



# *Custodial Staffing and Cleanliness Standards*

Significant Maintenance Deficiencies at Some Schools May Place Students' Safety and Learning at Risk

November 2024

**REPORT 2023-122**





**CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR**

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November 19, 2024

**2023-122**

The Governor of California  
President pro Tempore of the Senate  
Speaker of the Assembly  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor and Legislative Leaders:

As directed by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, my office conducted an audit of California Public School Custodial Cleanliness Standards, which included assessing the conditions of 18 public schools across six school districts: Calaveras Unified School District, Chico Unified School District, Fresno Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Palo Verde Unified School District, and Santa Maria-Bonita School District. Our evaluation focused on the custodial cleanliness standards and staffing at these public schools, and we determined that the schools had numerous maintenance deficiencies that may place students' safety and learning at risk.

My office found that many schools are not meeting State standards for cleanliness and maintenance, exposing children to unsafe and unhealthful conditions that can affect their academic success. For example, we found improperly stored hazardous cleaning supplies in multiple schools we visited. We also observed among the schools we visited leaky roofs, structural deterioration, stained ceiling tiles, and fire safety issues, such as classrooms with missing fire extinguishers. We noted that schools lack a funding source dedicated to facilities maintenance because the school funding formula is based solely on attendance and student characteristics. We recommend that the Legislature consider developing a funding category for maintenance separate from the current school funding formula.

We also found that oversight of school facilities needs improvement. Using the same Facility Inspection Tool (FIT) that schools use to evaluate facility conditions, my office generally scored the schools lower than the schools scored themselves on their School Accountability Report Cards, and our FIT scores were generally lower than those from their respective county Offices of Education. Because the report cards are a way for the school to provide information on school conditions to the public, there may be an incentive for schools to rate themselves generously. Additional oversight of this process is necessary. Finally, we identified potential improvements to the FIT itself so that it will better reflect school conditions and be a better means of communicating information on school cleanliness and maintenance to the public.

Respectfully submitted,

GRANT PARKS  
California State Auditor

Selected Abbreviations Used in This Report

APPA	Association of Physical Plant Administrators
CDE	California Department of Education
DGS	Department of General Services
FIT	Facility Inspection Tool
FMPs	Facilities Master Plans
FTE	full-time equivalent
HVAC	heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
LAO	Legislative Analyst’s Office
LCFF	Local Control Funding Formula
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
SARC	School Accountability Report Card

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	1
<b>Introduction</b>	3
The School Districts We Reviewed Did Not Comply With Facility Requirements, Risking Student Learning and Safety	11
Without Effective Oversight, School Facilities Will Remain in Poor Condition	31
The FIT's Deficiency Rating System Does Not Accurately Reflect School Conditions	41
<b>Other Areas We Reviewed</b>	47
Recommendations	52
<b>Appendix A</b>	
FIT Scoring Comparisons	55
<b>Appendix B</b>	
Example of an Updated FIT	73
<b>Appendix C</b>	
Scope and Methodology	75
<b>Responses to the Audit</b>	
California Government Operations Agency	79
Department of General Services	80
California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the Department of General Services	85
Fresno County Office of Education	87
California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the Fresno County Office of Education	89
Fresno Unified School District	91
California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the Fresno Unified School District	93
Los Angeles Unified School District	95
California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the Los Angeles Unified School District	103



## Summary

### Key Findings and Recommendations

Over the past 20 years, at least a dozen studies have demonstrated an adverse link between inadequate conditions at K-12 public schools and outcomes for students. These studies have found that when schools defer maintenance or fail to clean their facilities adequately, students can exhibit increased rates of absenteeism, more frequent illnesses, and lower average test scores. In an effort to ensure that students receive the maximum benefits from their education, schools conduct annual assessments of their campuses' cleanliness, maintenance, and safety. The assessments—which schools perform using the Facility Inspection Tool (FIT)—compare the facilities at each school against Good Repair Standards that state law describes.

### Our review found the following:

- None of the 18 schools we inspected in six school districts throughout the State maintained their facilities in a manner that meets every State standard for good repair. We most commonly assigned *poor* scores to their safety, structures, and interiors. Some of the deficiencies we identified—such as hazardous cleaning chemicals and propane tanks stored in classrooms—posed significant risks to students, and schools corrected those immediately. The deferred maintenance we identified, which included leaky roofs and stained ceiling tiles, may be in part because school districts no longer receive funding specifically dedicated to the maintenance of school facilities. Instead, maintenance costs are one of many competing priorities that school districts must address with their available funding.
- The 18 schools in our review self-reported FIT scores in their school accountability report cards that were often higher than the scores we assigned when we conducted our inspections. County offices of education and school districts—the entities to which state law assigns responsibility for overseeing the condition of the school facilities—have not consistently provided monitoring to ensure that school districts report reliable information.
- The Department of General Services' (DGS) Office of Public School Construction should make certain adjustments to the FIT to increase its effectiveness as an inspection tool. Specifically, because the FIT does not adequately consider the severity of deficiencies and does not account for the existence of multiple deficiencies in the same area, the FIT's scores may not adequately communicate the magnitude of the cleanliness and maintenance concerns at schools. In addition, the FIT does not provide guidance on assessing the specialized classrooms often found in high schools, such as woodshops, automotive classrooms, and agricultural areas.

To address these findings, we have provided recommendations to the Legislature and to DGS. Our recommendations are designed to increase oversight of school facility conditions, provide dedicated funding for school maintenance, and ensure that the FIT provides adequate, accurate feedback on school cleanliness and maintenance.

### **Agency Perspective**

DGS generally agreed with our recommendations. Because we did not make recommendations to the California Department of Education, the school districts, or county offices of education, no written response was required or expected from them; however, we did receive responses from Fresno Unified, Los Angeles Unified, and the Fresno County Office of Education. The Fresno County Office of Education raised concerns about redacted material, and Fresno Unified and Los Angeles Unified agreed in part but raised some concerns with our recommendations.

# Introduction

## Background

In academic year 2023–24, California’s approximately 10,000 public K-12 schools served more than five million students. Ensuring that these schools’ facilities are both safe and suitable for learning is critical to the health and education of the students who attend them. In the past 20 years, research has demonstrated an adverse link between inadequate facility conditions at public schools and student educational outcomes. For example, several studies found that poor cleanliness and maintenance conditions at public schools—such as dirty interior surfaces or old and poorly maintained buildings—correspond with increased rates of absenteeism and illness among students.<sup>1,2</sup> Further, one study found that student absenteeism is more likely to occur at schools with visible mold and building condition problems, noting this association was most apparent in schools in lower socioeconomic districts.<sup>3</sup>

Research has also shown that the condition of public school facilities is linked to students’ academic performance. Specifically, when school facility conditions improve, so do performance outcomes, such as graduation rates. Unfortunately, the inverse is also true. For example, one study in Texas measured student academic performance against the age and condition of high schools. The study concluded that students who attended schools meeting the highest standard for facility conditions—which the study refers to as *excellent*, meaning no major repairs were needed—graduated at higher rates and scored higher on standardized tests than did students who attended schools in need of repair.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows some of the negative outcomes that can be associated with certain types of deficiencies.

## The Williams Case

In 2000, nearly 100 California school children filed a class action lawsuit against the State of California, the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education (CDE), and the California Superintendent of Public Instruction. The lawsuit alleged that these entities failed to meet a constitutional duty to ensure that all public school children have equal access to the basic educational tools they need to learn, including resources and facilities. The case, *Eliezer Williams et al. v. State of California et al. (Williams)* was settled in 2004. The settlement included a package of legislative proposals to ensure, in part, that students would have well-maintained schools.

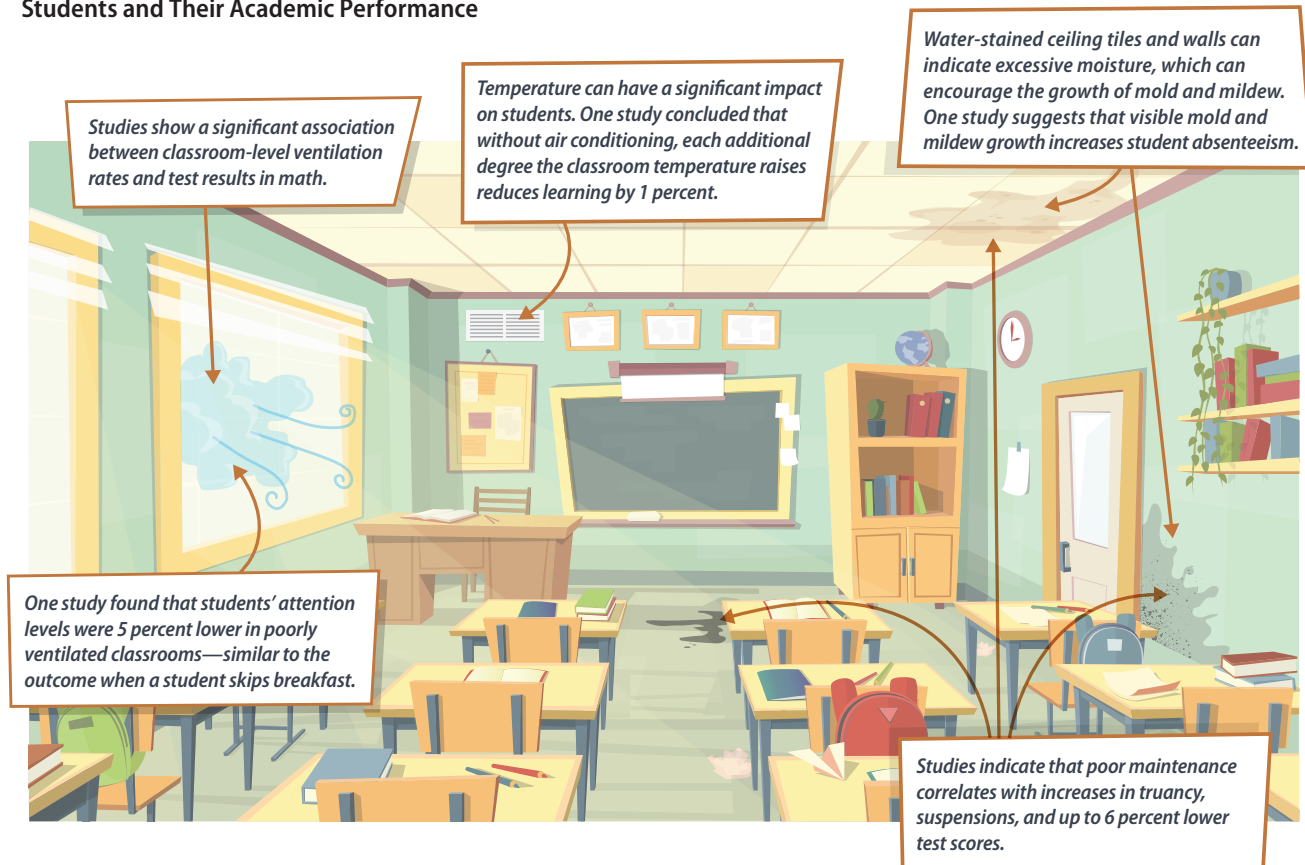
<sup>1</sup> Elinor Simons, et al, “The Impact of School Building Conditions on Student Absenteeism in Upstate New York,” *American Journal of Public Health*, September 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Buckley, et al, “Los Angeles Unified School District School Facilities and Academic Performance,” *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities*, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Boese and John Shaw, “New York State School Facilities and Student Health, Achievement, and Attendance: A Data Analysis Report,” *Healthy Schools Network, Inc.*, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> James Maurice Blincoe, “The Age and Condition of Texas High Schools as Related to Student Academic Achievement,” doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2008.

**Figure 1**  
Poor Classroom Cleanliness and Maintenance Can Negatively Affect Students and Their Academic Performance



Source: Several academic studies on various maintenance and cleanliness deficiencies and the negative effects they can have in a school setting.

Following the *Williams* settlement, the Office of Public School Construction, which is under the authority of the Department of General Services (DGS), developed the Facility Inspection Tool (FIT) to provide a means of assessing the maintenance, cleanliness, and safety of school facilities. State law requires that school districts (districts) use the FIT, or an alternative tool they create which meets the same criteria, to perform such evaluations every year. The districts must publish the results of their annual FIT evaluation of each school in that school's School Accountability Report Card (SARC). We describe the FIT in more detail in the next section.

After the *Williams* settlement, the Legislature appropriated \$800 million in increased funding to address critical facility repairs at certain schools with poor academic performance (*Williams* schools) and increased oversight of *Williams* schools. Specifically, following the *Williams* settlement, the Legislature amended state law to require county superintendents to conduct annual inspections of all *Williams* schools within the districts that their county offices of education oversee. As part of these inspections, the county superintendents must determine the accuracy of the data the schools report on their SARCs regarding the safety,

cleanliness, and adequacy of their facilities, including whether those facilities are in good repair. Finally, the *Williams* settlement required every district to use a uniform complaint process to identify and remedy complaints about emergency or urgent facility-related conditions (*Williams* complaints).

## The FIT

State law requires districts to use the FIT or a similar tool to annually determine the adequacy of school facilities, identify needed maintenance, and ensure that schools are in good repair. State law defines *good repair* and outlines the school facility systems and components that inspectors should consider when assessing school facilities. For a school to meet the Good Repair Standards, the school must be maintained in a manner that assures it is clean, safe, and functional.

The FIT consists of 15 sections that identify the systems and components that an inspection of a school facility must consider. An inspector, who might be a school employee, district employee, or consultant, uses the FIT to evaluate the areas of a school on a section-by-section basis.<sup>5</sup> Examples of FIT sections include *Interior Surfaces*, *Overall Cleanliness*, and *Electrical Systems*. Table 1 describes the 15 FIT sections and shows the eight categories into which they are grouped for SARC reporting. An inspector must use each of the 15 sections to evaluate locations such as classrooms, playgrounds, and restrooms, unless a particular section is not applicable to a location. For example, an inspector would generally not review a tennis court or running track under the *Roofs* section because these locations tend to be uncovered. An inspector might perform reviews at different times throughout the year, such as just after a deep cleaning during a winter break or at the end of a school day, which might affect observed school conditions in that moment.

After evaluating the conditions present in each location, the inspector makes a determination of whether a particular area is in good repair by assigning one of four possible FIT scores. The text box defines these scores. For example, a drinking fountain would be scored *OK* if it was accessible, functioning as intended, and did not have a deficiency, such as mold or excessive staining on the fixtures. An inspector would assign a *deficient* rating for a roof if the roof or its

### FIT Ratings

- **OK:** All statements in the section's Good Repair Standards are true, and there is no indication of a deficiency.
- **Deficient:** One or more statement(s) in the Good Repair Standards for the section is not true, or there is other clear evidence of the need for repair.
- **Extreme Deficiency:** One or more of the extreme deficiencies described in the Good Repair Standards for the section are present; there is a condition that qualifies as an extreme deficiency but is not noted in the Good Repair Standards; or there are one or more deficiencies that meet the definition of an extreme deficiency: a deficiency that is critical to the health and safety of pupils and staff and that, if left unmitigated, could cause severe and immediate injury, illness, or death.
- **Not Applicable:** The Good Repair Standards section (building system or component) is not relevant in the evaluated area.

Source: The FIT.

<sup>5</sup> The FIT does not require that an inspection be conducted by someone with specific skills or abilities.

fixtures, such as gutters, had visible damage. Ratings of *extreme deficiency* require immediate attention and can include gas pipes that are broken or do not appear to be in good working order.

**Table 1**

**The FIT Requires an Inspector to Evaluate School Sites According to 15 Sections Grouped Into SARC Categories**

SARC CATEGORY	FIT SECTION	CRITERIA
<i>Systems</i>	<i>Gas</i>	Gas systems and pipes appear safe, functional, and free of leaks.
	<i>Mechanical Systems (HVAC)</i>	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems as applicable are functional and unobstructed.
	<i>Sewer</i>	Sewer line stoppage is not evident.
<i>Interior</i>	<i>Interior Surfaces</i>	Interior surfaces appear to be clean, safe, and functional.
<i>Cleanliness</i>	<i>Overall Cleanliness</i>	School grounds, buildings, common areas, surfaces, and individual rooms appear to have been cleaned regularly.
	<i>Pest/Vermin Infestation</i>	Pest or vermin infestation are not evident.
<i>Electrical</i>	<i>Electrical</i>	There is no evidence that any portion of the school has a power failure. Electrical systems, components, and equipment appear to be working properly. Lighting appears to be adequate and working properly, including exterior lights.
<i>Restrooms/Fountains</i>	<i>Restrooms</i>	Restrooms in the vicinity of the area appear to be accessible during school hours, clean, functional and in compliance with state law.
	<i>Sinks/Drinking Fountains</i>	Drinking fountains appear to be accessible and functioning as intended.
<i>Safety*</i>	<i>Fire Safety</i>	The fire safety equipment and emergency systems appear to be functioning properly.
	<i>Hazardous Materials</i>	There does not appear to be evidence of hazardous materials that may pose a threat to pupils or staff.
<i>Structural</i>	<i>Structural Damage</i>	There does not appear to be structural damage that has created or could create hazardous or uninhabitable conditions.
	<i>Roofs</i>	Roof systems appear to be functioning properly.
<i>External</i>	<i>Playgrounds/ School Grounds</i>	The playground equipment and school grounds in the vicinity of the area being evaluated appear to be clean, safe, and functional.
	<i>Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences</i>	Conditions that pose a safety and/or security risk are not evident.

Source: The FIT.

\* Figure 2 uses the *Safety* category to illustrate how FIT sections comprise SARC categories.

Using the individual scores for locations throughout the school, the inspector must then assign the school an overall score, which the school publishes in its SARC. Figure 2 shows the process the inspector must follow to determine the school's average FIT score for each section reported in the SARC. The inspector then uses this information to assign the school's overall FIT score—*exemplary*, *good*, *fair*, or *poor*—as the text box describes. For more information about how schools complete these calculations, see Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
Example of Calculation of FIT Score for the SARC Safety Category

### Step One: *After Conducting the Inspection, the Inspector Determines the Total Number of Areas That the Inspector Evaluated*

The inspector counts the evaluated areas—classrooms, and outdoor facilities such as fields and tennis courts.

AREAS EVALUATED  
**32**

### Step Two: *Determine the Number of Areas That Received Each Score*

The inspector then counts the number of areas that received each rating across the 15 sections. In this example, the inspector counts the number of ratings assigned to each area for the *Hazardous Materials* and *Fire Safety* sections and deducts any areas rated as *Not Applicable*.

RATINGS	FIT SECTION A: HAZARDOUS MATERIALS	FIT SECTION B: FIRE SAFETY
OK	17	31
	+	+
Deficient	15	1
	+	+
Extremely Deficient	0	0
	–	–
Not Applicable	0	0
	=	=
Total Number of Areas in Each Section:	32	32

### Step Three: *Determine Section Scores*

The inspector then divides the number of areas with OK ratings by the total number of areas evaluated in each section.

FIT SECTION A:  
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS  
 $17 \div 32 = 53$  percent

FIT SECTION B:  
FIRE SAFETY  
 $31 \div 32 = 97$  percent

### Step Four: *Determine the SARC Category's Score\**

The inspector combines the scores for the sections included in the category. In this example, the inspector is calculating the score for the *Safety* category, which includes the *Hazardous Materials* and *Fire Safety* sections.

$$(\text{Section A Score} + \text{Section B Score}) \div \text{Number of Sections} =$$

$$(0.53 + 0.97) \div 2 = 0.75$$

The FIT classifies category scores from 75% to 89.99% as *fair*.

**Category Score = 75%, Fair**

Source: State Auditor.

\* Table 1 shows how the FIT sections comprise SARC categories.

## Funding for School Cleanliness and Maintenance

### SARC Score

- **Exemplary (99-100 percent):** The school meets most or all of the Good Repair Standards. Deficiencies noted, if any, are not significant and/or affect a very small area of the school.
- **Good (90-98.99 percent):** The school is maintained in good repair with a number of noncritical deficiencies noted. These deficiencies are isolated, may be the result of minor wear and tear, and/or are in the process of being mitigated.
- **Fair (75-89.99 percent):** The school is not in good repair. Some deficiencies noted are critical and/or widespread. Repairs and/or additional maintenance are necessary in several areas of the school site.
- **Poor (under 75 percent):** The school facilities are in poor condition. Deficiencies of various degrees have been noted throughout the site. Major repairs and maintenance are necessary throughout the campus.

