



# February Newsletter ELECTION EDITION

2024

Dear Fellow CCDU Members and Supporters,

Thank you so much for your continued support and for being a part of CCDU! Below is a special edition of our monthly newsletter, geared towards the election on March 5, 2024. See you tomorrow night, and don't forget to vote on or before March 5!

Best,

Eli Jones  
Communications Vice President

## This Newsletter Covers:

1. Tomorrow's Meeting
2. ELECTION
3. CCDU Endorsements
4. Election Opinions: Crystal Alexander and Andrew Lachman
5. President's Message

## February Newsletter ELECTION EDITION

### Meeting Tomorrow! Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Please join us tomorrow, Wednesday, February 21, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. for our monthly meeting!

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks from President Eric Rudin;
2. Approval of Minutes from January 10, 2024 CCDU Meeting;
3. Report from Treasurer Judy Scott;
4. Report from VP of Membership Ron Ostrin;
5. Updates from CCDU Endorsed Candidates for March 5, 2024 Elections;
6. Items from the Floor;
7. Adjournment.

Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86858894560?pwd=SmZhd3MzRIJ2cGJ2aHFESldSNkxXZz09>

Meeting ID: 868 5889 4560

Passcode: 626064

We look forward to seeing you all tomorrow night!

# Election Info - March 5, 2024

## Voting In-Person

Safe and accessible in-person voting will be available in this election beginning Saturday, February 24.

### Days and Hours

- February 24 - March 4: 10 AM - 7 PM
- Election Day, March 5: 7 AM - 8 PM

Find a vote center: <https://locator.lavote.gov/locations>

## Vote by Mail (VBM)

**If Voting by Mail, Ballots must be returned ON or BEFORE March 5, 2024.** Ballots were mailed to all registered voters for the March 5, 2024 Presidential Election on February 1, 2024.

There are multiple easy return options available:

- Return by mail, no postage required
- Use one of 400+ [Ballot Drop Box](#) locations across Los Angeles County
- Drop off at a local [Vote Center](#) beginning February 24.

This election has a long ballot with many contests and candidates. Voters should review the instructions carefully and **remember to sign and date the Return Envelope** before submitting their ballot.

For more information, visit [LAVOTE.GOV](https://LAVOTE.GOV) or <https://www.culvercity.org/City-Hall/Election-Information>

[Download or View the Official Press Release from Registrar](#)

## Endorsements

**DON'T FORGET TO VOTE ON MARCH 5, 2024!**

# CULVER CITY DEMOCRATS UNITED

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTION

**LOCAL ENDORSEMENTS**

The **YOUNGEST** and  
**FASTEST GROWING**  
Democratic Club  
in Culver City!

Meetings every  
second Wednesday  
of the month.



Find out more at [culvercitydems.com](http://culvercitydems.com)

Los Angeles County  
Supervisor, District 2

**Holly  
Mitchell**

CA Assembly  
District 55

**Isaac  
Bryan**

Los Angeles County  
District Attorney

**Jeff  
Chemerinsky**

Scan here to join!



Los Angeles County  
Democratic Party  
Central Committee

**Joe Rose**  
**Darrel Menthe**  
**Lindsay Carlson**  
**Jimmie Woods-Gray**

Los Angeles County  
Superior Court Judges

Judicial Seat No. 39

**Jacob Lee**

Judicial Seat No. 48

**Renee Rose**

Judicial Seat No. 97

**Sam  
Abourched**

CULVER CITY DEMOCRATS UNITED  
MARCH 5, 2024, PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTION  
LOCAL ENDORSEMENTS

Los Angeles County Supervisor, Second District – **Holly Mitchell**

CA 55th Assembly District – **Isaac Bryan**

Los Angeles County District Attorney – **Jeff Chemerinsky**

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judges

**Judicial Seat No. 39: Jacob Lee**

**Judicial Seat No. 48: Renee Rose**

Los Angeles County Democratic Party Central Committee:

**Lindsay Carlson**

**Jimmie Woods-Gray**

**Darrel Menthe**

**Joe Rose**

## Election Opinions

### **CCUSD Negative Audit Findings: Explanations From a Former Auditor**

By Crystal C. Alexander

Like a number of professions (e.g., law, engineering, medicine), the world of auditing is subject to arcane language and jargon that may not be part of the average person's vocabulary. It can be frustrating to try to decipher, which is why I am writing this in the first place. As a former auditor, I hope this will help "part the mists" with a bit of interpretation because it's extremely important everyone understands the seriousness of the audit report from Nigro & Nigro.

Every year, the Culver Unified School District (CCUSD) is required to perform a financial audit. This gives insight into the CCUSD's financial condition and compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. The audit report by Nigro & Nigro contained several important negative findings.

