

West Contra Costa Unified School District  
*Office of the Superintendent*

**Friday Memo**  
**March 15, 2019**

**Upcoming Events – Matthew Duffy**

March 16: Elementary Basketball League, Greenwood Academy, 9 - 4  
March 16: Parent University, Korematsu, 9-12  
March 19: DLCAP Meeting, Kennedy HS, 6:30 PM  
March 20: Board of Education Meeting, DeJean MS, 6:30 PM  
March 21: Middle School Open House  
March 22: Minimum Day Middle Schools Only  
March 23: Elementary Basketball League, Greenwood Academy, 9-4  
March 23: Parent University, Korematsu 9-12  
March 26: Agenda Setting, Superintendent's Office, 4:00 PM  
March 27: Board of Education Joint CBOC Meeting, FOC, 6:00 PM  
March 28: End of 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter  
March 28: High School Open House – Minimum Day  
March 30: Elementary Basketball League, Greenwood Academy, 9-4  
March 30: Parent University and Graduation, Korematsu, 9-12  
March 29: Middle and High School Minimum Day (Report Card Marking)  
April 1-5: Spring Recess, No School

**Intradistrict Transfers based on CSI/PI status – Matt Duffy**

At the next Board meeting, I will bring a consent item to ask the Board to move back to allowing intradistrict transfers for CSI schools, rather than PI schools. Now that the CSI list is public, there are too many schools from the old PI days that have made significant progress according to the state. I am asking the Board to approve 2019-20 intradistrict transfers only using CSI. The list is attached.

**District audit summary - Dr. John al-Amin**

Included for your Friday memo review are copies of the District Financial Audit, Bond Financial Audit of 2010 Measure D and 2012 Measure E, and the Measure G Parcel Tax Audit. The district received unqualified opinions on our bond financial and parcel tax audits, and an unmodified opinion on the financial audit. On the district financial audit there was a qualified opinion given which is related to how our Fixed Capital Assets have been reported. Staff are currently working to resolve this. Our auditor, Christy White, will present these reports at your next meeting on March 20, 2019. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

**WCCUSD Solar Power Purchase Agreement - Pinole Valley High School-Lisa LeBlanc**

On March 20, 2019, District staff will be requesting the Board to approve a Power Purchase Agreement with Engie for solar panels at the newly constructed Pinole Valley High School. The District prepared a Request for Qualifications/Proposal, completed the selection process and identified Engie as the best value firm for the solar project. To date, the district has implemented solar at 31 sites throughout the District and we are very pleased to partner with Engie to continue implementing sustainable energy solutions for our schools. The solar project at PVHS will be constructed over the Summer of 2019 and will consist of solar carports over the main parking lot of the site. We anticipate a savings of approximately \$1.7 Million over 25 years.

**WCCUSD Food Services' Lovonya DeJean Cafeteria Celebrates Black History Month and National School Breakfast Week with Students - Lisa LeBlanc**

WCCUSD Food Services appreciated the request from the principal and staff from Lovonya De Jean to offer a special lunch in recognition of Black History Month for their students. Food Services worked with site staff, volunteers and student volunteers from Leadership to serve over 450 meals to students and staff during the event. BBQ chicken, mashed potatoes & gravy, freshly made corn muffins by Central Kitchen, Caesar salad and fresh seasonal fruit were on the menu. The event was a success for all involved. Special thanks to the cafeteria school staff and Food Services Central Kitchen for supporting this special event.

Busy weekday mornings make it a challenge for families to find time for a healthy breakfast. However, US Department of Agriculture data show that more students are starting their day with a nutritious breakfast in their school cafeterias. To encourage more families to take advantage of the healthy choices available with school breakfast, Lovonya DeJean cafeteria staff recognized National School Breakfast Week which was March 4-9, 2019. A smoothie bike was brought in to show students the importance of breakfast and exercise as they created their own smoothies made with yogurt, fruit and 100% juice. We also showcased breakfast items on a new mobile breakfast cart to attract students as they walked into the multipurpose room.

For more information on WCCUSD meal program, go to [www.wccusd.net](http://www.wccusd.net) - Food Services department or call WCCUSD Food Services at 510-307-4580



West Contra Costa Unified School District  
*Office of the Superintendent*

**Wilson ES Project Update - Lisa LeBlanc**

In March 2019, the District published a community newsletter to provide an update to the community regarding the status and progress of the Wilson project. Please see the attached project newsletter.

**Wilson ES: Granting an Easement to the City of Richmond**

At the upcoming Board meeting on March 20, 2019, the Board will need to hold a public hearing to receive comment and consider granting an Easement to the City of Richmond. District staff has prepared the easement in collaboration with the City of Richmond and the Design Build Team. As part of the Wilson Elementary School Project, the District intends to construct two student drop off zones along 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets which will require the relocation of an existing sidewalk onto District property. In order for the City of Richmond to maintain the public sidewalk once the improvements are completed, the District must grant the City non-exclusive access to certain portions in, over, under, along, and across the Wilson Elementary School site in the location of the relocated sidewalk improvements. If the Board approves the Easement on March 20, 2019, it will be sent to the City of Richmond for acceptance.

**News Articles of Interest - Marcus Walton**

<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2019/03/12/opinion-why-we-should-ban-kids-smartphone-use-in-school/> - Why we should ban kids' smartphone use in school

<https://www.sfgate.com/news/bayarea/article/Changes-To-Wccusd-Board-Elections-Aim-To-Improve-13673478.php> - Changes To Wccusd Board Elections Aim To Improve Representation

<https://richmondstandard.com/community/education/2019/03/06/judge-approves-wccusd-trustee-area-map-ending-litigation/> - Judge approves WCCUSD trustee area map, ending litigation

<https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article226279165.html> - How Sacramento City Unified got into financial crisis



**Wilson Elementary School**

**March 2019**

## Greetings!

Greetings to both the Wilson Elementary School Neighborhood and the greater area of Kennedy High School!

