



SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX PROGRAM • FISCAL YEAR 2022

# Liberty County Board of Education Hinesville, Georgia

Compliance and Performance Audit Report

Greg S. Griffin | State Auditor



**DOAA**

Georgia Department  
of Audits & Accounts

# Liberty County Board of Education

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Dr. Franklin Perry, Superintendent and Members of the  
Liberty County Board of Education

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have audited the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) records and operations of the Liberty County Board of Education (School District) for the year ended June 30, 2022. 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, 2022 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 on May 24, 2016 and March 16, 2021 by the voters of Liberty County.

### **Introduction**

Georgia Code Section 20-2-491 requires public school system 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 Liberty 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 V referendum and SPLOST VI referendum were passed by the voters of Liberty County. The maximum amount approved to be raised from the SPLOST V and SPLOST VI referendums are \$44,000,000.00 and \$54,000,000.00, respectively.

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

“(i) adding to, renovating, repairing, improving, furnishing, and equipping existing school buildings and other buildings and facilities useful and desirable in connection therewith, including, but not limited to, classrooms and physical education/athletic facilities, HVAC and other energy savings and management upgrades, roofing and paving; (ii) acquiring technology improvements, including safety and security improvements, computer technology and software and wiring upgrades; (iii) acquiring new school equipment and furnishings, including, but not limited to, new buses, maintenance vehicles and other school equipment; (iv) acquiring, constructing and equipping new school buildings and facilities useful and desirable in connection therewith; (v) acquiring land; (vi) and acquiring any necessary or desirable property, both real and personal, including textbooks and band instruments.”

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

“(i) adding to, renovating, improving, furnishing and equipping existing school buildings and other buildings and facilities useful and desirable in connection therewith, including, but not limited to, roofing, HVAC, playgrounds, additional classrooms and physical education/athletic facilities; (ii) acquiring technology improvements, including safety and security improvements and computer technology; (iii) acquiring new school equipment, including, new buses and maintenance vehicles, band instruments, text books and digital resources; (iv) and acquiring any necessary or desirable property, 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 if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed May 24, 2016 and March 16, 2021.
- Determine whether personnel overseeing the SPLOST projects communicates the status of the projects with the Board, to ensure that organizational goals are being met.
- 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.
- Determine that all SPLOST revenue is properly recorded.
- Provide for the issuance of periodic public 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 meeting the goals described in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.

## **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, 2021 to June 30, 2022. From a listing of disbursements made during the specified time frame, we tested 38 individually significant items totaling \$9,492,862.51. In addition, of the remaining population, we sampled 6 of 58 items totaling \$120,030.80. In total, we tested \$9,612,893.31 or 93% 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 Liberty County School District's SPLOST program is operating in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, the referendum approved by the County's citizens, and industry best practices. The following are the specific results of our audit:

**Objective #1:** Determine if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed on May 24, 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 38 individually significant items and a sample of 6 of the remaining 58 expenditures to ensure that spending of SPLOST funds 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 #2:** Determine whether personnel overseeing the SPLOST projects communicates the status of the projects with the Board, to ensure that organizational goals are being met.

**Procedures:** We discussed the School District's policies and procedures for communication with the senior management of the Board of Education. We inquired of management and reviewed the Board minutes to ensure that there is adequate communication between the Board and management concerning the financial status of SPLOST funds and the construction status of ongoing SPLOST projects.

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

**Objective #3:** Determine whether management of the School District is following Board approved procurement policies and procedures to ensure SPLOST funds are spent efficiently and economically.

**Procedures:** We obtained a copy of the School District's procurement and bid policies, including construction contracts. Additionally, we tested 38 individually significant items and a sample of 6 of the remaining 58 expenditures 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 and SPLOST funds are spent efficiently and economically.

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

**Objective #4:** 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.

**Objective #5:** Provide for the issuance of periodic public 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 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.

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

### Communication of Other Recommendations

**Observation:** In our testing, it was noted that SPLOST expenditures are initially paid from the School District's general operating bank account and transfers are made in the year under review from the School District's SPLOST bank account to reimburse those expenditures.

**Recommendation:** We recommend making monthly transfers of funds from the SPLOST bank account to the general operating account.

### 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

September 12, 2023