Source: The FIT.

A school's janitorial services and maintenance services differ significantly in terms of practice, purpose, and in some circumstances, funding sources. Janitorial services include daily cleaning tasks, such as emptying trash cans, vacuuming classrooms, and cleaning restrooms. In contrast, maintenance services focus on solving and preventing problems, such as replacing deteriorating wood or filling in potholes in the school parking lot. Districts pay for janitorial staff salaries and supplies through their general funds. However, the School Facility Program (facilities program) may provide funding for school facility projects.<sup>6</sup>

Funded largely by \$42 billion in voter-approved bonds, the facilities program assists districts with funding facility modernization and alteration. The State Allocation Board (Allocation Board)—which the Office of Public School Construction staffs—is responsible for the distribution of grant funds under the facilities program. Once the Allocation Board determines that a school district is eligible,

the district may obtain funding for improvements such as modernization projects. These projects can include replacing a school's roof or other major infrastructure. However, school districts must meet a variety of eligibility requirements before receiving funding from the facilities program. For example, modernization projects require districts to provide 40 percent of the necessary funding themselves, with certain exceptions for demonstrated financial hardship. As of 2024, the facilities program had about \$370 million available.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, factors such as local property taxes, voters' willingness to approve bonds, and a district's ability to successfully complete the application process for the facilities program significantly influence the funding available to the district. For example, districts that participate in the facilities program must create a restricted fund for maintenance. State law generally requires that districts deposit a minimum of 3 percent of their total general fund expenditures into this fund each fiscal year for 20 years after their receipt of facilities program funds. Districts use the funds they deposit into this restricted account to make necessary repairs to projects that were funded in part through the facilities program and to ensure that projects funded by the facilities fund are maintained in good repair at all times.

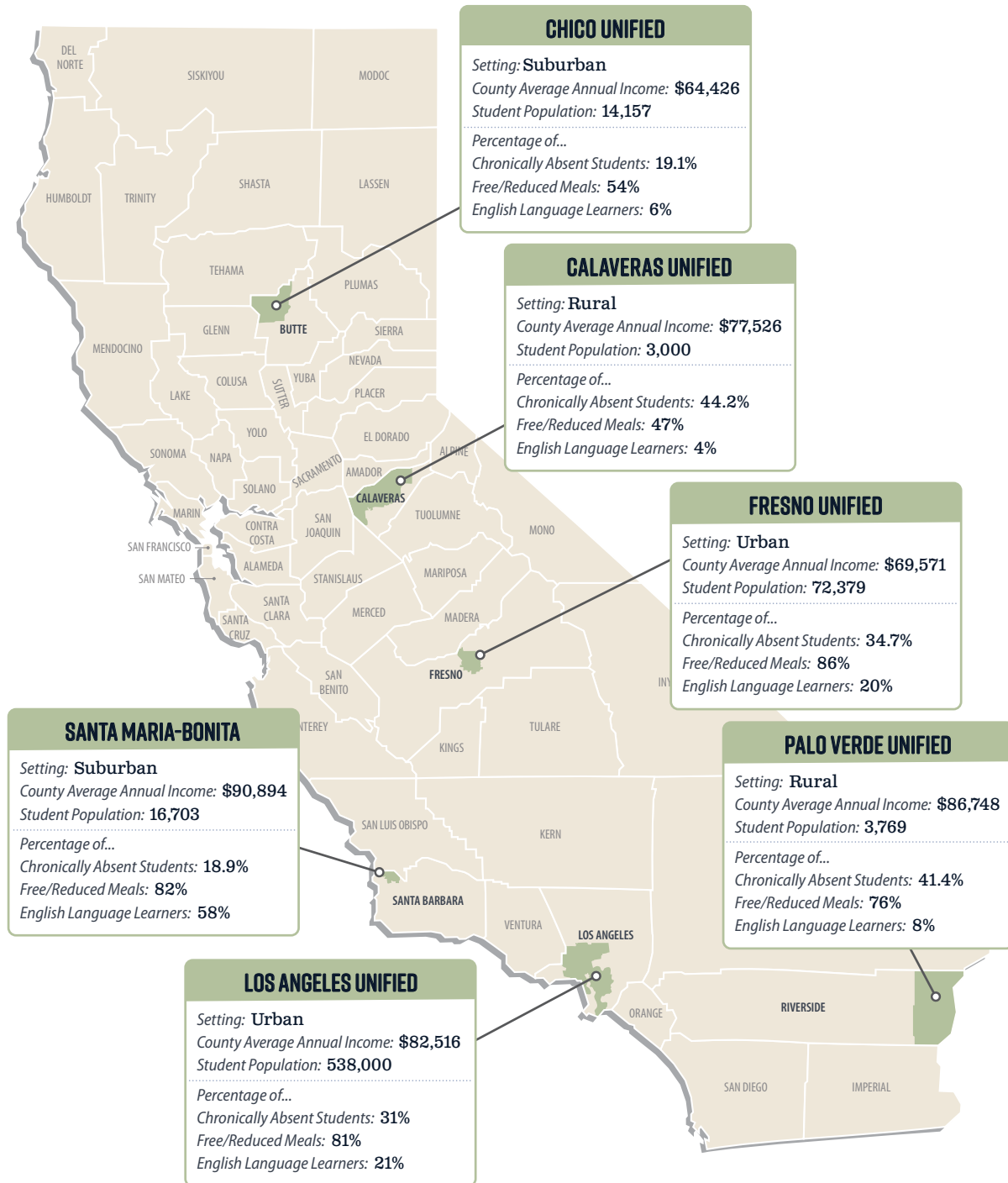
<sup>6</sup> The Leroy F. Greene School Facilities Act of 1998 established funding for the facilities program.

School districts may create additional restricted funds, such as a deferred maintenance account. State law allows the governing board of a district to establish such a fund for major repair or replacement of school facilities' systems and components, such as plumbing, heating, and roofing.

### **Districts Selected for This Audit**

We considered a wide range of factors when selecting the districts we reviewed for this audit. Using data from CDE, the U.S. Census, and reviewed SARCs, we selected districts with varying enrollment levels, absence rates, and population socioeconomic statuses. We also considered factors such as average county incomes, student demographics, the percentages of students enrolled in free or reduced meals, and geographic locations. We ultimately selected the following six districts: Calaveras Unified School District (Calaveras Unified), Chico Unified School District (Chico Unified), Fresno Unified School District (Fresno Unified), Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles Unified), Palo Verde Unified School District (Palo Verde Unified), and Santa Maria-Bonita School District (Santa Maria-Bonita). Figure 3 provides information related to each of our selected districts. We inspected three schools per district, for a total of 18 inspections.

**Figure 3**  
**Map and Details for Each Selected District**



Source: CDE and U.S. census data.

## The School Districts We Reviewed Did Not Comply With Facility Requirements, Risking Student Learning and Safety

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### Key Points

- All 18 schools we reviewed across California failed to meet the Good Repair Standards set by state law. Our inspections most commonly assigned these 18 schools *poor* or *fair* scores in the *Safety* and *Interior* categories. Many of the deficiencies we identified were the result of deferred maintenance.
- Since fiscal year 2013–14, the State has not allocated districts funding specifically for the maintenance of school facilities. Instead, maintenance costs compete with other priorities, such as instruction or special education, that districts must align with the funding they receive through the State's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and from local sources.

### Our Selected Districts Face a Variety of Maintenance, Safety, and Cleanliness Challenges

State law requires districts to assess the safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities, including identifying any maintenance necessary to ensure the facilities are in good repair. Further, under state law, a district's governing board or superintendent is responsible for visiting schools and carefully examining school needs and conditions. Nonetheless, as Table 2 demonstrates, all 18 schools we inspected failed to meet various elements of the Good Repair Standards in state law.

Our inspections most commonly assigned schools *poor* or *fair* scores to areas involving the FIT's *Safety* and *Interior* categories. Some of these scores resulted from general maintenance and cleanliness problems. However, other low scores resulted from significant safety deficiencies, such as the presence of unsecured hazardous materials in classrooms. Figure 4 shows the inspection process we followed at each school to determine the scores we assigned.

The causes of these deficiencies varied. For example, districts told us that they have policies against having unsecured hazardous materials in classrooms. They explained that in many cases, teachers brought in the hazardous materials we observed—such as cleaning wipes and bug spray. However, some of the hazardous materials we found in the classrooms, including industrial-strength cleaners, were district-issued. We observed during reinspections that after we brought our observations to the districts' attention, they corrected the deficiencies. Thus, we believe the core cause of these types of deficiencies is likely neither a lack of policies nor a lack of enforcement of those policies; rather, it is inadequate oversight. In other words, the districts are not addressing problems like hazardous materials in the classrooms because they are not performing the oversight necessary to know those problems exist.

**Table 2****Each of the School Districts We Inspected Had Multiple Schools That Did Not Meet the Good Repair Standards**

FIT/SARC CATEGORY	CALAVERAS UNIFIED	FRESNO UNIFIED	SANTA MARIA-BONITA	CHICO UNIFIED	PALO VERDE UNIFIED	LOS ANGELES UNIFIED
<i>Systems</i>						XX
<i>Interior</i>	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
<i>Cleanliness</i>				X		XX
<i>Electrical</i>	XXX	XX	XX	XXX		XX
<i>Restrooms/Fountains</i>	XXX	X	X	XX	X	XXX
<i>Safety</i>	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
<i>Structural</i>	XXX			XXX		XX
<i>External</i>	XXX			XX	XX	XX
<b>Total Number of Fair and Poor Scores</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>

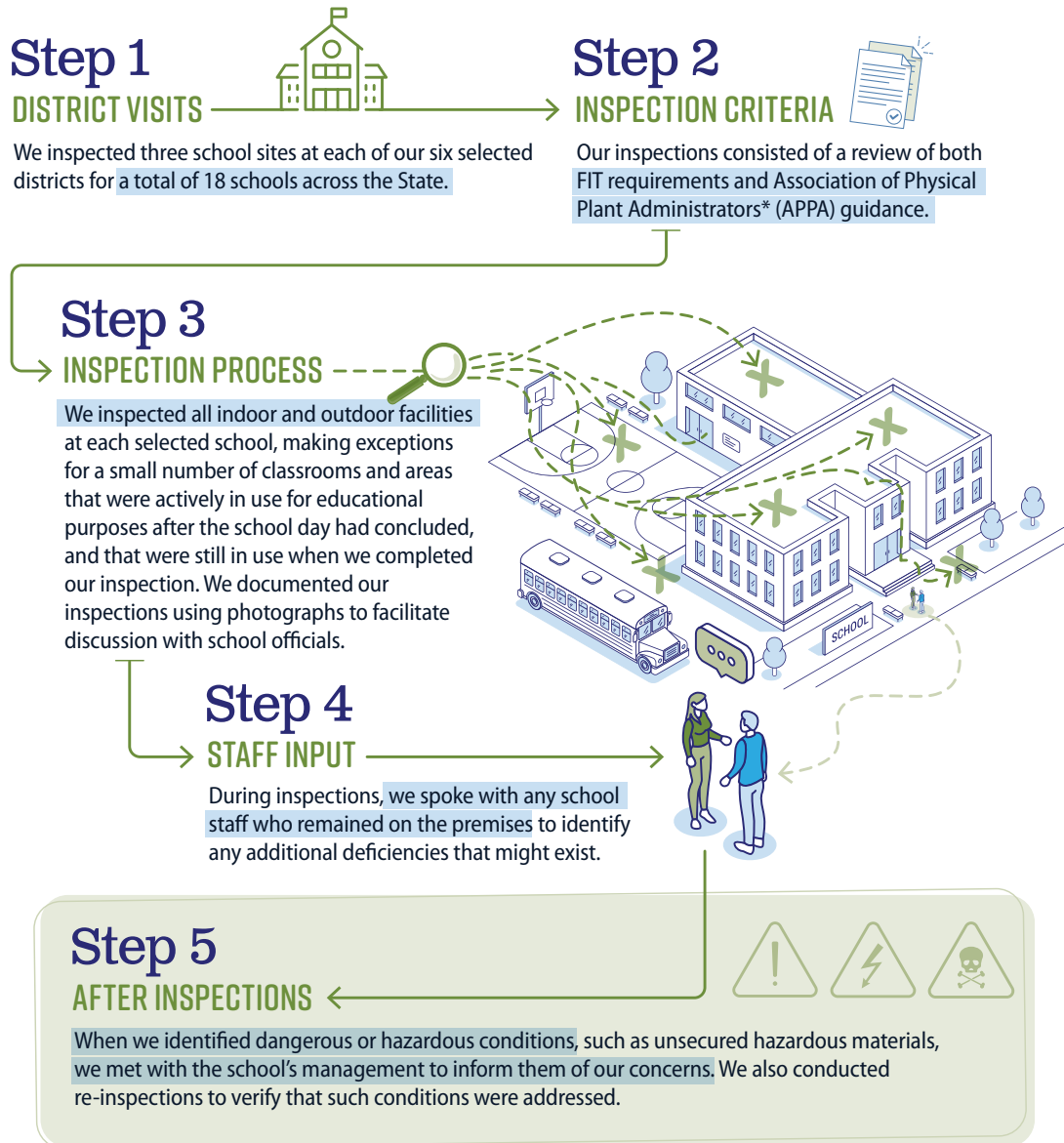
Source: State Auditor inspection of selected school sites.

Note: Each X represents one school that we inspected and rated as *fair* or *poor* in the related category. We inspected three schools in each district. Refer to Table 1 for a description of each of the eight categories, and consult Appendix A for each school's full scorecard.

In contrast, the districts explained that the overarching cause of the larger maintenance problems we identified is a lack of funding. Many of the deficiencies we observed will likely require significant time, investment, and specialized work to correct, which could be costly. For example, we noted 11 schools with nonfunctioning drinking fountains, which could require plumbing work. In addition, 14 of the schools we visited had evident roof problems that will likely require repair or replacement, and we observed stained ceiling tiles at all 18 schools, suggesting the possible need for even more roof work. Even a seemingly easy deficiency to fix, like daisy-chained power strips, may require significant expense to rectify: if a school's computer room does not have adequate power receptacles, that school will likely need to upgrade its electrical system.

The existence of maintenance and safety deficiencies increases risks to students and staff and can negatively affect educational outcomes. Throughout the pages that follow, we provide examples of the kinds of deficiencies that led to our assigning low scores to the schools we reviewed. Appendix A includes the school-reported scores on the SARC and the generally lower scores we calculated according to our own observations, for each of the 18 schools we visited.

**Figure 4**  
Our Office Developed a School Site Inspection Process to Determine FIT Scores



Source: State Auditor.

\* Refer to the section beginning on page 45 for more detail regarding the APPA.

### Each of the 18 Schools We Inspected Had Safety Deficiencies

To satisfy the Good Repair Standards of the FIT, schools must properly store hazardous materials that may pose a threat to students or staff in locked containers or in areas that students cannot access. Table 3 breaks down the *Safety* scores for the schools we inspected. Failure to store hazardous materials as required results in a *deficiency* or an *extreme deficiency*, depending on the severity of the risk. For example, improperly stored hazardous chemicals and flammable materials could indicate an extreme deficiency. A deficiency is warranted when, for example, a school improperly stores aerosols or pesticides.

**Table 3**

**Our Office Assigned a FIT Safety Score for Each School and Compared It to the School's Score**

SAFETY CATEGORY (COMPOSED OF FIRE SAFETY AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SECTIONS)		
SCHOOL	SCORE FROM SCHOOL	SCORE FROM STATE AUDITOR
Jenny Lind Elementary School	Good	Poor
Toyon Middle School	Fair	Poor
Calaveras High School	Fair	Poor
Calwa Elementary School	Good	Poor
Edison Computech Middle School	Good	Fair
Fresno High School	Good	Poor
Adam Elementary School	Good	Fair
Rice Elementary School	Good	Fair
Fesler Junior High School	Good	Fair
Citrus Elementary School	Good	Poor
Chico Junior High School	Good	Poor
Pleasant Valley High School	Good	Poor
Ruth Brown Elementary School	Good	Poor
Margaret White Elementary School	Good	Poor
Palo Verde High School	Good	Poor
Grape Street Elementary School	Good	Poor
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	Good	Poor
Manual Arts High School	Good	Poor

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

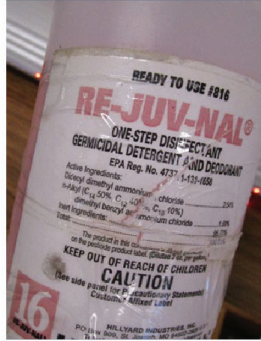
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

Of the 983 rooms we reviewed across the 18 schools, 359 had hazardous materials stored in an unsecured manner. The hazardous materials we identified included chemicals such as cleaning supplies, as Figure 5 shows. We also observed insect poisons. In one example, Palo Verde Unified had distributed a particular hazardous cleaning product to all of the schools we inspected, and that product was present in 51 classrooms. According to the manufacturer, contact with this cleaning product can cause irreparable eye damage, skin corrosion, and other serious conditions. When we informed the district of this hazard, it immediately removed the cleaning product, and it was not present upon a reinspection.

**Figure 5**

**Unsecured Hazardous Materials Were a Significant Source of Deficiencies at Each of the Schools**



We observed cleaning solutions like this one in classrooms throughout a district. The Material Safety Data Sheet for this product indicates that it is flammable and that contact with it causes irreversible eye damage and skin burns.



This cleaning solution, seen here in an elementary school, was found throughout classrooms in another district. It can cause serious skin corrosion and eye damage.



These canisters of pressurized gas were unsecured in an auto shop classroom at a high school. Unsecured pressurized canisters can become dangerous projectiles if the valve is dislodged.



Ajax cleaning powder, cleaning chemicals, and an unlabeled spray bottle were in an elementary school classroom. Such supplies can cause chemical burns as well as skin and lung irritation.



This cleaning solution was in a middle school classroom. The Material Safety Data Sheet indicates that it causes serious eye irritation, and may cause respiratory irritation.



Aerosol sprays were also found in numerous classrooms across all districts. The Material Safety Data Sheet for this product indicates that it is flammable and can irritate the lungs and skin.

Source: Auditor observation at Calaveras Unified, Palo Verde Unified, and Los Angeles Unified.

Note: Deficiencies in this FIT section, such as those used as examples above, included hazardous supplies that we found in unlocked areas and containers.

Although the districts consistently corrected the safety hazards we identified, their presence in so many classrooms raises concerns about what may be occurring at other schools throughout the State. For example, staff at several of the districts we reviewed informed us that teachers bring in their own cleaning supplies, despite being directed not to do so. Hazardous chemicals require careful and knowledgeable use, and storing them in an unsecured manner increases the risk of health consequences to students. When elementary school students, for example, have

access to toxic cleaners—as they did at all of the eight elementary schools we reviewed—the risk to their safety requires immediate action. The photo shows an example of a hazardous material we observed.

***We observed this cleaning chemical in a kindergarten classroom at Ruth Brown Elementary School and in other classrooms throughout Palo Verde Unified.***



Source: Auditor observation.

In addition, researchers have determined that health and safety risks often correlate with weaker academic performance. The 21st Century School Fund measured the relationship between Los Angeles Unified school sites' compliance with the district's health and safety regulations and those sites' academic performance.<sup>7</sup> The study concluded that schools with the highest levels of compliance had 36 percent higher test scores than schools at the lower end of the compliance spectrum. The FIT's health and safety standards overlap with the health and safety regulations measured in this study.

In addition to unsecured chemical hazards, we also identified fire safety deficiencies at all of the schools we inspected. The risks arising from fire safety deficiencies are clear: they may cause fires or limit the ability to respond effectively to fire-related emergencies. Not only can fire and smoke cause bodily harm, they can also damage facilities to such a degree that students' educations are negatively affected.

***We observed this fire extinguisher locked behind glass but with no method to readily access it in a classroom in Jenny Lind Elementary School.***



Source: Auditor observation.

Despite the importance of fire safety, deficiencies contributed to *poor* scores for Safety at 14 of the 18 schools we reviewed. For instance, four schools—one each in Calaveras Unified, Chico Unified, Palo Verde Unified, and Los Angeles Unified—had barbeques and propane tanks located inside of classrooms. According to state regulations, schools should store propane tanks—which are filled with flammable gas—in a location away from external heat sources and combustible materials, such as, in locked storage units outdoors, as retailers do. Moreover, these tanks should be protected from tampering by unauthorized persons.