Since last January the District Facilities Department, the Design and Build Team (DBT) of Overaa Construction and Gould Evans Architects, in association with the Principal and her staff at the Wilson Elementary School have been very busy. In little over a year, the design of the New Wilson Elementary School has gone from a concept to construction documents. On December 7, 2018, the project was submitted to the Division of State Architect (DSA) for an approval to build. We are hopeful that the approval will be granted by May of 2019.

### Activity

In December of 2018 four existing portables on the site were moved off. In Spring 2019 demolition is scheduled to begin at the existing site, making way for the new school.

Our partners, Principal Claudia Velez and the Wilson staff have been very instrumental in review of the functional layouts of the educational spaces.

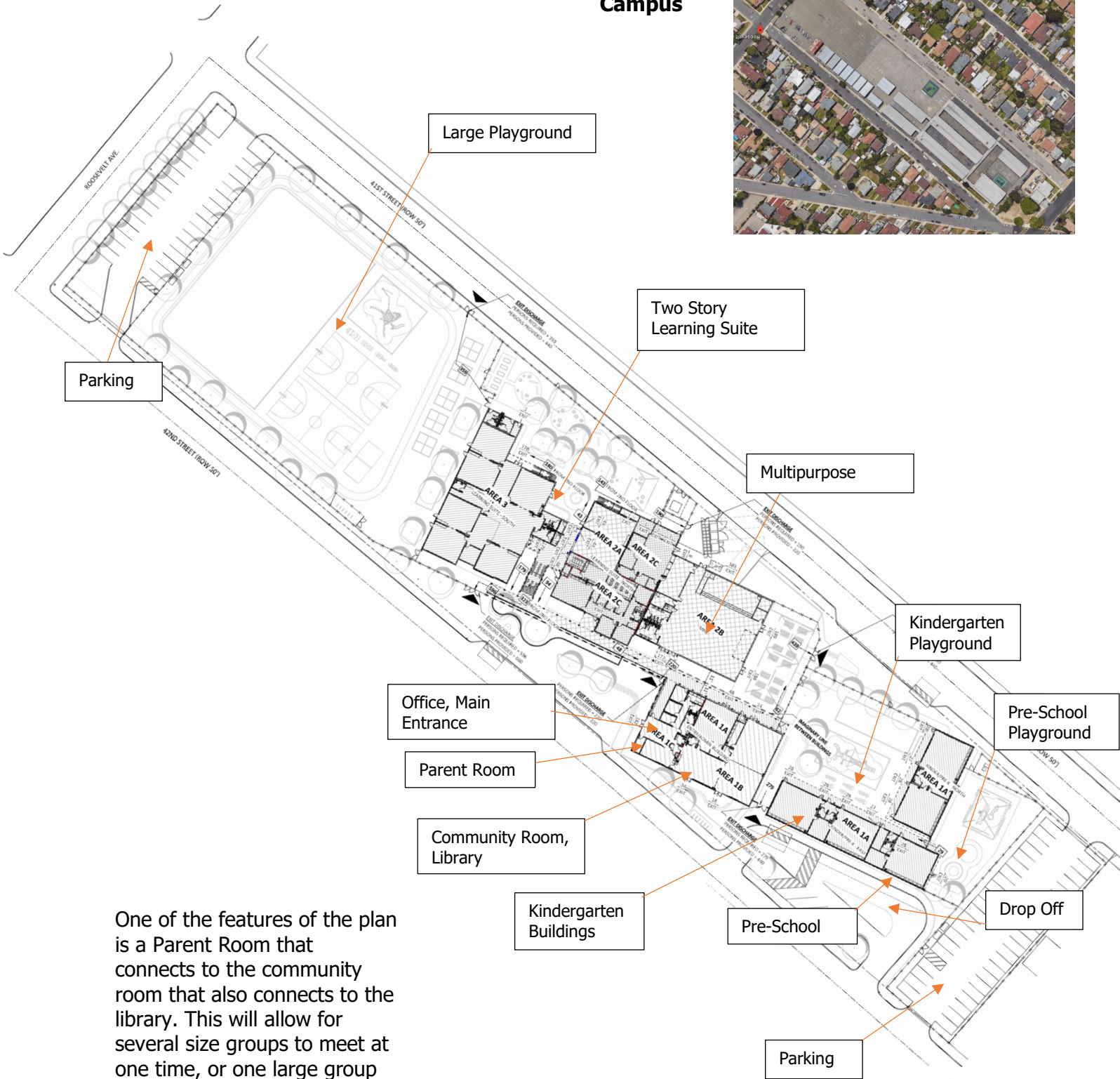
Design of the project has involved many meetings with

- Wilson Elementary Staff
- Wilson Parents / Community
- District Administration / Facilities
- Local and State agencies



# Site Plan New Campus

## Old Campus



One of the features of the plan is a Parent Room that connects to the community room that also connects to the library. This will allow for several size groups to meet at one time, or one large group

## What's Next

The DBT has been busy distributing documents for final bidding, this will conclude in June. During the process the District has monitored the budget, making adjustments to maintain cost control in a quickly changing market. Inflation in the construction industry has been extreme.

This school is an exciting project. The design is amazing. The functional layout of the Learning Suites is the District's initiation into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century school facility design. The Design-Build process has been and continues to be collaboratively allowing for flexibility. A 21<sup>st</sup> Century school allows for staff and student collaboration, interaction, and flexibility.

