

Agenda Item:	IV C: Action Item
Date:	December 14, 2023
To:	Magnolia Educational & Research Foundation dba Magnolia Public Schools (“MPS”) Board of Directors (the “Board”)
From:	Finance Committee
Staff Lead(s):	Steve Budhraj Ed.D, Chief Financial Officer
RE:	MSA-4,6,7 & 8 Fiscal Benchmarks

Proposed Motion:

I move that the Board approve the actions taken by MPS staff to address Fiscal Benchmarks noted by LAUSD during their last renewal for the above noted MSA schools.

Background:

As part of the 5-year charter renewal process, LAUSD recommended that MPS address certain Fiscal Benchmarks on internal controls protocols and other considerations based on the School Services of California (SSC) report submitted during the 2017-18 fiscal year.

Impact:

After careful analysis, MPS staff implemented most of the of the recommendations that we noted in the SSC Report. However, MPS currently maintains multiple software programs for payroll reporting, general ledger and budget planning. MPS Staff has conducted a thorough review of the existing software as well as options for implementing software that can better integrate each of the functions into a single system. After conducting an RFP, we decided to partner with Oracle NetSuite to consolidate our system so that we may streamline our our processes including financial reporting. The agreement between MPS and NetSuite was approved by the board on August 10, 2023. We plan to begin implementation of the new system during January 2024 to improve efficiencies and address the remaining item noted in the LAUSD Fiscal Benchmarks.

Budget Implications:

N/A

Exhibits:

As per 2017-2018 Annual Oversight Visit Report (Fiscal Operations)	MERF's governing board approved plan of action (meeting date: July 12, 2018)	MERF's governing board approved plan of action (meeting date: December 13, 2018)
Areas noted for further growth and/or improvement:		

1) Bank Reconciliation Reports	All bank reconciliations are reviewed and approved via email by Designees/Financial Analysts on a monthly basis. In order to adopt a recommendation by School Services of California ("SSCAL"), as of January 2017 MERF Financial Analysts approve, sign and date all bank reconciliation statements before scanning and emailing the same to MERF's back office provider. The new back office provider Delta Managed Services ("DMS") has been notified of the MERF policy about the bank reconciliation timeline (20th of the following month).	Bank Reconciliations starting July 1, 2018 are prepared by DMS, the new back office service providers. CFO or designee reviews and signs all bank reconciliations before returning to DMS and filing for records.
2) Credit Cards	As of April 2018, all credit cards issued to former employees have been closed. All school site credit cards are held at the home office and are in the name of the CEO. Every month, MERF Financial Analysts review all credit card statements and charges. Balances of all active credit cards are paid in full unless there are disputed transactions.	The credit card processes approved by board of directors in the July 2018 meeting is still being followed consistently every month. All credit cards are paid in full every month. Statements are reviewed and coded correctly by senior financial analysts.
3) Automated Clearing House (ACH)/Recurring Automatic Payments	MERF's Magnolia Public Schools Financial Policies and Procedures Manual, provided to LAUSD on March 1, 2018, covers all payments types regardless of the manner of issuance. However, for the avoidance of doubt and to institute CSD's recommendations, MERF will revise its policy to make it clear that the policy applies to ACH transactions and recurring payment processes. Such revision will be presented to the MERF Board of Directors for adoption at its September 13, 2018 board meeting.	All ACH transactions are in compliance with the board approved MERF Fiscal Policies.
Other Observations:		
1) MERF needs to improve the timeliness of its responses to the CSD	MERF responds as soon as possible to all CSD information requests. Staff adhered to the deadlines the great majority of the time and kept CSD staff informed whenever information could not be provided according to the stated deadline. Prospectively, MERF Staff will inform CSD when requested information cannot be provided by the stated deadline and the reason for such delay. In such instances, MERF staff will provide CSD with the best approximation of when the information will be provided. In all instances, MERF will use its best reasonable efforts to provide the information as quickly as possible.	Staff has been very conscientious in ensuring that responses to emails and requests from CSD staff are provided within 48 hours, if possible.
2) The CSC recommends that MERF update its fiscal policies and procedures to require original detailed receipts for all purchases made via check disbursements or credit cards.	MERF's fiscal policies already require that detailed receipts are required for all purchases made via check disbursements or credit cards. Finance Department staff has commenced and will continue to make regular visits to all school sites to train and review fiscal processes with school staff. On an ongoing basis, MERF Finance Department staff will attend and offer trainings to principals during their monthly meetings at MERF's home office.	Finance team ensures that all reimbursement requests and purchases are supported by detailed receipts and all documentations required based on our fiscal policies.
3) The CSD recommends that MERF present and discuss the CSD's Annual Performance-Based Oversight Reports with its governing board.	MERF staff presented CSD's Oversight report to its Board of Directors during the May 2018 meeting. It was again discussed in more detail at the July 2018 Board of Directors meeting. The approved board minutes for the July 2018 Board of Directors meeting were submitted to LAUSD on August 14, 2018. Lastly, it was reviewed and discussed by the MPS Board on July 18, 2019. MPS Board of Directors reviewed and discussed the 2019-20 CSD Annual Performance Based Oversight Reports and any related items on July 9, 2020 and July 23, 2020, respectively.	MERF staff presented CSD's Oversight report to its Board of Directors during the May 2018 meeting. It was again discussed in more detail at the July 2018 Board of Directors meeting. The approved board minutes for the July 2018 Board of Directors meeting were submitted to LAUSD on August 14, 2018.
As per the SSC's Management Letter (dated July 27, 2018)	MERF's Response	MERF's governing board approved plan of action (meeting date: December 13, 2018)
Current Recommendations		