*What the fiscal year 2022-23 audit report tells us about the Culver City Unified School District (CCUSD) is that there is a lack of institutional control, actions leading to fines and penalties, and misreporting information to the public. (Click here to see the [2022-2023 audit](#))*

*Bottom line: The CCUSD may get passing grades for the educational programs that it provides. However, this and other prior audits reveal a systemic, and even cultural, lack of institutional controls on the business side operations of the CCUSD. The failing grade here cannot continue, or the CCUSD will risk a continued deterioration of its financial condition as well as a continued downward trend in their trustworthiness, as seen by the community it serves.*

The audit reveals several important errors. The CCUSD's failures are:

1. Failing to meet the spending minimums on educational salaries for two years in a row
2. Allowing Transitional Kindergarten classes to be over-enrolled leading to state fines of \$431,233
3. Being inconsistent with reporting on the physical state of its facilities to the public and the state.
4. Underreporting the number of meals served which led to a \$240,363 deficit in reimbursement.
5. Failing to take corrective measures in a timely fashion, even for repeated notice of audit failures.

These failures show a lack of institutional control. Why do organizations need internal controls? Such controls exist and are effected by the school board, district management, and other district personnel, to provide reasonable assurance that information is reliable, accurate, and timely. Controls also ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, contracts, policies, and procedures.

Responsibility for CCUSD spending, accurate reporting, and educational standards ultimately rests with the School Board and the Superintendent.

The audit findings:

*For the second year in a row, CCUSD did not meet minimum state requirements to spend at least 55% of its budget on classroom salaries*

The Classroom Teacher Salaries Finding (page 78) is a repeat finding from the last fiscal year and *a sign that there is a continued lack of institutional control in the CCUSD*. The CCUSD did not meet the minimum state requirement of spending 55% of its budget on classroom salaries, for the second year in a row. It spent \$2,827,621 less than the required amount to reach the 55% threshold. This resulted in only 52.2% of spending on classroom salaries.

Teachers have the most immediate and important impact on learning for students so the state sets a 55% of the budget threshold. Many parents and educators agree that this is considered to be more of a spending floor in the classroom, not a ceiling. Why is our District failing to spend enough on teacher classroom salaries? Where is the budget being spent?

In its spending report, the CCUSD's "current expense of education" totals \$100,986,476. Only \$52,714,886 or 52% went toward classroom teacher salaries.

Cutting to the chase, what this means is *the CCUSD is spending heavily on management, consultants, and other items that are not the teachers in the classroom, educating our children*. Because this is a repeat finding, the CCUSD is playing risky games, as repeat findings of this nature have consequences, such as fines, disqualification for grants, or control taken over by the state.

The fact that this lack of classroom spending has been repeated demonstrates that no one is minding the store to fix this.

*The CCUSD over-enrolled two Transitional Kindergarten classes resulting in fines of \$369,347 and \$61,886: Total \$431,233*

TK over-enrollment penalty (page 80.) This finding addresses compliance requirements for operating transitional kindergarten (TK) programs. The CCUSD exceeded the maximum allowable enrollment in two TK classes at two schools. Those same two classes also exceeded the required adult-to-pupil ratio. The financial penalty for these two violations is \$431,233. (Exceeding TK enrollment \$369,347 penalty, exceeding adult-to-pupil ratio \$61,886.)

Knowledge of what was going on in the district as far as community reaction and speakers at the School Board is outside the auditor's purview. At the February 13, 2024, School Board meeting, both teacher's union president Ray Long and Board Member Brian Guerrero gave public remarks saying that CCUSD management was advised in 2023 that there were problems with the enrollment in the TK program and that penalties were forthcoming. No actions were taken to mitigate the problem. This is a case of mishandling and ignoring information. Institutional control includes listening to information provided by a School Board member and the teacher's union president.

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*Inconsistent reporting on the physical state of its facilities to the public and the state*

Every year a public school district must provide an accountability report card that includes reporting on safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities, including maintenance to ensure good repair.

They must complete a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) which is available to the public. A second report, the Facilities Inspection Tool (FIT), should support the SARC findings. The FIT inspection is usually completed by superintendents from the County Offices of Education.

The SARC and the FIT reports do not match in several categories. The SARC reports show worse facility conditions than the FIT. (page 78)

The CCUSD reported to its own community that its facilities were in worse condition than the FIT inspections showed. *This is a tragic breach of trust with the very community that funds the CCUSD*. In a more understated manner, the audit report states "We recommend that an employee verify the information presented in the SARC. This information is essential to present the required information about the school fairly to the public." (Page 78)

This leads to the question:

Can the information coming from the CCUSD be relied upon, by the community, to make decisions on items of importance, including revenue enhancing ballot measures such as bonds or parcel taxes?

