School District has policies and procedures in place to ensure that expenditures are properly approved by an individual who reviews the work to ensure that invoices submitted are valid in regard to work completed and appropriate for the SPLOST projects.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #4: Determine whether management of the School District is following Board approved procurement policies and procedures.

Procedures: We obtained a copy of the School District's procurement and bid policies, including construction contracts. We tested 31 individually significant items and a nonstatistical random sample of 42 of the remaining 416 items to ensure all policies set in place by the Board are being followed.

We reviewed board minutes for any new construction contracts and obtained bid documentation for any SPLOST related construction activity to ensure Board policy is being followed.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #5: Provide for the issuance of periodic reports at least annually with respect to the extent to which expenditures are meeting the goals described above.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the prior year performance audit report to determine if this objective was met in the previous year. In addition, this objective is being met by the publication of this report for the current year.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #6: Provide for the issuance of public recommendations at least annually for improvements in meeting the goals described above.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the prior year performance audit report to determine if this objective was met in the previous year. In addition, this objective is being met by the publication of this report for the current year.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #7: Determine that all SPLOST revenue is properly recorded.

Procedures: We confirmed with the Georgia Department of Revenue the amounts collected for and remitted to the School District.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

School District Response: Thomas County Board of Education agrees with the report.

Communication of Audit Findings and Recommendations

No matters were reported.

Closing

This report is intended solely for the information and use of the Board and management of the School District and is not intended to be, and should not be, used by anyone other than these specified parties.

Respectfully submitted,



Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

February 7, 2025