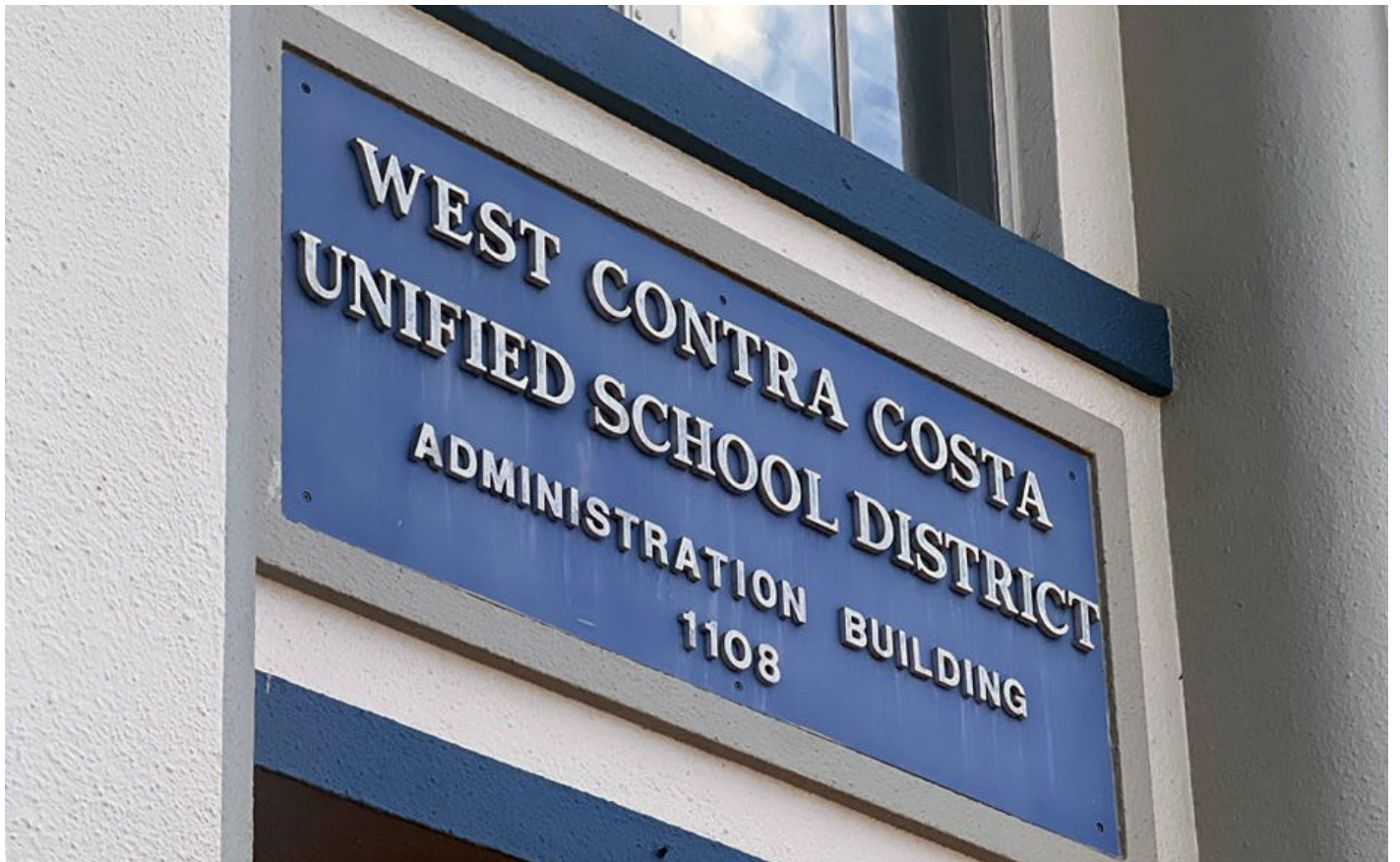




DIANA LAMBERT



NEWS BRIEF

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026 — 2:12 PM

Court to decide if West

Contra Costa Unified illegally used long-term substitutes

A civil rights lawsuit alleging that the West Contra Costa Unified School District illegally used long-term substitutes to fill teacher vacancies has reached the First Appellate District Court of Appeal in San Francisco.

Attorneys for both sides made their arguments in [Cleare et al. v. West Contra Costa Unified School District](#) on Monday. The court is expected to render a decision in the next few months.

In 2024, a Contra Costa County Superior Court ruled in favor of the school district after its attorneys argued that it had no option but to assign substitute teachers to classrooms because of a national teacher shortage.

This was the first time a school district had been sued under the [Williams Settlement Legislation](#), a 2004 agreement requiring that all public school students have access to adequate textbooks, qualified teachers and safe, clean facilities. Public Advocates, which is representing the plaintiffs in this case, served as co-counsel on the Williams case.

Complaints filed by three teachers in 2024 alleged that the district failed to provide students with qualified teachers, resulting in teachers taking on more classes and sacrificing preparation time.

In its [response to the complaints](#), West Contra Costa school leaders acknowledged that the allegations were true and said that vacancies weren't filled due to teacher transfers and late notices from teachers who left the district

during the 2022-23 school year.

