



# CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

Elaine M. Howle, State Auditor

# FACT SHEET

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Report No. 2012-103

**The California State Auditor released the following report today:**  
**Los Angeles Unified School District**  
*It Could Do More to Improve Its Handling of Child Abuse Allegations*

## BACKGROUND

With more than 650,000 students for the 2011–12 school year, the Los Angeles Unified School District (district) employed approximately 27,000 certificated K-12 classroom teachers, 4,600 substitute teachers, and 5,100 teacher assistants—who do not hold a certificate to teach from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (commission). The district also employed nearly 30,400 classified employees, who are not required to have a teaching certificate, in positions such as campus aide or clerk. The district must report to the commission certificated employees whose change of employment status is final either through resignation, dismissal, or settlement with a school district as a result of an allegation of misconduct or while an allegation is pending. Allegations of suspected child abuse must be reported immediately by calling a law enforcement entity and filing a report within 36 hours.

## KEY FINDINGS

During our review of the district's handling of allegations of employee abuse against students, we noted the following:

- The district often failed to notify the commission when required to do so, such as when employees with a certificate to teach were dismissed while allegations of misconduct were pending.
  - ✓ Realizing it had failed to report such cases, the district reviewed its practices and reported about 600 cases to the commission in a span of three months—at least 144 cases were submitted more than one year late and of these, 31 were more than three years late.
  - ✓ Twenty-three of the 31 late cases involved misconduct against a student. In one case, a district teacher who allegedly had a sexual relationship with a student was reported to the commission 3.5 years late—thus, the commission could not promptly determine whether to revoke the teacher's certificate and prevent the teacher from working in other school districts.
- No statewide centralized notification system exists to warn other school districts when a classified employee separates from any given district by dismissal, resignation, or settlement during the course of an investigation or for cases in which no arrest or conviction is made, and thus such employees may be able to find employment in other school districts.
- The district generally followed state law when reporting suspected child abuse and its own policies related to investigating child abuse allegations but did not always act promptly during an investigation and in disciplining employees. In one case, the principal took nearly five months to issue a memo, and although the district issued a suspension two months later, the superintendent took another five months to ask the district to pursue settlement and dismissal options.
- In order to keep an employee who is being investigated for misconduct away from the school site, the district relocates or “houses” them during the investigation. However, the time an employee is housed can range from days to years while the district continues to pay the employee's salary.
  - ✓ For the 24 allegations we reviewed, 17 employees were housed, but only one was housed for less than 120 days—the maximum per the district's policy at that time.
  - ✓ Of the 111 certificated employees that were housed for various reasons during 2011, the average time they were housed exceeded 200 days and the district paid them more than \$4.2 million in salaries.
- Because of the lengthy, expensive dismissal process required for certificated employees, the district often enters into settlement agreements with those employees yet does not track the cost of each settlement. Of the 61 settlements we reviewed, 47 related to inappropriate employee conduct involving a student and we computed that the payouts totaled more than \$2 million.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made several recommendations to the district including that it adhere to requirements for reporting cases to the commission in order for the commission to determine if teaching credentials should be suspended or revoked. Further, the district should increase its oversight of open allegations of employee abuse to speed up its investigation and disciplinary processes, and should track the nature and amount of settlements. We also recommended the Legislature consider establishing a mechanism to monitor classified employees who separate from a school district by dismissal, resignation, or settlement during the course of an investigation.