Our inspections of the 18 schools also identified over 120 instances of obstructed fire extinguishers, missing fire extinguishers, and fire extinguishers without the gauges necessary to ensure that they are properly charged. The photo provides an example of an obstructed extinguisher. The number of problems we identified with fire extinguishers at the schools we inspected raises concerns about the possible existence of similar problems at schools statewide.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Buckley, et al, "Los Angeles Unified School District School Facilities and Academic Performance," *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities*, 2004.

## Many of the Schools We Inspected Had Roof Deficiencies

Failing roofs can lead to a cascade of negative consequences. For example, roof leaks can cause water damage, mold, and mildew, all of which can require expensive remediation. Further, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has concluded that mold and mildew can negatively affect students' health, which may in turn increase their absences and lower their test scores. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the *Structural* scores we assigned to the schools we inspected.

**Table 4**  
Our Office Assigned a FIT *Structural* Score for Each School and Compared It to the School's Score

STRUCTURAL CATEGORY (COMPOSED OF STRUCTURAL DAMAGE AND ROOFS SECTIONS)		
SCHOOL	SCORE FROM SCHOOL	SCORE FROM STATE AUDITOR
Jenny Lind Elementary School	Good	Poor
Toyon Middle School	Good	Poor
Calaveras High School	Good	Poor
Calwa Elementary School	Good	Good
Edison Computech Middle School	Good	Good
Fresno High School	Good	Good
Adam Elementary School	Good	Good
Rice Elementary School	Good	Good
Fesler Junior High School	Good	Good
Citrus Elementary School	Good	Fair
Chico Junior High School	Good	Poor
Pleasant Valley High School	Good	Fair
Ruth Brown Elementary School	Good	Good
Margaret White Elementary School	Good	Good
Palo Verde High School	Good	Good
Grape Street Elementary School	Poor	Poor
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	Good	Fair
Manual Arts High School	Good	Good

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

Nonetheless, we noted deficiencies with the roofs at 14 of the schools we visited. Those deficiencies, when sufficiently frequent, contributed to lower scores for a number of schools in the *Structural* category, as noted in Table 4. Figure 6 provides

***We observed stained ceiling tiles like these in a classroom at Citrus Elementary School. Such stains can indicate roof problems.***



Source: Auditor observation.

examples of some of these deficiencies. According to the FIT, roofs, gutters, and downspouts should appear to be functioning properly and not have visible damage. Many classrooms we inspected had water-damaged ceiling tiles that school staff told us could be the result of leaking roofs. The photo provides an example. Further, four schools, including Calaveras High School, had roofs that were visibly sparkling, indicating that the asphalt granules had worn off and that the roofs needed to be replaced. Asphalt granules are necessary to protect the watertight components of a shingle, and a lack of granules means that the roof is at the end of its life. School officials generally indicated that they were aware that the roofs required replacement but that sufficient funding was unavailable to address such major maintenance items.

### Each of the 18 Schools We Inspected Had Interior Surface Deficiencies

#### Interior Surface Deficiencies, According to the FIT Guidebook

##### Ceilings

- Cracks, tears, holes, or water damage.
- Missing, damaged, loose, or stained ceiling tiles.
- Mildew or visible mold.

##### Walls

- Cracks, tears, holes, or water damage.
- Missing, damaged, or loose wall tiles.
- Damaged plaster or paint.

##### Flooring

- Cracks, tears, holes, or water damage.
- Missing, damaged, or loose floor tiles.
- Damaged or stained carpets.

Source: *The FIT Guidebook*, California Coalition For Adequate School Housing, October 2017.

The FIT specifies that to satisfy the relevant Good Repair Standards, interior surfaces such as floors, ceilings, and window casings must appear clean, safe, and functional. Examples of deficiencies include torn or worn carpeting, water damage, and tears in walls, as the text box describes. These types of damaged interior surfaces can increase risk by exposing students and staff to mold and by creating tripping hazards, among other concerns. Studies have shown that attending schools with poorly maintained facilities, such as deteriorated interior surfaces, can negatively affect students' educational outcomes. All 18 schools we inspected had interior surface deficiencies that resulted in our assigning them a *poor* score in that category and section, as Table 5 shows.

Further, many classrooms had multiple deficiencies in the *Interior Surfaces* category. For example, 34 of 48 classrooms we inspected at Palo Verde High School in Palo Verde Unified had stained or damaged ceiling tiles, damaged walls, damaged floors, or a combination of these. Similarly, Citrus Elementary School in Chico

Unified had 18 classrooms with multiple *Interior* deficiencies, such as stained or moldy ceiling tiles and damaged linoleum floors. Figure 7 provides examples of these types of deficiencies. Schools generally reported that such deficiencies were the result of a lack of adequate funding to perform needed maintenance.

**Figure 6**

The Schools We Inspected Had Numerous Deficiencies in the Roof Section of the FIT



Rotting wooden cladding pictured at the junior high school below represents a typical deficiency identified during inspections.



The roof at a high school below had a sparkly appearance indicating that it had lost a significant percentage of its asphalt granules and was at the end of its service life.



Source: Auditor observation at Calaveras Unified and Chico Unified.

**Table 5****Our Office Assigned a FIT *Interior* Score for Each School and Compared It to the School's Score**

<b>INTERIOR CATEGORY</b> (COMPOSED OF INTERIOR SURFACES SECTION)		
<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>SCORE FROM SCHOOL</b>	<b>SCORE FROM STATE AUDITOR</b>
Jenny Lind Elementary School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Toyon Middle School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Calaveras High School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Calwa Elementary School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Edison Computech Middle School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Fresno High School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Adam Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Rice Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Fesler Junior High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Citrus Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Chico Junior High School	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Pleasant Valley High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Ruth Brown Elementary School	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Margaret White Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Palo Verde High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Grape Street Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Manual Arts High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent**Three of the 18 Schools We Inspected Had Cleanliness Deficiencies That Resulted in *Fair* or *Poor* Scores**

Finally, a lack of cleanliness in schools can lead to increased absenteeism. In fact, research has found that students are more likely to attend schools that meet certain staffing standards regarding the number of custodians per square foot.<sup>8</sup> The FIT states

<sup>8</sup> David Branham, "The Wise Man Builds His House Upon the Rock: The Effects of Inadequate School Building Infrastructure on Student Attendance," *Social Science Quarterly*, 2004.

that school grounds and buildings should appear to have been cleaned regularly, with minimal buildup of dirt and no odors. Table 6 compares our observation of school cleanliness with schools' reported scores.

**Figure 7**

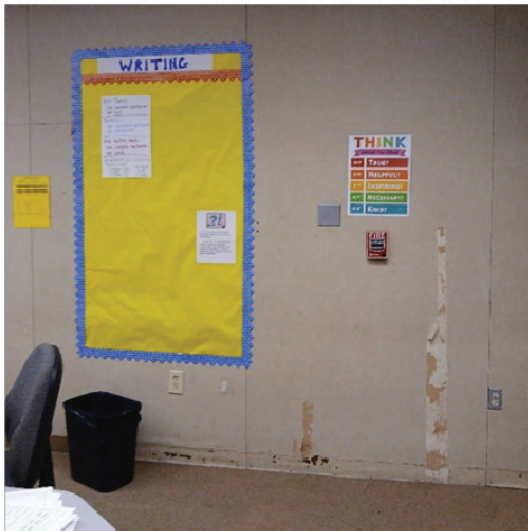
We Assigned *Poor* Ratings for the *Interior* Category at Each of the Schools We Inspected



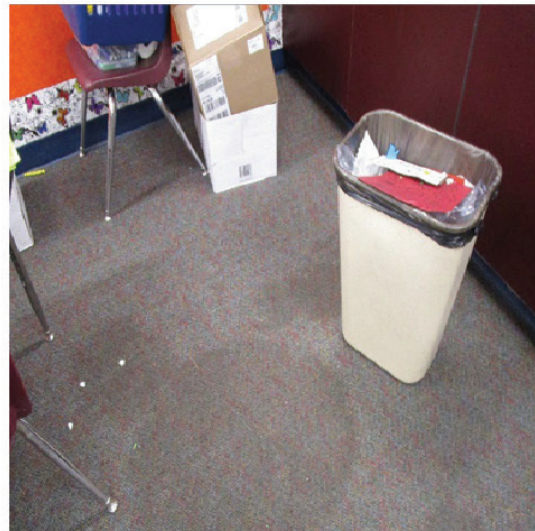
This classroom contained a collapsed ceiling tile, with exposed insulation, and visible dampness.



Large or numerous incidences of ceiling staining and damage were common deficiencies.



Torn wallpaper, missing baseboards, and a stained carpet are visible in this classroom.



Stained carpet such as this example, located in an elementary classroom in Palo Verde Unified, were another common deficiency.

Source: Auditor observation at Calaveras Unified and Palo Verde Unified.

**Table 6**

Our Office Assigned a FIT *Cleanliness* Score for Each School and Compared It to the School's Score

CLEANLINESS CATEGORY (COMPOSED OF OVERALL CLEANLINESS AND PESTS/VERMIN INFESTATIONS SECTIONS)		
SCHOOL	SCORE FROM SCHOOL	SCORE FROM STATE AUDITOR
Jenny Lind Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Toyon Middle School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Calaveras High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Calwa Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Edison Computech Middle School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Fresno High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Adam Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Rice Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Fesler Junior High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Citrus Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Chico Junior High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>
Pleasant Valley High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Ruth Brown Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Margaret White Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Palo Verde High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Grape Street Elementary School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>
Manual Arts High School	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

Note: The *Cleanliness* category refers to whether surfaces are dirty, whereas the *Interior* category, shown in Table 5, generally refers to whether surfaces are broken or otherwise in poor repair. Cracked walls would be noted in the *Interior* category.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

However, we assigned *fair* or *poor* scores in *Cleanliness* to three of the schools that we inspected: Chico Junior High School in Chico Unified, Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School and Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles Unified, as Table 6 details. In each of these three schools, our inspection identified numerous deficiencies. For example, 57 of the classrooms we inspected at Manual Arts High School had grime and dust buildup on windowsills, baseboards, and floors. Some walls also appeared to be visibly dirty. Similarly, Chico Junior High School had grimy baseboards and visibly dirty exterior walls. Figure 8 provides examples of the deficiencies we noted at Manual Arts High School.

**Figure 8**

Manual Arts High School Exhibited Deficiencies in Its FIT *Cleanliness* Category



Above, dirty walls, baseboards, and floors at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles Unified.



Above, a typical stained floor at Manual Arts High School.

Source: Auditor observation of Manual Arts High School.

We observed custodians cleaning at all three school sites. However, the cleaning deficiencies appeared long-standing in nature: for example, we found grime that was difficult to remove manually. School leadership at Manual Arts High School indicated that even though staff cleaned the school over the summer, some areas will look dirty because the school is old. The principal at Chico Junior High School noted that his leadership team pressure-washes the school exterior regularly but that the school's layout—consisting of dirt patches next to walkways—means that the exterior surfaces are often visibly dirty again within days. Both of these are logical rationales for the observed deficiencies. Nevertheless, the conditions are not clean.

In addition, we determined that Manual Arts High School and Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School in Los Angeles Unified—along with Chico Junior High School and Pleasant Valley High School in Chico Unified—have not maintained sufficient custodial staffing to meet federal recommendations. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—a federal agency that is part of the U.S. Department of Education—publishes cleaning standards, including custodial staffing benchmarks, in their best practice guidelines for school facilities. The NCES estimates that one custodian should be able to clean from 19,000 to 25,000 square feet per eight-hour shift while maintaining a standard that will ensure the health and comfort of students and staff. Our analysis indicates that the four schools we list above have assigned custodians to clean more than 25,000 square feet since academic year 2014–15, as Table 7 shows. Chico Unified staff noted that the custodial staffing records for our selected schools do not include substitute or roving custodians, which the district assigns to schools temporarily and on an as-needed basis. However, despite these staffing ratios, we found only one of the four schools to be *poor* in the *Cleanliness* category.

Calaveras Unified, Fresno Unified, Palo Verde Unified, and Santa Maria-Bonita generally assigned their custodians areas to clean that fell within NCES’s best practices. Specifically, since academic year 2014–15, four of the 15 selected schools with data back to academic year 2014–15 increased the square footage they assigned per custodian, four schools did not change the assigned square footage, and seven decreased it. Perhaps as an effect of the current square footage assignments, very few of the schools we reviewed exhibited cleanliness problems. We provide additional information on custodial staffing levels in the Other Areas We Reviewed section of this report.

### **Under the LCFF, School Maintenance Competes With Other Priorities for Funding**

The competing priorities schools face when allocating their resources, in part because of the elimination of a dedicated funding stream for maintenance, have likely contributed to the maintenance deficiencies we observed. A funding stream dedicated to a particular purpose is called *categorical funding*. For example, before fiscal year 2013–14, schools received *deferred maintenance* funding from the State, which provided \$313 million to schools in fiscal year 2012–13. Indeed, school districts told us that maintenance often depends on the availability of funds. Since fiscal year 2013–14, school districts have received state resources through the LCFF. School districts receive LCFF resources through a formula that is based on average daily attendance in each grade, and that formula includes additional funding to support students who are English language learners, eligible for free or reduced price meals, or who are foster youth. According to the Brookings Institute, the LCFF sought to increase equity, efficiency, and flexibility in school funding by replacing categorical funding streams—that also included complicated formulas and spending restrictions—with unrestricted state aid that districts can use according to local needs and priorities.

**Table 7**

**Schools and Districts With a Lower Ratio of Square Feet per Custodian Tended to Have Higher FIT *Cleanliness* Scores**

Square Feet Per Full-Time Custodian											
DISTRICT / SCHOOL	FIT CLEANLINESS SCORE*	ACADEMIC YEAR									OVERALL CHANGE
		2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	
Calaveras Unified†											
Jenny Lind Elementary School	Good	–	–	–	11,300	11,300	12,556	22,600	11,895	15,067	↑ 3,767
Toyon Middle School	Good	–	–	–	21,748	18,123	13,592	21,748	15,534	21,748	0
Calaveras High School	Good	–	–	–	17,858	28,197	20,606	29,764	24,352	12,756	↓ 5,102
Fresno Unified											
Calwa Elementary School	Good	18,887	16,188	16,188	16,188	16,188	16,188	16,737	16,737	16,737	↓ 2,150
Edison Computech Middle School	Good	18,561	19,001	19,001	19,001	19,001	19,001	19,001	19,241	19,241	↑ 680
Fresno High School	Good	19,839	18,490	18,490	18,490	18,490	18,490	19,141	20,260	18,927	↓ 912
Santa Maria-Bonita											
Adam Elementary School	Good	13,170	13,170	13,170	13,170	13,170	13,170	13,170	17,560	17,560	↑ 4,390
Rice Elementary School	Good	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	18,734	0
Fesler Junior High School	Good	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	18,407	0
Chico Unified											
Citrus Elementary School	Good	19,771	19,771	19,771	19,771	19,771	39,541	39,541	19,531	19,531	↓ 240
Chico Junior High School	Fair	55,250	39,597	39,597	11,8791	39,597	39,597	39,597	59,395	39,597	↓ 15,653
Pleasant Valley High School	Good	54,411	38,865	38,865	34,007	39,025	39,025	39,025	36,222	41,925	↓ 12,486
Palo Verde Unified											
Margaret White Elementary School	Good	12,741	12,741	12,741	15,574	14,449	14,449	14,449	13,523	12,667	↓ 74
Ruth Brown Elementary School	Good	11,733	11,733	11,733	15,195	14,097	14,097	14,097	13,194	12,359	↑ 626
Palo Verde High School	Good	25,289	25,289	25,289	25,289	23,482	23,482	23,482	21,917	20,547	↓ 4,742
Los Angeles Unified											
Grape Street Elementary School	Good	19,097	19,097	19,097	28,646	28,646	28,646	28,646	19,097	19,097	0
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	Fair	25,143	30,172	25,143	25,143	25,143	25,143	30,172	30,172	30,172	↑ 5,029
Manual Arts High School	Poor	30,166	33,936	38,784	38,784	38,784	38,784	30,166	30,166	30,166	0

Source: Auditor observation, square footage documentation, and janitorial staffing documentation from selected districts.

Note: Amounts in red font indicate that the school exceeded 25,000 square feet per full-time custodian. The NCES estimates that one custodian should be able to clean from 19,000 to 25,000 square feet per eight-hour shift while maintaining a standard that will ensure the health and comfort of students and staff.

\* All scores shown in the FIT *Cleanliness* score column are our own based on the inspections we conducted in spring 2024.

† Calaveras Unified staff explained that the district did not maintain relevant information before academic year 2017–18 and it could not provide information for academic years 2014–15 through 2016–17.

However, the LCFF does not include funding earmarked for building maintenance in its formula, and state funding for maintenance outside of the LCFF is minimal. As noted above, the LCFF is based on attendance and certain characteristics of students in districts; it does not include factors associated with facilities. Further, funds dispersed through the LCFF comprise the majority of funds that districts receive. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the State's funding constitutes the majority of funding for schools, more than 60 percent in recent years. The remainder comes primarily from local sources. Among the six districts we visited, LCFF accounted for between 50 and 85 percent of the districts' budgets.

We found several other opportunities for maintenance funding, but they had significant limitations on both the use of funds and the amount of funding available. One such program is the California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Efficiency (CalSHAPE) Program. Funded with proceeds from California's large electric and gas investor-owned utilities, the program is available to local education agencies throughout the State who seek to assess, maintain, and upgrade their ventilation and plumbing systems. Unfortunately, these funds would only be applicable to one of the eight facilities categories reported in the SARC: the *Systems* category. Further, the program paused accepting applications after July 2024, citing concerns over funding availability and project completion timelines because all unused funds must be returned to the utilities by December of 2026. We found that 15 of the 18 schools we reviewed—all the schools we reviewed except for those in Los Angeles Unified—were awarded a total of more than \$3 million in funding for plumbing or ventilation from the program, as of the July 2024 award list.

Another program is the California Energy Commission's (CEC) Energy Conservation Assistance Act-Educational Subaccount (ECAA-Ed) Zero-Interest Loan Program. Also available to local education entities across the State, ECAA-Ed funds could apply to a limited selection of SARC maintenance categories: the *Systems* and *Electrical* categories, particularly to upgrade lighting, heating, and ventilation systems. ECAA-Ed funds are composed of revolving loan funds, meaning they are replenished as borrowers repay them. CEC notes that the program has been oversubscribed, and because it does not have dispersible funds until it receives loan repayments, CEC is placing all new applications on a waiting list. Of the districts we reviewed, only Chico Unified received funds from this program in the last decade.

Finally, school districts and the State can and have proposed bonds for voter approval that may provide funding for school facilities. For example, in 2016 voters in Fresno County approved \$225 million in bonds for improving educational and support facilities within Fresno Unified. In November, California voters supported a measure (Proposition 2) to raise \$10 billion in bond funds for school and community college classroom upgrades, including \$4 billion for the renovation of existing buildings and \$3.3 billion for new construction. This ballot measure—for which final results are expected to be certified in December—is in line with a 2022 State Auditor report that estimated schools would need at least \$7.4 billion to meet school district modernization funding requests through 2027 alone, and modernization does not address all elements to keep a school in good repair.<sup>9</sup> Further, according

<sup>9</sup> Report 2021-115, *School Facilities Program: California Needs Additional Funding and a More Equitable Approach for Modernizing Its School Facilities*, January 2022.

to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), the measure requires school districts to provide between 35 and 45 percent of the funding for construction and renovation. Thus, school districts without the funding to set aside for these projects could be at a disadvantage.

The six school districts we reviewed spent significantly different amounts on custodial staff and maintenance. For all school districts that receive specific state funds related to the construction, modernization, reconstruction, alteration of, or addition to school buildings, state law requires those districts to set aside 3 percent of their general fund expenditures each year for maintenance. All six districts reported meeting that requirement. All six districts also stated that 3 percent was not sufficient to cover their maintenance costs. Further, during the period we reviewed—fiscal years 2021–22 and 2022–23—five of the districts increased their spending for the budget category “physical plant,” which represents the activities necessary to maintain and operate the facilities. The increases for Calaveras Unified, Chico Unified, and Los Angeles Unified ranged from 4.9 percent to 17 percent. Fresno Unified increased its funding by 52 percent, while Santa Maria-Bonita increased maintenance-related funding by 62 percent, in large part because it chose to direct pandemic relief funding to maintenance.