Teachers are required to have either a multiple-subject, single-subject or special education credential to teach, depending on the grade level and coursework, but an ongoing statewide teacher shortage has meant that most school districts have had to rely on teachers who are not fully prepared to teach at least some classes on their schedule. Usually, these teachers work with various emergency-style permits or waivers.

“The research is unambiguous: the single most important in-school factor in a student’s success is having a qualified, prepared teacher,” said Public Advocates in a statement. “Yet for over two years, WCCUSD has openly staffed classrooms at its highest-poverty schools with rotating uncertified substitutes.”

A [ruling against plaintiffs](#) could open the door for districts statewide to abandon California’s 20-year Williams guarantee of a qualified teacher in every classroom, Public Advocates said in a press release.

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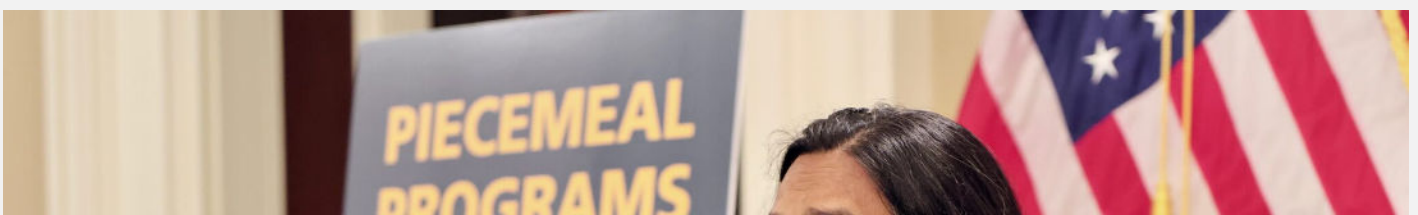


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TERESA MOONEY

COMMENTARY

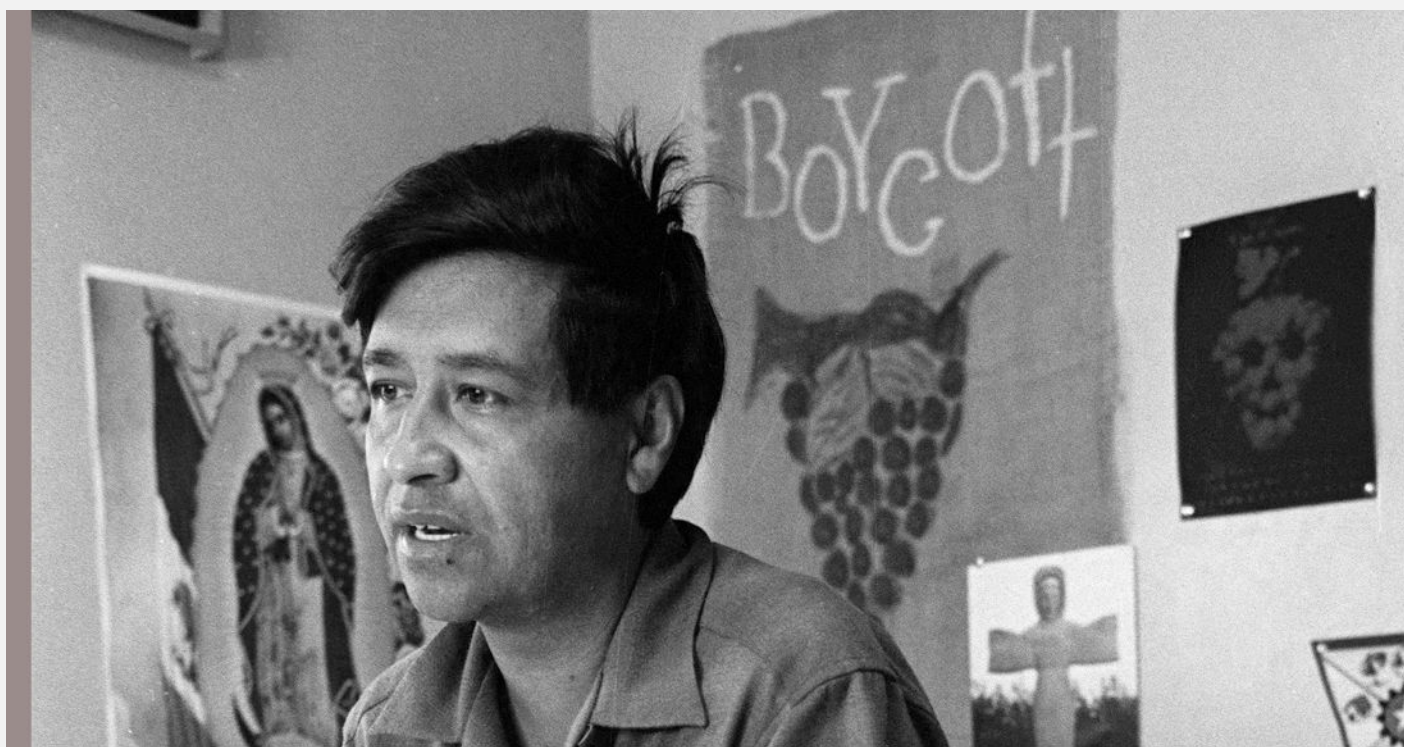




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