*Underreporting the number of meals served led to a \$240,363 deficit in reimbursement.*

In the audit (page 76), we learn that *the CCUSD actually harmed itself*. The number of cafeteria meals reported to the state was inconsistent with the number reported to the federal government. This underreporting resulted in \$240,363 not being claimed for reimbursement. The audit says the cause was "Numbers were inputted without being verified for accuracy before submitting." If allowed, the CCUSD may be able to claw back those monies with an amended claim.

*Failure to take corrective measures in a timely fashion, even for repeated notice of audit failures*

Taken all together the conclusion is that the CCUSD has failed to display and conduct:

- adequate compliance measures for both state and federal evaluations

- based on repeated audit failures, the lack of corrective action by the CCUSD
- sufficient monitoring to ensure the compliance measures and requirements are followed
- swift action upon learning of a violation

Regarding correction of violations, the fact that the violations were only revealed by a yearly unbiased audit report indicates that the CCUSD didn't know or acknowledge that the violation existed until the audit. Had the violation occurred mid-year and the CCUSD could prove they had taken corrective measures, the auditors would have noted it. There are no such notations.

A school district lacking institutional control can be subject to these kinds of consequences:

- 1) Severe monetary penalties;
- 2) Becoming disqualified to apply for certain state and federal funding programs;
- 3) Take over by the state (see Inglewood Unified School District.)

The information from the Yes on E promoters is that the CCUSD can apply for access to matching state school construction funds. Many state and federal funding programs require the recipient to have a clean audit report, otherwise known as an "unqualified opinion." Not only was this 2022-23 audit report not clean, the CCUSD violated state requirements. This opens the question of whether the CCUSD could apply for matching state funds.

In conclusion, as a former auditor, I say it looks like the CCUSD has systemic problems in running its business operations. A permanent Assistant Superintendent for Business Services position, the Chief Financial Officer for the CCUSD, has been vacant for almost a year.

It is recommended that the CCUSD undergo a top to bottom internal controls and management audit, and by a different auditor than completed this financial audit, for true independence. If results from those reviews warrant it, a more expensive and lengthy forensic audit should be considered.

*Crystal C. Alexander was the former elected Culver City Treasurer, former Redondo Beach City Auditor, and former Beverly Hills Budget & Audit Manager. She also served in senior finance positions with the City of Seattle OMB and the State of New York OMB (Office of Management & Budget.)*

## **2024 Elections Put California, Western States in Middle of Democratic Efforts to Save Democracy**

**By Andrew Lachman, DNC Member**

I recently returned from the meeting of the Association of State Democratic Chairs in San Diego. As Western States Caucus Chair for the Democratic National Committee, I have been able to participate and have a view into where the priorities are going to be to retain the White House, hold or expand the Senate and take back the House, which currently has a 3 vote Republican majority. The road to all of these runs through the West, with California at the center of this effort.

Any effort to hold the White House will involve winning Arizona, Nevada and Colorado again, each of which have been trending blue, with even the Arizona State House within single digits of gaining a Democratic majority. Of course this will also involve retaining Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Georgia. President Biden's policies supporting labor, the environment and small business through the CHIPS act and investments by the Inflation Reduction Act are quite popular, even in states where the President has faced partisan criticism.

The Senate map is tough this year because of the retirement of West Virginia's Joe Manchin (who was frequently an obstacle to the Democratic majority anyway). Texas offers a challenge to take the seat from Sen. Cruz who is not popular, but the race to hold the Senate requires our strong support for Jackie Rosen in Nevada and Ruben Gallego in Arizona, both of which hold slight leads. We also have to support John Tester's re-election in Montana, a reddish-purple state that has elected Democratic governors in recent years.

The West, especially California will be critical to taking back the House. We need to flip 3 seats and there are nine in reach in the West. There are five competitive seats in California, CD 13 (Adam Gray vs John Duarte), CD 22 (Rudy Salas v. David Valadao), CD 41 (Will Rollins vs. Ken Calvert) and CD 45 and CD 47, which have competitive races on the Democrat side to take on Young Kim and Michelle Steel. There are also competitive seats in Oregon, Colorado (including Lauren Boebert's former seat) and two in Arizona (Dave Schweikert and Joe Ciscomani hold marginally

Republican seats). New York also offers the possibility of picking up to three seats including Tom Suozzi running to replace the disgraced George Santos.

We also have to defend five competitive Democratic seats such as Mike Levin and Josh Harder's California seat, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez's Washington seat, Greg Stanton in Arizona, Susie Lee in Nevada, Gabe Vazquez in New Mexico and Yadira Caraveo in Colorado.

As a Democratic Club, Culver City Democrats United should work with groups like Grassroots HQ to do phone banks to help out in these races and if you can do a road trip, they always need help knocking on doors.

