

San Jose rejects development due to 'ridiculous' red tape
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Federal investigation
Report: Santa Clara County education office misused funds
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New interim housing community resembles brand-new apartment complex
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Maren Sederquist signs into the Willow Glen High School office using the newly installed Raptor system in San Jose, California on Wednesday, February 12, 2025. (The identification was blurred to protect the subjects identity) (Maxwell Alexander/Mosaic)

SJ Unified turns to technology to boost school safety after campus security breaches

Parents ask for district-wide talks to improve safety at schools

By Antara Gangwal | Mosaic

After a series of security incidents on its campuses and feedback from parents, San Jose Unified School District has installed technology to electronically screen visitors at its 41 campuses.

The Raptor School Safety Suite includes a sign-in system that scans school visitor IDs and checks for registered sex offenders. And it is supposed to aid response to disas-

ters, lockdowns and evacuations — an in-demand feature given that 67% of public schools experienced at least one violent incident during the 2021-22 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

A 2024 Santa Clara Civil Grand Jury report said that San Jose Unified lacked consistency in both safety event preparedness and responses. The district experienced swatting (false shooting threats) at Abraham Lincoln High School in 2022, gun threats from students at Willow Glen High School in 2023 and

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Kama Fletcher, director of development for Neighborhood Hands, said some of their homeless clients want to be reunited with family. A San Jose program proposed by Mayor Matt Mahan (right) could make that happen. Photo by Joyce Chu.

San Jose wants to send homeless people back to their families

By Joyce Chu
San José Spotlight

San Jose is launching a program to relocate and reunify homeless people with their families as the city strives to end unsheltered homelessness.

Homeward Bound, a pilot program proposed by Mayor Matt Mahan, will send outreach workers to make contact with homeless individuals and pay for transportation costs to bus them out of the city. City officials have committed \$200,000 from the 2024-25 general fund and will invest up to \$1,000 per individual to help reunite them with families in the county or outside the area.

"It's going to take many different strategies, many different tools, and we have to acknowledge that folks who are out there did not all become homeless for the same reason and may not all need the

exact same thing to get off of our streets," Mahan said at a news conference Tuesday.

Mahan wants to achieve "functional zero" — when the number of people exiting homelessness is greater than those becoming homeless — through short-term, temporary solutions such as tiny homes, safe parking and sleeping sites and shelters. Reuniting individuals with their families is another option for getting thousands of homeless people off the streets.

Roughly 15% of Santa Clara County's homeless population lived outside of the county or state before they became homeless, according to a 2023 census. There are roughly 10,000 homeless people in the county, with 6,340 in San Jose. Of the city's total homeless population, roughly 5,500 are unsheltered.

See REUNITE, page 5

Sandra Day O'Connor Institute announces winners of 6th annual Civics Challenge

The Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy is pleased to announce the ten winners of the 6th Annual Civics Challenge.

This online civics competition, open to students in grades 6 through 12, invites them to choose a civics education topic and express their knowledge through an essay, short video, or original song.

Among the eight students that received an honorable mention is Naina D., 11th grade student in San Jose.

"We are amazed by the knowledge, creativity and talent these students have demonstrated," Institute President

and CEO Sarah Suggs said. "Justice O'Connor was committed to civics education and the tremendous interest in our Civics Challenge is inspiring as we look to future generations to lead our nation. We congratulate all of the winners and honorable mention recipients for their commitment to civics."

The winners of the honorable mention for the high school categories are listed alphabetically below.

Honorable Mention:

- Amelia N., 9th Grade, Stamford, CT
- Frances A., 12th Grade, Napa, CA

- Laila S., 11th Grade, Washington, D.C.
- Matilda F., 9th Grade, Montpelier, VT
- Naina D., 11th Grade, San Jose, CA
- Ronan P., 12th Grade, Metuchen, NJ
- Rudra P., 12th Grade, Tampa, FL
- Travis D., 11th Grade, Mazomanie, WI

Winning entries and additional information on the Civics Challenge and other Institute programs are available by visiting: <https://oconnorinstitute.org/ocwinners>

Details for the next Annual Civics Challenge will be announced in September 2025.

