



March 26, 2021

Honorable Rudy Salas, Jr.
Chair, Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Salas:

This letter is to respectfully request that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approve an audit of the Bellflower Unified School District (school district) and its governing board by the California State Auditor. The purpose of the audit is to analyze the governance, financial, and ethical practices and performance of the school district and governing board, and to determine whether their actions threaten the financial, ethical, and legal ability of the school district to fulfill its mission of educating and serving its students and their families.

The school district, which is located in southeast Los Angeles, serves students within an eight square mile area of southeast Los Angeles County. This area includes most of Bellflower, a large portion of Lakewood, and a small portion of Cerritos. The school district serves a diverse student population of approximately 11,200 PreK-12 students. It operates 10 K-6 grade elementary schools, two 7-12 grade secondary schools, one continuation school, and a home education/independent study program. The school district is governed by a five-member governing board, with members elected by the community to four-year terms.

Since 2016, the school district and governing board have struggled with matters relating to governance and fiscal management. As we reach the one-year mark since our schools closed all in-person instruction, our school boards, administrators, educators, and parents must work together and strive for increased communication and accountability. Our schools are struggling to safely reopen, address devastating learning loss of students, and ensure students with disabilities receive critical services and in-person learning they desperately need. We are concerned by certain actions of the school district and governing board and believe these actions will negatively affect the school district's ability to provide services to its students. Specifically, our concerns includes the following:

- **Fiscal independence:** The school district and governing board has not complied with the State Superintendent's revocation of fiscal independence, the County Superintendent's appointment of a fiscal advisor, or the Fiscal Crisis Management and Assistance Team (FCMAT) fiscal health risk assessment.

- **Lack of budget transparency:** Since 2017, the governing board has adopted budgets without public input or expenditure detail. From March 2020 to February 2021, for example, the governing board approved over \$90 million in expenditures on consent with no public discussion. The school district has received \$24 million in federal CARES funding but has not disclosed an expenditure plan. Multiple fiscal obligations relative to special education remain outstanding and vendors have reported late or nonpayment for services.
- **Meal programs:** Enrolled students were not provided free meals during the early stages of the pandemic and were instead referred to neighboring districts to obtain meals.
- **Public record requests:** The school district has not complied with multiple public records requests from the public.
- **Community engagement:** Prior to the pandemic, the governing board did not follow Brown Act reporting and public comment requirements. Since the pandemic, the governing board has not responded appropriately to requests for online meetings. This failure to provide parents the opportunity to participate remotely is a great concern.

The specific goal of this audit request is to assess how the actions outlined above have affected the school district's and governing board's ability to meet its fiduciary responsibilities and govern in a legal and ethical manner and to make recommendations as necessary as to whether further local or state action is needed. We respectfully request that the State Auditor perform a comprehensive review of the school district and governing board actions and activities over the last five years. Specifically, we would like the State Auditor's review to include the following:

- (1) Evaluate administrative, fiscal, and/or programmatic actions and activities of the school district and governing board and assess whether they were unethical, unlawful, improper, or wasteful.
- (2) Determine whether the school district Superintendent and/or designees have misrepresented or withheld from the governing board vital information that was necessary for proper governing or decision-making. Additionally, review internal communications and determine whether any school district employee was directed to engage in questionable, unethical, or illegal practices.
- (3) Review the school district's enrollment data, revenue, and expenditures and assess its fiscal health and risk of insolvency. Additionally, review the school district's expenditures, particularly for legal and consulting services and identify any unusual spending or potential misuse of funds. Furthermore, determine how the level of consulting and legal service expenditures compares to other school districts.
- (4) Review and assess the school district's plans for spending increased state and federal funds, including CARES Act funds. Determine whether the school district adequately obtained and considered parents and community input regarding how to spend these funds.
- (5) Determine whether the governing board has violated the Brown Act concerning notices to the public, community engagement, and/or the safe harbor provisions.

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- (6) Determine whether the school district violated any legal obligations to its students with a disability who require specific services and instruction.
- (7) Determine whether there were any disruption to educational program and services, including meal services, to students during the pandemic, and assess the extent of the disruptions and district efforts to mitigate their impact on students.
- (8) Review the role of the California Department of Education, local county office of education, and FCMAT concerning the school district's fiscal stability and independence.
- (9) Identify any relevant additional steps the State, school district, or county office of education need to take to ensure fiscal stability, improve academic quality and student success, and increase public and community engagement.

We appreciate your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Assemblymember Cristina Garcia, AD 58



Speaker Anthony Rendon, AD 63