We are proud to be part of this project, and as progress is made, we will keep our neighbors informed.



200 Parr Blvd., Richmond, CA 94801

gouldevans

95 Brady Street, San Francisco, CA 94103



Website: [www.overaa.com](http://www.overaa.com)

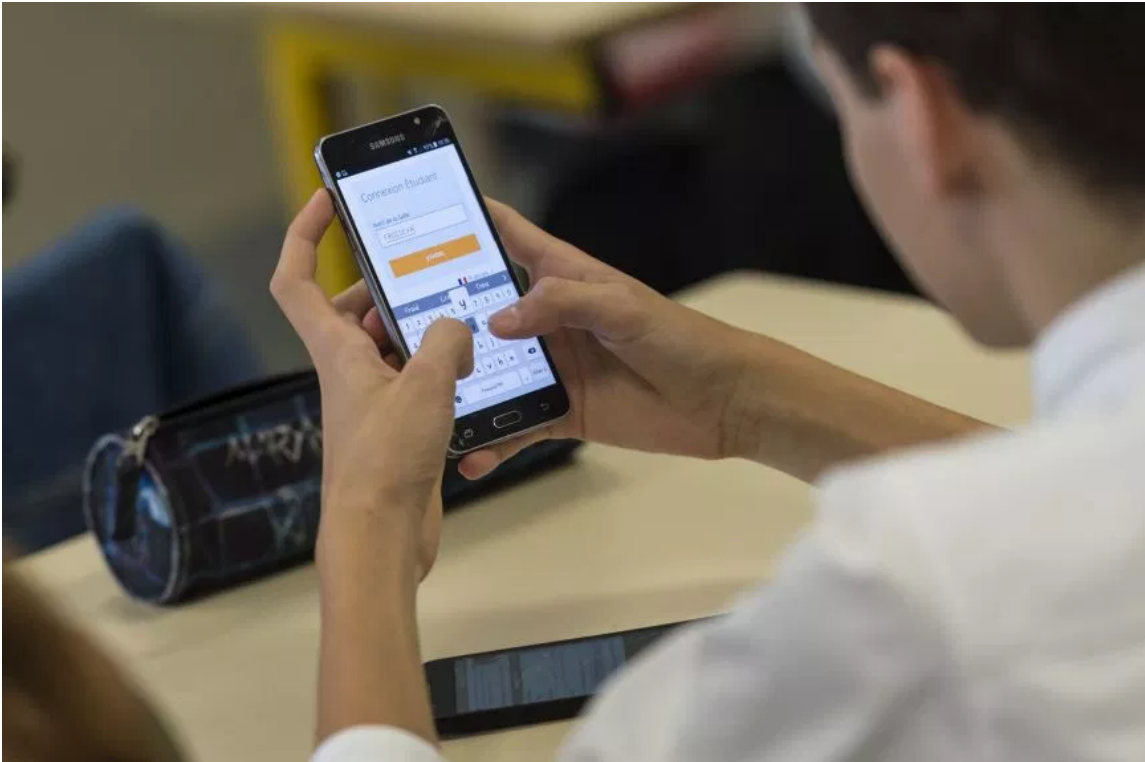


Contact: 510-234-0926

Opinion > [Commentary](#)

## Opinion: Why we should ban kids' smartphone use in school

Seventy-five percent of teachers surveyed assert student attention spans have dropped in the last five years



In this photograph taken on September 26, 2017, high school students use smartphones and tablet computers at the vocational school in Bischwiller, eastern France. Since the beginning of the school year in eastern France some 31,000 high school pupils have replaced their traditional textbooks by computers and tablets, a move popular with students but opinion is divided among teachers and parents. / AFP PHOTO / PATRICK HERTZOG (Photo credit should read PATRICK HERTZOG/AFP/Getty Images)

By **STEVE KOPPMAN** |

France is implementing a smartphone ban in schools nationwide. England mandated a similar ban after widespread local adoption. Israel too.

Maybe we should join them.

Studies demonstrate significantly improved academic performance follows removal of phones from schools. Lower-achieving students benefit most, narrowing the “achievement gap.”

Research finds U.S. teens — their minds still forming — average six to nine hours a day online. Half tell researchers they are on phones “all the time” and half similarly feel “addicted” (smartphones stimulate addiction-generating dopamine). Many go to sleep and wake up with them. Seventy-five percent of teachers surveyed assert student attention spans have dropped in the last five years.

Is this not a crisis?

We have enough research data to know young people’s development benefits from time away from an all-consuming internet, which absorbs attention and obstructs learning. Smartphones impede students’ concentration and engagement with people in their presence — arguably schools’ key purposes.

As James Steyer, a noted technology activist, puts it: “Tech companies are conducting a massive real-time experiment on our kids.”

Learning to get along without digital media, to depend directly on themselves and each other without electronic distraction several uninterrupted hours a day, could be the most important training we can give our young people before sending them into an uncharted and potentially uncontrollable technological future.

Banning smartphones in schools is NOT a Luddite plot to outlaw the devices or quash technology but a way to immerse young students, for a big chunk of their early lives, in the world of direct communication and physical reality. To benefit from what is inarguably great about technology — potentials to improve health, increase longevity and alleviate disability, for example — we need some control over it, including: Stop letting it bring up our kids.

The decisive question of our age will likely be: Will technology serve humanity or be its uncontested master? Technological colonization of children’s minds from an early age seems increasingly real. We can defend them best through public education.

Why do we have public schools? To give every young person a chance to learn and develop, regardless of origins, social status, or family or personal problems. Ensuring children learn to operate in long uninterrupted periods, independent of smartphones, the internet and social media, is vital to this mission today.