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San Jose rejects development due to 'ridiculous' red tape

By Vicente Vera
San José Spotlight

San Jose planners have rejected a proposed project because it was filed at 1.2 inches instead of 1 inch, leaving the developer stunned.

Real estate developer Donovan Adesoro said the planning department denied his housing proposal over incorrect paper sizing, a rejection that can create unnecessary setbacks when city standards are so rigid. To right this problem the city has been passing regulations to make it easier for developers to move forward with projects, but Adesoro still got caught in the web of regulations.

"I understand the importance of these requirements at the end of the day, but the big thing cities and the state should be looking for is if the building safe to live in," Adesoro told San José Spotlight. "Rejections should come from more than just if the margin's off, and this happens a lot."

He shared his frustration on social media, catching the attention of Mayor Matt Mahan, who responded.

"I'm sorry we rejected your map. But if we hadn't, the County would have rejected the map later and then added the time and cost of doing the entire process twice, so our team was trying to get ahead of that," Mahan said on X. "That said, we should have better com-

municated why we did this and obviously we need to work together to improve the upstream regs and/or downstream process at the County."

Adesoro moved to California from Houston, Texas about six months ago because of Senate Bill 684, which streamlined the approval process for development projects of 10 or fewer homes on urban lots under 5 acres. This motivated him to move to the Bay Area to create more infill housing developments, among other projects. He said small paperwork errors that delay projects put time-sensitive loans in jeopardy and stall housing needs.

"I feel like all developers have been treated like big developers and people think, 'Who cares if they need to wait or spend a little extra money,' but then there's little developers," Adesoro said. "Small-time developers like ourselves, we're on the same team as the city and our goal is to get more housing built."

Mahan pointed out Santa Clara County might have rejected Adesoro's plans as well, over incorrect margins, pen color and more.

"This is the kind of needless bureaucracy that's contributing to our housing crisis and eroding confidence in government as a good partner," Mahan told San José Spotlight.



San Jose City Hall is pictured in this file photo.

"When legislators make rules and regulations, they should make life easier, not harder — and in San Jose, we're digitizing much of our approval process to make it easier than ever to build and do business here."

Nolan Gray, senior director of legislation and research for California YIMBY, said he doesn't think the rejection solely based on a paper sizing error is justified, and the action goes against San Jose's purported goal of increasing housing by any means.

"It's the sort of behavior you expect from a jurisdiction when they are begrudgingly allowing housing," Gray told San José Spotlight. "The sort of things that the department was flagging for (Adesoro) in that case are just so ridiculous and so not necessary."

Housing planning stages that take just weeks in other jurisdictions are taking

months and even years in California, he said, and many of the planning issues can be resolved with simple communication.

"Having things be digital, having the process be streamlined and having opportunities for individual parts of applications to be fixed without requiring the entire application to be completely thrown out — those feel like very, very low hanging fruit," Gray said.

John Gregorchuk, a multifamily housing developer with YIMBY Action Los Angeles, said it's heartbreaking to see a developer who moved to California in hopes of addressing the housing crisis hit such a bureaucratic nightmare.

"One of the things that we're super passionate about, and we think a lot of pro housing groups are missing, is the pro business side of the equation, where it's a business to actually build and develop homes," Gregorchuk told San José Spotlight. "A lot of investors and housing providers are feeling attacked by the politicians, so they're putting their hands up and leaving."

He said it's refreshing to see elected officials like Mahan actively engaging with developers to increase housing supplies across the Bay Area.

"The way we solve the housing crisis, in my opinion, is with the help of a lot of little developers like myself," Adesoro told San José Spotlight. "But there may be other planners and jurisdictions who don't feel that way."

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Homelessness can't be a choice

By Matt Mahan

If you were to walk into our latest interim housing community, you would think it was a brand-new market-rate apartment complex.