The remaining district, Palo Verde Unified, reported a decrease in its maintenance expenditures between academic years 2021–22 and 2022–23, by 21 percent. However, the district's academic year 2023–24 budget shows that the district plans to double its expenditures on plant services—the budget area that includes facilities maintenance. According to the district, this budget includes significant projected expenditures from one-time funds related to a delayed shade structure project across school sites, additional security personnel and training, and planned heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system improvements.

Despite these increases in funding and one-time investments, schools in most of the districts contained two or more FIT categories that our inspections scored as *poor*, often related to *Interior Surfaces* and *Roofs*. However, FIT scores were higher at school districts that had additional funding to dedicate to maintenance. For example, our inspections gave Santa Maria-Bonita's schools the highest overall scores of any of the schools we reviewed, in part as a result of the district's investment of pandemic relief funds in maintenance. Fresno Unified increased its maintenance spending by 52 percent during the years we reviewed, which contributed to positive maintenance outcomes: two of its schools received overall *good* scores from our inspections.

Further, schools that received increased LCFF funding also had higher FIT scores. Under the LCFF, districts receive additional funding if their enrollment of English learners, free and reduced price lunch recipients, and foster youth exceeds 55 percent of total enrollment. Our inspections found that these same schools tended to have higher FIT scores. In fact, the three schools that our inspections identified as having the highest overall scores had student populations in which more than 90 percent of students were in categories that receive additional support. These results suggest that additional funding, dedicated to maintenance, would make a positive difference in FIT scores.

Officials at each of the school districts we spoke with stated that obtaining sufficient funding for maintenance was a continual challenge. The districts stated that the lack of dedicated funds, as well as tight budgets overall, meant that the districts often deferred maintenance in favor of other competing priorities. Fresno Unified was able to quantify the scope of its needs. A consultant that the district hired conducted a maintenance study that found the district would need to spend \$2.49 billion to return its school sites to an “80 percent” maintenance standard. This standard means the schools would still have outstanding maintenance issues. For context, Fresno Unified’s total general fund revenue for fiscal year 2023–24 was just over \$1.7 billion.

Even with Proposition 2 funding, current State budget pressures will continue to require that school districts make choices regarding where to target limited funds. Kindergarten through grade 12 education represents \$82 billion of California’s \$212 billion general fund budget for fiscal year 2024–25. In February 2024, the LAO estimated the State would face a \$73 billion budget shortfall for the 2024–25 fiscal year. Although the enacted budget addresses this shortfall, the LAO estimates continued deficits in the years to come. Given that K-12 education makes up nearly 40 percent of the State’s general fund, schools will likely continue to face budget pressure.

In addition, public school enrollment has fallen in recent years, which could reduce school budgets. The State’s public schools have seen enrollment decrease by 368,000, or 6 percent, since academic year 2017–18. Table 8 shows enrollment statewide and at the school districts we reviewed. **Because school attendance is a factor in calculating how the State distributes education funds, schools with significant decreases in enrollment may also receive a smaller share of state funding.** For example, Los Angeles Unified’s enrollment fell by 78,000 students—or about 17 percent—from academic year 2018–19 to academic year 2022–23. The other districts we reviewed have faced less severe enrollment declines, ranging from nearly 1 percent to 6.4 percent. Calaveras Unified’s enrollment increased slightly—by 1 percent—but it experienced the greatest decline of all districts during the 2020–21 school year, over 6 percent.

**Table 8**  
**School District Enrollment Has Generally Declined**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	PERCENT CHANGE
Calaveras Unified	2,870	2,814	2,875	2,685	2,854	2,900	1.05%
Chico Unified	12,203	12,242	12,362	11,911	11,996	12,088	– 0.94%
Fresno Unified	70,675	70,749	70,860	69,709	69,524	69,327	– 1.91%
Los Angeles Unified	467,007	453,276	440,365	419,443	397,583	389,420	– 16.61%
Palo Verde Unified	3,006	2,953	2,863	2,821	2,809	2,813	– 6.42%
Santa Maria-Bonita	17,122	16,940	16,959	16,665	16,569	16,703	– 2.45%
Statewide	6,220,413	6,186,278	6,163,001	6,002,523	5,892,240	5,852,544	– 5.91%

Source: CDE’s California School Dashboard data.

Note: The percent change shows the decline in enrollment between academic years 2017–18 and 2022–23.

School districts have so far been able to generally increase budgets for both *classified staff*—such as custodians, staff, and personnel in school administration—and *certificated staff*—those with a teaching credential. Only Fresno Unified increased funding for classified staff and decreased it for certificated staff. Table 9 presents the classified and certificated staff budgets for the districts we reviewed. However, without additional dedicated funding for school maintenance, school districts may need to choose in the future between funding increasingly severe maintenance deficiencies and funding student learning, which is likely to be a difficult choice given how deeply the two are interrelated.

**Table 9**  
**Districts Generally Increased Classified Staff and Certificated Staff Salary Expenditures**  
(Amounts Rounded to the Nearest Thousand)

DISTRICT	FISCAL YEAR 2021–22 ACTUALS	FISCAL YEAR 2022–23 ACTUALS	PERCENT CHANGE
<b>Classified Staff Salaries (Includes Maintenance Staff Salaries)</b>			
Calaveras Unified	\$5,639,000	\$7,204,000	27.8%
Chico Unified	24,189,000	27,317,000	12.9%
Fresno Unified	164,336,000	190,896,000	16.2%
Los Angeles Unified	1,257,177,000	1,348,758,000	7.3%
Palo Verde Unified	7,160,000	8,633,000	20.6%
Santa Maria-Bonita	28,969,000	31,398,000	8.4%
<b>Certificated Staff Salaries (Includes Teacher Salaries)</b>			
Calaveras Unified	\$12,460,000	\$14,071,000	12.9%
Chico Unified	70,192,000	77,967,000	11.1%
Fresno Unified	521,093,000	519,899,000	– 0.2%
Los Angeles Unified	3,379,759,000	3,468,019,000	2.6%
Palo Verde Unified	15,654,000	16,575,000	5.9%
Santa Maria-Bonita	95,239,000	102,766,000	7.9%

Source: Financial budgets and actual expenditure documentation from selected districts.



## Without Effective Oversight, School Facilities Will Remain in Poor Condition

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### Key Points

- The 18 schools in our review reported FIT scores in their SARC that were significantly higher than the scores our inspection supported.
- County offices of education have oversight responsibilities related to ensuring the cleanliness, maintenance, and safety of *Williams* schools, and one of the ways they have not fulfilled those responsibilities is by not ensuring the accuracy of the schools' FIT reporting.
- The schools we visited appropriately posted information about the *Williams* complaint process and resolved the substantiated complaints about maintenance or cleanliness that they received. However, most of the schools we reviewed rarely, if ever, received *Williams* complaints regarding maintenance and cleanliness, despite the deficiencies we identified at their facilities.

### Our Inspections Indicate That the SARC Scores for All 18 Schools We Visited Included Higher FIT Scores Than Conditions Warranted

All 18 schools we reviewed across six districts reported higher FIT scores than our inspections supported. On average, schools scored themselves about one score higher overall. For example, Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School and Manual Arts High School, both in Los Angeles Unified, reported overall scores of *exemplary* in their SARCs. However, when we calculated those schools' scores according to our observations, we rated them *poor* overall. Seven of the other schools we inspected reported overall scores of *good*, while we rated them *fair* or *poor*. Appendix A provides further detail on district scores and our scores, by school.

School officials generally asserted that the discrepancies between their scores and ours were the result of the timing of the inspections. Maintenance directors at several of the school districts we inspected stated that they conduct their FIT inspections during winter or summer breaks, when custodial staff conduct additional deep cleaning. However, we conducted our inspections in the spring and after school hours. Because our reviews occurred after class when school was in session and children were still on site, our inspections present a more realistic view of a school's day-to-day state; however, it is likely that schools in use will show greater wear and tear. Los Angeles Unified in particular noted that because our inspections of their schools occurred months after the district conducted its inspections, some of the problems we observed could have developed in that interval.

However, some of the problems we noted appeared to be longstanding. For example, Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles Unified had cracked tennis courts and asphalt, a trench dug across the running track, and rusty gutters. These deficiencies are unlikely to have appeared in the span of a few months. At Pleasant Valley High

School in Chico Unified, roofs overhanging some walkways were actively dripping, displayed signs of water damage, and had related deficiencies, such as mold and rust. We also observed several roofs that had shiny roof shingles, a sign that the asphalt granules in the shingles have worn away and that the roof needs to be replaced. Figure 9 includes examples of maintenance deficiencies throughout the schools we inspected that likely were problems well before the districts' most recent inspections or ours.

**Figure 9**

**We Identified Significant Maintenance Deficiencies at Many Schools That Were Not Reflected in Prior Scores**



This school scored its roof as *good*

This roof was coated with piles of bird feces, and the siding was peeling.



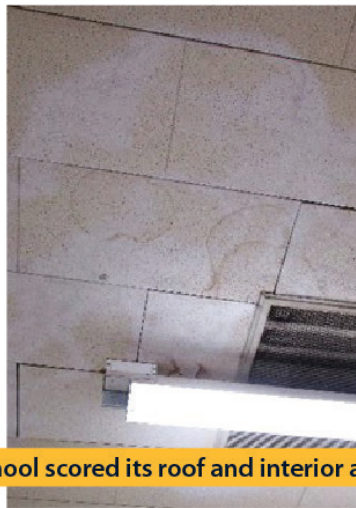
This school scored its exterior as *fair*

The asphalt of one of the basketball courts was heavily cracked and had standing water.



This school scored its roof and interior as *good*

This walkway overhang shows signs of water damage, including cracking, rust stains, and mold.



Many classrooms had stained and broken ceiling tiles, indicating a leaking roof.



School officials could not provide additional reasons for the discrepancies between their scores and ours; however, schools may have an incentive to rate themselves generously. As part of the SARC, the FIT provides information on schools' condition to parents, administrators, policymakers, and the public. Thus, school FIT scores can affect a school's reputation. For example, some parents may use this information in making educational decisions for their children, such as whether to send children to the local school or try to enroll them in a more distant school. The FIT may help inform policymakers' decisions about where to focus limited maintenance resources, should they choose to use it as such, but as we note previously, the need likely far outweighs available resources.

### County Offices of Education Have Not Fulfilled Their Oversight Duties by Accurately Verifying *Williams* Schools' FIT Reporting

Seven of the 18 schools we selected for inspection were *Williams* schools.<sup>10</sup> As we discuss in the Introduction, state law requires county offices of education to visit and examine each school in the county—including *Williams* schools—at reasonable intervals to observe school operations and to learn of school problems. County offices of education are required to visit *Williams* schools at least annually and determine, among other issues, the state of school facilities, which include their FIT scores. While county offices performed their inspections at different points in the year, we performed our inspections in the spring while school was in session to represent the school's day-to-day state, which may also show greater wear and tear. We found that although county offices of education conducted facilities inspections at *Williams* schools, they did not identify the deficiencies that we found during our inspections; only the county's score for Santa Maria-Bonita matched ours. As Table 10 shows, the other county offices of education rated schools higher than we did, and three schools received higher scores from the county offices of education than from their respective districts.

Because the county offices of education are required to determine the accuracy of the data reported by the school districts, we expected that the counties' scores would closely align with ours. However, as Table 10 shows, that was not the case: two of the six county offices of education—Calaveras and Fresno—reported even higher overall scores for the *Williams* schools than the schools themselves reported. The Los Angeles County Office of Education's inspection rated the Manual Arts High School with an overall *good* score, which was lower than the SARC score of *exemplary* but higher than our rating of *poor*. The following year, the county office rated the school *exemplary*. Figure 10 depicts concerns we identified at the Los Angeles Manual Arts High School that led to our assigning the school a lower score than both the district and the county did.

<sup>10</sup> Calaveras Unified had two *Williams* schools, Jenny Lind Elementary School and Toyon Middle School. The remaining districts we reviewed had one each.

**Table 10**

**FIT Scores From County Offices of Education Generally Equalled or Exceeded District Ratings and Were Well Above the FIT Scores From the State Auditor**

WILLIAMS SCHOOL	SCHOOL DISTRICT	OVERALL SCORE IN SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD (ACADEMIC YEAR 2022–23)	OVERALL SCORE FROM THE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION* (ACADEMIC YEAR 2022–23)	OVERALL SCORE FROM THE STATE AUDITOR
Jenny Lind Elementary School	Calaveras Unified	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Exemplary</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Toyon Middle School	Calaveras Unified	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Exemplary</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Chico Junior High School	Chico Unified	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Calwa Elementary School	Fresno Unified	<i>Good</i>	<i>Exemplary</i>	<i>Good</i>
Manual Arts High School	Los Angeles Unified	<i>Exemplary</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Ruth Brown Elementary School	Palo Verde Unified	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>
Fesler Junior High School	Santa Maria-Bonita	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>

Source: School districts' SARCs, county offices of education's scores, and auditor inspection of selected school sites.

\* The following county offices of education are responsible for the inspected districts:

- Calaveras Unified: Calaveras County
- Chico Unified: Butte County
- Fresno Unified: Fresno County
- Los Angeles Unified: Los Angeles County
- Palo Verde Unified: Riverside County
- Santa Maria-Bonita: Santa Barbara County

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

The Los Angeles county office said that, in general, the FIT captures the conditions of a school as a snapshot in time and may not reflect changes between inspections. The county also suggested that the FIT does not provide a scale that reflects the dynamic severity of a deficiency or the potential degradation of systems nearing the end of their lifecycles. We discuss the limitations of the FIT instrument, including the lack of a scale for severity, in a later section. Nonetheless, many of the deficiencies we identified appear to be longstanding—like uncontrolled water damage over time allowed to penetrate through exterior stucco walls—or frequently repeated—like daisy-chaining power strips when classrooms need additional outlets.

**Figure 10**

**Our Inspections Identified Deficiencies Not Identified in County Inspection Reports at Manual Arts High School**



**Issue:** Propane tank in classroom, which represents a significant fire hazard

**Category:** *Safety*

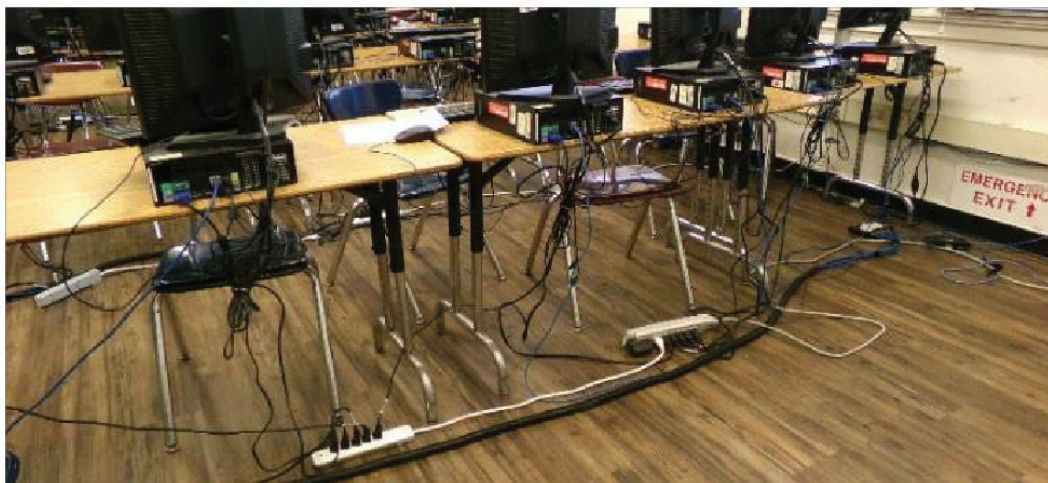
**Overall Category Score:** *Poor*



**Issue:** Unsecured insect spray in reach of students

**Category:** *Safety*

**Overall Category Score:** *Poor*



**Issue:** Improper use of electrical cords, known as *daisy chaining*. This poses a fire and trip hazard.

**Category:** *Electrical*

**Overall Category Score:** *Poor*

Source: Auditor observation at Manual Arts High School.

In addition, the Calaveras county office rated the two *Williams* schools it inspected higher than the schools rated themselves. For example, although the SARC for Jenny Lind Elementary School included an overall FIT score of *fair*, the Calaveras county office inspection resulted in an overall score of *exemplary*. In contrast, our inspection resulted in a *poor* score for the school overall, and we identified several items requiring repair—unlike either the SARC or the county’s inspection—such as damaged roofs,

holes in the walls and floors, bowing walls with strong mildew odor, and nonworking sinks and drinking fountains. The Calaveras county office explained that although it uses the FIT during its site inspections, it focuses on documenting what it perceives to be significant safety or maintenance issues; consequently, its inspections may not provide detailed assessments and may result in higher scores. For example, in its 2022–23 FIT inspection of Jenny Lind Elementary School, the county office rated the school *exemplary*, with a score of 100 percent, regardless of the deficiencies it had noted, such as concrete damage to one of its buildings. We identified similar concrete damage in our inspections. Similarly, in its inspection for Toyon Middle School in the same year, the county’s *exemplary* score did not reflect its own notes of deficiencies it had found, such as missing ceiling tiles. However, state law requires county offices of education to assess the safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities, including whether they meet Good Repair Standards, as we have done.

Further, some county offices of education have not been reporting *Williams* inspections as state law requires. According to state law, county offices of education must report their inspection findings annually to the school boards in their jurisdictions, to the county boards of education, and to the boards of supervisors for each county. State law also requires that county offices of education make quarterly reports to the school boards, describing the inspections they made that quarter and the accuracy of the schools’ related SARCs, even when they performed no reviews during that quarter. However, as Table 11 shows, three of the six county offices of education we reviewed—Los Angeles, Riverside, and Santa Barbara—provided all required *Williams* reporting.

**Table 11**  
**County Offices of Education Could Not Always Demonstrate That They Met *Williams* Reporting Requirements In the Years We Reviewed**

COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION	DID THE COUNTY OFFICE CONDUCT <i>WILLIAMS</i> INSPECTIONS*	DID THE COUNTY OFFICE SUBMIT ANNUAL REPORTS?†	DID THE COUNTY OFFICE SUBMIT QUARTERLY REPORTS?‡
Butte	Yes	Yes	Partially: Did not report in all quarters
Calaveras	Yes	Partially: Did not report to all boards in all years	No
Fresno	Yes	Partially: Did not report to school board	No
Los Angeles	Yes	Yes	Yes
Riverside	Yes	Yes	Yes
Santa Barbara	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Interviews and supporting documentation from our selected county offices of education for the 2021–22 and 2022–23 academic years.

\* County offices of education are required to perform annual inspections of *Williams* schools to verify the accuracy of the school SARCs and determine whether schools are in good repair or whether the condition of the school poses an emergency or urgent threat to health and safety.

† County offices of education are required to submit an annual report on their *Williams* inspections to each school district’s board, to the county board of education, and to the county board of supervisors.

‡ County offices of education are required to report on a quarterly basis to the school district’s board on results of *Williams* inspections or indicate whether visits were not conducted in that quarter.

Butte, Calaveras, and Fresno demonstrated partial compliance in submitting reports. For example, the Fresno county office reported annually to the County Board of Education and County Board of Supervisors, but it stated it does not present a report to each district's governing board; instead, the Fresno county office stated that the reports are available because they are public. Calaveras did not consistently make annual reports to the district board or County Board of Supervisors but instead made reports to the schools only. The remaining office—Butte—demonstrated that it submits annual reports as required, but its quarterly reporting to the school district governing board did not include SARC verifications or facilities conditions. Without adequate and timely reporting to school boards, county boards of education, and county boards of supervisors, these governing bodies may not have the information they need to make informed decisions on actions—such as budget allocations or work priorities—necessary to ensure the schools are in good repair.

