

California State Senate

SENATOR
SABRINA CERVANTES
THIRTY-FIRST SENATE DISTRICT



REVISED 5/20/2025

April 22, 2025

The Honorable John Harabedian
Chair, Joint Legislative Audit Cmte.
41st Assembly District
Swing Space, Suite 4350
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird
Vice Chair, Joint Legislative Audit Cmte.
17th Senate District
Swing Space, Suite 8720
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Request for Audit of Riverside Unified School District STEM Education Center

Chair Harabedian and Vice Chair Laird:

I write to request an audit of the manner in which the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) has managed the RUSD STEM Education Center (STEM Center) proposal. The STEM Center is planned to be located on the University of California, Riverside (UCR) campus, and as a result, the approval of both the RUSD Board of Education and the University of California (UC) Board of Regents is required for the proposal to move forward. It is the community's understanding that RUSD has used or is intending to use funding from Measure O, which was approved by RUSD voters in November 2016.

As required by the existing school bond process, RUSD established a project list to communicate to voters which projects Measure O would support if approved; the STEM Center was not included on that list. While the District has attempted to expand that list to incorporate other projects, including the STEM Center, that attempt has caused significant protest and public controversy.

I am increasingly concerned by the recent lack of transparency and communication that RUSD has manifested in its handling of the proposed STEM Center. **To that end, I request that an audit be approved so that the State Auditor can assist the Legislature in answering the following questions:**

1. Review and evaluate the laws, rules, and regulations significant to the audit objectives.
2. Assess whether the district Board of Directors (board) complied with applicable state laws and regulations when making decisions related to the STEM Education Center project by determining the following:
 - a. Whether the board approved the STEM Education Center project and, if so, did the approval process comply with all legal and regulatory requirements, and whether the approval was completed in a process that allowed public scrutiny and feedback.
 - b. To the extent possible, evaluate the board's conflict of interest policies and determine whether the board's members complied with those policies and existing legal requirements when considering the STEM Education Center project.
3. Assess whether the district complied with applicable state laws and regulations for using Measure O funds by performing the following:

- a. Identify the projects that the district originally approved for Measure O funding and determine whether the district's process for determining eligible projects has complied with all applicable laws and other requirements.
 - b. Determine whether, at any time, the district changed the projects that Measure O could fund and whether it complied with applicable laws and other requirements in doing so.
4. Identify the amount of Measure O bond funding allocated to and already spent on the STEM Education Center project.
5. Determine whether the most recent draft or executed property lease between the district and UCR provides transparency and protects the district by doing the following
 - a. Evaluate the key terms and conditions of the property lease in relation to any comparable lease terms and conditions or relevant best practices.
 - b. Determine whether the district complied with applicable state laws to ensure transparency, including making the terms of the lease publicly available.
 - c. To the extent possible, evaluate any planning conducted by the board to evaluate additional lease options should the current lease agreement be terminated.
6. Review and assess any other issues that are significant to the audit.

As you know, the diligent and transparent stewardship of taxpayer funds is one of our highest duties as publicly-elected officials. The STEM Center proposal and the way that RUSD has managed it has generated debate, notable disagreement, and distrust over recent years. It is imperative to ensure that RUSD has complied with its legal obligation, and conducted itself in a manner that leads to repairing public confidence in its ability to serve its students and the community. My hope is that the transparency of an audit will contribute to equitable consideration and decision-making by RUSD and the UC Board of Regents should the project move forward.

Thank you for your consideration of this audit request. If you have any questions or concerns about this request, please contact my Legislative Director, Paco Torres, at (916) 651-4031 or Paco.Torres@sen.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sabrina Cervantes', with a stylized, flowing script.

SABRINA CERVANTES
Senator, 31st District