



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION



Investigative Report Summary

OIGE Case 20-0007-I

Issued: August 26, 2021



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION
Richard P. Henry, Inspector General



August 26, 2021

To the Citizens of Maryland and Garrett County,

The Maryland Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) plays an important role in safeguarding State funds provided to local school systems. Our primary mission is to prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse, and educational mismanagement within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Interagency Commission of School Construction (IAC) and the twenty-four (24) local school systems throughout the State of Maryland.

Background

The Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) initiated an investigation after receiving information alleging that the Garrett County Public Schools (GCPS) was wasteful spending county and state funds relating to a renovation project. The allegation alleged that the GCPS had spent approximately \$934,000 on architectural plans and drawings for a middle school renovation that never occurred.

Investigation

The OIGE's investigation revealed a proposal by the GCPS to complete a full renovation of a selected middle school. This proposal dated to 2013. The proposal had been originally reviewed and approved by both the GCPS School Board and the Garrett County Commissioners. The cost of the construction was to be paid equally (50/50) by the State and Garrett County and was an identified project with the Maryland Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC). Based on the approval, the GCPS solicited an architect: incurring the initial costs related to the architectural plan drawings. During 2015, the plan to renovate was fast tracked by the IAC at a 90% approval level.

In 2016, the County Commissioners withdrew their support of the construction project and voted to decline financial support, citing a decreasing student enrollment and lower County revenues. Due to continued safety concerns, a decision was made to move forward with three school renovation projects. The projects involved improvements to the roof, sanitary and fire alarm system. The OIGE did confirm that some of the original construction plans were used for these projects; however, they were not completely compatible. GCPS incurred a cost of approximately

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\$41,000 dollars to revise compatible architectural and engineering plans. Approximately \$1.5 million dollars was spent on the three renovations to the building.

Funding status for the project, totaling approximately \$900,000 dollars was recorded as “work in progress”. GCPS stated the project was maintained in this matter should the Commissioners reconsider and agree to fund the construction for the next two fiscal years. In 2018, as reflected in the GCPS FY ‘18 financial report, funds for this project were disposed of. GCPS continued to record the proposed financial information until it was evident that no additional construction would be allowed beyond the approved (3) renovation projects. The GCPS relied upon the County to secure (bond) all debts when obtaining school renovation funding. Without approval from the County Commissioners, the GCPS school administration did not have the ability to obtain the required debt security for the renovation project.

Conclusion

The OIGE did not substantiate the allegation.

The OIGE understands information may be changed or updated after an investigation has been completed. The OIGE appreciates the cooperation provided by members of the Garret County Public Schools in this investigation.

Respectfully,



Richard P. Henry
Inspector General

Cc: Ms. Barbara L. Baker, Superintendent – Garrett County Public Schools
Mr. M. Thomas Woods, President – Garrett County Board of Education

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