



Award Winning Audits Session

Midwestern and Mid-America Intergovernmental Audit Webinar

December 4, 2025

**2025 NSAA Excellence in Accountability
Large Performance Audit Award**

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)- Oversight of Students with Disabilities

- Started as one audit– to evaluate LDOE's oversight of the special education services students with disabilities receive in Louisiana public schools
 - Approximately 97,000 students with disabilities
- Due to the scope, complexity, and vulnerability of the population this audit would potentially impact, we split this topic into three reports focusing on three specific high-risk areas



Reports

- Complaint Process for Students with Disabilities Receiving Special Education Services
- Risk-Based Monitoring of Special Education Services
- Seclusion, Restraint, and Abuse or Mistreatment of Children with Disabilities in Public Schools



Innovative Methodologies

- Designed three surveys for special education directors, teachers and other staff, and parents of students with disabilities
 - Established relationships with stakeholders who work with parents in order to be able to send the survey to a range of parents
- Went “undercover” and called the complaint hotline so we could document where they direct parents



Innovative Methodologies

- Obtained physical evidence by conducting on-site visits to observe the areas where students would be secluded and restrained and spoke to teachers and other staff around the regarding their experiences
- Analyzed special education data and also used Tableau software to visually show where LDOE conducted most of its monitoring



What We Found-Complaints

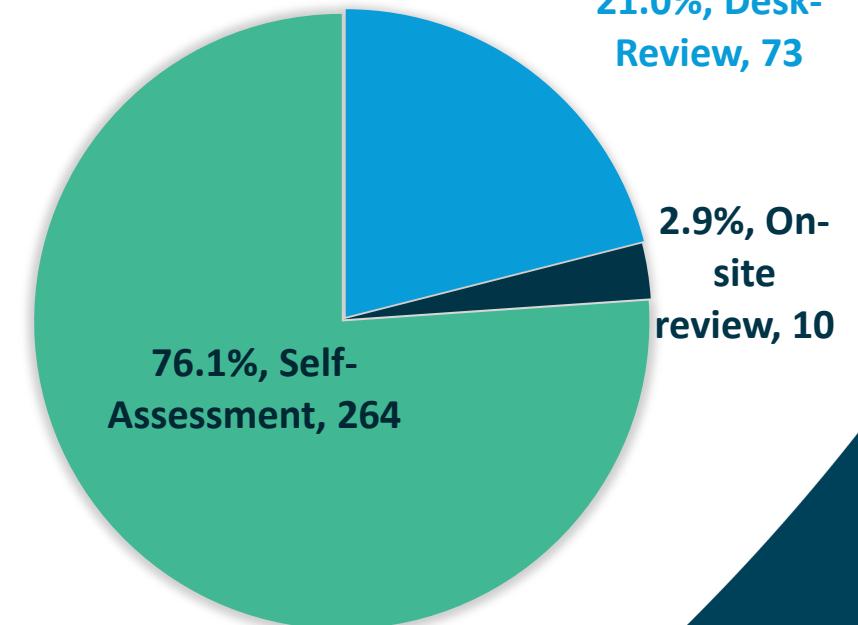
- LDOE did not address all allegations it received through its dispute resolution email
- LDOE could increase trust in its complaint process by making it more accessible, user-friendly, and transparent
 - According to our parent survey, LDOE's current complaint process has resulted in parents not having faith that LDOE would address their concerns, which could result in parents not voicing their concerns to LDOE



What We Found-Monitoring

- LDOE did not conduct a desk or on-site review for 43 (43.0%) of 100 school systems for at least seven years to ensure certain fundamental rights of students with disabilities required by IDEA are being protected
- Instead required these school systems to conduct self-assessments

Monitoring by Type Academic Years 2015-16 through 2021-22



What We Found-Monitoring

- LDOE's process to select students during a desk or on-site review does not ensure it monitors all applicable federal and state law requirements listed in its monitoring protocol
- LDOE did not follow federal regulations when calculating significant disproportionality relating to discipline
 - This is important to ensure that minority students with disabilities are not being disciplined at a significantly higher rate than their peers



What We Found-Seclusion and Restraint

- While LDOE is not required by state or federal law to monitor how school systems use seclusion and restraint, monitoring would help to ensure students with disabilities are provided protections in state law.
- LDOE could improve its process of reviewing seclusion and restraint data submitted by school systems to identify systems that may be underreporting. For example, in academic year 2023-24, 115 (72.3%) of 159 school systems reported zero incidents of seclusion and restraint.



What We Found-Seclusion and Restraint

- Allegations of abuse committed by school personnel may not be reported as required by state law
- Unlike other states, Louisiana does not have a process to ensure teachers who abuse, improperly use seclusion or restraint, or otherwise mistreat students have their certification sanctioned if they have not been criminally convicted



Audit Impact

- Act 479 of the 2025 Regular Legislative Session, which provided for the training and monitoring of seclusion and restraint, which passed
- The Complaint Process report resulted in LDOE providing additional training to the call center, adding dispute resolution forms in different languages and other helpful information to the dispute resolution website, conducting test calls to the call center, and hired a special education ombudsman



Audit Impact

- The Risk-Based Monitoring report resulted in LDOE correcting its disproportionality calculation and updating compliance monitoring procedures
- After the Risk-Based Monitoring report was issued, LDOE cited it when requesting additional positions from the legislature to hire six more special education staff, which the legislature granted



Strategies to Increase Report Impact

1. Narrow Topics
2. Write for Impact
3. Dissemination of Information
4. Building Relationships
5. Implementing Follow Up Process
6. Information Briefs and Reports



Writing for Impact Example

1. Bring out issue early (*not a mystery novel*)
2. Highlight effect
3. Give perspective (e.g., "*Unlike other states..*")
4. Short paragraphs
5. Use of visuals
6. Narrative call outs for data visualization



Questions?

- **Complaint Report-**

[https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/a666a02b25f610d586258a300077a992/\\$file/0000ls28.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/a666a02b25f610d586258a300077a992/$file/0000ls28.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

- **Monitoring Report-**

[https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/9971a4a5105df4be86258b1e0063d5db/\\$file/000047fc.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/9971a4a5105df4be86258b1e0063d5db/$file/000047fc.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

- **Seclusion and Restraint Report-**

[https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/463777ca4cf703c986258bf0007c37df/\\$file/000066ab.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app2.llla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/463777ca4cf703c986258bf0007c37df/$file/000066ab.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