It has individual units with private bathrooms, kitchenettes, and laundry and supportive services on site. But instead of taking advantage of this taxpayer-funded housing, 1 out of 3 people living on neighboring streets chose to stay outdoors. Some people are making the decision to remain in unsafe conditions less than 100 yards away.

We can't let homelessness be a choice. Especially when over 200 people die on the streets each year. Especially when it's harming the broader community — shuttering small businesses and costing taxpayers tens of millions each year. Especially when we're offering a safe, private, dignified alternative. If you agree, visit this site sign up here <https://tinyurl.com/mrjzw68tto> speak in support of holding people accountable for coming indoors on March 18.

In this year's March Budget Message, I am proposing that after 3 offers of shelter, we hold people accountable for turning their lives around. After the first two refusals, we will give people written warnings. After a third refusal, we will charge them for trespassing with a goal

of getting them into one of the County's behavioral health courts. Because we all have a responsibility to end this crisis — government has a responsibility to build shelter, and our homeless neighbors have a responsibility for using it.

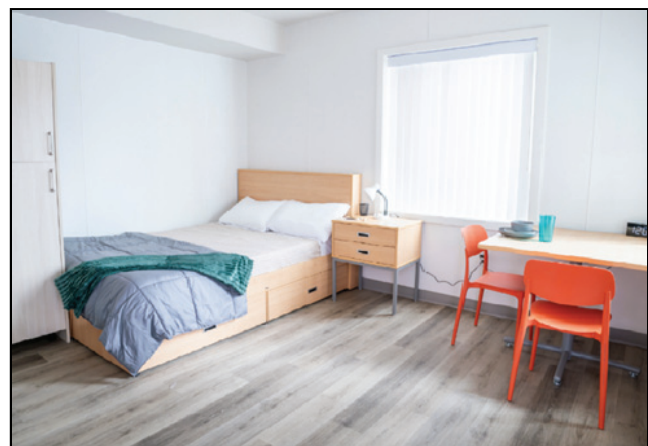
Often when people repeatedly refuse shelter, it is because they have an underlying mental health or addiction issue that is keeping them on the streets and preventing them from making a rational decision about their own well-being. That doesn't mean we should throw up our hands and give up on them. It means we need to help them break a destructive cycle that is harming both them and the larger community.

But the city can't do that alone. Santa Clara County, as the provider of health and human services, has a robust drug and behavioral court system with experts who can help find the best path forward for people. It also has an annual \$12 billion budget that prioritizes providing health and human services to our community with a focus on our most vulnerable residents.

If we've built housing, made contact multiple times, offered low-barrier housing or shelter—meaning someone can come with their partner, their pets, their belongings, without preconditions of being sober and without risk of being kicked out on an arbitrary timeline—and



From the Mayor
Matt Mahan
Mayor, San Jose



if an individual has repeatedly said no, we as a city are out of tools to help them. At that point, our County must step up and ensure that this person comes indoors and gets the help that they need.

We must embrace pragmatic, balanced solutions because the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable. Homelessness is a crisis — but if we don't get serious about accountability, it will become a constant.

That's why, over the course of this year, the City of San Jose will bring online over 1,000 new safe, dignified places for people to live safely indoors. These are mostly individual, private rooms with a door that locks, often with en-suite bathrooms, and robust on-site amenities including case management, laundry, internet and three meals per day.

San Jose taxpayers are doing more and more to meet our responsibility to our homeless neighbors. It's time to require that our homeless neighbors meet their responsibility to the wider community.

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**Screening and Q&A
for *The Unbroken Sky:
The Story of Francisco
Jiménez* March 23 at
Sobrato Theater**

On Sunday, March 23rd, Bellermino College Prep is hosting an exclusive screening of *The Unbroken Sky*, an award-winning short film about the plight of a 1940s undocumented Mexican teenager.

Following the screening, a Q&A will be held with acclaimed author Dr. Francisco Jiménez (whose books were inspired by the film) and NBC Bay Area's Damian Trujillo. The event will be held between 4 p.m. – 6 p.m. at Sobrato Theater, Bellarmine College Prep (960 W. Hedding St., San José, CA 95126).