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U.S. school phone policies vary all over the map by district, school and teacher. Policy closest to the norm lets students bring phones to school but bars use in class. Students can “legally” use phones before and after class, at lunch, and during recess and (usually) “passing periods.” They may carry phones or store them in backpacks.

But phones create new classroom cultures. Many students check them furtively several times a period. Classroom energy is drained as they do this, or consider it, while teachers keep repeating themselves. Having phones available with these fluctuating rules creates “cat and mouse” dynamics during classes and a return to smartphone-centered life when they break. Teachers avoid sacrificing class time on “enforcement” but phone use still typically is a top discipline issue.

Alternatively, a thousand-plus schools nationally (including, in the Bay Area, San Lorenzo High and El Cerrito’s Korematsu Middle School) have, like France, “banned” phones throughout the school day, storing them in inaccessible lockers or “pouches,” and restoring access at 3 pm.

Adult testimony suggests this can make profound improvements in learning, class dynamics and human relations. Surveys confirm most parents support removing smartphones from schools. If boards and schools don’t act accordingly, voters and civic groups should launch local initiatives on this issue so critical to our kids and our future.

*Steve Koppman has worked as a government analyst at federal, state and local levels. He holds a master’s degree in public policy from UC Berkeley.*

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 **The Trust Project**

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**Steve Koppman**

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# **Supreme Court Won't Hear Case on Church Repairs Using Tax Money**

By Connatix

Supreme Court Won't  
Hear Case on Church  
Repairs Using Tax  
Money

# Changes To Wccusd Board Elections Aim To Improve Representation

Bay City News Service Published 8:57 am PST, Friday, March 8, 2019

Big changes are coming to the way voters get to choose candidates for the West Contra Costa Unified School District's school board starting in 2020, and proponents of the change say historically underrepresented communities will now be guaranteed a seat at the table.

Rather than electing trustees from anywhere in the school district in an "at large" model, voters will be able to choose trustees to represent their specific geographical area within the district.

The move comes as a result of litigation with the Bay Area Voting Rights Initiative, which argued that the previous election methodology violated the California Voting Rights Act and that it resulted in "racially polarized voting," which may have left minority communities underrepresented on the school board.

A map of these new "trustee areas," which has been approved by a court after lengthy negotiations with the plaintiff as well as public input at a series of meetings, is available online at <https://bit.ly/2XINZSx>. District officials said they sought to create at least two trustee areas in traditionally underrepresented areas within western Contra Costa County.

The new map, however, will not affect which schools students attend based on where they live. For most voters the biggest change will be that instead of getting to vote for all five seats on the board, they will only get to select one board member to represent the part of the community they reside in.

In a statement issued Wednesday, board President Tom Panas said he was glad to see the litigation come to a close.

"It is the hope of this Board that the transition to trustee areas elections will give residents elected representatives who are passionate and effective advocates for all of the children in this District," Panas said.

Speaking on behalf of the plaintiff, Walnut Creek attorney Scott Rafferty said this agreement will have a significant impact on the way the district operates. He argues that in the past the board has often had a majority of trustees from El Cerrito, which represents a relatively small portion of the district's population.

"This district was one of the biggest school districts in CA that elected trustees at large, so trustees answered to special interests whose funding they needed," Rafferty said Thursday in a statement. "Now, grass roots candidates can run in their own neighborhoods."

"Winner take all meant that few minorities got elected... urban Richmond and San Pablo are now guaranteed two seats on the Board, including a majority Latino area, as required by federal law," Rafferty said.

As part of the judgment, which is available online at <https://bit.ly/2XIhfsJ> courtesy of district officials, the court has also directed the district to pay the plaintiffs \$280,000 for their legal expenses -- in addition to \$30,600 already paid.

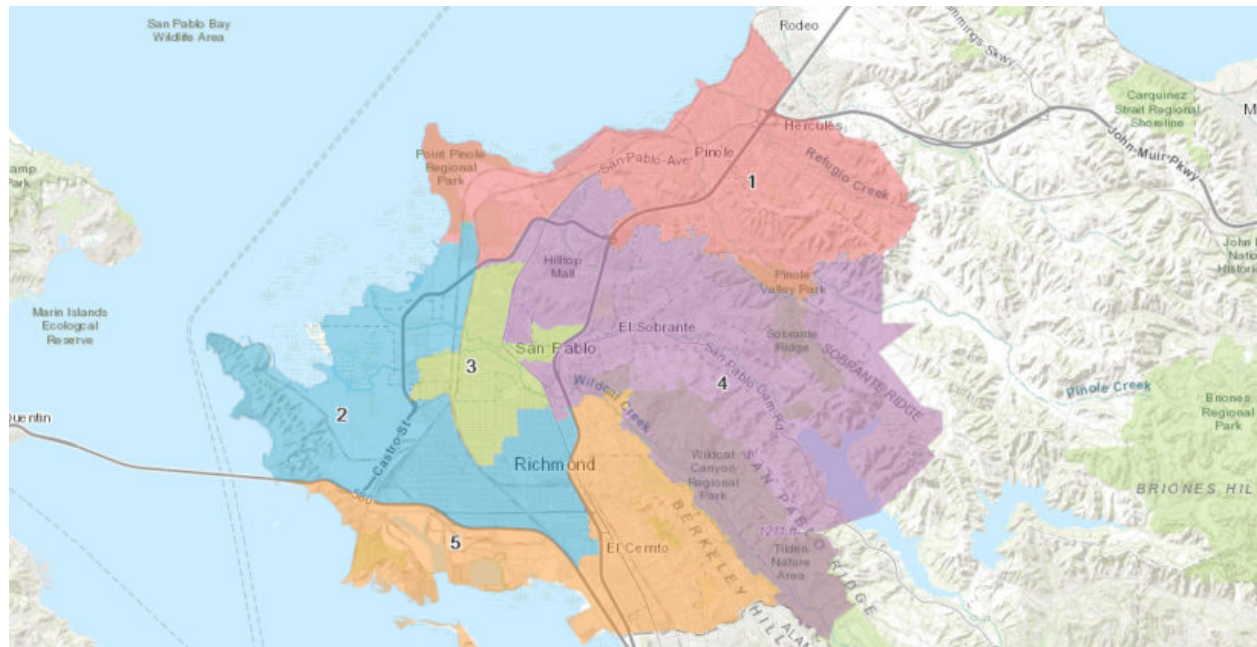
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**H E A R S T**

