

Arizona Department of Education Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program

Department needs 21 staff for Program workload, should improve customer service and timely processing of Program applications, and better protect personally identifiable information

Audit purpose

To review the Department's Program caseload and conduct a workload analysis; review fiscal year 2018 through 2020 Program revenues and administrative expenditure details; assess the timeliness and quality of Program phone customer service; determine how Program deadlines were established and if they are being met; and follow up on the Department's implementation status of the recommendations from our 2016 performance audit of the Program.

Key findings

- The Department could timely complete its projected fiscal year 2021 Program workload for its 3 key Program tasks with 21 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and have time to complete other Program-related tasks.
- In fiscal years 2018 through 2020, the Department spent or reported it will spend its Program administration monies and other Department monies to pay for Program-related costs. Specifically, the Department spent Program monies primarily on Program staffing and information technology. The Treasurer's Office similarly reported spending its Program administration monies to pay for Program-related costs, primarily for employee salaries and related benefits.
- In calendar year 2019, although Program staff were professional and courteous, they took an average of nearly 24 minutes to answer customer service phone calls, an average of nearly 5 workdays to respond to voicemail/email inquiries, and provided some customers with poor-quality information.
- The Department exceeded the 45-day statutory Program application decision deadline for 55 percent of the applications it received between July 2017 and October 2019, or the Program application decision dates were unknown.
- The Department has made progress addressing the 2016 audit recommendations, but several issues persist, including it releasing parent's/guardian's and children's personal information when fulfilling some public records requests.

Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Allocate 21 FTE positions to the Program in fiscal year 2021, monitor Program changes to determine if additional staff are needed in the future, and request legislative appropriations, accordingly.
- Ensure Program staff provide timely, high-quality customer service by developing and implementing customer service performance management policies, procedures, and metrics.
- Ensure Program staff notify parents/guardians of its application decisions within the 45-day statutory time frame.
- Ensure it protects personally identifiable and sensitive information.