The screening will serve as a fundraiser to support the Food Bank of Monterey County, aiding migrant farm-working families in the Salinas Valley, where Bellarmine students volunteer during one of our annual service immersion trips.

For tickets, visit the Bellermino Prep website: <https://shorturl.at/nPqBD>

Reunite

Continued from page 1

Other cities such as San Francisco have a relocation program that buses homeless people out of the city. Last year, former Mayor London Breed mandated city agencies offer relocation before giving shelter or other services.

San Jose Housing Director Erik Soliván said the city will apply a similar approach, but with some key differences. Relocation is voluntary and will be given as an option alongside housing and supportive services. Outreach workers will make contact with family members before reuniting them.

“Part of the lessons learned from San Francisco was we need to do (family) verification upfront. They tried to do it on the back end,” Soliván told San José Spotlight. “Beyond that ... we’re not putting any expectations on our outreach workers that they’re going to continue management post landing (of people) at their destinations.”

Homeless advocates such as Robert Aguirre question if the program is realistic. He said some unhoused people may be estranged from their families, who may not be capable of caring for them. He said the program shifts away from what he’d like to see more of: permanent supportive housing.

“It also is turning away from the real issue and the responsibility to house

people,” he previously told San José Spotlight.

Brenda Womack, who was formerly homeless and now lives with her daughter in Oregon, said reuniting with family members only works if you have a good relationship with them.

“That’s the most important part,” Womack told San José Spotlight. “I am with my family and I’d rather be with them.”

Since it is a pilot program, Mahan said he doesn’t yet know how much interest there will be in relocation.

“Our goal is to offer them options,” Mahan said. “But as you know, far too often, we can’t offer someone housing or even shelter, because we just don’t have it.”

Kama Fletcher, director of development at nonprofit Neighborhood Hands, said this program is important to some of the homeless people they serve. A couple weeks ago, she spoke with a homeless person who slept outside during the heavy storms. He told Fletcher he needed to get to Novato where his partner’s brother lives but couldn’t afford the bus ticket.

“While the humanitarian crisis playing out on our streets is overwhelmingly due to a severe lack of affordable housing in San Jose — which is an issue we cannot ignore or downplay — it is also true that our unhoused neighbors face many barriers in their extremely unique journeys out of homelessness,” Fletcher said.

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Security

Continued from page 1

an intruder recording students in the girls' locker room at Bret Harte Middle School last October.

In response, administrators, teachers and parents have worked to make schools safer.

When San Jose High School recently issued a shelter-in-place order, the Raptor system quickly notified teachers and staff, said senior Gabriel Ruiz Flores, who is an alternate student member of the district school board. He said that the district is experimenting with Raptor in drills. The district did not respond to a request for a comment.

Nilomi Patel, a parent of a sixth grader at Bret Harte Middle School and a junior at Leland High School, applauds the new technology, because some schools do not have fences enclosing their campuses.

"After a false social media threat at Leland High School last semester, I remember thinking how easy it is to get onto campus," Patel said. "Given the world that we are living in now, safety is one of the biggest concerns as a parent."

Other students, like Pioneer High School senior Frankie Bowen, are hopeful but cautious about the new technology.

He said that on Feb. 7, a teacher accidentally triggered a shelter-in-place drill earlier than the scheduled time. "I hope we don't completely rely on Raptor and cut out other forms of communication, because technology isn't perfect," Bowen said.

At Leland High, sophomore Anderson Lin recalled a man with a knife entering campus from a parking lot last November. No one was harmed, and school officials contacted the police.

The man was not threatening anyone and may have been picking up cans for money, Lin said. "Since then, they've had staff on golf carts running the perimeter during lunch, and that helps. Hopefully, the Raptor system will prevent incidents like this from happening again."

Across the state, safety has emerged as a bargaining issue for teachers and school districts.

In January, the San Jose Teachers Association outlined school safety and safe working conditions for teachers as two of their three priorities.