### **The Williams Complaint Process Has Not Resulted in Districts Effectively Identifying Maintenance Deficiencies at the Schools We Reviewed**

The schools we inspected have received few facilities-related *Williams* complaints. Following the settlement of the *Williams* case, the Legislature revised state law to require that districts post notices in classrooms—notice we routinely observed during our inspections—explaining how to obtain and file a complaint form and detailing the types of matters subject to the *Williams* complaint process. However, Table 12, which provides a breakdown of facilities-related *Williams* complaints at each of our selected districts, demonstrates that all six districts received an average of less than one such complaint per school site per year. One district—Chico Unified—had received none since academic year 2004–05. Districts use the *Williams* complaint process in part to identify and resolve deficiencies related to emergency or urgent facilities conditions that pose a threat to the health and safety of students or staff. Consequently, the absence of complaints and our own observations indicate that students and staff at school sites are not reporting deficiencies with sufficient frequency to ensure that the schools address the deficiencies. **Thus, the *Williams* complaint process by itself is not an effective means of identifying and addressing school maintenance problems.**

Nonetheless, when the schools we reviewed received *Williams* complaints related to maintenance problems, the schools generally handled those complaints effectively. Under state law, schools must remedy valid complaints within a reasonable time, not exceeding 30 working days from when schools received the complaint. Los Angeles Unified—the largest district in the State—reported having receiving more than 2,900 facilities-related *Williams* complaints since academic year 2013–14, and many of those complaints were related to air-conditioning systems. We reviewed a sample of 11 of these complaints—one from each fiscal year and all *Williams* complaints from our remaining selected schools and districts. We found that the schools remedied *Williams* complaints and issued resolution letters—a requirement of the process that informs individuals who made the complaints of the resolution to the complaint—within the time frames state law required. For example, district complaint files from Los Angeles Unified indicate that one of its schools remedied and formally responded to a *Williams* complaint related to deficient air conditioning

within five business days, well ahead of the required time frame in state law. In addition, the three other schools we selected that received a *Williams* complaint during the time frame of our audit remedied complaints and issued resolution letters within the time frames set forth in state law.

**Table 12**
**The Williams Complaint Process Has Resulted in Few Cleanliness or Maintenance Complaints at the School Districts We Reviewed**

	CALAVERAS UNIFIED	CHICO UNIFIED	FRESNO UNIFIED	LOS ANGELES UNIFIED	PALO VERDE UNIFIED	SANTA MARIA- BONITA
Total <i>Williams</i> Cleanliness or Maintenance Complaints (Districtwide)	1	0	10	2,923*	1	14
Total Number of Complaints at Our Selected Schools	1	0	0	1	1	1
Total Number of Complaints We Reviewed	1	0	0	11	1	1
Average Complaints Per Year (Districtwide)	<1	0	<1	292	<1	<1
Average Complaints Per Year at Our Selected Schools	<1	0	<1	0	<1	0
Percentage of Reviewed Complaints Addressed Adequately	100%	NA†	NA†	100%	100%	100%

Source: Calaveras Unified, Chico Unified, Fresno Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Palo Verde Unified, and Santa Maria-Bonita.

Note: The number of fiscal years that districts retained *Williams* records varied: Chico Unified, Palo Verde Unified and Santa Maria-Bonita maintained records for 20 years, Calaveras Unified for 17, Fresno Unified for 14, and Los Angeles Unified for 10.

\* Because Los Angeles Unified has more than 1,000 school sites, 2,923 complaints over 10 years indicates that its schools receive less than one complaint per year. The vast majority of these complaints were related to air-conditioner *deficiencies*.

† The schools selected in this district received zero maintenance-related *Williams* complaints during the time frame we requested complaints.

**The Districts We Reviewed Did Not Conduct Oversight Visits to Schools to Examine Conditions as State Law Requires**

The districts we reviewed had limited oversight that was ultimately not effective, according to our observations. State law requires district governing boards to ensure that the SARC for each school is issued annually, and we found SARCs to be available for all schools we reviewed. State law also requires district superintendents, their assistants, or the district's school board to visit each school in the district at least once each term. During these visits, superintendents or the school board are expected to examine the management, needs, and conditions of each school.

Some districts stated that school board officials visited sites periodically, while others noted different methods for addressing these requirements. For example, Palo Verde Unified stated that the school board president and superintendent walk

each site quarterly and share verbal feedback with sites. Similarly, Los Angeles Unified described engaging in visits that focused on data collection and engagement, during which district staff meet with site administrators, like school principals, who can raise issues such as those stemming from the physical needs of the school. Three districts—Calaveras Unified, Fresno Unified, and Santa Maria-Bonita—use third-party consultants to perform annual site inspections with the FIT, and Chico Unified stated that it observes conditions at schools as part of activities conducted throughout the year.

Despite these efforts, the results of our inspections indicate that none of the current systems in place for identifying maintenance problems in schools are functioning well. While districts may be making sure SARCs are available, that information is not useful if schools report scores on the FIT that do not reflect current conditions. Also, county offices of education are not casting a critical eye on FIT scores for schools they oversee, the *Williams* complaint process results in few identified problems, and district leadership are generally unaware of safety concerns. Without effective monitoring, students, parents, and decision-makers do not have access to accurate information about the quality of school facilities or the risks to student health or academic outcomes.

One potential solution to address this lack of oversight is to include schoolsite councils in the FIT process. State law requires that schools that receive certain federal and state funds must have a *schoolsite council*. In practice, most public schools in California likely have one. These councils are required to be composed of the school principal, teachers, school personnel, and parents of students attending the school; in secondary schools, the council should also include students. State law charges these councils with reviewing schools' achievement plans, including proposed expenditures. As possible additional oversight of the FIT process, the councils could also be charged with reviewing the FIT scores to ensure accuracy—for example, by spot-checking a selection of rooms. Students, parents, and guardians may have stronger incentives to be critical of school conditions and the impact those conditions may have on student learning. Coupled with the improvements to the FIT we describe later, such an approach could provide greater accountability by improving the accuracy of FIT scores.



## The FIT's Deficiency Rating System Does Not Accurately Reflect School Conditions

### Key Points

- The FIT does not adequately represent the severity of deficiencies and does not account for the existence of multiple deficiencies in the same area.
- The FIT lacks any guidance on assessing specialized classrooms often found in high schools, such as woodshops, automotive classrooms, and agricultural areas.
- Although designed to ensure college cleanliness, guidelines from the APPA (formerly known as the Association of Physical Plant Administrators) illustrate how small changes to the FIT could increase the level of detail the scores convey.<sup>11</sup>

### The FIT Does Not Sufficiently Account for the Severity and Number of Deficiencies

The FIT's rating scale is insufficient to account for the severity of deficiencies identified during a FIT inspection. When a school identifies a problem during its FIT inspection, the school must rate that problem as either a *deficiency* or an *extreme deficiency*. For each section within the FIT, both the FIT instrument and the guidance offer examples of what would constitute a deficiency. For example, stained ceiling tiles, cracking paint, or a broken water fountain would all be considered deficiencies. However, although the FIT offers a definition of an *extreme deficiency*—one that requires immediate attention and that, if left unmitigated, could cause injury, illness, or death of occupants—the FIT provides few examples. In six FIT sections—*Interior Surfaces*, *Overall Cleanliness*, *Restrooms*, *Sinks/Fountains*, *Roofs*, and *Playgrounds/School Grounds*—we identified no examples of what constitutes an extreme deficiency in either the FIT or the guidance.

This lack of guidance may cause those conducting FIT inspections to be reluctant to rate any deficiency as an *extreme deficiency*. In fact, none of the FIT inspections for the schools we reviewed included any *extreme deficiencies*, and we generally avoided using that score as well because of the lack of sufficient guidance. Figure 11 provides examples of FIT deficiencies that would be labeled as a *regular deficiency*. The photograph on the top right shows many stained ceiling tiles as well as a missing tile. This could have been rated as an *extreme deficiency*, but because the FIT does not define extreme deficiencies for interior surfaces, we chose to rate it as a regular deficiency.

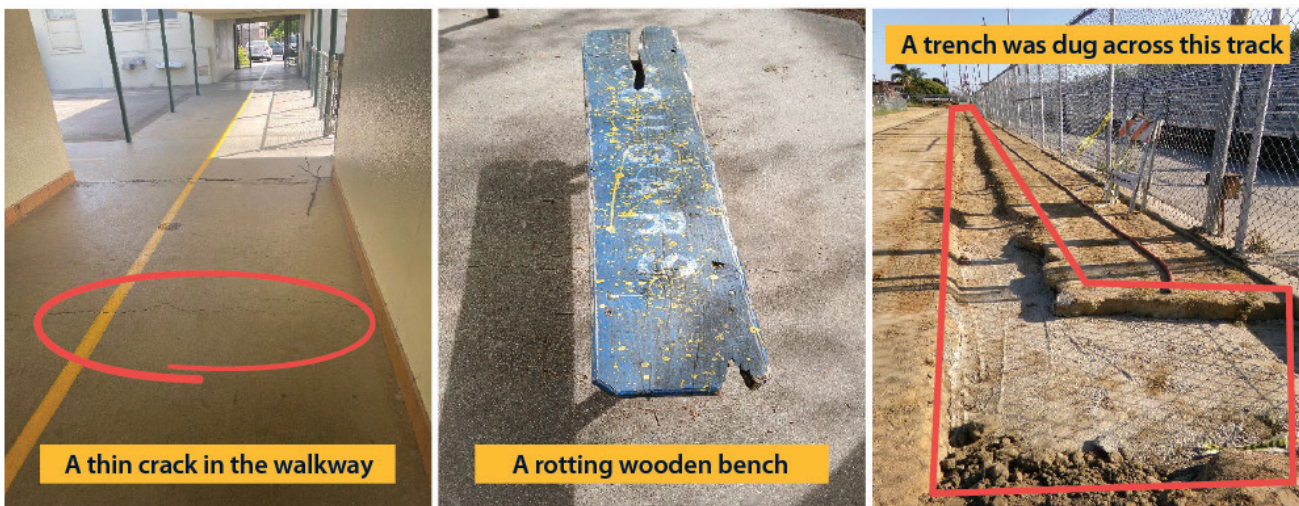
<sup>11</sup> The APPA is a membership and certification organization for educational facilities professionals. It publishes operational guidelines related to maintenance, custodial work, and grounds for educational facilities. It also maintains a *Body of Knowledge (the BOK)*, a peer-reviewed database that “develops, updates, and disseminates the foundational content required by facilities professionals at colleges, universities, schools, museums, and other nonprofit, educational organizations.”

**Figure 11**

The FIT Scoring System Does Not Sufficiently Account for the Severity of the Deficiencies We Observed



- FIT deficiencies may only be categorized as a *deficiency* or an *extreme deficiency*.
- *Extreme deficiencies* are listed by example in the FIT or may be additionally identified by the inspector if there is "a condition that qualifies as an extreme deficiency, but is not noted in the Good Repair Standard."
- The *Interior Surfaces* FIT section does not contain any examples of an *extreme deficiency*. Therefore, the three examples above would all be rated as a *deficiency* unless the inspector elected to use the catch-all exception to adjust the rating.



The same inadequacy can be demonstrated by the *playgrounds/school grounds* section, which also does not contain examples of *extreme deficiencies*. Above, the minor crack in the concrete, the damaged bench, and the open and unsecured trench on a high school track would all be considered simply *deficiencies*.

Source: Auditor observation at selected schools.

Further, the FIT does not account for the number of deficiencies in its rating scale. A classroom that has one stained ceiling tile would receive a *deficient* rating in the *Interior Surfaces* section and category, while a classroom with multiple stained ceiling tiles, a torn carpet, and peeling paint would also receive a single *deficient* rating in that same category. We followed the FIT methodology in developing our scores for each school; however, if we had instead counted each deficiency in a category and location separately, our scores would likely have been lower. For example, at Fresno High School in Fresno Unified, we identified 11 rooms with between two and five hazardous material deficiencies per room. Following the FIT's requirements, we gave the room with two deficiencies the same score as the room with five deficiencies. However, the safety risk posed by the classrooms with multiple hazardous material deficiencies can be greater because of the larger range and availability of hazards.

When combined, the lack of guidance on what constitutes an *extreme deficiency* and the lack of ratings to account for the frequency of deficiencies can obscure larger problems. For example, our inspection found that five of Palo Verde High School's seven drinking fountains were either dirty or inoperable. Palo Verde Unified did note that it has water bottle stations at most drinking fountains and asserted that, in a later visit to the high school, all were operable. In the record-breaking heat California has experienced in 2024, one nonworking drinking fountain might be inconvenient; however, several nonworking fountains could pose a health hazard to students who lack adequate access to water. We identified more than 60 inoperative water fountains across the 18 schools we reviewed.

A scoring scale that does not account for the number of deficiencies or adequately account for the severity of deficiencies penalizes those schools with few problems by scoring them at the same level as those with multiple problems. More importantly, the scale makes it difficult for decision-makers to identify and address schools that have significant, severe deficiencies and for parents and families to make informed decisions about the schools their children will attend.

### **The FIT Does Not Provide the Guidance Necessary to Rate Specialized Learning Environments and Offers Limited Guidance About Hazardous Chemicals**

Although the FIT offers guidance for inspecting areas such as playgrounds, it lacks similar guidance for areas used for specialized instruction. For example, most of the high schools and middle schools we inspected had one or more specialized classrooms used for culinary, automotive, electrical, or wood shop courses. We also observed classrooms that schools used to provide instruction on welding, agriculture, and heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC). Without specific instructions on how to apply the Good Repair Standards to these areas, inspectors must rely on the FIT's general guidance and their own judgment.

However, as Figure 12 shows, these specialized environments can pose unique dangers to students: they often involve power tool use, contact with various chemicals, and other hazards. For example, during our inspection of a welding classroom at Calaveras High School in Calaveras Unified, we identified a tank of argon gas that was actively venting into a closed and unoccupied classroom. Argon gas poses a significant

suffocation hazard because it is odorless, colorless, and heavier than air. We immediately contacted the school's principal, and the school ensured that the argon tank was closed. Nevertheless, this lapse demonstrates the sorts of hazards that can occur in specialized environments, involving both locations and hazards that the FIT does not currently address.

**Figure 12**

**The FIT Does Not Reflect the Needs of Specialized Learning Environments**



Source: Auditor observation at selected schools.

DGS's Office of Public School Construction last updated the FIT's form in April 2022, but the office has not updated the guidance on hazardous materials such as cleaning supplies since 2017. In the years since 2020, school sites have had to adapt to the realities of post-pandemic life, in which disinfection and cleaning are an expectation.

For example, teachers we spoke with at Adam and Rice Elementary Schools said that in recent years, they began keeping cleaning supplies, such as sanitizing wipes and district-issued cleaning sprays, in their classrooms in an effort to prevent the spread of infection. In fact, we identified unlocked and readily accessible cleaning supplies throughout the school sites we reviewed.

From the perspective of the FIT and related guidance, the accessibility of these supplies would be considered *deficiencies* because the labels included language to keep the materials out of reach of children, and in some cases such access would represent *extreme deficiencies* because of the risks they pose. However, it may be unrealistic to expect schools to remove all cleaning supplies, considering the continued needs for cleaning associated with COVID-19 and other illnesses. Without more refined guidance on the FIT, incorporating post-pandemic disinfection expectations, schools may be equally penalized on the FIT for having easy access to relatively harmless cleaning wipes as they would be for having unsecured cleaning agents that are caustic and can cause irreversible eye damage. DGS did not object specifically to the suggestions to update the FIT but noted that doing so is a lengthy process that requires input from many stakeholders, including DGS, education administrators, and others involved with school cleanliness and maintenance.

### **The APPA Guidelines Illustrate How Minor Adjustments to the FIT Could Provide Stakeholders With More Information**

The multilevel rating system from the APPA illustrates how adjustments to the FIT could result in district facilities' managers and students' families receiving more detailed and accurate information. The APPA uses a 1 to 5 scale to describe the cleanliness of locations. Level 1 is the highest score and is described as *orderly spotlessness*; level 5 is described as *unkempt neglect*. When we applied the APPA scale to the schools we visited, we found that the resulting scores generally aligned with the FIT scores we had assigned to the schools; however, the APPA scores better highlighted specific issues within the schools. For example, every school we inspected received a *poor* score in the FIT's *Interior Surfaces* section, which includes walls, floors, and ceilings. Under the APPA, this score would have been split into three categories: *Floors, Vertical and Horizontal Surfaces*, and *Ceiling and Lighting*. Nine of the 18 selected schools received a level 5 APPA score in the *Ceiling and Lighting* category, and the average score in the category was level 4, which the APPA describes as *moderate dinginess*.

Schools may benefit more from the FIT if it incorporates the enhanced specificity and detail of the APPA rating scale. State law requires all California public schools to report annually in each school's SARC on the safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities and to describe any needed maintenance to ensure good repair. Most of our selected schools' SARCs include details of the FIT deficiencies found, including the maintenance needed to ensure that the facilities are in good repair. Chico Junior High School, for example, reported in the 2013–14 school year that stained ceiling tiles in five classrooms needed repair, and the school also listed the work order number for the repairs. On the other hand, in its 2015–16 SARC, Grape Street Elementary School reported that the condition of its *Interior Surfaces* was

rated *poor*, but the school did not report the deficiencies found, the affected buildings or classrooms, or any specific actions taken or to be taken to ensure good repair. The APPA guidelines evaluate similar conditions but require more detail, splitting what would be one section under the FIT into several elements. Specifically, applying APPA to our inspection of Grape Street Elementary found that the school's interior surface deficiencies related to its ceilings and lighting were more significant and widespread than deficiencies related to its floors, walls, or other interior fixtures.

According to the NCES, when communities and districts have accurate and complete data about the status and condition of school facilities, they make better plans and are able to direct spending where it will have the most beneficial effects. As we discuss above, a *poor* score in the *Interiors* category could indicate minor damage to a small portion of the campus, or it could indicate consistent and severe damage to floors, walls, and ceilings. Adding more detail to the FIT scores could provide schools, districts, and students' families with more specific data about the condition of campus buildings, which would allow them to make more informed decisions.

With more accurate reporting of deficiencies found in the FIT inspections, schools and districts may be able to better prioritize and plan work to address problems and ensure that the schools are in good repair. State law requires all California school districts to report annually in each school's SARC on any needed maintenance to ensure good repair. Most of our selected schools' SARCs include details of the FIT deficiencies found, including the maintenance needed to ensure that the facilities are in good repair. For example, Chico Junior High School reported on ceiling tiles, as noted above, and also listed work order numbers for the repairs. Overall, we found that schools and districts that reported the details of the maintenance needed to meet the Good Repair Standards tended to receive higher FIT scores but that schools and districts that did not report these details tended to receive lower FIT scores.

Using FIT data to update Facilities Master Plans (FMPs) may make it easier for districts to prioritize ongoing and newly identified maintenance and repair needs. According to CDE, creating an FMP can benefit a district by helping it establish a program of continuous comprehensive planning and financing of school facilities, which is essential to ensuring that school facilities are in good repair. CDE further states that an FMP must be monitored continually and updated frequently to be an effective planning tool. Although five of our six selected districts have created FMPs, the plans vary in their level of detail, accessibility, and the extent to which they are updated. For example, Santa Maria-Bonita's FMP was most recently published in 2023, and it includes interactive graphs and other diagrams that show readers projected costs and needed repairs. In comparison, Fresno Unified has not published an update to its FMP since 2016, and that update was specific to the district's high schools. When districts do not distribute, update, or ensure the accuracy of their facilities data, school boards and their communities may struggle to access all the information needed to make informed decisions about school facilities. If districts were to use recent FIT data to regularly update their FMPs, this information could help schools and communities make more meaningful choices about how to prioritize maintenance and repairs.

## Other Areas We Reviewed

To address the audit objectives approved by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (Audit Committee), we reviewed students-to-custodial staffing ratios and the availability of cleaning supplies at the six districts we reviewed. We also looked for best practices among the districts we reviewed and in four other states.

### The Ratio of Students to Custodians Decreased At Most of the Schools We Reviewed

We found that the number of students per full-time custodian at 13 of the 18 schools decreased during the periods we reviewed, as shown in Table 13. Our review did not identify any legal requirements related to the number of students to custodians that each school should employ. Further, neither the APPA guidelines nor the NCES guidelines recommend a specific ratio of students to custodians. Finally, those guidelines we were able to identify that included the ratio of students to custodians were part of other formulas that also included square footage, number of teachers, and other details.

One of the factors resulting in a decreased ratio of students to custodians at some schools was the declining student enrollment at five of our six selected districts.

To put this in perspective, three of the five schools with an increase in the student-to-custodian ratio experienced an increase in student enrollment during the periods we reviewed. For example, Calaveras Unified added an additional grade to Toyon Middle School, increasing the number of students, but it did not increase the number of custodians. However, declining enrollment does not generally result in a reduced need for custodians. According to a report by Policy Analysis for California Education, school facility costs such as maintenance, heating and cooling systems, and custodial services are unlikely to vary significantly even if a school's enrollment drops dramatically.<sup>12</sup> Thus, actual custodial workloads have likely remained relatively consistent.

