

Fresno Teachers Association: Designated Schools Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Updated: January 27, 2025

Who made this decision?

Interim Superintendent Misty Her and the Fresno Unified Trustees: Claudia Cazares, Veva Islas, Elizabeth Jonasson Rosas, Keshia Thomas, Andy Levine, Susan Wittrup, and Valerie Davis.

What exactly is being eliminated?

Fresno Unified plans to eliminate the entire Designated Schools (DS) program, which includes:

- 30 additional minutes of daily instruction.
- 80 additional hours of meeting time annually.
- Extra student and site resources.
- An additional Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) at each designated school site.

This decision will affect 41 school sites and approximately 33,000 students.

If I'm a Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) at a Designated School and the program is eliminated, will I have to return to the classroom?

Yes.

When will the Designated Schools program end if the district's plan proceeds?

The program will end after the 2024-25 school year. All designated schools will revert to a standard schedule in 2025-26.

When will my pay change if the program is eliminated?

The pay cut will take effect in the 2025-26 school year, typically starting with your August 2025 paycheck.

How much of a monthly pay cut will I experience if the program is eliminated?

Teachers at Designated Schools will lose \$651 to \$1,168 per month, depending on their salary schedule placement.

Where will the money go if the Designated Schools program is eliminated?

The district has not provided a clear plan. The funds are expected to be redirected to consultants, administrative expansions, and reserves. This amounts to a \$28 million cut from 40% of Fresno Unified's classrooms, including a 12% salary cut for teachers.

Will the district go bankrupt or need to cut jobs if they don't eliminate the program?

NO. According to the latest financial data from the district's budget revision approved on January 15, 2025:

- The district received \$66.2 million MORE in revenue than projected in June 2024.
- It spent \$7.2 million LESS on certificated salaries this year.
- The unrestricted ending fund balance INCREASED by \$18.3 million, totaling \$234 million or 22.26% in reserves. The state only requires a 2% reserve.

Additionally, the Governor's proposed budget includes a \$2.5 billion increase in school funding for 2025-26.

What percentage of the district's total expenditures goes to the Designated Schools program?

Since its inception, the program's cost as a percentage of total expenditures has DECREASED:

- 2016-17*: 2.02% of total expenditures
- 2024-25: 1.61% of total expenditures

*First implementation of 41 schools.

In the same time, the district's reserves have increased dramatically:

- 2016-17*: \$147.8 million
- 2024-25: \$234 million

*First implementation of 41 schools.

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Where is Fresno Unified spending its money this school year?

The district is overspending on consultants, outside services, and building renovations, including a \$4.8 million remodel for the FUSD downtown office. According to the district's budget revision, approved on Jan. 15, 2025, this year the board has spent the following OVER their budgeted amount:

- \$78 million more on capital outlay (general funds spent on building improvements) than budgeted.
- \$29.3 million more on services and operations (primarily consultants).
- \$16.8 million more on miscellaneous spending (often consultants).

This totals \$124.1 million in OVERSPENDING, none of which directly impacts the classroom.

Will this impact my retirement?

Retirement is influenced by three main factors:

- **Years of service credit:** The total number of years you've worked for CalSTRS.
- **Age at retirement:** Your age when you retire.
- **Final compensation:** Your highest average annual salary over 36 consecutive months (or single highest annual salary with 25+ years of service).

For detailed information, consult CalSTRS.

What rationale did the district provide for eliminating the program?

The District cited the desire to increase reserves and a lack of academic return based on a May 14, 2021 report. Even though, in Nov. 2022, during bargaining, they proposed the expansion of the program to the remaining 26 non-designated sites, citing positive academic impact.

Was this a negotiated decision?

NO. In 2024, Fresno Unified leadership notified the FTA that the District intended to unilaterally eliminate the program. The Fresno Teachers Association (FTA) took legal action to challenge this decision under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The matter went to arbitration, where the arbitrator ruled that the District had the discretion to terminate the program. In FTA leadership's opinion, Fresno Unified leadership is trying to circumvent the bargaining process by allowing potential violations to go to arbitration, instead of having to address them during the bargaining process.

What was the arbitrator's decision?

Here is the language the arbitrator was asked to interpret (CBA Article 65, Section 4.2):

Due to the uncertainty and volatility of state and federal funding, it is understood and agreed that this Article shall terminate if for any reason there exists an inability for full funding through LCFF or successor legislation.

The FTA legal team argued that the article cannot terminate because the District is receiving its full funding from the state through the LCFF—a fact undisputed by all parties, including the arbitrator. Unfortunately, the arbitrator determined that the phrase "if for any reason" in the CBA gives the District discretion to terminate the program. This interpretation allows the District to end the program simply by choosing to redirect funding to consultants instead of maintaining the program.

What is currently being mediated?

While the specifics of the current mediation must remain confidential for now per both parties' agreement with the mediator, the mediation process addresses the impact of Interim Superintendent Her's and the school board's unilateral decision to eliminate the DS program.

What can we do about it?

We have two options:

1. Remain silent and allow the district to prioritize wasteful spending over classroom resources.
2. Educate and mobilize our colleagues and community to advocate for keeping resources in the classroom.

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Can this lead to the district eliminating other contractual agreements?

Yes. Without action from our membership, the district may target other contractual areas, including salary, healthcare, and class sizes.

I'm a non-designated school teacher. How does this impact me?

The elimination of the DS program sets a precedent for the district to attack other areas of our Collective Bargaining Agreement. United action is critical to protecting our rights and resources.

Does eliminating the DS program violate the district's goals and guardrails?

YES. At the January 22, 2025 board meeting, trustees approved a guardrail requiring community engagement for major decisions:

Community Engagement: The superintendent may not propose major decisions to the Board without first having a community engagement plan.

From June 2024 to June 2026, the percentage of major decisions brought to the Board for approval that impact more than 25% of a targeted group that include a community engagement plan will increase from 0% to X%.

Less than 24 hours later, the district announced its decision to eliminate the DS program, which affects 40% of students and teachers, via a Facebook post, both without an engagement plan. This action is both disrespectful and hypocritical.

Is it true that FTA opposed the Designated Schools program?

NO.

The Designated Schools program has been part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) since 2014, and FTA leadership has consistently protected our CBA while ensuring that students and teachers are not negatively impacted.

What we oppose is Fresno Unified's repeated reliance on so-called "silver bullet" solutions to "fix" education. These approaches ignore teachers' requests to feel heard and valued, to foster collaborative leadership, to design systems of support, and to allocate resources that students and teachers genuinely need.

For example, in 2014, the Fresno Unified Board and former Superintendent Michael Hanson claimed that simply increasing the instructional day and adding more meeting time for teachers would boost student achievement. However, they chose to ignore teachers' calls to create a culture where they feel heard and valued, provide meaningful leadership collaboration, build effective support systems, and allocate resources that address real classroom needs.

We see a similar pattern happening now. The Fresno Unified Board and Interim Superintendent Misty Her are promoting their "goals and guardrails." While setting goals is important, they are once again missing the bigger picture: nothing will truly change unless the district shifts its culture. This requires genuinely listening to educators, valuing all staff, addressing the culture of fear and retribution, providing real support, and making decisions that reflect the realities of classrooms and school sites.

Additionally, you may recall that during the 2019 bargaining cycle, we agreed to allow up to ten sites to vote on whether to become a Designated School. At that time, Interim Superintendent Misty Her, then serving as an Instructional Superintendent, visited school sites alongside her colleagues to persuade teachers to vote in favor of becoming a Designated School.