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## THE SKY IS FALLING ALPAUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

### BACKGROUND

When Alpaugh Elementary School first opened in 1906, classes were held in a tent. This all changed in 1908 when a two-room framed structure was opened and housed 30 elementary students. This structure was replaced by a two-story building which in 1930 was destroyed by fire and quickly rebuilt. The current building was built in the late 1950's and housed both elementary and high school students as it does to this day.

### REASONS FOR INVESTIGATION

Members of the 2009-2010 Tulare County Grand Jury visited the Alpaugh School District in December of 2009. The Superintendent conducted a tour of the school grounds, which revealed the existence of deplorable conditions.

### PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

1. Interviewed relevant witnesses.
2. Reviewed relevant documents.
3. Attended Alpaugh School District Board meetings.
4. Visited Alpaugh Elementary/High School.

### FINDINGS

1. Funds allocated for repairs of the Alpaugh School Buildings (School) are not being adequately utilized.
2. The following conditions were observed on the December 2009 visit:
  - a. School corridor ceilings falling down, with the worse areas being fenced off.
  - b. Standing water, green with algae in several places.
  - c. Newly painted outside walls cracking and peeling.
  - d. Restrooms with cracks in the cement floors.

3. The Williams Settlement Compliance Findings<sup>1</sup> (for school facilities) report of 2009 gave the Alpaugh School an over all rating of POOR (59.38%) for the following reasons:
 

“Exterior of building, cracked and peeling paint; Walkways are cracking with holes and raised edges that pose an immediate danger to students...walkway covers show dry rot, boards bowed and hanging down; 2. There is evidence that alkali intrusion from the ground and cement is effecting the site’s building foundations, walls and floors. This intrusion has caused cracking, peeling paint and probable structural deficiencies in the buildings. Although a foundation stress test was not included in the Williams inspection, there is evidence to conclude that the structural integrity of the site’s buildings has been compromised due the alkali intrusion.; The septic system is antiquated. In rainy weather, the system flows back, creating puddles of sewage on the playground causing an immediate health danger to students.”
4. The Alpaugh School Administration placed on their website (hosted by the Tulare County Office of Education) the following:
 

“Our school is in good repair, according

<sup>1</sup> The Williams Settlement Compliance Findings are generated by the Office of Public School Construction.

to the criteria established by the Office of Public School Construction. Our deficiencies are minor ones resulting from common wear and tear, and there are few of them. We scored between 90 and 99 percent on the 15 categories of our evaluation.”

5. The Uniform Complaint Form was not posted in all classrooms and public areas as required by California Education Code Section 35186.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The appalling conditions at the Alpaugh School are detrimental to the learning environment of students and the working environment of staff. The hazardous conditions at the School did not occur overnight. The withholding of designated maintenance funds, by the Administrative staff, to correct known unsafe and unhealthy conditions has exposed students and staff needlessly.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Use funds delegated for school building repairs to repair the school buildings.
2. Hire a licensed contractor to repair corridors, cracked walls, restrooms and any other areas that need repair or replacement.
3. Keep up with building repairs as they appear and do not let them go for years when it is almost impossible to repair.
4. Contact a California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) Consultant Branch for assistance in correcting identified unsafe and unhealthful conditions.

5. Provide the public with accurate information relative to the existing conditions of school buildings, playgrounds, classrooms and overall facilities ratings.
6. Post Uniform Complaint Procedures in every classroom and areas accessible to the public as required by law.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Alpaugh Unified School District  
Tulare County Board of Education