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**West Contra Costa Unified School District
Deserves Quality School Buildings
to Support Quality Education**

By Kevin MacQuarrie
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For over 41 years, my company, WLC Architects, Inc., has designed quality schools across California, including many for the West Contra Costa Unified School District. As good corporate citizens and neighbors, we welcome the scrutiny of a third-party audit of the school bond program, which will be released soon.

We fully participated in the audit process because we are confident it will underscore our commitment to designing outstanding school buildings in a financially responsible way.

We are proud of our work and the positive impact the new and modernized schools have had on the community, and we are saddened to see the program maligned by a small group of critics. Initial feedback from a forensic investigator associated with the audit is that we acted in good faith to keep costs down.

Critics of the building program gloss over this indisputable fact: When the bond program commenced in 1998, WCCUSD was badly in need of better school facilities. Children and parents felt unsafe. Many in the community were thinking in terms of simply protecting kids from stray bullets.

The District then started on a visionary path to build safe, 21st century schools to be used for years to come. The quality outcome is evidenced by great buildings like Lovonya DeJean Middle School, El Cerrito High School, Coronado Elementary School, and many others. The School Board agrees: They regularly hold their meetings at LoVonya DeJean.

As a professional services provider with nearly thirty years of experience, I can point to many reasons the accusations by a tiny number of detractors are absolutely unfounded.

Not the least of which is that taxpayer protections are by statute painstaking and thorough. Contractors bid competitively to win projects. Contracts are guided by California Public Contract Code, and continuous legal oversight, regulations, and procedures.

District requests for scope and cost increases have to be reviewed and approved by staff, multiple committees, and the Board of Education. Typical change orders are in line with overall construction costs, which are influenced by global commodity prices, the labor market, site conditions, and the Division of the State Architect requirements – all completely out of our control.

The bond program is independently audited every year as required by Proposition 39.

Part of why WLC was selected to design these schools is because we have the knowledge and skills to successfully complete the projects.

WLC also lost plenty of commissions to other architects but won many more because of our stellar reputation and proven results. We were found, time and time again, to be the best and most qualified choice for the work after facing serious and healthy competition.

Critics of the building program distort my public record of donating to bonds, parcel taxes, and deserving civil servants who share my passion for high quality schools as using the political process to wield influence, which is simply wrong.

I have always believed that the right thing to do is support programs that support quality school facilities. Investigations have found that WLC has performed commendably and did not receive any special treatment. The audit will further support this.

Rather than pursuing stopgap building modernizations that will result in additional costly changes in the future, the District is correctly thinking for the long term and is committed to building schools that will flourish well into the 21st century.

To do otherwise would be a disservice to the public interest. I look forward to the forensic audit not just supporting program participants, but applauding our responsible and cost-effective designs to meet the needs of WCCUSD students.

It is time the District moves forward and continues to raise the bar for our community and our children by continuing to build quality educational infrastructure.

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