

Audit faults Lake public school finances

By Erica Rodriguez, Orlando Sentinel

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A state audit that reviewed three years of financial activity for Lake County Schools found that the district misspent hundreds of thousands of dollars meant for new school construction on things like gaming curriculum and software.

The report, issued by the State Auditor General, found that the district misspent about \$387,000 of impact fee money on software, gaming curriculum, sensor bundles and teacher guides.

"These purposes do not represent allowable uses of impact fees," the report stated.

Impact fees are collected from builders when they pull county permits for new land developments. Last year, the district collected about \$3 million but were suspended by the county commission from collecting until April because of slowed development.

The district already put back \$123,000 into the fund, according to the report.

Carol MacLeod, chief financial officer, said the district will be getting guidance from the department of education. "We always have areas that we can improve upon, and that's what the audits are for," she said, adding that overall the audit was "fabulous."

The audit went on to state that the district should repay \$16,800 of additional impact fee money it spent on cleaning supplies and books in the 2007-2008 school year.

The report also found that the district could have saved about \$158,000 in a \$31.7 million contract to renovate Cecil E. Gray Middle School in Groveland. The report found that the district did not negotiate with the contractor, or thoroughly review indirect salary costs and ended up paying \$158,000 more than the standard rate from the U.S. Department of Labor.

MacLeod said district staff already has reviewed the contract language and made changes to prevent the same thing from happening in subsequent contracts.

