

California Legislature



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JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT COMMITTEE DAVID A. ALVAREZ, CHAIR

May 3, 2023

Members
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

REVISED 5/17/2023

Dear Members of the Committee:

The cleanliness levels of schools have long been a source of concern, notably flagged in *Williams v. California* and a key focus during the Covid-19 pandemic response. Despite growing investments in our schools, funding has lagged for custodial staffing and day-to-day maintenance needs. Funding dedicated to maintenance and repair is exclusively for the condition of physical structures, and not regular cleaning and maintenance. As a result, many schools have not augmented their custodial staff despite growing square footage and needs. The current funding mechanism often means schools have no other choice but to let things fall into disrepair in order to derive necessary funding.

Overview

Studies show that level of cleanliness is one of the primary factors in the spread of viral disease in crowded indoor environments, including schools and increased efforts at improved cleaning in schools have reduced upper respiratory symptoms. Enhanced hygiene in schools and targeted cleaning of frequent contact points resulted in reduced illnesses and reduced absenteeism due to infectious illness.

In the *Williams v California* (2004) settlement, the ACLU noted the State had failed its obligation regarding school facilities and that schools were facing an impending crisis as insufficient budgets forced many of the lowest performing schools to reduce maintenance and custodial staff. Ten years after this settlement, the problem has only worsened.

For example, at LAUSD in 2007, the ratio was one custodian for every 15,367 square feet, but in 2015 that had changed to 1 custodian for every 33,971 square feet. High levels of deferred cleaning and other facility deficiencies are a significant concern for California, most importantly when a school has a significant amount of these deficiencies, teaching and learning are hindered and education, health, and safety are compromised.

Recent Legislative Background

In 2021, the State mandated that the California Department of General Services (DGS) via the Office of Public School Construction consult with classifieds and other stakeholders to develop statewide cleaning standards for schools. Included in the consideration were standards developed by the Association of Physical Plant Administrators (APPA) that labor representatives had been calling on school districts to follow for years.

In 2022, per legislative mandates DGS established an extra assessment on their Facility Inspection Tool (FIT) to assess school cleanliness, in addition to the good repair assessment. This current inspection tool is entirely voluntary as is the submission of data, however it establishes an agreed upon minimum standard for assessing school cleanliness.

Need for Audit

Greater data is needed to determine whether our schools are in good standing when it comes to cleanliness. There is a consensus amongst parents, educators, and staff that our schools are not meeting the cleanliness expectations we have as Californians and the fourth largest economy in the world.

Clean schools have a direct impact on students' and staff health and attendance. Sanitary school conditions are essential to combatting communicable diseases and preventing the spread of the common cold, flu, and other illnesses that keep our kids, teachers, and staff out of school and impact learning.

Statewide, an estimated 38% of students go to schools that do not meet minimum facility standards, with higher levels of deficiencies in districts with smaller tax bases. Schools need funds to invest in additional custodial staff and supplies to upgrade, maintain, and clean ventilations systems, and reduce the risk of disease transmission in shared spaces like classrooms, restrooms, etc.

A key focus of our state and federal funding is to improve equity and raise up our most underserved students. Safe and clean schools are an essential component of healthy learning, yet our highest risk students have some of the lowest staffed schools that fall well below cleaning guidelines recognized by the industry and their educational institution peers in the community college sector.

There are currently no statewide cleaning and sanitation standards in place for our schools. California is among the 21 states that do not conduct or require districts to conduct comprehensive facility assessments that go beyond the visual inspection required in the FIT tool. Additionally, the loss of thousands of custodial positions since the Great Recession has left schools struggling to even sweep the floors more than twice a week as the cleanliness of our schools continues to worsen and our custodial and classified staff are asked to do more with less. This has led to unsafe and unwelcoming school environments for many, especially lower-income students of color.

Audit Consideration

Put forth in the spirit of ensuring that the State's public school system provides a sanitary and safe learning environment for its students and staff alike, I respectfully request approval of an audit to review the cleanliness and custodial staffing at a selection of school districts selected by the State Auditor. The audit will include but not be limited to the following scope, to the extent information is available:

- Determine how custodial staffing at these school districts has changed over the last 20 years, factoring in the square footage cleaned, number of students in a facility, and the number of high use areas to clean.
- Determine whether cleaning supplies and equipment are adequate and how funding for these materials has changed over the last 20 years.
- Assess whether cleanliness varies by certain factors such as rural vs urban school districts, low income areas vs high income areas, student demographics, number of homeless students, number of special needs students, and number of students per square foot of physical space.

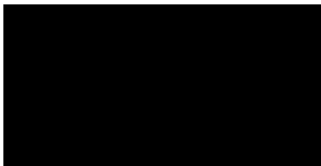
- Assess standards for cleanliness, inspections, data collection, and custodial staffing levels for public schools in like-states to identify possible best practices or potentially beneficial changes to state law or regulation.
- Identify whether school districts comply with basic cleanliness standards established by the APPA and utilized by FIT and whether these standards are adequate.
- Assess whether the FIT data collection process is adequate to determine a true assessment of school cleanliness.
- Identify possible adverse educational and health outcomes that may be associated with school cleanliness, potentially including the impact on absenteeism, dropout rates, increased incidents of asthma, allergies or other physical symptoms and the impact on student concentration and memory, as well as other cognitive functions.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

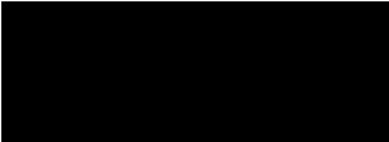
Sincerely,



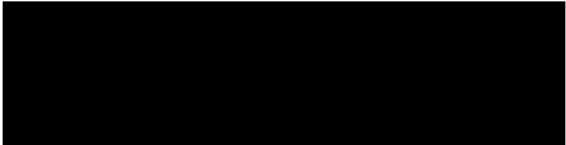
David Alvarez, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Assemblymember, 80th District



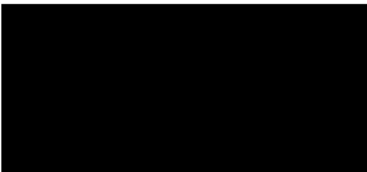
Wendy Carrillo
Assemblymember, 52nd District



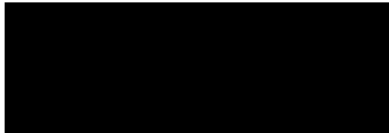
Susan Talamantes Eggman
Senator, 5th District



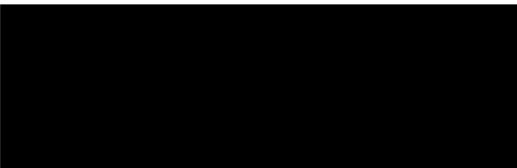
Kevin McCarty
Assemblymember, 6th District



Jim Patterson
Assemblymember, 8th District



Miguel Santiago
Assemblymember, 54th District



Avelino Valencia
Assemblymember, 68th District



Scott Wilk
Senator, 21st District