"Employees and management are coming together to improve systems and build safer environments," Melissa Urbain, the union vice president, said at the school

board meeting.

Parents are also asking for broader safety discussions. That is an objective of the Why Wait Project, an initiative co-founded in 2023 by Trudi McCanna, parent of both a Abraham Lincoln High School graduate and a Willow Glen High School student. She wrote a letter signed by 300 parents asking the school board to put school safety on its agendas.

The Why Wait Project is pushing for a districtwide approach to school safety to replace the current system, based on California Education Code, where individual school site councils handle safety. Each site council — composed of students, staff, parents and administrators — develops its own safety plan to prepare for emergencies, natural disasters, hate crimes and harassment.

McCanna believes this school-by-school system can cause discrepancies.

"If every school is designing these things individually, it really doesn't make our whole community safer," she said.

The Why Wait Project recommends hiring a safety director, creating a districtwide safety task force and having safety discussed at district board meetings rather than at each school.

Maren Sederquist, chair of the Willow Glen High site council, also wants to see more communication and collaboration.

"If the district really wants all of the schools to be as safe as possible, it would benefit from hearing from all of us and we can all learn from each other," she said. "There will have to be variance at the different campuses, but there are so many things that apply to all of the schools."

Others disagree.

"There are so many different factors, layouts, and ways things can happen. So ultimately, I think it has to be decided from school to school. We get the people who know the school the best to really see what's the safest option for students," Flores said.

Why Wait Project cofounder McCanna cautions against quick solutions to a difficult problem. "What really keeps people safe is when communities are engaged in conversations about safety and working together."

Editor's Note: This article was written for Mosaic, an independent journalism training program for high school students who report and photograph stories under the guidance of professional journalists.

Antara Gangwal is a senior at Leland High School in San Jose.



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Times **Local News**

San Jose Youth Symphony to hold auditions for the 2025-26 Season

The San Jose Youth Symphony (SJYS) will be holding its annual general auditions for the 2025-2026 Season.

The auditions will be held on Thursday afternoons (March 27th & April 3rd) and Friday afternoons (March 28th & April 4th) between the hours of 4-9 p.m. Saturday auditions will be held all day (March 29th & April 5th).

All student musicians are welcome, ages 8 and up, who play orchestral instruments (woodwinds, brass, percussion & strings) or who are interested in performing jazz.

Marching Band musicians are welcome to apply for an audition now and then join after marching band season ends.

To submit an audition application, visit: www.sjys.org to join one of SJYS's 12 orchestras and instrumental ensembles. Your audition will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. The symphony will do its best to accommodate your date preferences you list in the application.

The deadline for submitting applications is March 23, 20245

Questions? Reach out to sjys@sjys.org

About the San Jose Youth Symphony

The San Jose Youth Symphony is one of the oldest and finest youth orchestras on the

West Coast of the US. Founded over 70 years ago as part of the former San Jose Symphony*, SJYS has a rich tradition of musical performance and education.

SJYS member musicians, of ages 8 to 20, are selected from more than 650 applicants through our annual spring General Auditions. SJYS comprises 12 distinct performing ensembles: two full orchestras; a chamber orchestra; two flute choirs; concert winds, saxophone, percussion, jazz and harp ensembles; and two string ensembles. Each group rehearses weekly from September to May or early June and performs a scheduled series of concerts each season. In addition, member musicians participate in a weeklong summer camp and receive special coaching and participate in masterclasses from professional and renowned musicians in the Bay Area.

The premier group of SJYS is its Philharmonic Orchestra, led by SJYS Music Director and Conductor, Yair Samet. The orchestra performs its season subscription concerts at the historic and beautiful, California Theatre, in downtown San Jose. The orchestra also travels biannually on its International Concert Tours, and have performed in renowned concert halls in Japan, Italy, Austria, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic, Ireland, Argentina and Uruguay. The orchestra's last two-week concert tour in 2022, saw them traveling to the Baltics: Vilnius, Lithuania; Riga, Latvia; Parnu & Tallinn, Estonia; and Helsinki, Finland.

