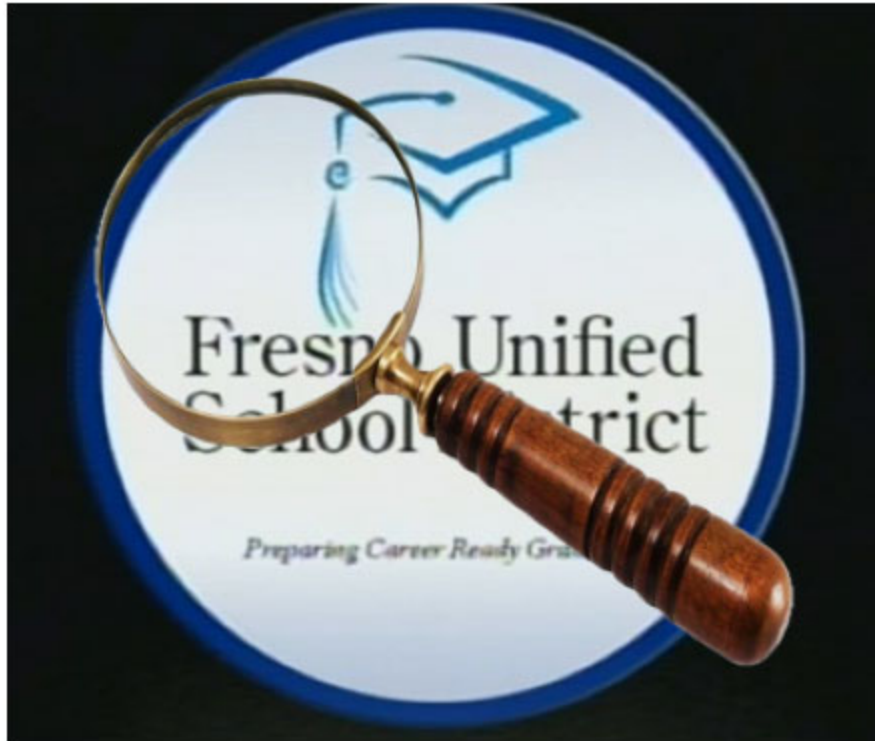


A Sharper Focus for Fresno Unified

How updated job descriptions and consistent evaluations might improve performance and accountability



Magnifying glass over Fresno Unified School District logo

2025-2026 Fresno County Civil Grand Jury

Report #3

Report Date: June 3, 2026



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SUMMARY

The Fresno County Civil Grand Jury was presented with a complaint concerning money spent by Fresno Unified School District (FUSD). Specifically, the issue was about payments made to a non-certified, non-union employee(s) upon their resignation. The Grand Jury determined that this matter was of sufficient interest and concern to the community to conduct further investigation. The investigation was limited to the review of District procedures, and was focused on payments to non-certified, non-union employees.

Although FUSD has the authority and ability to make severance payments to employees upon resignation, under specific conditions the FUSD Board of Education approval is required. This authority is granted under both the California Education Code §35160 and the Board's accepted policies.

In the course of the investigation, the Grand Jury determined that FUSD appeared to follow its specific policies and procedures in the incident brought to the Grand Jury's attention. However, a related matter surfaced. It was discovered that the school district was not rigorously enforcing its policies and procedures regarding personnel evaluations. The Grand Jury believes that this lack of continuity may have contributed to the original issue.

The Grand Jury found that FUSD leaders were aware of the personnel evaluation issue. The District is working toward its improvement, including efforts to establish and create consistency and uniformity in how personnel evaluations are conducted.

The Grand Jury found the FUSD to be credible in the response to our inquiries, and forthcoming with documentation and information.

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GLOSSARY

To better understand the employee structure and how it relates to the issues discussed, a simplified summary of different terms used in this report are outlined below:

- Certified - All employees whose position requires a certification from the State of California. This includes all teachers, principals, assistant principals, and others.
- Classified - Employees who are not required to have certification - includes personnel from janitorial and food services, up to and including secretarial positions of all levels.
- Management - Employees responsible for the work of others. This includes department heads and site supervisors. These employees can be classified or certified, depending on their job descriptions and requirements.
- Confidential - Employees responsible for positions related to confidential matters, such as executive secretaries.
- Bargaining units - Both certified and classified employees may belong to a bargaining unit. If there is a bargaining unit for their position, issues such as evaluations and disciplinary matters are determined by the conditions of the specific bargaining unit. For purposes of this report, employee groups represented by a bargaining unit are not the subject of this Grand Jury investigation.
- Contract employees - some Chief Executives, Deputy Superintendent and the Superintendent are not covered by any bargaining units and are instead covered under employment contracts.

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- Site Leaders - Principals, responsible for the operation of any of the School District sites.
- Department Leaders - Department heads or other personnel responsible for the operation of a department.
- Student Outcome Focused Government (SOFG) - A program adopted by the FUSD Board to prioritize student outcomes in every function of the District. It incorporates four specific goals, and four specific 'guardrails' to implement in meeting those goals. The specific goals and guardrails related to this investigation are included in the Discussion section.
- Brown Act - Government Code Chapter specifying how public entities are to conduct their meetings. Meetings must generally be open, accessible, and held in non-discriminatory facilities. Closed Sessions are restricted to specific, legally allowed topics like pending litigation and labor negotiations.

