

2024-2025 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



LAKE SIDE UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Release Date
May 5, 2025**



Image from Goboinfo.com

LAKESIDE UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT Facing Growing Pains

SUMMARY:

The Lakeside Union School District's (District) Office is located on Old River Road near Shafter Road and serves parts of Southwest Bakersfield. Currently, the District is comprised of two schools, Lakeside Union School (Lakeside) and the Donald E. Suburu School (Suburu). Lakeside, located adjacent to the District Office, serves grades Kindergarten through 8th grade and has a current enrollment of 886 students. Suburu, located on Harris Road, next to Silver Creek Park, serves students from Preschool through 5th grade and has a current enrollment of 820 students.

The District was formed in January 1941 through the consolidation of three adjacent districts: Old River, Ordena, and Paloma. In its first year, 1941-42, the District had an assessed valuation of \$9,639,000 and had an average daily attendance (ADA) of 340 students. At that time, the District was considered one of the county's wealthiest districts. In the 1970's, the District faced a reduction in revenue due to the passage of the Williamson Act¹. Lakeside lost over \$7 million in assessed revenues which forced them to make cuts.

Student enrollment grew steadily up through the 1990s with an ADA of 186 students. By 1996, the District had an ADA of 519 students. Suburu was built in 1998 to accommodate the growing

¹ The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) allows local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners to restrict specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. It aims to preserve agricultural land and prevent urban sprawl by providing tax benefits to landowners who agree to keep their land in agricultural use.

population. By 2000, the ADA had climbed to 863 students. Current enrollment is approximately 1706 students.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to Penal Code §933.5, the 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) investigated the operations and management of the Lakeside Union School District to see if the needs of the community are being met.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury toured both schools within the District, conducted interviews with teachers, staff, and administration, as well as board members and members of the community. The Grand Jury also consulted with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS) office, attended a board meeting, and conducted internet research.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

Lakeside Union School District is positioned where urban and rural begin to meet. There is a close-knit community atmosphere that serves a diverse population. According to the KCSOS website, enrollment in the area has increased by approximately 20% in the past ten years. Reasons for the growth include new affordable housing developments, attractive amenities such as parks, shopping centers, and recreational facilities.

According to a public-school review website, enrollment at Lakeside School has increased by 41% within the last five years. Because of this population growth, the District had to increase its use of modular classrooms. The District also plans to build another school within two to three years on property it already owns, which is located on the corner of Old River Road and McCutchen Road.

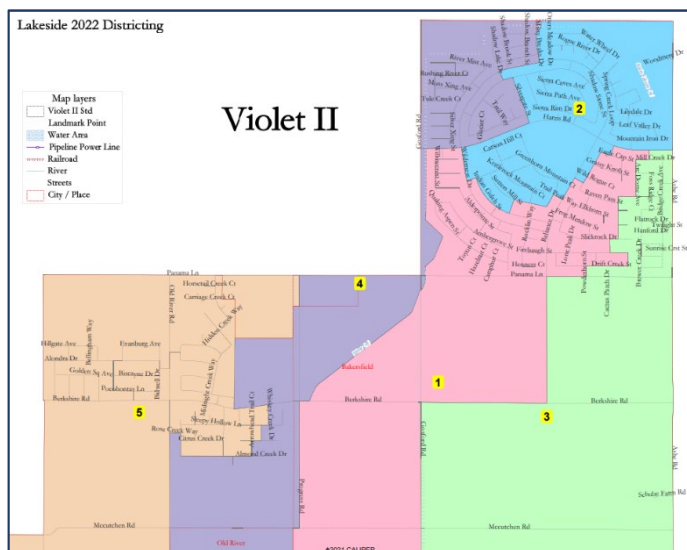
In addition to the State Local Control Funding Formula², Lakeside Union School District receives the following state and federal funding for special programs:

- English Language Acquisition, Teacher Training and Student Assistance
- Lottery (Earmarked for Instructional Materials)
- Special Education
- State Lottery
- Title I, II, and III
- Transportation

² The State Local Control Funding Formula, enacted in 2013-2014, changed the finance system for grades (K-12). It established uniform grade span grants and is funded through a combination of local property taxes and state funding. It changed how local educational agencies in the state are funded, how they are measured for results, and the services they receive to allow all students to succeed to their greatest potential.

