



SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX PROGRAM • FISCAL YEAR 2024

City of Valdosta Board of Education Lowndes County, Georgia

Compliance and Performance Audit Report

Greg S. Griffin | State Auditor



DOAA

Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts

City of Valdosta Board of Education

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Dr. Craig Lockhart, Superintendent and Members of the
City of Valdosta Board of Education

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have audited the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) records and operations of the City of Valdosta 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 17, 2015 and March 19, 2019 by the voters of Lowndes 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 Lowndes 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 2015 and 2019, the SPLOST V and SPLOST VI referendums were passed by the voters of Lowndes County. The maximum amount approved to be raised from the SPLOST V and SPLOST VI referendums are \$58,860,000.00 and \$66,450,000.00, respectively.

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

“(i) The acquisition, construction and equipping of a new high school complex to replace the current Valdosta High School complex, (ii) the addition, renovation, repair and improvement to existing school buildings, facilities and grounds, including, but not limited to, all existing elementary and middle schools, (iii) equipping and furnishing system-wide new construction, additions, and renovations, (iv) acquisition of school vehicles, including but not limited to school buses, maintenance vehicles and equipment, (v) system-wide technology improvements, (vi) acquisition of security and safety equipment, and,/or fencing, (vii) textbooks (including e-books), band and musical instruments, vocational equipment, and physical education and athletic equipment, (viii) renovations and modifications or the relocation and replacement of the Valdosta City School System Central Office complex, and (ix) acquisition of any property necessary and desirable for new construction, expansion and/or improvement of existing facilities, both real and personal (collectively, the "Valdosta Projects"), and funding the payment of the principal of and interest, including capitalized interest and the costs of issuance of the Valdosta School Bonds.”

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

“(i) The retirement of principal and interest on previously incurred general obligation debt in the maximum amount of \$37,736,500; (ii) the addition, renovation, repair and improvement to existing school buildings, facilities and grounds, including, but not limited to, all existing elementary and middle schools; (iii) equipping and furnishing system-wide new construction, additions and renovations; (iv) acquisition of school vehicles, including but not limited to school buses, maintenance vehicles and equipment; (v) system-wide technology improvements; (vi) acquisition of security and safety equipment and/or fencing; (vii) textbooks (including e-books), band and musical instruments, vocational equipment, and physical education and athletic equipment; (viii) renovations and modifications or the relocation and replacement of the Valdosta School System Central Office complex; and (viii) acquisition of any property necessary and desirable for new construction, expansion and/or improvement of existing facilities, both real and personal.”

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 17, 2015 and March 19, 2019.

- 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 27 individually significant items totaling \$13,860,936.01. In addition, of the remaining population we tested 28 of 29 items totaling \$388,424.86. We also verified all debt payments of \$7,856,650.00 to supporting documentation. In total, we tested \$22,106,010.87 or 99.95% 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 City of Valdosta School District's SPLOST program is operating in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and the referendum 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 resolution adopted by the School District.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the SPLOST Resolutions approved by the Board of Education of the School District and the voters of Lowndes County which outlines eligible expenditures from SPLOST proceeds. We verified that the list of SPLOST projects provided by the School District agreed to those stated in the Resolutions.

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 17, 2015 and March 19, 2019.

Procedures: We obtained a copy of the SPLOST Resolution 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 a sample of expenditures in order to ensure that spending of SPLOST funding was compliant with the approved activity in the resolution. We tested each transaction to supporting documentation such as vendor invoices.

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 27 individually significant items and 28 of the remaining 29 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 and ensuring to the maximum extent possible that the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically.

Procedures: We obtained a copy of the School District's procurement and bid policies, including construction contracts. We tested 27 individually significant items and 28 of the 29 remaining expenditures and verified all debt payments 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 in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.

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 in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.

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: City of Valdosta 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg S. Griffin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

June 10, 2025