



Burbank Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent
1900 W. Olive Avenue
Burbank, CA 91506
Ph: 818.729.4442

Board of Education

Abigail Pontzer Kamkar, President
Dr. Emily Weisberg, Vice President
Laurette Cano, Clerk
Kelsey Olson
Dr. Armond Aghakhanian

Interim Superintendent

Oscar Macias, Ed.D.

THE SOBEL GROUP INVESTIGATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION AND KEY FINDINGS

In June 2025, the Board of Trustees, through District General Counsel, retained The Sobel Group, Inc., (Sobel) to conduct a thorough, independent investigation of the Specialized Support Services (SSS) contract and other District-related concerns. The Board's goal was to obtain an objective, outside third-party review of District staff's internal investigation of the SSS contract and investigate other concerns that came to light in the course of that internal investigation.

Sobel has completed its work and submitted its report. The report is a confidential, attorney-client privileged document. However, in furtherance of the Board's commitment to share relevant information regarding the SSS contract with BUSD community, the Board is providing this summary of key findings from the investigation.

Additionally, in furtherance of our transparency commitment, early in the new school year the Board will make a redacted version of the Sobel report available for public review after appropriate redactions are completed by District counsel to protect employee confidentiality and other protected rights and interests.

INVESTIGATION OVERVIEW

Sobel interviewed thirty-four (34) witnesses and reviewed extensive written and other documentation, resulting in a comprehensive report covering the SSS contract and other issues of concern. Notably, former Board member Charlene Tabet (Tabet) and former Superintendent Dr. John Paramo (Paramo) both declined to participate in the investigation. Sobel's key findings are summarized below.

The SSS Contract

Tabet was the owner of SSS and intentionally tried to conceal this information from the District. Certain District staff, including Paramo, did know or should have known of Tabet's involvement in SSS at or near the inception of the contract in August or September 2024. The contract was approved by the Board in September 2024. At that time, the other members of the Board did not have knowledge of Tabet's personal involvement in SSS or the contract and did not learn this information until May or June 2025.

In August 2024, a District employee did have concerns about the SSS contract and Tabet's involvement. The employee shared those concerns with one District leader, but neither shared those concerns with anyone else in the District, including other members of the Board.

Contrary to District procedure, SSS did not submit adequate documentation of services performed in order to receive payment. Instead, a District employee both prepared and approved an invoice for payment to SSS. Further, SSS largely did not perform and deliver the work required by the contract, which certain staff members knew. However, SSS was still paid the full contracted amount of \$90,000, in addition to a \$3,000 overpayment, for a total payment of \$93,000.

The Knoll Contract

Paramo led the hiring of his personal trainer, Isaiah Knoll, to provide athletic training services for students. The hiring process did not follow normal District procedure. Members of District staff had serious concerns regarding Knoll's qualifications and experience to perform the services. Despite these concerns, the contract was approved and payments to Knoll were approved by Paramo and/or another member of District leadership, presumably at Paramo's direction. Contrary to standard District practice, the payment warrants for the trainer were routed to the Superintendent's office instead of being mailed to the trainer.

Vikings Field Use

Tabet was the President of Vikings Youth Sports Program (Vikings). Over a period of years, Tabet used her position as a Board member to gain preferential access to the use of District facilities for Vikings. Tabet pressured and intimidated District staff to allow Vikings to book the use of District football fields out of compliance with District facility use policies and procedures. Tabet also used this preferential access, with preferential rates, to then sublet the fields at higher rates to other users. In some instances, even where another group had the right to use a facility with a proper use permit, Vikings would force the other group to give up their use in favor of use by Vikings. Vikings also did not pay all of its invoiced fees or consistently comply with other District use requirements, but was still permitted continued facility use because of Tabet's intimidation of or pressure on District employees.

Christmas Tree Lot

Tabet took over the operation of a Christmas tree lot business that used a District school site for several years. Tabet did not contribute a portion of the lot sales to the school site, contrary to what was promised or represented. It is undetermined whether Tabet requested or was issued a use permit to operate the lot on the school site.

Storage Containers

Tabet arranged for the placing of multiple storage units on District property without a use permit or other proper authorization for her use. For an extended period, District staff did not have access to the units and did not know what they were used for. When District staff ultimately gained access to the units, staff discovered items related to the Christmas tree lot, Vikings, and what appeared to be personal items related to Tabet or one of her associates.

Operational Weaknesses

The report also revealed weaknesses in the District human resources, fiscal and other operational policies, procedures and practices. For example, among other issues, there has been (i) a lack of appropriate controls for District facility access keys; (ii) a lack of proper controls and separation of responsibilities for payroll approvals; and (iii) inappropriate sharing of District system access credentials between employees.

SPECIFIC KEY FACTUAL FINDINGS

Findings Related to SSS

- SSS is owned by Tabet and she tried to hide her personal involvement in SSS from the District.
- On September 5, 2024, the Board approved the SSS contract, a vote in which Tabet participated.
- At the time the contract was approved, the other members of the Board were not aware of Tabet's involvement in SSS or the contract. They became aware of Tabet's personal involvement in SSS and the contract in May or June 2025.
- Tabet used her position as Board member to intimidate, influence, and threaten District employees with regard to the SSS contract.
- Paramo and another District employee knew or should have known of Tabet's personal involvement with SSS in August or September 2024.
- At or near the time the SSS contract was originally approved, a District employee involved in its approval had concerns about the contract and reported those concerns to a member of District staff leadership, but neither reported those concerns to anyone else.
- Certain District employees were aware that SSS was not providing sufficiently completed work product under the contract but still authorized and made payments to SSS.
- Payments were made to SSS without invoice documentation provided by SSS. Rather, requests for payments to SSS were internally generated by a District employee on behalf of SSS.
- Payment warrants for SSS were re-directed to the Superintendent's office and held for Tabet to pick up in person.
- The contract amount was in excess of what the District would have paid an internal employee or another outside contractor for the contracted services.
- Total payments made to SSS were in excess of the contracted amount by \$3,000.

Findings Related to the Isaiah Knoll Contract

- Knoll was the personal trainer for Paramo.
- Paramo arranged for the District to hire Knoll to perform athletic training services to District students, bypassing normal hiring procedures.
- Several District staff members had serious concerns regarding Knoll's credentials and experience to provide the services.

- Several District staff members had concerns that Knoll was not in fact providing all of the contracted services for which he was being paid.
- One senior member of District staff leadership with concerns regarding the Knoll contract signed off on payments to Knoll at the direction of Paramo.
- Knoll's payments were re-directed to the Superintendent's office rather than being mailed to Knoll.

Findings Related to Vikings

- Tabet was the Viking's President and used her Board position to intimidate, influence, and threaten BUSD employees in order to procure preferential District facilities use for Vikings.
- The District offered a three-tier fee and priority structure for facility use. Vikings paid the Category 1 lower fee; however, based upon its entity status, Vikings should have paid the higher Category 3 fee.
- Vikings "kicked" other groups off of District fields, even when those groups had the appropriate field use permit.
- Due to its preferential treatment, Vikings was able block field use dates from other organizations and then sublet use to those other organizations at a higher fee than Vikings was charged.
- Vikings did not fully pay their invoiced fees to the District.
- Vikings did not maintain its 501(c)(3) status, being in delinquent status since January 2022 as well as suspended status with the California Franchise Tax Board.

Findings related to District Operations

- A need to update and modernize the District's human resources, fiscal, and payroll systems to ensure accurate, timely, and verifiable processes with appropriate segregation of duties