The District is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees elected by a By-Trustee Area Election System. The District is separated into five geographic trustee areas, and each area is allocated one seat on the board. Voters within each area vote only for the candidates who reside within that area.

The Board is governed by a set of bylaws, and meetings are held monthly, with the current agenda being posted on the District's website (www.lakesideusd.org). The goals of the Board are to achieve academic excellence through instruction and innovative learning techniques, maintain a strong financial position and be fiscally responsible to all stakeholders, foster a healthy, cohesive, effective, and positive learning environment for students and staff, and maintain district facilities to be clean, safe and secure to provide a learning environment where student success is the priority.



Districting Map Provided by Lakeside Union School District

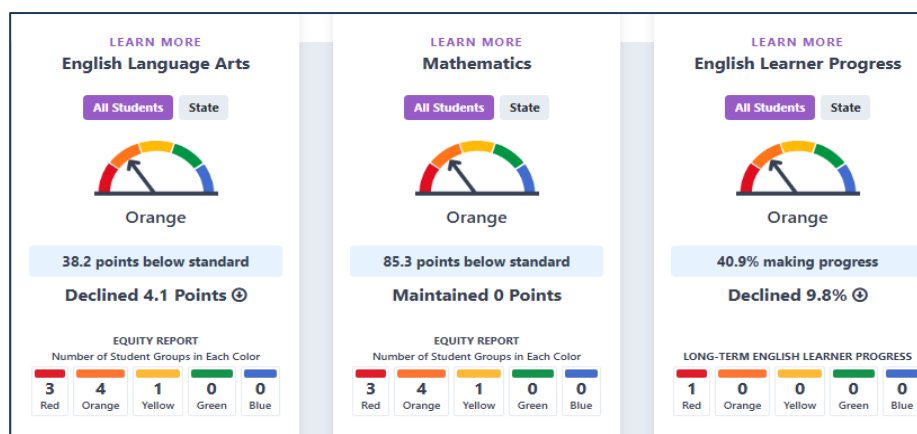
The District's Website

The website is well maintained and provides information and resources for parents, students and the public. Some of the information included is:

- Bus Schedules
- Parent portals
- Breakfast and lunch programs
- Employment opportunities
- Online enrollment
- Accountability plans
- Complaint forms
- Board Meeting Agendas and Minutes

Additional information about school safety plans and drinking water can also be found. The website provides links to the California School Dashboard, which is created by the California Department of Education and provides information on school and district progress in California.

School Statistics



2024 Statistics from CA Dashboard

According to the CA Dashboard, 2024 statistics indicate that 66.8% of students in the district are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 16.4% are English learners, and .6% are foster youth. The overall academic performance of the District appears to be below average. According to the National Center for Education Statistics for Lakeside School, the percentage of students achieving proficiency in math is 16% (state average is 33%). Proficiency in reading/language arts is 39% (state average is 47%). The student/teacher ratio of 24:1 is higher than the California State level of 21:1.

Statistics for Suburu Elementary are as follows: math proficiency is at 20% (state average 33%) and reading and language arts is 35% (state average 47%). The student/teacher ratio is also 24:1 compared to the 21:1 state average.

Chronic absenteeism in the District is down to 28.8% in 2024 compared to 35.7% in 2023. Chronic absenteeism occurs if a student misses ten percent or more of instructional days. The state average is 18.6%. The District has worked in conjunction with the KCSOS to combat chronic absenteeism. Interventions that may include home visits have been performed to assess the needs of the student.