# Judge approves WCCUSD trustee area map, ending litigation

March 6, 2019



*The newly approved WCCUSD trustee map.*

A Contra Costa County Superior Court judge today approved a map creating trustee areas in the West Contra Costa Unified School District, a crucial step in changing the way voters will elect members of the Board of Education starting with the 2020 election.

In March last year, the WCCUSD Board of Education voted to move from an at large system of elections, where voters elect all five district board members, to a “by-trustee” system where voters elect only the board member who represents a defined area within the district where they reside.

The vote came the same day a lawsuit was filed by a Walnut Creek attorney alleging that WCCUSD’s at-large system for electing Board of Education members violated the California Voting Rights Act of 2001. The suit claims at-large elections give unfair advantage to candidates in more affluent areas, often disadvantaging minorities.

An initial trustee area map was rejected by the County Committee on School District Organization. A revised version, however, has been approved by the court following negotiations between the plaintiff and district. The district said the approved map also incorporates public input.

The map “seeks to create at least two trustee areas in which traditionally underrepresented communities have a better opportunity to elect representatives of their choosing to the Board of Education,” the district said in a statement.

“Under the terms, voters in WCCUSD will elect members to the Board of Education by geographic area beginning in 2020 and have trustee area boundaries drawn and approved by an independent commission beginning with the 2022 election,” according to the district.

All five seats on the Board will be up for election in 2020.

The judge’s decision today ends the litigation against the district, although the judgment directs the district to pay the plaintiff’s attorney fees of \$280,000 (in addition to the \$30,600 previously paid).

WCCUSD is one of many jurisdictions across the state, not just school boards but also city councils, that have been transitioning away from at-large elections under threat of legal action.

"I am pleased to draw this litigation to a close and look forward to returning our focus to ensuring that our students get the best educational experiences possible," Board President Tom Panas said. "It is the hope of this Board that the transition to trustee areas elections will give residents elected representatives who are passionate and effective advocates for all of the children in this District."

For more information, go: [www.wccusd.net/trusteeareas](http://www.wccusd.net/trusteeareas).

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**Mike Aldax**

EDUCATION

# Your primer to the Sac City Unified budget crisis – how did we get to now?

BY SAWSAN MORRAR



MARCH 10, 2019 03:00 AM, UPDATED MARCH 10, 2019 10:30 AM



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Parents and school officials discuss the Sacramento City Unified School District's budget shortfall at a meeting Thursday, Oct. 4, 2018. The district has until Monday, Oct. 8, 2018, to submit a revised budget to the county office of education.

By José Luis Villegas

Sacramento City Unified School District is chipping away at expenses in a last-ditch effort to close its \$35 million budget gap, but time is running out and a state takeover seems imminent.

The unprecedented rejection of the district's budget in August by the Sacramento County Office of Education appeared to take many by surprise – but Sacramento City's fiscal problems didn't happen overnight.

Auditors have noted that sharp turn toward insolvency came on the heels of the 2017 labor contract between the district and teachers, which narrowly averted a strike. They said that deal combined with other factors, including a decade of financial missteps, leadership problems, labor strife and shrinking student enrollment, to take the district to the brink of disaster.

Here's who is involved

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did mean for the district's



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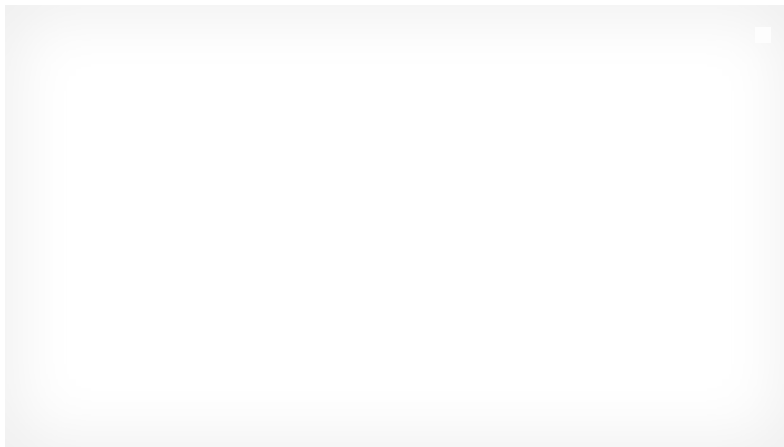
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## THE PLAYERS

**Sacramento City Unified School District:** The district is home to more than 42,000 students and 3,000 teachers in 81 schools. It's the 11th-largest school district in California, with an annual budget of nearly \$400 million.

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**Sacramento City Teachers Association:** The SCTA is one of five unions in the district. Representing about 2,500 teachers, it's the seventh-largest teachers union in California, according to its website. It is an affiliate of the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association. The union and the district are at odds over contract negotiations, with SCTA members currently voting whether to authorize a strike.