The orchestra will be touring again during the summer of 2025 to Poland and the Czech Republic!



Supervisors approve new foster home plan

Proposal seeks 'therapeutic' homes for youths with high needs

By William Bellou

Publisher

Santa Clara County supervisors unanimously approved an ambitious plan to expand its network of foster families at its board meeting last week.

The plan also calls for the creation of therapeutic homes for teens with severe mental health challenges.

The move comes nearly a year after the Bay Area News Group began exposing how, since 2020, the county had been operating up to 10 "scattered sites," or group homes that have been the scenes of numerous

police calls, incidents of assault and battery, psychological breakdowns, at least one alleged rape and a fentanyl overdose.

Supervisors have earmarked \$2 million to start implementing the plan, which includes opening four therapeutic homes with professional staff as early as spring 2026.

Here's a breakdown of how the expenditures will be spent:

- \$176,000 per bed — for a high needs foster youth to stay with a foster parent in an Intensive Services Foster Care home.

- \$846,500 per bed — community organization-run, high-level therapeutic foster home for no more than two youths (Short-term Residential Therapeutic Program).

- \$1.6 million per bed — for the same therapeutic home for two youths if the county ran it instead, which supervisors say is an important backup if the contractor backs out.

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Times **Local News**

Welcome a lifelong friend; how to open your home to a foreign exchange student

World Heritage International Student Exchange Program (WH), a Non-profit, public benefit organization, is seeking local families to host foreign exchange students this coming school year.

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The exchange students have pocket money for personal expenses and full health, accident and liability insurance. World Heritage students are carefully selected based upon academics and personality, and host families choose their student from different backgrounds, countries and personal interests.

World Heritage also offers qualified American students the opportunity to learn another language and culture by spending a school year, semester or a summer with a host family in another country.

If interested in hosting an exchange student or becoming an exchange student abroad, please call Debra at 1-800-888-9040, visit www.world-heritage.org or send an email to info@world-heritage.org to request more information or start the application process. Students are eager to learn about their American host family, so begin the process of welcoming your new son or daughter today. The memories and the relationship you create with your exchange student will stay with you forever.



Workers complete \$117M Coyote Creek flood control project

By William Bellou
Publisher

Eight years ago, after a series of atmospheric river storms, Coyote Creek flooded, forcing the evacuation of 14,000 people in neighborhoods around downtown San Jose and causing \$100 million in damage in a torrent of muddy water.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District recently finished a project aimed at reducing the chances of serious flooding in the area in the future.



The \$117 million project from the district, a government agency based in San Jose, constructed flood walls and other features along 8,500 feet of Coyote Creek in a 4-mile stretch of the waterway between Interstate 280 and Old Oakland Road in some of the areas that suffered the worst.

"This neighborhood was flooded," said Shiloh Ballard, a water district board member, at a ceremony to mark the occasion near William Street Park. "There was water in people's homes. It was up to people's knees. The entire community rallied afterward to clean up.

There were dumpsters, and everybody was carting trash. Trash and mud were everywhere. It's not 100% risk free now, but we are minimizing the risk of it happening again."

The flood, on Feb. 21, 2017, was the worst Coyote Creek flood since 1997. City officials and water district leaders blamed each other afterward, with city leaders saying the water district didn't provide clear enough warning of the impending flood beforehand, and water district leaders saying the National Weather Service warnings were straightforward days earlier, but the city was too slow to order evacuations.

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Times **Feature**

TECH JARGON OF THE WEEK

Tool calling

By Shubhi Asthana



Have you ever stumbled into a conversation where everyone is speaking around this “techie” word – and even after you’ve broken in, it is difficult to understand the unfamiliar jargon and acronyms? Well, there’s no need to sweat it. Let me teach you the meaning of some commonly used tech words:

Tool calling

Two months ago, I started working on tool-calling functions as part of the debug team in my organization. When I began looking into tool calling, I observed that we know what tool calling entails—the trick is how to get an LLM (large language models, which are AI systems that can process and generate text) to actually “call a tool.” The only way I could think of was to watch the LLM’s output for keywords. Then you must constantly command the LLM that if certain types of questions come in, it should spit out a keyword to run a tool. And you must keep repeating that command over and over because of the context window. Almost every prompt, we must remind the LLM how to use tools.