The SARC Report

By February 1st of each year, schools in California are required by state law to publish a School Accountability Report Card (SARC). The report contains information about the condition and performance of each school. Schools are then required to prepare a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) which describes how the school plans to meet the school-specific needs of each student. The 2023-2024 SARC reports for both Lakeside and Suburu are posted on their webpages. Some key facts in addition to test scores from each report are listed as follows:

Donald E Suburu School

1. Per Kern Integrated Data Systems (KIDS), the student body includes 99 students receiving special education services, 135 identified as English Language Learners, and 42 identified as homeless.
2. In 2022-2023, Suburu School had 24 fully credentialed teachers, and 8 teachers not fully credentialed.
3. The Lakeside Union School District Board of Trustees adopted a Resolution (for both schools), as per California Education Code §6019(1), that each student has a textbook or educational materials to use in class and to take home and that sufficient textbooks and materials that are aligned with academic content standards are provided to each student.
4. The Parent Involvement Policy is promoted to facilitate communication between home and school and to engage parents positively in their children's education.
5. The ratio of pupils to academic counselor is 735:1.
6. The average teacher salary is \$59,961. This figure represents 25% of the District budget compared to 31% for the state average for districts in the same category.
7. Teachers are provided regular professional development training by the Principal, the District Technology Coordinator, and other outside support.
8. Suburu states it is proud of its high standards for campus maintenance and general housekeeping practices. A universal work order process for repairs is used district wide. Each day, custodians and/or maintenance staff inspect the campus for potential hazards and to secure gates.

Lakeside School

1. The two top priorities of Lakeside School are safety and academic achievement.
2. As per KIDS, 13% of the student body receive Special Education Services, 15% qualify for English Language Learner support.
3. TK through 6th grade instruction is provided in single, self-contained classrooms. Seventh and eighth grade students receive instruction in a departmentalized format (e.g. period 1, 2, 3...etc.).
4. Lakeside School has Chromebooks in all classrooms.
5. In the 2022-2023 school year, Lakeside had 24 fully credentialed teachers and 5 teachers not fully credentialed.
6. Since the original facility was built in 1942, there is ongoing maintenance and improvements to ensure facilities remain up to date.
7. Custodians, school office staff, and individuals supervising students carry either cell phones or handheld radios to quickly facilitate emergency and routine communications.

8. Teacher newsletters, telephone calls, parent conferences, and the school website are some of the resources used to involve parents in student education.
9. The ratio of pupils to academic counselor is 875:1.
10. For year 2022-2023, the beginning teacher salary was \$52,336 compared to the state average of \$57,839. The percent of the budget allocated for teacher salaries is 25% compared to 31% for the state average for districts in the same category.

The Lakeside Way (PBIS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) is designed to create positive school environments and improve student behavior. PBIS focuses on teaching appropriate behaviors, positive reinforcement, and social-emotional well-being rather than punitive punishments for (action or measures) poor student behavior. Schools tailor this system to meet their specific needs. Lakeside school implements “The Lakeside Way.” It teaches students to be respectful, responsible, and safe. Each morning, the media class makes morning PBIS announcements. Students TK through 6 grade spend 15 minutes on social emotional learning, and 7th and 8th grade spend 18-20 minutes a day. Positive behavior is rewarded through “Bulldog Bucks” Students in grades 6th through 8th can access their accounts with their Chromebooks and can use their “Bucks” to purchase rewards through an online store. Assemblies are held for the younger students, which is known as “Bulldog Day,” in which they are given time to purchase rewards such as t-shirts or backpacks provided by the Booster Club.

In the event of a student not meeting PBIS expectations, students may be sent to a Reflection Room to address behavior that does not meet set expectations. Progressive discipline steps are utilized if needed.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), each child who receives special education and related services must have an individualized IEP. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, administrators, and students to work together to improve educational results for children. Most federal education funding, like most state funding, is allocated based on overall student attendance regardless of how many students receive special education or what services they receive.

According to a 2019 article published on *EdSource*, the average cost of educating a special education student is \$26,000 per year compared to \$9,000 to educate a general education student. Costs vary depending on the needs of the student. When IDEA was passed, the federal government was supposed to pay states the equivalent of 40% of the national per-student expenditure on education multiplied by the number of special education students in that state; they have failed to keep up with rising costs. Special education within the District can cost up to \$100,000 per student per year. The District currently has 275 students with an IEP.

Federal law requires districts to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to interact with peers in whichever educationally appropriate setting offers the most opportunity to interact with

peers who do not have disabilities. For some students with special needs, special education teachers go into the student's classroom to meet their education needs. This is known as "pushing in" to the classroom. Children with moderate to severe needs attend special day class that is staffed with one teacher and two aides. For students whose needs can't be met in the classroom, the District collaborates with the KCSOS Special Education Department to create an appropriate learning environment. This Department provides specialized services and programs for children from birth to 21 years of age.

