

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has released an independent performance audit of graduation rates for Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). The audit was conducted by Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services (A&M), an independent firm selected by MSDE.

A&M did not find any direction was given from the school system's leadership to change grades. The auditors found no financial incentives to change grades, and no evidence of system-wide intimidation or fraud related to the allegations of grade manipulation. The following is a summary of the audit process, findings, recommendations and next steps:

- On September 1, 2017, MSDE notified PGCPS about the award of a contract to Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services (A&M) to conduct an independent performance audit of graduation rates.
- The independent auditor focused on four key areas: Governance, Policies, Data Collection and Analysis, and On-Site Reviews/Investigations.
- Auditor interviewed internal and external stakeholders, reviewed complaints, and conducted on-site investigations at all high schools, including meetings with principals, school administrators, teachers and professional school guidance counselors.
 - Auditor received 222 relevant complaints from 107 individuals.
 - 60 complaints received from the auditor's hotline.
 - 34 contacts were given by Board of Education members.
- Auditor met with central office staff to request and obtain data from the school system's student information system (SchoolMAX). Auditors obtained the names of the people who entered grades, and the dates and times that grades were entered and/or changed.
- The auditor reviewed a sample of 1,212 student transcripts from the graduating classes of 2016 and 2017, and found that 4.9 percent of transcripts were insufficient to meet all graduation requirements.
 - In the Class of 2016, 405 students' grades were valid and documented; there were no grade changes to affect the final grades of 378 students; and fully documented grade changes were made for 27 students. There was insufficient and/or no documentation for grade changes affecting 156 students; and 21 students (3.6 percent of the sample) did not meet graduation requirements.
 - For the Class of 2017, 451 students' grades were valid and documented; there were no grade changes to affect the final grades of 418 students; and fully documented grade changes were made for 33 students. There was insufficient and/or no documentation for grade changes affecting 141 students; and 38 students (6 percent of the sample) did not meet graduation requirements.

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- Key audit findings include:
 - PGCPs governance structure has performance gaps.
 - PGCPs staff does not consistently adhere to policies and procedures related to grading and graduation certification.
 - School-level record-keeping regarding grading and graduation certification needs improvement.
 - Irregularities in grade changes and graduation certification were identified.
- Audit recommendations include:
 - Clarify policies and procedures, provide regular training to include awareness and understanding, and improve adherence to policies and procedures.
 - Minimize the potential risk management and discourage fraud through automation of record-keeping and increased controls.
 - Increase monitoring and accountability to ensure accountability and adherence to grading policies, grade changes and graduation certification policies and procedures.
- PGCPs will work with an external third-party to review and implement recommendations.
- PGCPs will request a second independent review next year to ensure progress.
- Students will be held harmless for errors made by the school system.

