

GDOE cites Guahan Academy's weak accounting of public funds

Haidee V Eugenio, heugenio@guampdn.com Published 4:53 p.m. ChT Oct. 13, 2017 | Updated 4:56 p.m. ChT Oct. 13, 2017



(Photo: Frank San Nicolas/PDN)

Superintendent Jon Fernandez and other Guam Department of Education officials on Friday told the education board and the council overseeing charter schools that Guahan Academy Charter School has weak financial controls that make it hard to account for every taxpayer dollar that goes into it.

Franklin J.T. Cooper-Nurse, chief auditor at GDOE, said about 96 percent of Guahan Academy's funding comes from government of Guam appropriations that are part of the GDOE budget.

Charter schools are also public schools, but they have the option to secure private sources of funding to operate, in addition to their government funding.

The fiscal 2018 budget gives \$6,500 per enrolled student at charter schools.

James Lujan, a member of the Guam Education Board, said it does not make sense to have a charter school that relies almost entirely on the GovGuam budget, the same as all other schools under GDOE.

Cooper-Nurse said Guahan Academy, which receives about \$5 million in GovGuam funding, does not seem to have its own procurement office or procurement officer.

"One of the things that we notice in the charter schools is really the accounting infrastructure is really not as strong as I'd like it to be," he told board members.

Cooper-Nurse said GDOE internal auditors take six to 10 days to review and validate charter schools' expenditures. He said when deficiencies are noted, there's always a back-and-forth between GDOE internal auditors and Guahan Academy. GDOE has to validate whether a charter school's spending, including procurement, complies with the law.

"If this were a typical government agency they would be subject to an appeal or cancellation of this procurement," he said.

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Maria Gutierrez, acting chairwoman of the education board, said the Charter Schools Council needs to thoroughly review not only the two existing charter schools' operations but also the applications of two others.

Cooper-Nurse said if two other charter schools are approved, then GDOE needs to increase its internal audit office to monitor charter school spending.

Fernandez and Cooper-Nurse discussed GDOE's concerns about charter schools during a work session of education board. The board also invited Amanda Blas, chairwoman of the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council.

Fernandez submitted GDOE's review of Guahan Academy's operations and finances to the Council and Guahan Academy.

Fernandez said he supports charters, but said GDOE needs to help strengthen charter schools' financial sustainability and accountability.

"If a charter school cannot sustain itself, then GDOE and, more importantly, the many students and families who are depending on that charter school, are going to be impacted down the road. It's even worse if the charter school has taken on debt obligations that it cannot pay. I'm hoping that we can look at and deal with these issues now, especially with more charters knocking at the door," Fernandez said in a statement on Wednesday.

At the work session, education board member also expressed support for Sen. Joe San Agustin's bill, separating the budget of GDOE from those of charter schools.

Reporter Haidee Eugenio covers Guam's Catholic church issues, education, business and more. Follow her on Twitter [@haidee_eugenio](https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio) (https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio). Follow Pacific Daily News on Facebook/GuamPDN (<http://www.facebook.com/guampdn/>) and Instagram @gua (<http://instagram.com/GuamPDN>)mpdn (<http://instagram.com/GuamPDN>).

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