District Turnover

Recently, the District faced a bus driver shortage which forced the Director of Maintenance, Operation and Transportation to drive busses to ensure students were able to attend class. Part of the reason for the shortage was there is only one CHP officer that certifies bus drivers within the county. Busses for the 7th and 8th grade classes were often late; routes occasionally had to be cancelled due to the driver shortage. Once students arrive on campus, they are entitled to breakfast before attending class, and as a result, they were often late to class. The District is now fully staffed with drivers, and the schedule was altered to ensure students arrive to class on time.

There has also been considerable turnover among the teaching staff, particularly in special education for various reasons, one of those reasons being accepting positions with higher pay and benefits in other districts. Exit interviews indicate salary and lack of support from administration as the top reasons for leaving.

School Safety

A Comprehensive School Site Safety Plan is developed in collaboration with local agencies, and school administrators to meet the requirements of Senate Bill 187³. The plan includes child abuse reporting procedures, teacher notification of dangerous pupil procedures, disaster response procedures, safe arrival and departure procedures, sexual harassment policy, and dress code policy. Both students and staff participate in monthly fire and lockdown drills, as well as the Great California Shake-Out Earthquake Drill in October. A safety team meets quarterly to plan, update, and implement best practices for school safety. They use the motto of "See something, say something," to help promote safety on campus. A guest sign in system, which scans a valid ID or Driver's License, is used to screen visitors at the front desk.

Additional Facts

- A. In California, new teachers receive a Preliminary Teaching Credential by completing a degree and by demonstrating knowledge, skills and abilities. Then they participate in a two-year program called Teacher Induction, which provides support and additional

³ Existing law declares the intent of the Legislature that all California public schools operated by school districts develop a comprehensive school safety plan, as specified. The comprehensive school safety plan may include, among other things, development of an action plan, in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies, for implementing appropriate safety strategies and programs and determining the fiscal impact of executing the strategies and programs. Existing law provides for grants to assist schools in implementing their comprehensive school safety plans.

professional development opportunities. Lakeside Union School District helps pay for this program.

- B. The District contracts with the Boys and Girls Club to provide activities to students before and after school. This program is free to students in grade levels TK through 6 if they qualify.
- C. As a result of high chronic absenteeism and low test scores in language arts and math, Lakeside School is currently on year two of a Differentiated Assistance Program, which is an action plan overseen by KCSOS.
- D. Curriculum is to be ordered by the school secretary and delivered to the bus barn and distributed to teachers by July or August before the beginning of each school year.
- E. Teachers receive four hundred dollars a year in discretionary funds to buy supplies needed for class.
- F. Lakeside School has their own water well on campus and is currently installing another water tank to expand capacity levels.
- G. Because of high arsenic levels in the water, the Lakeside School has provided bottled waters to students and staff since 2009. Currently, the District is in the process of installing new drinking fountains with point-of-use water filters.
- H. The District contracts with Taft City School District to provide meals to the students. Chicken teriyaki day is a student favorite.
- I. Lakeside School currently has a shade area and a nurse's building under construction. There are also plans to build an 8-foot fence to surround the campus.
- J. The District has early detection monitors for earthquakes installed in their digital clocks. Additionally, vaping sensors have been installed in the restrooms.
- K. The District spends approximately one million dollars a month on payroll expenses.
- L. Lakeside School has one security supervisor to patrol the large campus.
- M. One of the distinct amenities Lakeside School offers is a swimming pool, which is available to students for PE and to the public during the summer months.
- N. Former Board Members who served at least one year may participate in a health and welfare benefits program at their own expense.

FINDINGS:

- F1. In order to reduce teacher turnover, the District may benefit by providing teaching coaches for mentorship and training of new teachers to ensure success in the classroom.
- F2. Although teachers should receive curriculum materials before the beginning of the academic year, some classes received their curriculum (October and November) after the school year had started, or not at all. This created frustration among the teaching staff, as they had to find alternate methods of teaching.

