

Fresno Unified hires outside firm to assist with federal subpoena

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On the eve of the deadline to respond to a federal grand jury subpoena probing Fresno Unified School District's no-bid construction contracts, the school board voted to hire an outside company to help it with that response.

On Wednesday night, the school board unanimously voted to pay more than \$98,000 to [Discovia](#), a San Francisco-based company that specializes in helping organizations comply with electronic evidence collection in litigation or government investigations. According to its website, Discovia works to "reduce litigation costs and gain better control and visibility into litigation matters and increase defensibility."

According to the [subpoena](#) served to Fresno Unified in August, the district was required to turn over a wide range of documents to the U.S. Attorney's Office related to school building projects with Harris and Bush construction firms by Thursday.

"This is a significant amount of work that our attorney is trying to achieve ... and I'm glad that we're taking another necessary step to fully cooperate in the investigation," Trustee Christopher De La Cerda said. "I just wanted to have that statement made because I think it's important to know as we move forward with this investigation that this is just another important step that we're taking."

Carl Faller, an attorney the district hired to help comply with the subpoena's demands, said Fresno Unified is working with prosecutors to establish a more realistic deadline.

"It takes a while to get the process completed. ... We'll be working with (prosecutors) to make sure they'll get everything they need over the next couple months," Faller told The Bee [last week](#). "It's going to take whatever amount it takes."

District spokesman Miguel Arias would not comment further about where the district stands in the process of turning over the financial and personal records required or whether a new deadline has been set.

Wednesday's vote came despite some public outcry.

Barbara Hunt, who volunteers with schools in the district, gave an emotional speech to the board, asking it not to pass the Discovia motion, citing money the district has spent in [court](#) so far over its contracts with Harris Construction.

"You guys are playing games up here," Hunt said. "You take everything from everybody except from your own checks."

Fresno Unified parent Andrew Fabela also asked the board not to hire Discovia.

"(Hanson's) arrogance, poor judgment, lack of knowledge and poor leadership has embroiled this district into a legal mess that is causing the district to hemorrhage money on legal fees that should be better spent on classroom needs," Fabela said, referring to Superintendent Michael Hanson.

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