



Alum Rock Union Elementary School District

The District and Its Board Must Improve Governance and Operations to Effectively Serve the Community

Background

Serving nearly 10,000 students in 25 elementary, middle, and K–8 schools within Santa Clara county, the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District (district) is governed by a five-member board of trustees (board). The board establishes the strategic direction of the district, ensures educational and fiscal accountability to the community, provides support to the district's superintendent and other staff as they carry out the board's directives, and hires the superintendent. The superintendent oversees the day-to-day operations of the district's faculty, administrators, and support staff.

Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should require members of school district boards to receive ethics training biennially.
- The board should comply with state laws and do the following:
 - » Use a structured process to select the most qualified firms to perform construction projects and work with district staff to evaluate proposals when contracting for legal services.
 - » Request training in applicable state requirements for governance and transparency.
 - » Assess the superintendent's performance timely to ensure it aligns with expectations.
- The district should improve its contracting practices by developing procedures to identify contracted personnel's potential conflicts of interest and developing contract monitoring procedures to ensure contractor performance.
- The district should provide its board members with ethics training at least once every two years, and should reduce payments to board members when they fail to attend meetings.

Key Findings

- The district awarded contracts for construction projects without using a structured process to select the most qualified firms at fair and reasonable prices as required—the board awarded three contracts we reviewed without evaluating other firms.
- The district's poor contract management practices hinder its ability to adequately monitor its contractors.
 - » The district does not have procedures to monitor its contractors and ensure they fulfill their responsibilities before paying them.
 - » It provides insufficient information to the board about payments to contractors to allow the board to assess the reasonableness of the expenditures.
 - » Because it did not require some of its contracted personnel to declare their financial interests, it does not know whether those individuals had potential conflicts of interest with the district.
- The board's actions have raised concerns about its transparency and accountability to the community, and it is not subject to state law requiring biennial ethics training for government officials.
 - » Board members did not consistently attend meetings yet the district paid these officials for meetings they did not attend.
 - » Board members did not always comply with state law. For example, in one instance a board member voted to approve a group of hires that included his son, and in another instance, they made several decisions even though they did not have a sufficient number of members present to establish a quorum.
 - » It did not adhere to district policy requiring that it perform a comparative evaluation of proposals when it selected a law firm to serve as the district's general counsel.
 - » It has not provided the district's superintendent with timely evaluations and has not sufficiently acted on implementing recommendations a state-established monitoring entity made in 2017 to improve district operations and governance.