Contrary to the term, in tool calling, LLMs do not call the tool/function in the literal sense. So, what do they do? Let me explain with a simple example:

Imagine you ask your phone’s voice assistant, “What’s the weather like?” Within seconds, it tells you the forecast. But how does it know? The assis-

tant doesn’t predict the weather—it simply knows how to ask a weather service for information. This is an example of tool calling, a way for AI models to interact with external systems to get real-world data or perform tasks.

Modern AI models, like ChatGPT, don’t always have up-to-date information or built-in calculators. Instead, they use a method called tool calling to fetch information from the right source. Instead of guessing, the AI checks a list of available tools and decides which one to use. If you ask for today’s stock prices, the AI identifies a financial data tool and requests the latest numbers. If you need help translating a phrase, it selects a language translation tool.

But here’s the catch: AI doesn’t directly press a button to use these tools. Instead, it generates a structured request—like a digital order form—describing what it needs. This request is then processed by the right system, which returns an answer. The AI takes this response and explains it to the user in a natural way.

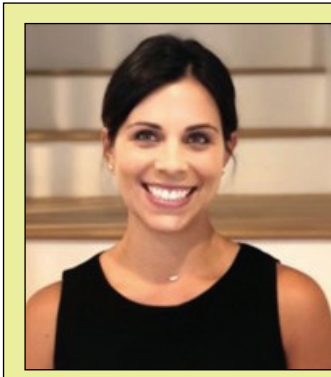
Why does this matter? Tool calling makes AI more useful by giving it access to real-time data and specialized functions. Instead of being limited to what it was trained on, AI can now interact with external knowledge, making it more accurate and practical in everyday tasks.

Next time AI answers a tricky question, remember—it might not know the answer, but it knows where to find it!

About the Author

Do you enjoy reading this column? Send in your comments or feedback to the author at shub.saxen@gmail.com. Shubhi Asthana works as a Research Senior Software Engineer at the IBM Almaden Research Center, San Jose.

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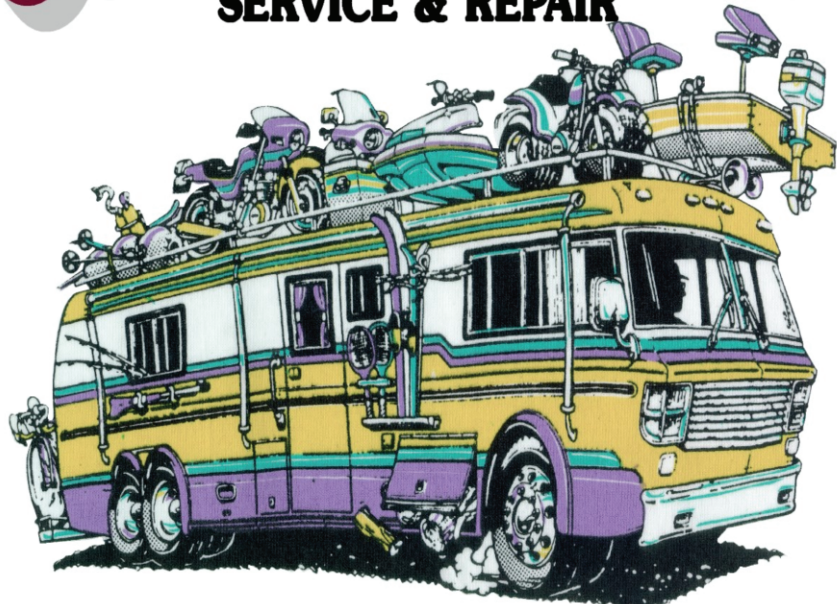
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The Santa Clara County Office of Education Interim Superintendent **Charles Hinman** said a series of investigations into his ousted predecessor have revealed even more issues. File photo.

