

## Reading, writing, ripoffs: Auditor blasts Everett school shenanigans

By Kevin Rothstein

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**S**tate Auditor Joe DeNucci issued a scathing report yesterday on the Everett Public Schools that depicts a free-spending superintendent who blew school cash on homecoming, football and questionable consultants with little regard for bidding and other spending laws.

The far-reaching 85-page audit - following a Herald report on the troubled school system - reveals a school business office rife with phony bids and other procurement shenanigans, unlicensed teachers in the classroom and a district overseen by a rubber-stamp school committee.

"The results of the audit indicate there are serious problems that need to be addressed," DeNucci said. "I think it's too important to be overlooked for the children of the city of Everett."

The audit found 30 questionable or inauthentic bids covering \$520,250 in expenditures.

The findings come on top of bid-rigging charges pending in Middlesex Superior Court against a top school official, Lona DeFeo, and a well-connected contractor, Louis Grande, who is Superintendent Frederick Foresteire's former brother-in-law.

Foresteire himself is awaiting trial on charges he had two school-bought air-conditioners installed in his home.

The audit follows a series of Herald reports revealing how school committee members and their relatives work for the Everett schools and how a contractor installed school-bought plaster board in Foresteire's home.

In one new case, auditors found a bid submitted in 2002 in the name of a company that had been out of business since 1997. In another case, two bids contained the same misspelling: "Hight School."

"If they had invested the time in our educational system instead of these machinations and schemes, we would be an educational powerhouse," said Everett Common Councilor Catherine Gover.

In a three-page rebuttal to the auditor's report, Foresteire generally maintains the schools did nothing wrong or had taken steps to fix minor paperwork errors.

But the audit lays out in detail not only bidding irregularities but also the wholesale misuse of school funds, sometimes in violation of state or municipal law or federal grant requirements.

In one case, \$59,000 meant for MCAS tutoring was instead spent on lettering football team helmets, data processing, set-up for a homecoming parade and various painting projects, including a sandwich board sign for Everett stadium.

Foresteire said the MCAS account was "misidentified."

DeNucci's report questions \$180,000 in legal consultant fees, noting the lawyer couldn't provide any documents to back up the bills, and criticizes the use of 50 unlicensed educators and misuse of \$830,000 in grants for new teachers that was instead used to bolster existing payrolls.

Education Commissioner David Driscoll said in a statement, "We will in particular look closely at the (allegations) that relate to the Department of Education and will take whatever action is necessary to respond to them."

### Where the money went

State Auditor Joe DeNucci's report says the Everett Public Schools:

- Created what city officials call a "slush fund" of special education money, as first reported in the Herald last month, where Everett wrongly diverted tens of thousands of dollars of special education money and spent it on newspaper ads (\$46,289), homecoming parade bands (\$12,000) and other non-special education related items.
- Paid \$25,560 to a former Everett teacher for copying and printing without soliciting bids or submitting purchase orders in violation of city ordinances.



Everett Public Schools  
Superintendent Frederick  
Foresteire  
(Herald file photo)

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- Spent \$135,115 to advertise in local papers over two years, double the amount spent by similar communities.
- Split more than \$6,000 in bids to circumvent procurement laws, including one bill accompanied by a note saying, "There are two separate prices because I was told the (purchase orders) had to be under \$1,000."
- Spent \$64,240 for two years of football homecoming parades.
- Had a "flawed budgetary process" including lax school committee oversight that led to \$1.2 million in overspending.

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