

Alum Rock's 'rogue' board majority needs to shape up

By Laura Aguirre and Raymond Mueller

Smoothly run school districts aren't typically the subject of what the state calls an extraordinary audit. So we should not be surprised Thursday evening when Santa Clara County Office of Education Superintendent Jon Gundry presents the results of the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) audit to the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District Board of Education.

The audit was a necessary step since a majority of the Alum Rock Board has ignored staff concerns with bond expenditures. It has the capacity to support the district in identifying weaknesses in the fiscal controls and improve those systems to become better stewards of the taxpayers' money.

Sadly, this board, led by President Khanh Tran and Trustee Esau Herrera, is not interested in improving fiscal systems. Instead of welcoming the support of FCMAT and the County Office of Education, they have vowed to "fight" the extraordinary audit recommendations and implausibly "take this all the way to the Supreme Court".

Not only is that response silly, but it is a disservice to the taxpayers and school children of the Alum Rock District.

The FCMAT extraordinary audit does not level accusations against any members of the Board of Trustees. Yet when confronted with questionable expenditures for project and construction management paid to Southern

pleads, "innocent until proven guilty."

Basic government ethics practices are all but lost on the Alum Rock board majority.

With \$444 million from three voter approved bond measures in play, this board should embrace the help and support of the State and County Office of Education on behalf of schoolchildren and taxpayers. It should seek to stabilize the district and support the staff leadership team that inherited this mess.

But Tran, Herrera and trustee Dolores Marquez are scapegoating yet another superintendent and others to distract the community from the board's micromanagement and possible mismanagement. This thrusts the district into further chaos, a long-held tactic of both Herrera and Marquez.

The board majority may be able to unseat tremendously competent Superintendent Hilaria Bauer, contributing further to the chaos and instability.

Bauer has created a culture of collaboration with the greater Silicon Valley. She has built innovative partnerships with the city of San Jose and credible nonprofit providers to help close long standing achievement gaps. She is an indefatigable advocate of early learning. The fruits of her work will be clear to the community as our youngest students advance into bright futures.

Despite her administration's vision and effort to advance a new Alum Rock, the board majority cannot seem to break old patterns. Bauer

pushed out, only to flourish elsewhere.

The rogue board majority do not appear to be concerned or interested in education or representing the will of the people. They are much more concerned with their primary constituent, the Del Terra Group. It is imperative that they are reminded of their roles as members of the Alum Rock board of trustees.

The superintendent's job is to manage and lead the district based on the policy direction provided by the board. The dysfunction on display is due to the three Alum Rock trustees that insert themselves into the management and daily operations of the district. They must be stopped.

Alum Rock residents want the deficiencies defined in the extraordinary audit to be corrected. The board must stand behind the superintendent and bring stability and sanity to the district.

Tran, Herrera and Marquez are diverting from the real issues of accountability and transparency by scapegoating Superintendent Bauer. Sound familiar? Resist #theAlumRock3. *Laura Aguirre is an Alum Rock Union Elementary School District parent. Raymond Mueller, also a parent, chairs the district's Citizen's Oversight Committee for bond measures G, J and I. They wrote this for The Mercury News.*

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California-based Del Terra Group, can't become yet another Alum
Tran consistently Rock superintendent

Commentary

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