**California Department of Education:** If Sacramento City Unified determines it has become insolvent and needs an emergency loan to pay its bills, it will request one from the state Education Department. That request triggers a state takeover. The department has appointed a trustee for all previous state takeovers, including Oakland Unified in 2003 and Inglewood Unified in 2012. But that responsibility has shifted. Since the passage of Assembly Bill 1840, signed into law last year, the authority to appoint an administrator lies with the school district's county superintendent.

**Sacramento County Office of Education:** The county education department, led by Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools **Dave Gordon**, has been monitoring Sacramento City Unified closely since it started showing signs of financial duress a decade ago. If the district requests a loan from the state, Gordon will assume all legal rights, duties and powers of the school board. He would then appoint an administrator.

**Sacramento City Unified Superintendent Jorge Aguilar:** Aguilar arrived after a long period of management turnover. The district had gone through six superintendents, some temporary, during the past 15 years. When Aguilar joined the district in mid-2017, it had a \$5-million budget surplus, but the relationship between the district and its teachers was poor. [A teachers strike was narrowly averted](#) in November 2017 after more than a year of bitter contract negotiations. But labor tensions are again running high amid the financial turmoil.

**Sacramento City Unified Board of Education:** The board has eight members, including seven trustees elected by trustee area to four-year terms. The eighth member is a high school student selected to a one-year term by the Student Advisory Committee. The board is responsible for general district oversight, including hiring the superintendent. It approves or rejects the administration's policy, budget and personnel decisions. If the district goes into state receivership, fiscal decisions will be taken out of its hands. The board selected Area 7 trustee **Jessie Ryan** as its president in 2017.

**Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg:** Steinberg joined the budget wrangling that averted a teacher strike in 2017. He scribbled a back-of-the-napkin deal that included an 11 percent increase to teacher salaries – an agreement that the union says the district has walked away from.

**FCMAT:** The state-created Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team provides financial advice, administrative help and training at the request of school districts and county offices of education. In December 2015, FCMAT presented an audit that named Sacramento City Unified that if it



failed to correct its budget deficit, it would face a state takeover in six months. The independent team faulted the district, which announced it would run out of money by November 2019.

**California Legislature:** Assemblyman Kevin McCarty, D-Sacramento, requested a state audit of the district, which was approved Wednesday by the Joint Committee on Legislative Audit. The audit is scheduled to begin on May 1. If the district requests an emergency loan, it must be appropriated by the state Legislature.

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

In the last four fiscal years, between 2013 and 2017, Sacramento City Unified ran surpluses, according to its financial statements and FCMAT.

And then in 2017-18, the district suddenly ran a deficit of nearly \$10 million. What caused the crisis?

**Insufficient cuts:** In April 2008, the county office of education changed Sacramento City Unified's certification from positive to qualified because the district had not identified enough cuts, and some of the millions targeted still needed board approval.

In 2010, when Jonathan Raymond assumed the role of district superintendent, Gordon noted in a letter that some big-ticket items identified by the district for cuts – namely, furlough days and health benefits – required union negotiations.

“Our understanding is that formal negotiations have only just begun,” read Gordon's letter. “The timeline is tight and there is little or no room for deadline modifications.”

The county's Office of Education showed signs of faith in the district. In 2012, it concurred with the district's qualified certification despite some reservations.

“Our decision to not downgrade the district budget to a negative certification was based on our reliance on the district's implementation of its budget reduction plan,” read Gordon's letter.

But the district took risks. Lots of them.

Cash flow estimates submitted by the district in 2012 showed that it would require \$50 million in tax revenue anticipation notes – money that it didn't have in hand, but that it expected from tax increases proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown. Gordon asked the district to prepare a contingency plan if the governor's tax increases failed to materialize. Ultimately, the money did not come through, forcing the district to spend down millions of dollars from its general funds.

**'Leadership issues':** The December FCMAT audit [criticized Sacramento City Unified](#) for past mismanagement, communication failures and inexperienced staff that contributed to its ongoing budget problems.

“It is a governance and leadership problem, period,” FCMAT CEO Mike Fine said when he delivered the audit. “And it's many years of governance and leadership issues – not purely the last twelve months.”

The audit found that the district's business team did not communicate enough with other departments, making it more difficult to solve fiscal problems. It also said the district's staff underutilized software and lacked understanding of how to maintain and analyze data.

**Salary agreement, continuing labor strife:** While Sacramento City Unified traveled a long road into fiscal trouble, with many warning signs along the way, its finances took a precipitous turn after the district and teachers signed a new labor contract.

[The deal was brokered](#) by Steinberg, Aguilar and the union at the mayor's Greenhaven house over a weekend in November 2017 as a strike loomed. It provided a 7.5 percent salary increase for teachers with an additional 3.5 percent adjustment to mid-range salaries.

At the time, it was lauded as balance between fiscal prudence and paying teachers fairly.

But independent auditors now say that while the salary increases weren't solely to blame for Sacramento City's fiscal woes, after the deal was signed, the district quickly slid toward insolvency.

“What happened in 2017 was the tipping point. That seems to have changed the financial picture,” said Michelle Giacomini, FCMAT’s deputy executive officer and author of the district’s fiscal analysis.

Standard & Poor’s credit rating agency cited a dramatic decline in Sacramento City Unified’s fund balance, primarily due to cost increases for staffing and benefits, [when it downgraded the district’s bond rating](#) to near rock-bottom in January.

Asked by The Bee whether he now has regrets about the deal, Steinberg declined through a spokeswoman to comment. Aguilar also declined, citing current negotiations.

According to a Bee story at the time, the school district and teachers union agreed to negotiate together with the district’s health care providers to lower health care costs. If they could find ways to save money, they would try to fund nurses, counselors and mental health workers, as well as reduce class sizes.

