

Editorial: Four trustees block Fresno Unified investigation

By The Bee Editorial Board

Fresno Unified School Board President Cal Johnson and Trustees Valerie Davis, Janet Ryan and Christopher De La Cerda continue to block the public's view into the workings of the region's largest school district.

This time, they won't even entertain a public vote on whether an independent investigation is needed into how the district has been awarding contracts for school construction.

Fresno Unified Trustee Christopher De La Cerda represents the McLane High area. | Juan Esparza Loera Vida en el Valle

Johnson — acting with the support of Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda — recently [denied a request](#) by Trustee Brook Ashjian to have an independent investigator examine a controversial leaseback construction deal with Harris Construction that was deemed illegal by the 5th District Court of Appeal.

After Johnson turned down Ashjian's request, trustees Luis Chavez and Carol Mills joined with Ashjian [to publicly urge](#) their fellow board members to consider an outside investigation.

As they have for most of their tenure on the board, Johnson, Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda take their orders from Superintendent Michael Hanson and seldom act on their own. Johnson, Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda shamefully have abdicated their oversight roles.

It's time that the board majority show they can be independent thinkers and have a public discussion of the district's school construction strategy. The taxpayers paying the bills deserve at least an opportunity for a full board discussion on a system that an appellate court has called into question.

The cozy way the school district operates only raises more questions about its construction strategy. These issues must be brought into the open for the benefit of all parties.

We believe an independent investigator can help do just that, and the full school board should support hiring someone with the independence and credibility to get at the truth and give everyone a fair shake. The district's credibility is at stake.

Unfortunately, Johnson, Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda don't seem to care about the district's credibility and they have circled the wagons at the district offices. Putting their heads in the sand does not help the taxpayers or the district's students and parents.

This is how bad it is: Hanson and the board majority made fools of their lawyers by sending them into the appellate court to argue something that wasn't true in the lawsuit filed by Fresno contractor Stephen Davis against the district. [The court blew the whistle](#) on this inept legal strategy.

Yet Johnson, Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda continue to fight transparency, and block every attempt for the public to get answers about how the district authors and awards construction contracts.

Hanson, meanwhile, has proposed an internal investigation. That idea is a non-starter because, in effect, the



superintendent would be investigating himself.

Only an independent investigation will provide answers. And for that investigation to happen, the public will need better representation than what it has been getting from Johnson, Davis, Ryan and De La Cerda.