<p>1) Consider consolidating to one financial system.</p>	<p>MERF previously agreed to Implement a more integrated system structure and a PO system that interfaces with the accounting system in order to create improved overall processes and internal controls. In order to meet this commitment, as of July 1, 2018 MERF transitioned to new back office service provider Delta Managed Solutions, Inc. ("DMS"). DMS uses a financial software package called Escape/SchoolAbility ("SchoolAbility") that incorporates purchasing and accounting processes into one database. SchoolAbility covers purchasing, payables, budget, financial reporting that is SACS compliant and compatible. Significantly, SchoolAbility allows for the generation of real-time reports for budget status, purchase requests, encumbrances, payments processed and other pertinent accounting records. MERF's previous software (CoolSIS and NetSuite) and back office provider did not have the capability to generate real-time reports. MERF will amend its fiscal policy and procedures manual at its October 2018 Board of Directors meeting to reflect the change in financial software. MERF continues to use Paycom software for human resource and payroll functions. Payroll registers are uploaded to SchoolAbility on a semimonthly basis. MERF has reduced the number of software systems it uses from three to two. MERF believes that this change is consistent with the recommendation to streamline services and increase accessibility to information.</p>	<p>The selection of DMS was approved by MERF's Board of Directors. This recommendation has been implemented insofar as establishing a more integrated system and lessening the number of software packages used.</p> <p>As of July 1, 2018, MERF uses two instead of three software packages. MERF will continue to work towards consolidating into one financial software package.</p> <p>Schoolability is currently the financial software being utilized for requisition, purchasing, reimbursements, accounts payable, accounts receivable, general ledger and financial reporting.</p> <p>Paycom is the software being used to maintain personnel records, payroll information and generates pay checks.</p>
<p>2) Consider developing a more streamlined and standardized process for accounts payable.</p>	<p>As mentioned, MERF has hired a new service provider, DMS. DMS uses SchoolAbility which Incorporates all financial processes (including but not limited to purchasing, A/P, bank reconciliation, and state and federal reporting) into one database. MERF's Finance Department has centralized its accounts payable processing to have all invoices go to MERF's head office in order to provide more visibility of MERF's different vendors, their terms and conditions and to more closely monitor aging of payables. In addition, all approval processes are integrated into the SchoolAbility software (including home office executive team and school site principals' routing and approval, as required per MERF fiscal policy handbook) thereby creating an appropriate audit trail. The approval process is enhanced because Finance Department staff review all purchase requisitions, payment requests and employee reimbursements.</p>	<p>The selection of DMS and the use of SchoolAbility was approved by MERF's Board of Directors. The new financial system is more streamlined and standardized in processing purchase requests, payables, reimbursements and budgets.</p>
<p>3) Consider reviewing cash receipts for timely deposits.</p>	<p>MERF Finance Department staff will continue to support school staff in making timely cash and check deposits. Finance Department staff will continue to make regular visits to all school sites to train and review fiscal processes with school staff. For example, from July 30, 2018 to August 2, 2018, Finance Department staff attended and participated in beginning of school year professional development training for office managers and principals. On an ongoing basis, MERF Finance Department staff will attend and offer trainings to principals during their monthly meetings at home office. MERF Finance Department staff will continue to monitor the timeliness of cash and check deposits. Where noncompliance is found, MERF Finance Department staff will work with the noncompliant school or staff to address and remedy any issues that contribute to noncompliance.</p>	<p>Continues trainings and communication with site staff is ongoing. CFO meets with all principals every month during the principals' meeting to address current issues and provide additional training. In addition, Senior Financial Analyst conducts site visits at least once a month to all school sites.</p>
<p>4) Consider reviewing cash deposits for appropriate coding.</p>	<p>Effective July 1, 2018 all transactions will be in compliance with SACS coding. Unlike its previous software, SchoolAbility is SACS compliant. MERF Finance Department staff will review all coding and GL postings before submission of interim reports and unaudited actuals thereby insuring that all transactions are recoded to the correct account.</p>	<p>Schoolability is a SACS compliant financial software. All transactions are coded based on CDE's SACS. Each entry is reviewed and approved by MPS Senior Financial Analyst and CFO before posting.</p>