But just weeks after the deal was signed, [Gordon warned](#) that the agreement would drain Sacramento City’s reserves within two years, and the district would have to propose new cuts to avoid being placed on the state’s early financial warning list.

Gordon said the district would need to reduce its budget by \$15.6 million for the 2019-20 school year to avoid “falling into a structural deficit.”

But reductions were not made.

“At the point when it was reached, it was clear that the budget reduction was necessary to offset the agreement,” said Giacomini. “And that didn’t happen. It’s not that it couldn’t be afforded, it’s that it had to happen with the reduction.”

Meanwhile, the contract continues to be the main source of strife between the district and the union.

The S&P agency cited that conflict when it downgraded the district’s bond rating in January, noting that negotiations have had a “contentious nature.”

To date, some of the 2017 agreement has been implemented, but the two sides hit an impasse on the 3.5 percent salary adjustment for mid-career teachers.

The district in November filed a complaint in Sacramento Superior Court requesting a declaration that there was not an agreement between both parties.

The district says that under the contract, the increase would cost \$7 million. The district claims that the SCTA’s proposed adjustment would cost \$14 million, which the district said it cannot afford.

The court mandated the two sides head back into arbitration, which were set to begin Friday.

The SCTA says it would work with the district to ensure any pay increases do not exceed the agreed-upon levels for the 2018-19 school year and beyond.

**Other spending decisions:** The labor agreement wasn’t the only wallet-buster.

The Sacramento City Teachers Association argues that several moves by Aguilar actually triggered the deficit: A vacation buyout program that paid administrators cash for accrued vacation time in order to bring down balance expenses; the decision to hire 20 new administrators that the union

And county officials and auditors have pointed to financial mismanagement dating back more than a decade under several of Aguilar's predecessors.

Gordon delivered written warnings to the district as early as 2007 to avoid relying on one-time funding, which he said had been a district practice for years.

"The budget is again balanced using one-time funds," read one letter from Gordon to then-Sacramento City Superintendent Carillo Mejia. "The district continues to rely on one-time funding to solve budget ongoing deficits."

That year, the district used \$3.6 million in one-time revenues.

In 2018, Gordon warned the district again to not resort to the "poor business practice." But when district budgeted for the funds again, it anticipated that it would receive \$20.2 million from the state – \$11.4 million in one-time revenues – to cover its recent \$15.6 million shortfall.

"We would just hope that a grant comes in, and with the hope that that funding won't go away," district spokesman Alex Barrios said. "Well this year, in a lot of cases that funding did go away."

The county suggested the district instead divert the one-time funds to its promised long-term retiree benefits — another financial drain that the county had asked the district to address for years.

**Health benefits:** The county Office of Education had been asking the district to address its retiree benefits and lack of proper funding since 2007.

Employees' health benefits are locked down in a decades-old agreement that provided generous compensation: free health care. But the cost of benefits has increased over the years.

More than 1,500 teachers in the district are making more than \$100,000 in total compensation – salary and benefits combined. Some of those teachers' salaries vary between \$47,000 and \$90,000.

Only in the past decade did teachers begin paying \$20 a month toward their health care benefits to offset some of the costs.

The district says it spends more on health benefits than any other district in the Sacramento region, with most employees opting for the "Cadillac plan."

"We feel we invest the most," Barrios said. "We're told we aren't doing enough, and it's very hard to see these dollar amounts and say we are not investing."

Data show that few other school districts in the region provide lifetime health benefits after retirement, such as Davis Joint Unified and Elk Grove Unified. But their plans are prefunded, with contributions made to offset future liabilities. By contrast, Sacramento City Unified's liability is more than \$700 million..

**Enrollment declines:** A shrinking student population has put further strain on the district's finances.

School districts' funding from the state is directly tied to the number of students enrolled. And Sacramento City's enrollment has been declining for the last 15 years, according to the December FCMAT report. Gordon cited enrollment decline as a concern in his letters to the district dating back to 2007.

Such declines have led to school closures in other districts like Oakland Unified, which was taken over by the state in 2003.

While Sacramento City Unified would not speculate on the future of its schools, a state takeover would demand deep cuts beyond stringent budgeting.

## WHAT'S LIKELY TO HAPPEN?

Although the district has assembled to patch its budget hole, Gordon and FCMAT chief executive Mike Fine warned in late February that a state

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**Administrator appointed:** If the district runs out of cash, it will have to request a loan from the state, which would place it in receivership, Fine said.

Upon the district's receipt of the loan, Gordon would assume the powers and responsibilities of the district's governing board. He would then appoint an administrator to act on his behalf.

The new administrator is not obligated to consult with the school board or district superintendent, Gordon told The Bee last year.

**What happens to the teacher contract?:** Under a takeover, the district's labor contracts stay in place and negotiations continue, according to Giacomini.

But because the district spends 91 percent of its general funds on salaries and benefits – 6 percent more than the state average – employees could see cuts as future contracts are hammered out in negotiations.

Most of the nine California school districts taken over by the state since 1990 experienced some rollbacks in salaries or benefits.

**What is really at stake, what could students lose first?:** The district says it is adamant about keeping the cuts as far away from classrooms as possible.

The school board has approved a motion to lay off employees, citing a decline in student enrollment. District officials identified full-time positions in several departments that could be reduced, including vacant positions. About 150 of those positions belonged to K-12 teachers. Notices of potential layoffs will be issued March 15, but it won't be known until the end of the school year how many teachers will actually receive pink slips.

The board also decided at its most recent meeting to cut 33 administrative positions, on top of \$1 million in previous reductions.

The last time the district faced mass layoffs was in 2016.

"If people don't feel like we are in a budget crisis right now, it's because they have been trying their hardest not to impact the community," Barrios said. "But that could only last so long until we have collaboration with all labor parties in how we balance the budget."