Report: Santa Clara County education office misused funds

By **Brandon Pho**
San José Spotlight

A federal investigation has found more than \$135,370 earmarked for preschool education program Head Start was misappropriated to pay for non-Head Start staff and credit card purchases, according to the Santa Clara County Office of Education.

Interim Superintendent of Schools Charles Hinman said the failure has been remedied in a Wednesday statement. But he said a recently published report by federal auditors shows a pattern by previous administrators of “scoffing grant rules” and “rejecting calls for oversight” by the Board of Education.

His office is referring to his predecessor, former Superintendent Mary Ann Dewan, who was fired in October by a board majority. After backlash from educators and state lawmakers, the board majority and Hinman accused Dewan of mispending funds. Hinman, appointed shortly after Dewan’s firing, launched separate investigations into Dewan’s spending in November.

The report found the office of education charged the Head Start federal grant for wages and credit card expenses of a non-Head Start manager in the amount of \$135,372.97 between January and June of last year.

Hinman and board members said Dewan’s firing has been vindicated, as the report confirms suspicions that funds weren’t being legally appropriated — and that previous administrators refused to comply with calls for public review and neglected to engage the community members being served by the grant per federal mandates.

“Since stepping into this role, myself and the rest of SCCOE leadership have taken these issues seriously and have been proactive in addressing concerns to ensure compliance with all federal regulations,” Hinman said in the statement. “We remain committed to completing our own investigations so we can fully understand how these things happened and ensure they never happen again. It is our duty to ensure that all possible resources are used in the best interest of our students.”

Dewan said when it was brought to her attention that the funds were unintentionally charged to wrong accounts, she ensured it was corrected immediately.

“I have dedicated the last 11 years of my life to serving the children and families of Santa Clara County,” Dewan told San José

Spotlight. “My focus and attention have been on what is in the best interest of the students, families and staff. These attacks on me are unnecessary. I urge the Santa Clara County Board of Education to focus on the needs of the community and use the limited public resources for the children and families who need their support now more than ever before.”

One of Dewan’s few allies on the board, Tara Sreekrishnan, called the office of education’s announcement “yet another politically motivated attack” meant to deflect from the serious governance issues facing the board.

“When this accounting error was identified, it was immediately corrected — no funds were lost, no services were impacted and an independent audit recently gave SCCOE an A+ rating,” Sreekrishnan told San José Spotlight.

The Administration for Children and Families found Dewan’s office did not immediately comply with the federal review into its use of Head Start funds in 2024. Additionally, the report found Dewan “did not meet the standard” in implementing Head Start, including not having “a process for engaging the parents, including the policy council and parent committees” or providing appropriate training and technical assistance on Head Start to the policy council and board of education.

The office of education eventually confirmed the misallocation of funds and reversed the charges out of Head Start on June 11, but it only came after months of a “failed cover-up,” Board of Education President Maimona Afzal Berta said in the statement. Berta was part of the board majority that fired Dewan.

“The results from this federal review validate the rightful concerns and actions of the Board of Education despite the now proven intentional and illegitimate effort to undermine the Board’s oversight and governance authority, as publicly elected officials,” Berta said. “The public has a right to know exactly what occurred. These are precious public dollars meant to help the most vulnerable in our community and no administrator should ever be allowed to act in this manner ever again. As stewards of the public’s trust, we must ensure that we have the unfettered ability to fulfill our duty to oversee this program and put appropriate measures in place.”

Yadira Orozco, chair of the Head Start Policy Council for the office of education, said the prior administration did not keep her panel in the loop or properly prioritize program participants based on community needs.

“It is unfortunate that Head Start has experienced challenges stemming from the actions of previous leadership,” Orozco said in the statement. “Our focus now is on addressing these issues and working collaboratively to strengthen and enhance the program for the children and families we serve.”

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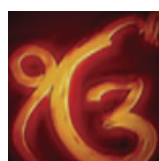


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