Reviewing guidelines from the APPA could help decision makers for K-12 schools better assess the need for custodians; however, these guidelines were established for use at college campuses, and districts with limited staff time may find them difficult to apply. The APPA guidelines recommend considering factors beyond square footage and student enrollment when determining custodial staffing levels. Specifically, APPA indicates that an accurate space inventory—a list of specific areas and rooms with an expected cleanliness classification for each—is required to project custodial staffing needs using APPA guidelines. Although all of our selected districts provided basic information on schools' square footage, the level of detail the districts had available about campus facilities varied widely. School districts that face cleanliness challenges—such as those associated with extremely old or worn buildings—may find that such additional detail is beneficial when determining staffing requirements.

<sup>12</sup> Carrie Hahnel and Max Marchitello, "Centering Equity in the School-Closure Process in California," Policy Analysis for California Education, September 2023.

**Table 13****Most Schools We Reviewed Experienced a Reduced Number of Students Per Full-Time Custodian During the Past Nine Academic Years**

Students Per Full-Time Custodian											
ACADEMIC YEAR											
DISTRICT / SCHOOL	CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	TOTAL CHANGE
Calaveras Unified*											
Jenny Lind Elementary School	– 17%	–	–	–	102.40	102.00	103.33	153.20	86.95	117.87	↑ 15.47
Toyon Middle School	14%	–	–	–	176.00	140.67	140.25	212.80	156.29	212.40	↑ 36.40
Calaveras High School	– 22%	–	–	–	111.60	173.68	125.23	181.56	141.82	71.05	↓ 40.55
Fresno Unified											
Calwa Elementary School	– 7%	214.67	188.00	190.00	194.57	204.29	193.43	176.29	160.00	170.57	↓ 44.10
Edison Computech Middle School	– 2%	204.25	197.00	201.50	202.50	201.75	206.25	206.50	199.00	199.50	↓ 4.75
Fresno High School	– 11%	170.66	163.95	157.76	149.25	146.53	144.29	155.92	146.41	137.63	↓ 33.03
Santa Maria-Bonita											
Adam Elementary School	– 22%	273.75	259.00	247.50	245.75	234.50	230.75	223.25	286.67	285.33	↑ 11.58
Rice Elementary School	– 2%	309.67	307.33	296.33	300.67	301.67	315.33	286.33	281.00	304.33	↓ 5.34
Fesler Junior High School	12%	213.75	228.25	233.50	237.25	243.50	257.25	247.25	239.50	239.75	↑ 26.00
Chico Unified											
Citrus Elementary School	4%	164.00	158.00	150.00	147.50	157.00	307.00	315.00	171.00	170.50	↑ 6.50
Chico Junior High School	45%	319.50	206.00	270.67	835.00	292.67	302.67	279.00	446.00	309.33	↓ 10.17
Pleasant Valley High School	3%	358.40	259.43	261.14	245.75	281.57	273.29	245.57	221.88	262.86	↓ 95.54
Palo Verde Unified†											
Margaret White Elementary School	– 7%	–	–	286.89	280.33	243.73	263.12	248.67	228.11	217.67	↓ 69.22
Ruth Brown Elementary School	– 8%	–	–	275.00	263.93	250.19	231.94	227.38	222.06	204.67	↓ 70.33
Palo Verde High School	– 8%	–	–	274.77	267.69	240.86	235.43	244.00	220.53	205.00	↓ 69.77
Los Angeles Unified†											
Grape Street Elementary School	– 39%	–	207.67	202.00	291.00	258.50	234.00	216.00	130.00	125.67	↓ 82.00
Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School	– 33%	–	380.80	311.83	287.17	286.00	278.00	320.80	280.60	257.00	↓ 123.80
Manual Arts High School	– 34%	–	194.13	209.86	201.14	191.29	185.43	125.78	115.33	114.00	↓ 80.13

Source: Square footage documentation and inspection and janitorial staffing documentation from selected districts.

\* Calaveras Unified provided staffing records from the 2017–18 academic year to the 2022–23 academic year.

† Palo Verde Unified and Los Angeles Unified provided student enrollment data dating back to the 2016–17 and 2015–16 academic years, respectively.

It is also important to note that accurately calculating a school's custodial staffing needs does not guarantee adequate staffing levels. For example, Los Angeles Unified uses a method that is similar to APPA's, though simplified, when determining the number of custodians it requires. The district uses a formula based on the physical characteristics of each campus to calculate the hours of custodial labor that each school needs. However, all three of the schools we reviewed in Los Angeles Unified consistently employed too few custodians to meet the *acceptable* NCES cleanliness standard and employed fewer custodians than their own calculations indicate the schools needed. In 2023 the district's inspector general found that 31 percent of schools were understaffed because budget constraints have impacted funding for custodial staffing. According to district documents, during the 2022–23 academic year, Manual Arts High School required the equivalent of 16 full-time custodians; because of budget reductions, however, the school was allotted only 10 full-time custodians. This reduced custodial staffing likely explains why our observations led to Manual Arts High School receiving an overall *poor* score in our calculation of the SARC's *Cleanliness* category, as noted in Table 6.

### The Schools We Reviewed Had Adequate Cleaning Supplies

All 18 schools we reviewed had adequate, readily accessible custodial supplies and equipment. We could not identify specific guidance related to the volume of cleaning supplies needed in schools. For example, DGS told us that it was not aware of any such standards, and the APPA does not have a guideline related to the volume of cleaning supplies needed in public schools. The custodial managers we interviewed at the six district offices all indicated that they had sufficient access to cleaning supplies and equipment. We also spoke to custodians during the course of our school visits, and they echoed the statements of the district custodial managers. Further, the custodial supply and equipment rooms we reviewed at each school appeared well stocked with a variety of cleaning supplies and equipment, including cleaning solutions, disinfectants, and cleaning implements. Figure 13 provides an example of a custodial office at Jenny Lind Elementary School, and we observed similarly well-stocked custodial facilities at the other sites.

As Table 14 shows, expenditures related to cleaning supplies and equipment at our six selected districts have generally increased. For example, in the most recent fiscal year, Palo Verde Unified's expenditures on cleaning supplies and equipment more than doubled from five fiscal years prior, and Santa Maria-Bonita's expenditures held relatively steady across that time period. Variations in cleaning expenditures for fiscal years 2019–20 and 2020–21 largely related to changes caused by the pandemic, which decreased the extent of in-person schooling. The available data showed that the same held true at the individual school sites we reviewed.<sup>13</sup> For example, compared to five fiscal years ago, the most recent fiscal year of costs for custodial supplies at one high school in Chico Unified tripled. However, since fiscal year 2021–22, costs at this school have fluctuated by 25 percent to 30 percent each fiscal year.

<sup>13</sup> The districts we reviewed were not all able to provide us with school-level cleaning supply and equipment expenditures. Specifically, Chico Unified, Fresno Unified, and Santa Maria-Bonita district staff explained that their districts do not always track equipment expenditures by school site.

**Figure 13**

Jenny Lind Elementary School Had a Well-Stocked Custodial Supply Room



Source: Auditor observation of Jenny Lind Elementary School.

**Table 14**  
**School Districts Generally Reported Increased Cleaning Supply and Equipment Expenditures Over the Past Six Fiscal Years**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	FISCAL YEAR						PERCENT INCREASED (DECREASED) FROM FISCAL YEAR 2018–19 TO 2023–24
	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	
Calaveras Unified	Unknown*	Unknown*	Unknown*	\$74,000	\$89,000	\$83,000	NA
Chico Unified	\$249,000	\$230,000	\$241,000	316,000	390,000	367,000	47%
Palo Verde Unified	130,000	77,000	588,000	296,000	232,000	314,000	142%
Santa Maria-Bonita	235,000	193,000	103,000	306,000	240,000	230,000	(2%)
Los Angeles Unified	19,904,000	18,880,000	29,244,000	51,510,000	58,112,000	23,212,000	†
Fresno Unified	863,000	845,000	848,000	3,578,000	1,755,000	1,063,000	23%

Source: School district-generated summary reports on yearly cleaning supply and equipment expenditures.

Note: Figures are not comparable among districts because of differences in how they account for cleaning supplies and equipment.

\* Calaveras Unified staff explained that their district maintains relevant expenditure information for only three fiscal years, and as a result, information for these years is unknown.

† Los Angeles Unified only provided partial-year data for 2023–24. Their expenditures increased 192 percent from fiscal years 2018–19 through 2022–23.

### We Did Not Identify Transferable Best Practices Among the Six Districts or Four Comparable States We Reviewed

We reviewed information from four states educationally comparable to California—Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas—and did not identify unique practices that could benefit California. We selected comparable states according to student enrollment, test scores, and absenteeism data. Illinois state law requires regional superintendents to inspect school facilities annually. New York regulations require school districts to conduct building condition surveys once every five years. According to the Texas School Safety Center, Texas performs school safety and security audits that cover much of the same ground as the FIT, and like California districts, Texas districts may conduct the audit themselves. Unlike California’s districts, however, Texas school districts do not need to make the results available to the public. State law in Florida allows the state to develop standards and perform inspections of public schools. Through our review, we did not identify practices appreciably different from or an improvement on the process California uses to assess cleanliness and maintenance in public schools.

In addition, although we interviewed both school and district management at the six districts we visited, we did not identify generally applicable best practices related to school cleanliness, safety, or maintenance. As we previously discuss, our school site assessments identified significant or numerous deficiencies, resulting in *poor* scores at each of the schools we reviewed. However, our review found that different

schools have different challenges. For example, Fresno High School received a *poor* score in the *Electrical* category because it had numerous daisy-chained power strips. However, that same school lacked deficiencies in the *Structural* category, but others we reviewed did have such deficiencies.

We noted that Santa Maria-Bonita did somewhat better than other districts, and we discussed its success with district management. Santa Maria-Bonita generally indicated that its successes were the result of the levels of personal investment by its staff at all levels—and its funding. For example, one school principal in Santa Maria-Bonita explained that many of the school’s custodians are parents of students at the school, that the district actively recruits custodians who have a child in the district, and that the district has received adequate funding allowing it to prioritize the cleanliness, maintenance, and safety of its schools’ campuses. The adequacy of the district’s funding is at least in part the result of the additional funds it receives because of the high percentage of English language learners among its students, which is one of the factors in the LCFF that can lead a school district to receive more funding. We discuss funding in an earlier section of this report.

## Recommendations

### Legislature

To improve the maintenance and safety of California’s schools to meet NCES best practices, the Legislature should consider augmenting and, if appropriate, earmarking additional funding to school districts for facilities maintenance. This funding should be appropriated and distributed outside the LCFF—which is based on the characteristics of students—and instead should be commensurate with need. For example, a formula could include the age of facilities and the need as expressed in facilities’ master plans, or it could depend on independent needs assessments, such as the one we describe from Fresno Unified on page 28.

To better ensure that those who conduct FIT inspections lack incentives to overstate the cleanliness and safety of school facilities, the Legislature should consider modifying existing law. State law could require that the use of state funds for maintenance be contingent upon periodic review and validation of FIT inspection reports by a party who did not perform the FIT inspection, such as a schoolsite council, that could include parents, guardians, and students.

To better ensure the safety of K-12 students, the Legislature should require CDE to make available to school districts model training that the districts could provide to teachers, custodians, and site administrators about FIT requirements related to hazardous materials. This training should address the information the FIT guidebook provides related to identifying and securing hazardous materials that the FIT tool reports. The model training should include a focus on the materials that schools must provide—such as cleaning agents, propane, and pesticides—differentiating

the materials that are hazardous from those that are not, identifying the materials that are appropriate for classroom use, and specifying how such materials should be stored if they are to be kept in classrooms.

### ***Department of General Services***

To increase the accuracy of FIT reporting, DGS should engage in its stakeholder process by October 2025 to update the FIT, with a target completion date of October 2026, to include the following additional elements:

- A broader range of deficiency ratings that specifically differentiates *cosmetic deficiencies*, *minor deficiencies*, *moderate deficiencies*, and *extreme deficiencies*. Further, DGS should adjust the weighting of the various deficiency ratings to provide a more accurate assessment of each school's compliance with Good Repair Standards. DGS should also provide multiple examples for each section and deficiency level. These examples could include detailed descriptions or photographs that exhibit the differences of severity in common deficiencies. For example, photographs could show a small hole in a carpet, which could be considered cosmetic, and a larger rip, which could pose a trip hazard and therefore warrant a more severe deficiency rating.
- Guidance about scoring individual locations that contain multiple deficiencies in the same section.
- An update of the scoring system that removes the aggregation of FIT sections into category-level reporting and clarifies how such changes will affect overall scores. For example, the *Systems* category currently includes HVAC, sewer, and gas. A *good* score on two of those subcategories could hide problems in a third that scores *poor* because the overall *Systems* category score would likely average out to *good* or *fair*.
- The inclusion of guidance in the FIT on the assessment of specialized learning environments. This guidance should include but not be limited to woodshops, welding shops, and agricultural areas.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and under the authority vested in the California State Auditor by Government Code section 8543 et seq. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Respectfully submitted,



GRANT PARKS  
State Auditor

November 19, 2024

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## Appendix A

### FIT Scoring Comparisons

We conducted FIT inspections at 18 schools from six school districts across the State. We then calculated the schools' scores and compared them to the scores that the schools reported in their academic year 2022–23 SARC. For all 18 campuses we inspected, we assigned lower scores in at least one category than the scores the schools included in their 2022–23 SARC reporting. *Safety* was the category with the greatest number of differences between our scores and those in the schools' SARCs, closely followed by the *Interior* category and overall score. Tables A.1 through A.18 are the scorecards for each district, including the sections and categories in which we assigned the schools different scores from those they reported in their SARCs.

**Table A.1**  
**Jenny Lind Elementary School**  
**CALAVERAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Fair
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Fair	Fair	Electrical	Fair
Restrooms/Fountains	Fair	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Fair
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Poor	Structural Damage	Poor
			Roofs	Poor
External	Fair	Poor	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Fair
Overall Score	Fair	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.2**  
**Toyon Middle School**  
**CALAVERAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Poor
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Poor	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Fair	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Fair	Poor	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Poor	Structural Damage	Poor
			Roofs	Poor
External	Poor	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Fair	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.3**  
**Calaveras High School**  
**CALAVERAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Fair
Electrical	Poor	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Fair	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Fair	Poor	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Poor	Structural Damage	Fair
			Roofs	Poor
External	Good	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Fair
Overall Score	Fair	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.4**  
**Citrus Elementary School**  
**CHICO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Fair
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Fair	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Poor
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.5**  
**Chico Junior High School**  
**CHICO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Fair	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Poor
Electrical	Good	Fair	Electrical	Fair
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Fair
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Fair
Structural	Good	Poor	Structural Damage	Poor
			Roofs	Poor
External	Good	Poor	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Poor
Overall Score	Good	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.6**  
**Pleasant Valley High School**  
**CHICO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Fair	Electrical	Fair
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Fair	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Poor
External	Good	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Fair
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.7**  
**Calwa Elementary School**  
**FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Good		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.8**  
**Edison Computech Middle School**  
**FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Fair	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Fair
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Fair
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.9**  
**Fresno High School**  
**FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Poor	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Poor	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Fair
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Fair	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.10**  
**Grape Street Elementary School**  
**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Fair	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Poor
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Fair
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Fair
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Poor	Poor	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Poor
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.11**  
**Rudecinda Sepulveda Dodson Middle School**  
**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Fair	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Poor
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Fair	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Poor
Electrical	Good	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Fair	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Fair
External	Good	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Fair
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Exemplary	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.12**  
**Manual Arts High School**  
**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Poor	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Poor
Electrical	Good	Poor	Electrical	Poor
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Poor	Restrooms	Poor
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Poor
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Fair
External	Good	Poor	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Exemplary	Poor		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.13**  
**Margaret White Elementary School**  
**PALO VERDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Exemplary	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.14**  
**Ruth Brown Elementary School**  
**PALO VERDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Fair	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Fair
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent

**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent

**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent

**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.15**  
**Palo Verde High School**  
**PALO VERDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Fair	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Poor
Safety	Good	Poor	Fire Safety	Fair
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Fair
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Fair	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Poor
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.16**

Adam Elementary School

SANTA MARIA-BONITA SCHOOL DISTRICT

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Good	Electrical	Good
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Fair	Restrooms	Fair
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Fair	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Exemplary	Fair		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.17**  
**Rice Elementary School**  
**SANTA MARIA-BONITA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Fair
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Fair	Electrical	Fair
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Fair	Fire Safety	Good
			Hazardous Materials	Fair
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Fair
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Good		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

**Table A.18**  
**Fesler Junior High School**  
**SANTA MARIA-BONITA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

FIT CATEGORY	SCHOOL'S SELF-SCORE	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE	FIT SECTION	STATE AUDITOR'S SCORE
Systems	Good	Good	Gas	Good
			HVAC	Good
			Sewer	Good
Interior	Good	Poor	Interior	Poor
Cleanliness	Good	Good	Pests/Vermin	Good
			Cleanliness	Good
Electrical	Good	Fair	Electrical	Fair
Restrooms/Fountains	Good	Good	Restrooms	Good
			Fountains	Good
Safety	Good	Fair	Fire Safety	Fair
			Hazardous Materials	Poor
Structural	Good	Good	Structural Damage	Good
			Roofs	Good
External	Good	Good	Playgrounds/School Grounds	Good
			Windows/Doors/Gates/Fences	Good
Overall Score	Good	Good		

Source: State Auditor inspections and school SARCs.

**Exemplary:** ..... 99-100 percent  
**Good:** ..... 90-98.99 percent  
**Fair:** ..... 75-89.99 percent  
**Poor:** ..... under 75 percent

## Appendix B

### Example of an Updated FIT

The document on the following page provides an example of changes that DGS could make to the FIT to incorporate our recommendations. For example, the addition of a more nuanced “minor deficiency” rating would allow schools to more accurately assess the severity of their deficiencies. Further, scoring by FIT section instead of by SARC category would provide parents with more accurate information.

**Figure B**  
Example of an Updated FIT Instrument

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
**FACILITY INSPECTION TOOL (FIT)**  
SCHOOL FACILITY CONDITIONS EVALUATION

SCHOOL, DISTRICT/COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION		COUNTY	
Anycity Unified School District		Sacramento	
SCHOOL SITE	Inspector's Name	SCHOOL TYPE (GRADE LEVELS)	NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS ON SITE
Elm Street Elementary	Jane Doe	K-6	10
INSPECTOR'S TITLE	INSPECTOR'S NAME	NAME OF DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE ACCOMPANYING THE INSPECTOR(S) (IF APPLICABLE)	
TOTAL ESTIMATED BUILDING VOLUME (CUBIC FEET)	TIME OF INSPECTION	Legend	
TOTAL ESTIMATED SITE SQUARE FOOTAGE /ACREAGE	WEATHER CONDITION AT TIME OF INSPECTION	OK - No deficiencies	
TOTAL ESTIMATED BUILDING SQUARE FOOTAGE		MD - Minor deficiency, such as a small stain on the ceiling or a cracked floor tile that does not pose a trip hazard.	
		D - Deficiency. More serious than MD, such as damaged or missing ceiling tiles or torn carpet.	
		X - Extreme deficiency. Poses a risk to health and safety.	

Sections are rated separately from each other. No overall categories.

Additional minor deficiency rating included. This rating would address smaller deficiencies that don't pose serious risks to students and staff.

PART III: SECTION TOTALS AND RANKING (round all calculations to two decimal places)														X - Extreme deficiency: Poses a risk to health and safety.																	
TOTAL NUMBER OF AREAS EVALUATED	GASLEAKS		MECHANICAL		SEWER		INTERIOR SURFACES		OVERALL CLEANLINESS		PEST/VERMIN INFESTATION		ELECTRICAL		RESTROOMS		SINKS/FOUNTAINS		FIRE SAFETY		HAZARDOUS MATERIALS		STRUCTURAL DAMAGE		ROOFS		PLAYGROUND/SCHOOL GROUNDS		WIND/DAMAGE TO GREENSPACE		
	Number of "OK"s:		Number of "MD"s:		Number of "D"s:		Number of "X"s:		Number of "N/A"s:		Percent of System in Good Repair		Number of "OK"s divided by (Total areas - "N/A"s)*		Rank (Circle one)		GOOD = 90% - 100%		FAIR = 75% - 89.99%		POOR = 0% - 74.99%										
	10		8		10		2		3		10		9		8		10		10		0		9		8		10		10		
	0		1		0		4		5		0		0		2		0		0		3		0		0		0		0		
	0		0		0		3		2		0		1		0		0		0		6		0		0		0		0		
10	Number of "D"s:		0		0		1		0		0		0		0		0		0		1		1		2		0		0		
	Number of "N/A"s:		0		1		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		
Percent of System in Good Repair		100.00%		88.89%		100.00%		0.00%		30.00%		100.00%		90.00%		80.00%		100.00%		0.00%		0.00%		0.00%		100.00%		100.00%			
Number of "OK"s divided by (Total areas - "N/A"s)*																															
Rank (Circle one)		Good		Fair		Good		Poor		Poor		Good		Good		Fair		Good		Good		Poor		Poor		Poor		Good		Good	
GOOD = 90% - 100%																															
FAIR = 75% - 89.99%																															
POOR = 0% - 74.99%																															

\*Note: An extreme deficiency in any area automatically results in a "poor" ranking for that category and a zero for "Total Percent per Category".