With the challenges of a state takeover, the district could see enrollment drop even more in the next few years, prompting school closures.

Officials have pointed to Oakland Unified as a possible harbinger of things to come. That district's teacher strike just ended, and teachers received an 11 percent raise.

The Oakland district is still under state receivership, after the state loaned it \$100 million in 2003. Since the takeover, the district's enrollment has dropped from about 54,000 to 37,000 according to court documents, and 18 schools have closed. Fourteen of those schools have reopened as charter schools.

The contract deal includes a five-month freeze on school closures after the district looked to close or merge as many as 24 schools in the next five years.

Troy Flint, spokesman from the California School Boards Association, attended a Sacramento City Unified board meeting in February, drawing a comparison between the two districts.

Today, Oakland Unified owes about \$33 million, roughly the same debt that sent it into state takeover, and also the same amount of debt that Sacramento City Unified is in today. Flint said that Oakland Unified still has not recovered from its financial woes, and encouraged the board to make difficult choices now rather than later.

"I assure you that the alternative is worse," he said.

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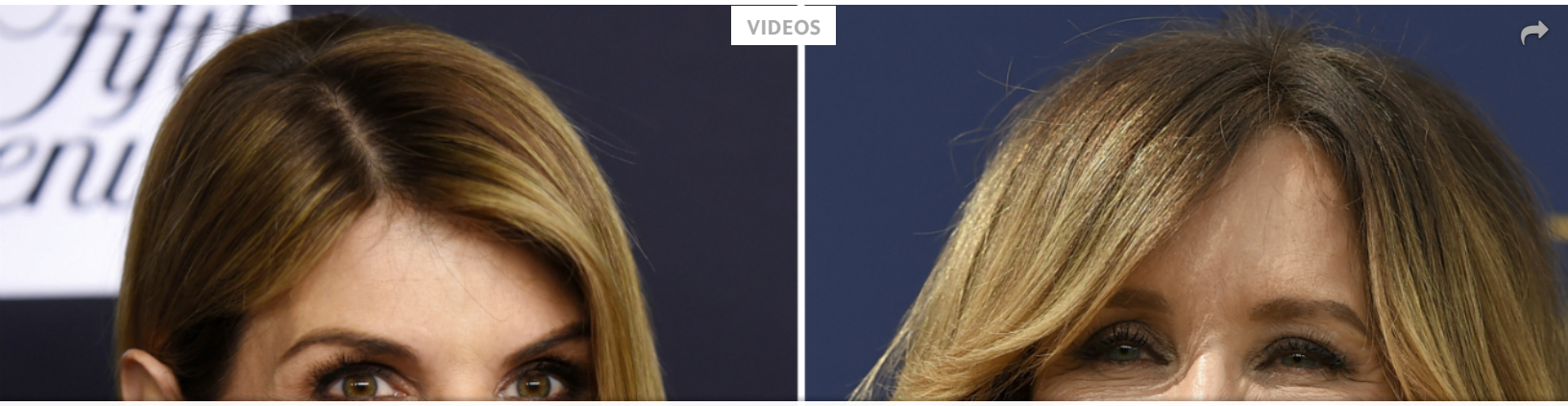


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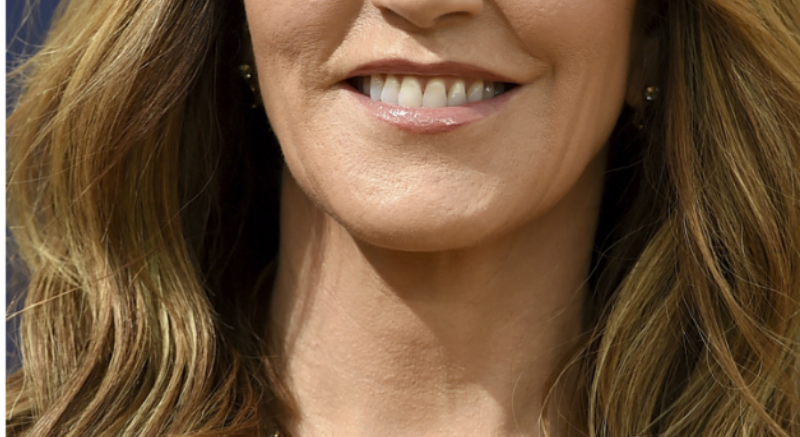
Sawsan Morrar covers school accountability and culture for The Sacramento Bee. She grew up in Sacramento and is an alumna of UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. She previously freelanced for various publications including The Washington Post, Vice, KQED and Capital Public Radio.

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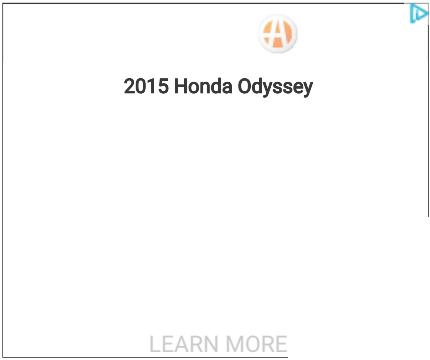
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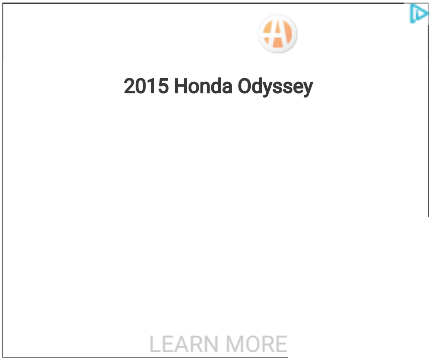
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