## President's Message

### *Putting the Progress Back in Progressive*

Things are starting to get exciting with March right around the corner! Our upcoming CCDU meeting is the last before the Primary Elections on March 5 so please, make sure that you have received your ballot and encourage all of your family, friends, and neighbors to vote. Things are also exciting here at CCDU as we are proud to be the fastest growing Democratic Club in Culver City and are now Culver City's Democratic Club with the highest number of members. Our CCDU message is getting out there and it is you who we have to thank!

In thinking about CCDU, and the Democratic Party as a whole, recently, I thought about how "progressive" has become a dirty word to some because it is associated with the far left. Well, I think of myself as a "progressive" because I believe in progress. Why should we let the far left take the term "progressive" from the rest of us when they run on ideas that lead to regression rather than progress?

Our local community provides us with great examples of what "progressive" looks like without the "progress" part, and also what Democratic progress looks like despite not being "progressive" to the far left. Move Culver City was and is a nightmare. While we need to point that out, we should also look at how members of our City Council like Albert Vera, Dan O'Brien (Vice Mayor), and Göran Eriksson, are working to make the best of a bad situation. And it's not just trying to fix Move CC where they are making progress. The aforementioned [Council Members have been hard at work, in concert with City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, to help our neighbors experiencing homelessness](#). We need to pay attention to our leaders who are making our city a better place for all, especially come election time.

Similarly, regarding crime, our current Culver City Mayor is running for reelection for City Council this November with a stated goal of defunding CCPD to the tune of 50% its budget. Moreover, we have a Los Angeles County D.A. running for reelection touting equally horrendous policies, all in the name of being "progressive." We can go down that rabbit hole again, or we can elect leaders who have excelled in their careers and who have ideas that will move us all forward. George Gascón clearly is not the answer to the problems in the D.A.'s office; but that isn't the only reason why CCDU endorsed Jeff Chemerinsky for District Attorney. Jeff has succeeded and then some in his career and has put forth [liberal goals with practical plans to achieve them](#).

One of the most blatant examples of "progressive" without progress is our CCUSD Board's leadership. President Kent (now with VP Ezidore's backing) and prior School Board President Paula Amézola refuse to collaborate meaningfully with teachers, classified staff, or CCUSD parents. They have violated the law by having closed door meetings to avoid public scrutiny. Then they gaslit parents harassed by an attorney for one of their chosen contractors because those parents had the gall to speak truth to power up and make legal records requests. Now, our School Board is asking to be trusted with a \$358 million bond without the support of the teachers and classified staff unions in addition to mounting concerns expressed by parents. [The issue of trust is so bad that, as of the date of this message, our teachers and classified staff unions have not yet endorsed the school bond](#). Think of how bad the lack of trust with the Board must be for teachers and classified staff not to have endorsed a school bond this close to the election.

In 2014, CCUSD teachers and classified staff, led by their unions, not only endorsed the school bond, but also they went door to door to garner support. Not so in 2024. They of course want better learning environments for students and better working conditions for themselves. We should listen to our school's union leaders and wait until November to put forth a bond that has staff and community input. Our schools need money, and our students deserve the best education that we can give them. However, our schools won't progress without the right leadership, and they won't progress with plans that have been rushed through without the proper planning and input.

While the leadership of the School Board is a far cry from making progress, I did get to participate in a CCUSD meeting

where progress was at the forefront. At our El Rincon Site Council meeting we were analyzing test scores and seeing where scores were “in the red.” The ten of us on the zoom, under the leadership of our principal and with our teachers and classified staff, talked about looking into root causes of the red numbers and potential actions we can take to help students. It was an hour of collaborative work with great leadership. I felt uplifted and that we’re in a good place with ideas on how to get even better.

Progress is possible but it requires leaders and community members interested in progress rather than appearing to be “progressive” for the sake of the title. Indeed, the March primaries are coming up and it is a time to think not only of what we are against (*i.e.*, the GOP agenda), but also what we stand for. Identifying problems is important, but electing capable leaders with the best interests of their constituents in mind can be even more crucial. Let’s spend some time focusing on good candidates and then let’s vote them in.

Warmly,



Eric Rudin  
Culver City Democrats United President

## **Want to submit a piece for a future newsletter?**

**Click the button below to visit the submission link.**

[Write for CCDU's Next Newsletter!](#)

Newsletter Submissions are due the first of each month.

Submissions will be selected one week before our monthly meeting.

Authors will be notified if their submission is chosen.

Newsletters will be published the Tuesday before our monthly meetings.

## **Interested in playing a bigger role in the newsletter?**

Email [eli@culvercitydems.com](mailto:eli@culvercitydems.com)

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