OVERALL RATING:

DETERMINE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF 15 SECTIONS ABOVE	65.93%	SCHOOL RATING**	POOR
---	--------	-----------------	------

\*\*For School Rating, apply the Percentage Range below to the average percentage determined above, taking into account the rating Description below.

PERCENTAGE	DESCRIPTION	RATING
99%-100%	The school meets most or all standards of good repair. Deficiencies noted, if any, are not significant and/or impact a very small area of the school.	EXEMPLARY
90%-98.99%	The school is maintained in good repair with a number of non-critical deficiencies noted. These deficiencies are isolated, and/or resulting from minor wear and tear, and/or in the process of being mitigated.	GOOD
75%-89.99%	The school is not in good repair. Some deficiencies noted are critical and/or widespread. Repairs and/or additional maintenance are necessary in several areas of the school site.	FAIR
0%-74.99%	The school facilities are in poor condition. Deficiencies of various degrees have been noted throughout the site. Major repairs and maintenance are necessary throughout the campus.	POOR

INSPECTOR'S COMMENTS  
AND RATING EXPLANATION:

DISTRICT'S RESPONSES TO REPORT (Attach additional pages if necessary):

# Appendix C

## Scope and Methodology

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee (Audit Committee) directed the California State Auditor to conduct an audit of custodial staffing and cleanliness standards of California public schools. Specifically, the audit committee requested that we determine how custodial staffing levels have changed at a selection of schools, and assess changes in the square footage cleaned, number of students in each school, and the number of high-use areas to clean. Further, the requester asked us to assess the adequacy and availability of cleaning supplies and equipment and evaluate how funding for these materials has changed. Additionally, we were tasked with evaluating available cleanliness data to determine trends and compliance with certain standards.

Table C lists the objectives that the audit committee approved and the methods we used to address them. Unless otherwise stated in the table or elsewhere in the report, statements and conclusions about items selected for review should not be projected to the population.

**Table C**  
**Audit Objectives and the Methods Used to Address Them**

AUDIT OBJECTIVE	METHOD
1 Review and evaluate the laws, rules, and regulations significant to the audit objectives.	Reviewed relevant laws, rules, and regulations applicable to public school cleanliness and maintenance.
2 For a selection of schools within a judgmental selection of school districts, perform all of the following:  a. Determine how custodial staffing levels have changed during the past 20 years and assess changes in the square footage cleaned, number of students in each school, and the number of high-use areas to clean.	Selected school districts with varying enrollment levels, absence rates, socioeconomic statuses, student demographics, county income rates, geographical locations, and environments.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reviewed each selected school’s custodial staffing records according to full-time equivalents for the period the school maintained accessible records.</li><li>We requested all information available, but in general, school districts did not have 20 years’ worth of data.</li><li>Determined student enrollment levels for the same period.</li><li>Determined square footage each year for the same period.</li><li>Calculated the number of students per full time custodian and custodial FTE per square foot.</li><li>Conducted inspections to identify high-use areas.</li></ul>

*continued on next page . . .*

AUDIT OBJECTIVE	METHOD
<p>b. Assess the adequacy and availability of cleaning supplies and equipment and evaluate how funding for these materials has changed during the past 20 years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspected cleaning supplies and equipment at each selected school site. Interviewed custodians and principals at each school site to determine whether they had sufficient cleaning supplies and equipment. Interviewed district level custodial managers about the availability of cleaning supplies districtwide.</li> <li>• Reviewed the FIT, APPA resources, Department of Public Health resources, and district policies for guidance related to cleaning supplies and equipment. Did not identify requirements related to the adequacy of cleaning supplies.</li> <li>• Obtained and documented custodial supply and equipment expenditures from each of the six selected school districts on both a district and site-specific level.</li> <li>• Analyzed cleaning custodial expenditures to determine trends.</li> <li>• Requested all information available, but in general, school districts did not have 20 years' worth of data.</li> </ul>
<p>c. Evaluate available cleanliness data to determine whether there are trends based on certain factors, such as geographic location, student enrollment, rural/suburban/urban environment, area income level, student demographics, and students experiencing homelessness, special needs populations, or the number of students per square foot of physical space.</p>	<p>Requested cleanliness data at each of our selected districts. The districts report that cleanliness data is not obtained outside of FIT inspections. As a result, and because we determined that the scores reported in the SARC were unreliable, we could not report on the demographic trends requested in this audit objective.</p>
<p>d. Identify whether the selected school districts comply with basic cleanliness standards established by the FIT and those recommended by the APPA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspected three schools within each of six selected school districts and performed FIT inspections. Assessed all 15 FIT elements at each applicable location within the school sites. Documented deficiencies and extreme deficiencies at each site. Calculated scores for each section and category.</li> <li>• Compared results with schools' self-reported FIT scores.</li> <li>• Assessed compliance with APPA recommendations at each school site.</li> </ul>
<p>3 Assess standards for cleanliness, inspections, data collection, and custodial staffing levels for public schools in comparable states to identify possible best practices or potentially beneficial changes to state law or regulation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selected states with comparable student enrollment, absenteeism rates, test scores, and other factors.</li> <li>• Reviewed available information on cleanliness requirements, inspections, data collection and custodial staffing requirements. We did not identify best practices during this review.</li> </ul>
<p>4 Identify school cleanliness best practices and assess whether the FIT data collection processes are adequate to determine a true assessment of school cleanliness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compared FIT scores based on inspections across our selected school sites. Met with school site custodians and principals. Met with district custodial and maintenance managers. Conducted interviews to determine challenges and potential best practices. Transferable best practices were not identified.</li> <li>• Determined that the information reported on the SARC and based on the FIT instrument was not reliable and thus not a true assessment of school cleanliness.</li> </ul>

AUDIT OBJECTIVE	METHOD
5 Identify potential adverse educational or health outcomes that may be associated with declining or poor cleanliness in school facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a review of scholarly papers related to potential adverse educational or health outcomes.</li> <li>Met with CDE's Director of Facilities, and the DGS Office of Public School Construction. Conducted interviews about potential adverse effects.</li> </ul>
6 Review and assess any other issues that are significant to the audit.	Obtained <i>Williams</i> complaints related to facilities deficiencies at our selected districts. Reviewed those for our selected schools to determine whether the districts had addressed the complaints.

Source: Audit workpapers.

### Assessment of Data Reliability

The U.S. Government Accountability Office, whose standards we are statutorily obligated to follow, requires us to assess the sufficiency and appropriateness of computer-processed information we use to support our findings, conclusions, or recommendations. In performing this audit, we relied on financial reports from electronic accounting systems related to custodial and cleaning supply expenditures that we obtained from each school district. We performed data verification and validation of that information and determined that the data are reliable for the purposes of our audit objectives.




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**DATE:** October 25, 2024  
**TO:** Grant Parks  
California State Auditor  
**FROM:** Secretary Amy Tong  
**SUBJECT:** California State Auditor's Report No. 2023-122

Pursuant to the above audit report, enclosed are the Department of General Services' comments pertaining to the results of the audit.

The Government Operations Agency would like to thank the state auditor for its comprehensive review. The results provide us with the opportunity to better serve our clients and protect the public.

DocuSigned by:  
  
6D93093C5C494C2...

10/24/2024



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** October 24, 2024

**To:** Amy Tong, Secretary\*  
Government Operations Agency  
1304 O Street, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**From:** **Ana M. Lasso, Director**  
**Department of General Services**

**Subject:** **RESPONSE TO CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S REPORT NO. 2023-122**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the California State Auditor's (state auditor) Report No. 2023-122, Custodial Staffing and Cleanliness Standards, which includes recommendations for the Department of General Services (DGS) resulting from the audit. The following response addresses the recommendations for DGS.

### OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

DGS has reviewed the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in Report No. 2023-122, and generally agrees with the state auditor's recommendations for DGS.

Report No. 2023-122 accurately notes that DGS' Office of Public School Construction (OPSC) most recently updated the Facility Inspection Tool (FIT) in April 2022. For additional context, DGS notes that the April 2022 update resulted from a requirement in Senate Bill (SB) 129 (Chapter 69, Statutes of 2021, Skinner) for OPSC to update the FIT, which also appropriated \$250,000 to OPSC for this purpose. In updating the FIT, SB 129 required OPSC to consult with various stakeholders and consider current standards for school facilities, including, but not limited to, the Association of Physical Plant Administrator's (APPA) Operational Guidelines for Educational Facilities, and both local and state public health guidance and standards.

To complete the most recent FIT update required by SB 129, OPSC held three stakeholder meetings in November 2021, January 2022, and February 2022, and OPSC presented resulting recommended changes to the FIT to the State Allocation Board in April 2022. Although the scope of the 2022 FIT update differed somewhat from the specific recommendations in Report No. 2023-122, stakeholders involved in the 2022 process did not express overall concern with the FIT's instructions, rating criteria, or overall scoring. Additionally, stakeholders

\* California State Auditor's comments appear on page 85.

Amy Tong

-2-

October 24, 2024

were sensitive to FIT updates that could increase the time necessary to complete the FIT for each facility.

Additionally, Report No. 2023-122 indicates that “[a]s of 2024 the school facilities fund had no additional available funds.” DGS notes that as of the October 23, 2024 State Allocation Board meeting, \$371.5 million remains in school facility funding, primarily from General Fund appropriations to the program in the Budget Acts of 2022 and 2023. Additionally, Proposition 2 proposes a \$10 billion statewide school facilities bond on the November 5, 2024 general election ballot, of which \$8.5 billion would be available to Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public school facilities if the bond measure is approved by a majority of California voters.

①

#### REPORT NO. 2023-122 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DGS:

***To increase the accuracy of FIT reporting, DGS should engage in its stakeholder process by October 2025 to update the FIT, with a target completion date of October 2026, to include the following elements:***

- ***A broader range of deficiency ratings that specifically differentiates cosmetic deficiencies, minor deficiencies, moderate deficiencies, and extreme deficiencies. Further, DGS should adjust the weighting of the various deficiency ratings to provide a more accurate assessment of each school’s compliance with good repair standards. DGS should also provide multiple examples for each section and deficiency level. These examples could include detailed descriptions or photographs that exhibit the differences of severity in common deficiencies. For example, photographs could show a small hole in a carpet, which could be considered cosmetic, and a larger rip, which could pose a trip hazard and therefore warrant a more severe deficiency rating.***
- ***Guidance about scoring individual locations that contain multiple deficiencies in the same section.***
- ***An update of the scoring system that removes the roll-up of FIT sections into category-level reporting and clarifies how such changes will affect overall scores. For example, the “Systems” category currently includes HVAC, sewer, and gas. A “good” score on two of those subcategories could hide problems in a third that scores “poor,” as the overall “Systems” category score would likely average out to “good” or “fair.”***
- ***The inclusion of guidance in the FIT on the assessment of specialized learning environments. This guidance should include but not be limited to wood shops, welding shops, and agricultural areas.***

Amy Tong

-3-

October 24, 2024

**DGS RESPONSE TO REPORT NO. 2023-122 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

DGS generally agrees with the recommendations and is willing to incorporate the recommendations identified as changes to the FIT, if feasible. Specifically, DGS notes the following regarding the FIT elements recommended by the state auditor:

- ***A broader range of deficiency ratings, adjusted weighting of the various deficiency ratings, and multiple examples for each section and deficiency level*** – DGS acknowledges that there could be value in including these changes in an update to the FIT, and notes that any such changes should also seek to minimize additional complexity for local-level individuals using the FIT to evaluate facilities.
- ***Guidance about scoring individual locations that contain multiple deficiencies in the same section*** – DGS acknowledges that guidance about individual locations that contain multiple deficiencies in the same section may benefit individuals using the FIT to evaluate facilities, and notes that any such changes should also seek to minimize additional complexity for local-level individuals using the FIT to evaluate facilities.
- ***An update of the scoring system that removes the roll-up of FIT sections into category-level reporting and clarifies how such changes will affect overall scores*** – DGS notes that removal of the roll-up of FIT sections into category-level reporting may impact overall FIT ratings in some cases and agrees with the state auditor's assessment that clarification of the impact of this change on overall ratings must be considered. DGS notes that it is currently unknown how the recommended update to the scoring system would impact overall FIT ratings and associated reporting that local educational agencies are required to include in their School Accountability Report Cards. Additionally, DGS notes that although the current FIT presents "percentages in good repair" per category and an overall rating based on the average of eight category ratings, it also includes "evaluation detail" in which the facility evaluator rates each of the 15 sections individually, as well as percentages of each of these 15 sections that are in good repair.
- ***Guidance in the FIT on the assessment of specialized learning environments, including but not limited to wood shops, welding shops, and agricultural areas*** – DGS recognizes that some school facilities – particularly high schools – contain specialized learning environments, and acknowledges that FIT guidance specific to these types of facilities may benefit individuals using the FIT to evaluate them. However, although Report No. 2023-122 indicates that specialized learning environments involve locations and hazards that the FIT does not currently address, DGS notes that some of the specific issues identified in the audit report, such as

Amy Tong

-4-

October 24, 2024

a pile of rusty metal scraps in the yard outside of a welding classroom and a structurally compromised greenhouse, can be addressed under more general categories in the existing FIT, such as "evidence of hazardous materials that may pose a threat to pupils or staff" and "structural damage that has created or could create hazardous or uninhabitable conditions."

②

DGS notes that the outcome of California voters' consideration of Proposition 2 in the November 5, 2024 general election has significant implications for the availability of state facilities funding for school facilities, as well as for OPSC's administrative operations. OPSC anticipates that the state auditor's recommended timeline to commence the stakeholder process to update the FIT by October 2025, with a target completion date of October 2026, is feasible, provided funding for administrative costs is allocated. At this time, OPSC does not have the resources to perform this workload.

OPSC will engage stakeholders with the intention of including the state auditor's recommended elements in an updated version of the FIT for consideration by the State Allocation Board. Adoption of the revised FIT must ultimately be approved by the State Allocation Board with at least six positive votes.

### CONCLUSION

DGS is committed to pursuing improvements to the FIT to facilitate accurate and transparent evaluations of school facilities at the local level. DGS will evaluate the Auditor's comments and take appropriate actions where necessary to address issues presented in the report.

If you need further information or assistance on this issue, please contact me at (916) 376-5012.

Sincerely,



Ana M. Lasso  
Director



## Comments

### CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES

To provide clarity and perspective, we are commenting on DGS's response to our audit. The numbers below correspond to the numbers we have placed in the margin of its response.

We appreciate the additional information DGS provided and have corrected the text on page 8 to reflect the balance in the fund. We also acknowledge Proposition 2 in the report on page 26.

①

We agree that in general the FIT is able to reflect some potential hazards in specialized learning environments—indeed, we were still able to rate those facilities. However, as we note on page 43 of the report, these environments can pose unique dangers to students: they often involve power tool use, contact with various chemicals, and other hazards. Consequently, on page 53 we recommend that DGS update the FIT to include information on specialized learning environments.

②





# Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher, Superintendent

October 23, 2024

Grant Parks\*  
California State Auditor  
621 Capitol Mall, Suite 1200  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: 2023-122 – Confidential Draft Audit Report for Review

Dear Mr. Parks:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and offer comment on your report 2023-122 titled: Custodial Staffing and Cleanliness Standards: [title redacted]. We reviewed the provided reports which were heavily redacted and contained 34 of 70 pages. These comments pertain only to the unredacted text provided by your office.

① ②

In reviewing the report, we reviewed the scope as requested by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) as listed in Table A of the report on pages 67-69 of the report. Based on the heavily redacted report provided, we did not see any discussion on cleanliness standards and staffing levels and are unable to comment on the adequacy of the report.

② ③

Beyond the scope listed in Table A, the report goes on to discuss maintenance funding and need based on FIT inspections and funding sources. This is a complicated issue that merits further study with a larger and possibly different group of educational partners.

Additionally, in the unredacted portions specific to Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS) Williams monitoring, the report cites a discrepancy between district self-reporting on SARC and Williams monitoring scores. The report concludes that county offices “have not fulfilled those [Williams oversight] responsibilities by not ensuring the accuracy of schools’ FIT reporting.” This is a misrepresentation of the use of the FIT and Williams monitoring process. The FIT inspections by both districts and county offices are a point-in-time assessment of the current conditions, and it is reasonable that conditions could fluctuate between “Good” and “Exemplary” at different moments in time (based on the Calwa Elementary, Fresno Unified sample cited in the unredacted portion of the report).

④

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please contact Jeff Becker at 559-497-3721.

**Fresno County Office of Education**  
1111 Van Ness Avenue • Fresno, California 93721  
(559) 265-3000 • [www.fcoe.org](http://www.fcoe.org)

\* California State Auditor’s comments appear on page 89.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Lira". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Diane" and last name "Lira" clearly distinguishable.

Dr. Diane Lira  
Deputy Superintendent  
Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

## Comments

### CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSE FROM THE FRESNO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

To provide clarity and perspective, we are commenting on the Fresno County Office of Education's response to our audit. The numbers below correspond to the numbers we have placed in the margin of its response.

While preparing our draft report for publication, some page numbers shifted. Therefore, the page number count that the Fresno County Office of Education cites in its response does not correspond to the final report. ①

Government Code sections 8545 and 8545.1 prohibit the disclosure of any substantive information about an audit before it is completed, including information pertaining to other audited entities. Thus, we provided Fresno County Office of Education a redacted version of our draft audit report that excluded substantive information pertaining to other audited entities. ②

We discuss cleanliness standards and staffing levels in the report. However, because these sections did not relate to county offices of education, we did not include them in the redacted version of the report that we provided to the Fresno County Office of Education. ③

Our report accurately represents the FIT and the *Williams* monitoring process. Specifically, we acknowledge on pages 5, 31, and 33 that observations of any individual completing the FIT are point-in-time observations, and specific circumstances during the observations, such as the presence of students, may affect the scores. ④





**BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Susan Wittrup, President  
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Keshia Thomas

**SUPERINTENDENT**

Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.

October 23, 2024

To: John Lewis \*

From: Drone Jones

**RE: California State Audit Report**

Mr. Lewis,

In response to the redacted state audit report received on October 17, 2024, Fresno Unified would like to exercise our right to respond.

- FUSD agrees that custodial staffing within the district is consistent with best practices.
- References made on page 62 that FUSD does not track equipment deployed to sites is inaccurate. Operations tracks all equipment deployed to sites. (1)(2)
- Page 22 of the report addresses potential safety hazards related to daisy chained extension cords in classrooms. FUSD personnel have been instructed to remove daisy chained extension cords when identified and we will reiterate this policy quarterly. (1)
- FUSD acknowledges that some personnel may bring aerosols and cleaning products from home. This practice is against district policy and is prohibited. Memos reflecting this policy have been disseminated to sites on a reoccurring basis.
- FUSD does recognize some of our aging facilities interior surfaces would benefit from modernization. We are actively working to secure a bond to address these concerns.
- Page 52 of the report provides a recommendation to solicit input from school site counsels when conducting FIT inspections. Our third-party consultant does include school site personnel input when determining the appropriate FIT score for their site. (1)(3)

Thank you for providing FUSD with the opportunity to respond to the state audit performed at our facilities. We're hopeful that legislators will appropriate funding for Operations similar to what is provided through RRM.

Best Regards,

Drone Jones  
Fresno Unified School District  
Operations Director



## Comments

### CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSE FROM THE FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

To provide clarity and perspective, we are commenting on Fresno Unified's response to our audit. The numbers below correspond to the numbers we have placed in the margin of its response.

While preparing our draft report for publication, some page numbers shifted. Therefore, the page numbers that Fresno Unified cites in its response do not correspond to the final report.

