



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ELLEN WEAVER
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

August 2, 2024

Mr. Brian D. Lamkin
South Carolina Office of the Inspector General
111 Executive Center Drive, Suite 204
Synergy Business Park, Enoree Building
Columbia, SC 29210-8416

Dear Inspector General Lamkin:

Pursuant to S.C. Code §1-6-35, please accept this letter as a formal request that your office initiate and conduct a thorough review or investigation of Jasper County School District. I am requesting a thorough investigation of the District to determine the existence of fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, misconduct, violations of state or federal law, and wrongdoing.

Last week, we reviewed the attached article published by the *Post & Courier* on July 18, 2024. The article spotlights allegations of \$228,000 in “questionable expenses” for District officials’ travel.

The issues raised in this article are particularly relevant due to the District’s current fiscal practices designation of “fiscal caution,” as defined by S.C. Code §59-20-90. On March 24, 2023, the Department issued a Declaration of Fiscal Watch due to the District’s late audit, which was provided more than sixty days after December 1, 2022.

On February 29, 2024, the District was elevated to Fiscal Caution due to the District’s second consecutive year providing a late audit. The District has still not provided the required 2023 audit, which is grounds for elevation to a state of Fiscal Emergency under S.C. Code §59-20-90(E)(1&5). As of today, the District has been elevated to a state of Fiscal Emergency.

Underlying all this, the SCDE notified the Jasper County Superintendent and School District Board Chair on December 1, 2023, that the Jasper County School District was identified as an underperforming school district under §59-18-1615 et seq. for the second consecutive year. The letter further noted:

A chronically underperforming district is a district that receives an unsatisfactory designation for three consecutive years. Chronically Underperforming Districts will be determined in 2024, using data from 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024. The State Superintendent of Education may seek a state-of-education emergency declaration for a district that is chronically underperforming. (S.C. Code Ann. §59-18-1640 (4)).

In order to ensure a bright educational future for the students of Jasper, it is essential that we bring clarity to the financial dealings of the District.

Therefore, I hereby request your office investigate all financial and procurement matters, including P-card transactions. If you conclude that other actions or further referrals are appropriate, please proceed under your statutory authority as circumstances dictate.

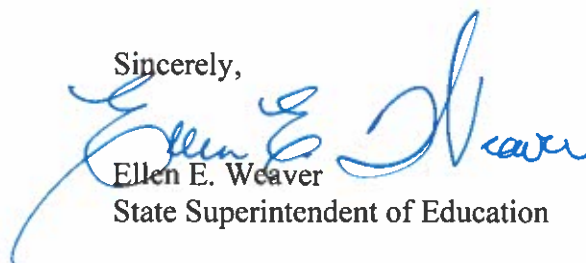
Furthermore, as Governor McMaster has previously stated in correspondence with your office on an unrelated matter:

Please note that the cited concerns and accompanying materials are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive in nature but rather are referenced and provided for purposes of “articulat[ing] the basis of any alleged wrongdoing” in connection with this request. S.C. Code Ann. § 1-6-35(B). The description and documentation should not be construed to narrow or confine the scope of any further SIG inquiry or investigation or limit your preexisting or independent authority to, inter alia, “receive complaints alleging a violation of a statute or rule relating to the purchase of goods or services by a current or former employee, state officer, special state appointee, or person who has a business relationship with an agency,” id. § 1-6-30(3), “receive complaints from any individual, including those employed by any agency, alleging fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, misconduct, violations of state or federal law, and wrongdoing in an agency,” id. § 1-6-30(4), or otherwise identify matters that warrant further investigation.

Finally, if—during the course of reviewing the questions raised or conducting any subsequent investigation—you or your office concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, misconduct, violations of state or federal law, or wrongdoing has occurred or is occurring, S.C. Code §1-6-40 provides for you to report such findings immediately to the Governor, agency head, or appropriate law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities with jurisdiction over the matter.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important and timely request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information or be of service. The South Carolina Department of Education stands ready to assist in any way possible to bring this matter to resolution.

Sincerely,



Ellen E. Weaver
State Superintendent of Education