BACKGROUND

Fresno Unified is the third largest school district in the State of California, operating over 100 schools and covering more than 76 square miles. FUSD employs over 10,000 personnel, and serves over 67,800 students. It is supported by taxes, fees, and educational grants.

The District is led by a Superintendent of Schools, who answers to a locally elected Board of Education. The Board of Education and its meetings are operated under the "Brown Act", found at Government Code Section 54950-54963.

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METHODOLOGY

To investigate the complaint, the Grand Jury examined excerpts from the FUSD Human Resources Manual, which includes policies and procedures for how the District operates. The Grand Jury also interviewed a number of parties with knowledge of FUSD policies and procedures. Parties interviewed were able to reference the manual during the interview process.

During interviews, the Grand Jury was introduced to a program recently adopted by the School District known as Student Outcome Focused Government (SOFG). This program was explained to the Grand Jury, or referred to, by every person interviewed. An outline of the program is discussed below.

DISCUSSION

FUSD has a current set of Board of Education policies and Human Resources Manual. This was last updated in 2011 and the website where it is housed is currently under reconstruction.

In regard to payments made to non-represented employees upon resignation, FUSD policy allows the Director of Human Resources to authorize payment up to \$100,000. Amounts above this must be approved by the Board of Education. This action may be taken in a “closed session” of a Board of Education meeting, per provisions of the Brown Act.

In the course of its interviews, the Grand Jury determined that the Board of Education followed the correct procedure in the specific instance that triggered the initial investigation.

During this investigation, the Grand Jury learned of a program being newly implemented within the FUSD. The program is known as Student Outcome Focused Government (SOFG). The intent of SOFG is to change the direction of the District, the

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school sites, and the classroom, so that every employee is working toward the same four goals. SOFG also includes a series of four guardrails necessary to achieve these goals. One of the significant guardrails implemented by the Board was the principle of effective staffing.

Effective staffing was defined as investing in all personnel, providing them the ability to do their jobs properly, and supporting them during their learning process. The Grand Jury learned that one impediment to effective staffing was a lack of consistent and timely personnel evaluations.

The Grand Jury's investigation revealed that, generally, employees were to be evaluated at least once every two years. The frequency of evaluations for represented employees varies based on the terms of their applicable union contracts. During the interview process, the Grand Jury learned that perhaps as little as 12% of the entire staff at FUSD had been evaluated in the last 10 years.

The Grand Jury learned that there is a lack of a base line, or calibrations, for many of the evaluations. Calibrations would allow for employees to be evaluated consistently and effectively with clear benchmarks for improvement. The District has started to standardize and train leaders on how to evaluate consistently.

The Grand Jury discovered that job descriptions in many cases need to be updated. Without current job descriptions, there may be difficulty in making headway toward the calibration issue. The lack of updated job descriptions was also cited as a factor in the original complaint. Job descriptions needed to be updated to reflect the latest computer technology, including the use of current computer programs and the application of artificial intelligence (AI).

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CONCLUSION

FUSD acknowledges that it needs to bring continuity and consistency to its employee job descriptions and evaluations. The District administration and Board of Education appear to be taking steps to rectify this. A timeline should be implemented so that accountability follows.

FINDINGS

F1 - FUSD and the Board of Education were within their authority under the California law and their policies and procedures to pay severance to a non-certified employee.

F2 - Outdated job descriptions and a lack of continuity and consistency in its personnel evaluations timeline and process may have contributed to this payout.

F3 - FUSD appears to be making an effort to update job descriptions and adhere to an updated performance review cadence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 - FUSD Board of Education should direct executive staff to develop a procedure for completing personnel evaluations per its current policies, including a standard timeline, with some exceptions, so that these evaluations can be completed on a biennial basis, to be done by November 1, 2026. (F2, F3)

R2 - The FUSD Board of Education should direct FUSD staff to complete personnel evaluations on all classified and administrative employees by the completion of the 2027-2028 school year, to be done by November 1, 2026. (F2, F3)

R3 - The FUSD Board of Education should direct FUSD staff to review and update job descriptions for all full-time employees by the end of the 2027-2028 school year, to be done by November 1, 2026. (F2, F3)

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RESPONSES REQUIRED

Pursuant to California Penal Code §933, each entity or individual named below must respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines.

Required response within 90 days:

1. FUSD Board of Education.
 - a. Findings: F1, F2, F3
 - b. Recommendations: R1, R2, R3

All interviews with the Fresno County Civil Grand Jury are confidential (Penal Code §929). Responses must be based on the findings and recommendations of the report, not the process of how the findings and recommendations were acquired.

Responses to FINDINGS shall be either:

- The respondent agrees with the finding; or
- The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

Responses to RECOMMENDATIONS shall be one of the following:

- The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action;
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time limit for implementation;
- The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time limit for the matter to be prepared for

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discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency where applicable. This time limit shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Civil Grand Jury report; or

- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

INVITED RESPONSES

The Fresno County Civil Grand Jury also invites the following individuals to respond:

1. Superintendent of Schools, Fresno Unified School District
 - a. Findings: F3
 - b. Recommendations: R1, R2
2. Chief Human Resources/Labor Relations, Fresno Unified School District
 - a. Findings: F2, F3
 - b. Recommendations: R1, R2, R3

Responses are to be sent to:

The Honorable Judge Jeffrey Hamilton, Jr.

Fresno County Superior Court

1100 Van Ness Avenue

Fresno, CA 93724-0002

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DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires reports of the Civil Grand Jury to not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

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