①

Based on discussions with Fresno Unified, we modified the text to clarify that school districts, including Fresno Unified, did not always account for expenditures on maintenance equipment by individual school.

②

Fresno Unified misunderstands our recommendation. The schoolsite councils referenced in our recommendation on page 52 are bodies comprised of school personnel, parents, and, in some cases, students.

③





**LAUSD**  
UNIFIED

October 25, 2024

Grant Parks\*  
California State Auditor  
621 Capitol Mall, Suite 1200  
Sacramento, California 95814

**SUBJECT: Los Angeles Unified School District Response to the California State Auditor's Draft Report of Custodial Staffing and Cleanliness Standards**

This letter provides the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD or District) response to the California State Auditor's (CSA) draft report on custodial staffing and cleanliness standards in California public schools. While LAUSD was one of six school districts examined in this statewide assessment, and no formal response is required, LAUSD appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the audit findings and recommendations. LAUSD's response is organized into three sections:

1. Legislative recommendations proposed by CSA
2. Facility inspection findings at three LAUSD schools
3. Additional considerations and concerns

**1. Response to CSA's Recommendations for the Legislature**

The CSA's report provided two recommendations for the State Legislature to consider:

*Recommendation 1: The Legislature should consider earmarking, and if appropriate augmenting, funding to school districts for facilities maintenance outside of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) so that funding is provided based on facility needs such as age of facility.*

LAUSD concurs with the audit's recommendation regarding increased state funding for facilities maintenance, specifically for custodial and janitorial services. Clean, well-maintained school facilities are essential for student health, safety, and academic success. As the report notes, "the State has not allocated funding specifically for the maintenance of school facilities since 2013, and that maintenance costs now compete with other priorities such as instruction or special education." The audit correctly identifies that without supplemental funding, school districts must make challenging fiscal decisions between maintaining facility cleanliness and supporting educational programs, as both are paid from the same limited general funds.

LAUSD wholeheartedly supports additional funding from the State earmarked specifically for custodial support. However, placing restrictions on the use of current funds without providing additional or new funding could be problematic. Such restrictions would significantly limit LAUSD's ability to optimize resource allocations across our diverse school communities' needs. LAUSD remains committed to working alongside stakeholders and education partners to advocate for dedicated state funding that would enhance custodial staffing levels and support facility maintenance needs.

①

\* California State Auditor's comments appear on page 103.

Recommendation 2: *The Legislature should consider modifying existing law to require that the use of state funds for maintenance be contingent upon periodic review and validation of FIT (Facilities Inspection Tool) inspection reports by a party who did not perform the FIT Inspection.*

- ② LAUSD respectfully disagrees with the recommendation for additional third-party validation of FIT inspection reports, as robust external review processes are already in place. The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) currently conducts comprehensive FIT inspections at approximately 20% of LAUSD schools annually as part of Williams Inspection requirements. Recent LACOE inspections demonstrate strong facility maintenance standards: of the 178 schools inspected in the past 15 months, 60% received exemplary ratings, 37% good, 2% fair, and less than 1% (one school) poor. The results from these independent assessments do not
- ③ support the report's suggestion that districts are inflating their FIT scores. Furthermore, LAUSD's Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) performs Safe School Inspections at all schools. These evaluations ensure compliance with federal, state, and local safety mandates, encompassing asbestos management, chemical and construction safety, emergency procedures, Fire/Life Safety, Indoor *Environment standards, Injury and Illness Prevention, and Pest*
- ④ *Management programs*. Additionally, School Site Administrators at secondary schools appoint a Chemical Safety Coordinator who trains school staff on the safe handling and storage of chemicals. Implementing an additional layer of validation would create unnecessary administrative redundancy and divert limited resources away from actual facility maintenance and cleanliness improvements. LAUSD recommends maintaining the current oversight structure, which already provides reliable third-party validation while ensuring resources remain focused on direct facility maintenance and improvements.

## 2. Facility Inspection Findings at Three LAUSD School Sites

- ⑤ CSA inspected three schools in each of six school districts included in their statewide assessment. Unfortunately, given LAUSD's size of more than 850 school site campuses, a sample of just three schools (0.35% of the total) does not provide any statistical validity for drawing meaningful conclusions about district-wide conditions.

In LAUSD, inspections were conducted in May 2024 at:

- Grape Street Elementary
- Dodson Middle School
- Manual Arts High School

Using the State's Facility Inspection Tool (FIT), which evaluates 15 distinct facility categories, CSA compared their findings to LAUSD's facilities assessment included in the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) ratings, specifically focusing on categories that received 'poor' ratings. The SARC, mandated by California law, provides comprehensive annual documentation of school demographics, performance, and facility conditions. For Manual Arts High School, LAUSD was able to reference a FIT inspection conducted by LACOE in 2021 as an additional point of comparison. The report findings focused on four FIT categories:

1. Safety - Hazardous Materials and Fire Safety
2. Structural - Roofs
3. Interior Surfaces
4. Overall Cleanliness

### 1) **Safety Category - Hazardous Materials and Fire Safety**

The inspections identified improperly stored hazardous materials at the three schools, including disinfectants, cleaning wipes, air-fresheners, and insect sprays in classrooms. A

propane tank and barbeque (present at the time of inspection for a Senior class event) was found in a classroom. Inspections also identified fire extinguishers that were either

obstructed, missing or not properly charged. These conditions resulted in a “Poor” FIT score in the Safety category, as noted below.

SCHOOL	DISTRICT SARC SCORE	CSA SCORE	LACOE SCORE
Grape Street EL	Good	Poor	N/A
Dodson MS	Good	Poor	N/A
Manual Arts HS	Good	Poor	Good

**LAUSD Response Regarding Hazardous Materials:**

LAUSD takes the proper storage and handling of materials designated as hazardous very seriously. Maintenance and Operations (M&O) conducted follow-up inspections at all three sites to address two distinct challenges: the proper storage of District-issued maintenance materials and the presence of personal cleaning supplies brought to campus by school staff. Following these inspections, all District-approved materials have been properly secured and non-approved items have been removed, including the barbecue and propane tank equipment.

LAUSD maintains comprehensive chemical safety protocols through multiple oversight mechanisms. LAUSD requires all school sites to provide Hazardous Communication Training for staff handling workplace chemicals. The Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) oversees this training alongside other critical safety programs, including the Injury and Illness Prevention Program and Chemical Hygiene Plan for laboratory chemical management. Through its Safe School Inspection Program, OEHS enforces policies requiring that only OEHS-approved products be used by authorized, trained staff and that all hazardous materials are securely stored away from students.

OEHS Safe School Inspections were conducted at Grape Street Elementary (February 2023), Dodson Middle School (October 2023), and Manual Arts High School (March 2023). While these inspections do not generate FIT ratings, findings are communicated to Site Administrators and M&O Complex Project Managers in accordance with the Board of Education's "Safe and Clean School Environment" Resolution (February 2001) to ensure ongoing safety compliance. OEHS will continue to provide guidance to Site Administrators on the safe storage of gas cylinders. M&O will ensure that custodial staff are reminded annually of their responsibility to ensure that propane tanks and other gas cylinders are approved for use, meet all safety requirements for storage, and report any non-compliance issues to OEHS as required.

In addition, M&O has strengthened its protocols by implementing mandatory Department of Pesticide Regulation and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training. All M&O staff are required to complete this training at the beginning of the school year. This training is being rolled-out to all school site staff to be completed by the second quarter of 2025. This comprehensive training covers antimicrobial use, chemical storage requirements, and compliance with District IPM policy regarding pesticide application restrictions.

**LAUSD Response Regarding Fire Safety:**

M&O has verified that all fire extinguishers at the three LAUSD schools were inspected for tags, unobstructed, in good working condition. The M&O Fire Extinguisher Department maintains over 55,000 portable fire extinguishers district-wide, adhering to State Fire

Marshall requirements for annual maintenance. To strengthen compliance monitoring, M&O has implemented the following measures:

- Automating work order generation for scheduled maintenance
- Tracking monthly compliance metrics
- Continuing monthly inspections by Area Operations Supervisors to ensure custodial staff complete and document required visual inspections
- Maintaining documentation requirements in accordance with M&O Procedures G-F-8, G-F-2 and the OEHS Safe School Inspection Guidebook
- Establishing clear protocols for plant managers to report equipment compliance issues through the service request system

Although not categorized under this specific category, the report noted an electrical safety concern at Manual Arts High School regarding the use of "daisy-chained" electrical cords (where multiple extension cords or power strips are connected in sequence, creating potential fire hazards). M&O conducted follow-up inspections to verify that these electrical safety issues have been corrected. LACOE, OEHS, and M&O regularly distribute the "[Common Classroom Safety Violations in Classrooms](#)" is guidance document to administrators, reinforcing safety protocols and compliance requirements for maintaining secure learning environments.

## 2) Structural Category – Roofs

The inspection identified roof system deficiencies at all three schools. Roof deficiencies, as defined by the FIT, include potentially malfunctioning roofs, gutters, and downspouts, along with water-damaged ceiling tiles. While specific details were not provided in the report as to what was identified at the three schools, inspected conditions resulted in "Poor" FIT scores in the Structural category at Grape Street Elementary and Manual Arts High Schools, and a "Fair" score at Dodson Middle School

SCHOOL	DISTRICT SARC SCORE	CSA SCORE	LACOE SCORE*
Grape Street EL	Poor	Poor	N/A
Dodson MS	Good	Fair	N/A
Manual Arts HS	Good	Poor	Good

### LAUSD Response:

To protect classroom environments, M&O implements a proactive maintenance strategy, initiating service calls and planned repairs before the rainy season to prevent water intrusion issues. In the wake of the Winter 2024 storms, roof-related service calls were generated at Grape Street Elementary, Dodson Middle School and Manual Arts High School, and all repairs were completed in February 2024 by District in-house crews, augmented with local contractors. In October 2024, site-wide roofing inspections were completed at the three schools and any necessary repairs made. As of this writing, there are no open service calls at the schools. M&O maintains a comprehensive facilities management approach through regular Facilities Condition Assessments (FCA) of all building systems, including roofs. This data-driven process guides the prioritization of roofing replacement projects and tracks completed improvements.

## 3) Interior Surface Category

The inspection evaluated interior elements including floors, ceilings, and window casings at all three school sites. While specific details for each school were not provided in the report, identified deficiencies would include items like worn carpeting, stained ceiling tiles, and

damage wall surfaces or paint deterioration. These conditions resulted in "Poor" FIT scores in the Interior Surface Category at all three schools.

SCHOOL	DISTRICT SARC SCORE	CSA SCORE	LACOE SCORE*
Grape Street EL	Good	Poor	N/A
Dodson MS	Good	Poor	N/A
Manual Arts HS	Good	Poor	Fair

LAUSD Response:

M&O has completed inspections at all three schools to identify and assess interior surface conditions requiring repair or replacement. Service calls are categorized and prioritized through a three-tiered system: Emergency (addressing immediate health and safety risks), Urgent (resolving significant functional impacts), and Routine (handling standard maintenance needs). This prioritization system ensures efficient resource allocation and timely response to critical issues. Immediate safety concerns, including trip hazards and deteriorating wall surfaces, have been designated for priority response. All identified corrections are scheduled for completion by December 2024. To ensure ongoing maintenance, Area Operations Supervisors conduct monthly inspections and verify that plant managers submit timely service requests for interior surface repairs.

**4) Cleanliness Category**

This category of the FIT evaluates whether grounds and buildings are regularly cleaned with minimal accumulation of dirt and no odors. At Manual Arts High School, the audit documented grime and dust buildup on windowsills, baseboards, and floors, along with visibly dirty walls. The CSA determined that both Manual Arts High School and Dodson Middle School lack sufficient custodial staffing to meet federal custodial staffing level recommendations. These conditions resulted in "Poor" FIT score at Manual Arts High School, a "Fair" score at Dodson Middle School, and a "Good" score at Grape Street Elementary.

SCHOOL	DISTRICT SARC SCORE	CSA SCORE	LACOE SCORE*
Grape Street ES	Good	Good	N/A
Dodson MS	Good	Fair	N/A
Manual Arts HS	Good	Poor	Good

LAUSD Response:

The CSA inspections were conducted in May, coinciding with the end of the academic year when facilities typically show maximum wear. M&O staff has since addressed most identified conditions during the deep cleaning that occurs during the summer break, and includes floor refinishing, wall cleaning, and baseboard maintenance.

While the report acknowledges that inspections occurred prior to scheduled summer deep cleaning, it also identifies conditions that appeared longstanding at Manual Arts HS. These include an open trench across the track, deteriorated gutters, and cracked tennis courts. LAUSD confirmed that the trench was a temporary condition related to a stadium lighting construction project, which has since been completed and the track fully restored. In regards to the tennis courts that have cracks, they will be added to LAUSD's critical repair list for prioritization among other facility needs. In addition, a gutter replacement project is underway, with new gutters currently in fabrication and scheduled for installation upon completion.

3. **Additional Considerations and Corrections:**

- A. The report notes that districts’ Facilities Assessment were higher than the SCA scores, which indicates the need for more oversight. As noted in the previously, LAUSD maintains comprehensive inspection processes and multi-layered oversight systems that ensure thorough facility assessments.

Assessment Process: LAUSD's M&O Complex Project Managers conduct standardized SARC inspections at all sites annually between February and September using a uniform digital platform using Android tablets. This platform interfaces directly with the LAUSD’s Maximo Asset and Work Order Management System, enabling immediate response to identified deficiencies. While current protocol allows for repairs before finalizing SARC ratings, this methodology reflects actual facility conditions at reporting time rather than inflating scores.

- ② External Validation: LACOE provides robust independent oversight, conducting FIT inspections at approximately 20% of LAUSD schools annually. Recent LACOE inspections of 178 schools demonstrate strong alignment with LAUSD assessments, as shown in the Table below:

School Type	Number of Schools	Exemplary	Good	Fair	Poor
High Schools	24	14	10	0	0
Middle Schools	40	20	19	0	1
Elementary Schools	107	67	36	4	0
Span Schools	7	4	2	1	0

Additionally, OEHS conducts comprehensive Safe School Inspections at all sites, ensuring compliance with federal, state, and local safety regulations. Safe School Inspections have been completed at all three schools.

Superintendent and Board Oversight: Given LAUSD's vast geographic scope—approximately 1,300 schools and centers across 710 square miles, including most of Los Angeles and portions of 25 other cities and unincorporated areas—LAUSD has implemented a comprehensive oversight structure that exceeds the requirements of Education Code section 35292. The mandate to examine "the management, needs and conditions of schools" is fulfilled through multiple channels. The Superintendent is assisted by:

- Four Regional Superintendents (North, South, East, and West)
- District Regional Directors, each responsible for no more than forty schools with regular site visits throughout the year
- Regional Administrators of Operations who oversee facility needs
- Operations Coordinators who provide direct operational support to groups of 20-30 schools

This extensive network ensures continuous monitoring of facility conditions beyond just custodial and cleanliness matters, with schools receiving multiple visits throughout the year from various levels of District leadership. Through this structure, LAUSD maintains consistent oversight across its extensive territory while ensuring thorough, professional assessment of facility conditions.

LAUSD does not support making maintenance funding contingent upon FIT inspection validation by untrained parties such as School Site Councils. As explained, the current SARC assessments are conducted by qualified professionals:

⑥

- M&O school maintenance and custodial managers with extensive facility management experience
- LACOE FIT inspectors with specialized training in facility evaluation
- OEHS safety officers with expertise in environmental health and safety compliance

Requiring validation by School Site Councils would create unnecessary complications, requiring extensive training of non-facilities personnel while potentially causing confusion over who has final authority for facility ratings. Instead, LAUSD proposes strengthening the existing professional inspection process through improved staff training to identify all facility issues, regardless of size or scope. LAUSD would enhance staff expertise in facility inspections and modify operational procedures to ensure thorough and objective assessments. This focused approach maintains clear accountability while improving the quality of facility evaluations.

B. The report cites that “school districts and the state can and have passed bonds that may provide funding for school operations, maintenance, and facilities.” Pursuant to Article XIII A of the California Constitution, bonds may only be issued for the construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or replacement of school facilities, including the furnishing and equipping of school facilities, or the acquisition or lease of real property for school facilities. Moreover, the use of bond proceeds for operating expenses, which includes custodial services and regular maintenance, is explicitly prohibited. Los Angeles Unified, however, has passed several bond measures over the last three decades to fund improvements to school facilities, including the replacement of school building systems that have met or exceeded their service life. This distinction highlights the need for sustainable funding solutions that address both facility maintenance and cleanliness adequacy.

⑦

C. The report notes that under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), school maintenance competes with other priorities for funding. The State law requires school districts that access funding through the State Facilities Program to set aside 3% of its general fund revenue for a dedicated Routine Repair Maintenance Account (RRMA). LAUSD uses LCFF revenue to mostly fund the RRMA, although the LCFF does not contain a factor related to maintenance.

D. LAUSD requests corrections to Table 9 regarding salary expenditure classifications. The labels should be switched to read "Classified salaries (which includes Maintenance Salaries)" for the first entry and "Certificated Salaries (which includes Teacher Salaries)" for the second entry. This correction accurately reflects that maintenance workers are classified employees, while teachers are certificated employees. Additionally, LAUSD requests acknowledgment that the expenditure figures were sourced from the General Fund section of the Unaudited Actuals Financial Reports.

⑧

E. LAUSD requests corrections to Table 14 to accurately reflect expenditures by fiscal year:

⑨

- Fiscal Year 2018-19: \$19,904,000
- Fiscal Year 2019-20: \$18,880,000
- Fiscal Year 2020-21: \$29,224,000
- Fiscal Year 2021-22: \$51,510,000
- Fiscal Year 2022-23: \$58,112,000
- Fiscal Year 2023-24: \$23,212,000 (partial year data as of June 5, 2024)

The current table appears to shift each expenditure amount forward by one fiscal year. Additionally, the table should note that Fiscal Year 2023-24 data represents partial year expenditures.

LAUSD appreciates the opportunity to respond to the CSA's findings and recommendations. The District remains committed to maintaining safe, clean learning environments while efficiently managing our facilities resources. For any questions regarding this response, I can be reached at (213) 241-4213 or [krisztina.tokes@lausd.net](mailto:krisztina.tokes@lausd.net).

Sincerely,

**Krisztina Tokes**

Digitally signed by Krisztina Tokes  
DN: cn=Krisztina Tokes, o=Los Angeles Unified School District,  
ou=Chief Facilities Executive, email=krisztina.tokes@lausd.net,  
c=US  
Date: 2024.10.25 16:31:19 -07'00'

Krisztina Tokes  
Chief Facilities Executive  
Los Angeles Unified School District

cc: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent  
Pedro Salcido, Deputy Superintendent of Operations  
Gregory Garcia, Acting Director of Maintenance and Operations

## Comments

### CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSE FROM THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

To provide clarity and perspective, we are commenting on Los Angeles Unified's response to our audit. The numbers below correspond to the numbers we have placed in the margin of its response.

Los Angeles Unified misinterprets the intent of our recommendation to the Legislature on page 52. We have modified the language of the recommendation slightly from what the district saw in our draft to better communicate that intent.

①

Los Angeles Unified cites ratings from the Los Angeles County Office of Education to suggest that the additional oversight we recommend on page 52 is unnecessary; however, beginning on page 33, we raise concerns with the County Offices of Educations' FIT inspections as well.

②

We do not say that the school districts are inflating their scores, but on page 39 we note that scores from the schools are not useful if they do not reflect current conditions.

③

We did not assess whether the school districts complied with various safety and environmental standards. This audit focused in part on whether schools were reporting FIT scores accurately.

④

The methodology we used to select and assess the schools is a valid audit methodology and meets Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. As we indicate on page 75, we do not claim that our targeted selection was a statistical sample, nor did we project the results to the entire district.

⑤

As we note on page 5 of the report, the FIT does not need to be completed by specialists. We appreciate Los Angeles Unified's commitment to a robust oversight structure, but nevertheless we repeat that our scores, based on the FIT and related guidance, were lower in many cases than Los Angeles Unified's scores.

⑥

We acknowledge that this sentence on page 26 lacked clarity and precision and modified it to say "...provide funding for school facilities."

⑦

We agree that this was a transposition error and informed Los Angeles Unified before they provided their response that we made the correction suggested.

⑧

Upon review of the evidence it appears that our numbers in the table on page 51 did shift, and we have corrected the error and noted that fiscal year 2023-24 are partial-year expenditures.

⑨