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Mr. S. Ford Weiskittel  
Board President  
Geneva City School District  
400 West North Street  
Geneva, NY 14456

Report: Unique Student Identifier

Dear Mr. Weiskittel:

I am writing to transmit the final results of our recently completed audit of student data for the 2011-12 school year at Geneva City School District (District). The audit was conducted pursuant to the Commissioner of Education's authority under Section 305 of the Education Law. Our audit objectives were to: assess the adequacy of the systems and processes to collect and report student data and verify the reliability and accuracy of the assigned unique student identifiers (ID).

To accomplish our objectives, we interviewed District officials to determine how student data is collected, maintained, and processed at the District; reviewed District policies and procedures, and tested District's student data resolutions. We obtained an understanding of the applicable computer systems and the processes and controls in place at the District to assess the adequacy in providing reasonable assurance that the assigned IDs in the New York State Student Identification System (NYSSIS) are reliable.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## **Background**

The Student Information Repository System (SIRS) is the primary system that provides a single source of standardized individual student records for analysis at the local, regional, and State levels to track student performance and to meet State and federal reporting and accountability requirements. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must use this system to report certain data to the State Education Department (Department). NYSSIS is a key element of SIRS that was developed by the Department to assign a unique ID to every pre-kindergarten through grade 12 student in New

York State. The IDs assigned by NYSSIS are used by LEAs to report student-level data to SIRS. Unique IDs enhance student data reporting, improve data quality, and ensure that important educational records are associated with the correct students as they transfer between LEAs. Through NYSSIS, LEAs obtain new IDs for students who do not have an existing one and retrieve IDs that have been previously assigned. Data accuracy is paramount to ensuring that LEAs do not create new records in error or match two unique student records in error.

In NYSSIS, when a student's demographic data is entered for processing, the system checks the database to determine whether that data matches any existing records. If no match is found, a new unique ID is created. If a match is found, the existing ID is assigned to the student. A "Near Match" results if the system cannot determine if the data submitted matches an existing record. A Near Match record is made up of the newly submitted student record and one or more records that are already in the database that contain many similar data elements but not enough to determine if the records are for the same student. As such, the newly submitted record is placed in a Hold Queue with the records from the system it nearly matches. Authorized LEA personnel must then review and resolve these Near Matches by determining if the student record should be matched with an existing ID or issue a new ID.

## **Audit Results**

### Internal Control Over Student Data

A strong system of internal control would include formal policies and procedures for functions that occur on a periodic basis to ensure compliance with State requirements and completion in a timely manner. In addition, policies and procedures can provide guidance to assist changes in personnel or new assignments. Strong control would be established if procedure required a second review of decisions made in order to ensure accuracy.

The District has not established formal written procedures governing the review and resolution of students identified in the NYSIS Hold Queue. This lack of procedures may have contributed to the length of time taken to resolve a Near Match in the Hold Queue. The District took on average 26 days to resolve a Near Match for 2011-12 school year; nearly 80 percent of school districts in the State resolve them in less than 4 days.

### Accuracy and Reliability of IDs

The District accurately resolved most of the Near Match records in the Hold Queue for the 2011-12 school year. We tested all 33 records and found the District created a new ID in error for 2 records that should have been matched to existing IDs. The existing ID in NYSSIS had the same student name and date of birth. A District official confirmed that the two records should have been matched to existing IDs. A second District review of the decisions made in resolving the Near Match records would most likely have detected the 2 errors.

## Recommendations

1. Establish a formal procedure for resolving the NYSSIS Hold Queue in a timely manner.
2. Ensure that appropriate actions are taken to resolve the NYSSIS Hold Queue and that all IDs are accurately assigned to students.
3. Take the necessary steps to correct the ID assigned to the two students.

The results of this audit have been discussed with District officials and their comments have been considered in preparing this report. The District was given many opportunities, but did not provide a written response to the draft audit report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James A. Conway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

James A. Conway

c: S. Cates-Williams, K. Slentz, K. Moorhead, C. Szuberla, J. Delaney, J. Conroy, A. Timoney (DOB), J. Dougherty (OSC), T. Newton (Superintendent), S. Bischoping (District Superintendent of Schools)