- F3. Implementation of PBIS can be challenging due to high staff turnover rates. New staff members may lack the professional development needed to execute PBIS as a whole.
- F4. Although the District has a custodial staff, there have been reports of classrooms not being cleaned for three to four days at a time. Some teachers have taken the initiative to clean their classrooms using their own supplies. This puts an extra burden on teachers and hinders maintaining sanitation and cleanliness of the classroom.
- F5. Although security is listed as a top priority in the SARC Reports, there are several issues that still need to be addressed:
- Lakeside school personnel were unable to reach the office or administration to report an intruder on campus
 - Gates are not always locked. When the Grand Jury toured Lakeside, the gate to the water well was not locked
 - Children have been seen roaming on campus with no supervision or hall passes
 - There was a report of a student bringing a gel gun on campus
 - It is not intended for all staff members to have 2-way radios. Although there is a PA system, not all teachers feel they are informed of potential security issues
 - Teachers do not feel safe as there have been threats from students and parents
 - Although the District has a Comprehensive School Safety Plan, some of the staff are uncertain of security protocols. This is detrimental to safety on campus
- F6. CAASPP (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress) testing done by the state is conducted in April; however, the District does not receive the results until November or December. To gain insight ahead of those results, the District uses computer-based STAR testing to monitor student progress throughout the year.
- F7. Safety cameras installed at Lakeside seem to help in monitoring student behavior; however, the school is still having to address social media bullying with students. Combating this issue is vital to student well-being.
- F8. Because of late bus arrivals, some 7th and 8th grade students missed first period altogether. A second roll call was conducted during second period before marking the student “absent” for the day. A student would then deliver the roster to the attendance office. This takes away class time from students and seems to be misleading.
- F9. Although Suburu is a “walking school,” there is considerable traffic congestion during drop-off and pick-up times. This poses a potential safety risk at these times.
- F10. In the event of an instructional aide shortage for IEP students, general education aides are sometimes pulled off their regular duties to give support to the IEP students. This may create a burden for the general education teachers.

- F11. Although there is a “no smoking/vaping” policy on campus, with the aid of the vaping detectors in the restrooms, some staff members have been caught either smoking or vaping on campus. This muddles the effectiveness of the policy and the example it sets for the community.
- F12. The copiers used by teachers are unpredictable. They jam frequently and have little to no toner. This makes it difficult for teachers to prepare for class.
- F13. There seems to be a breakdown in communication between the staff and administration. This poses a threat in their ability to address student needs.
- F14. Some staff members feel uncomfortable reaching out to the administration for help as they feel their concerns are not addressed.
- F15. Although Lakeside School hired a campus supervisor for security this year, staff at both school sites feel there is still a need for additional security.
- F16. Board meetings are held monthly, but attendance is typically low. This shows a lack of engagement from parents, staff, and the community.

COMMENTS:

The 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury would like to thank the Board of Trustees, administration, staff, and the public for providing insight into the Lakeside Union School District. It is evident this team cares about student success; however, operating this district is complex and requires a collaborative effort from all stakeholders. The District’s accountability plans are well-written and well thought out; however, the District falls short in the execution of these plans.

Two phrases resonated with the Grand Jury during the investigation: “We are growing with what we have,” and “I can’t fix it if I don’t know about it.” Limited finances complicate decisions of where to allocate funds and how to maintain standards. The District is growing exponentially, and there is a need to be able to adapt to constantly changing situations. There seems to be some resistance to change within the District, and the lack of communication also seems to be a significant issue. Fostering open communication will help transition through change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Grand Jury recommends that the Lakeside Union School District:

- R1. Work with KCSOS to secure funding to hire additional mentor teachers or coaches to provide guidance and support to new teachers by August 31, 2025. (Finding #1)
- R2. Create a system of follow-up to ensure curriculum is ordered and delivered to the classrooms before the beginning of the school year by August 1, 2025. (Finding #2)

- R3. Administration should provide additional training and development for teachers and staff to ensure PBIS is implemented fully by September 1, 2025. (Finding #3)
- R4. By August 1, 2025, ensure classrooms are cleaned and sanitized daily by communicating expectations with current custodial staff and by hiring additional custodial staff if needed. (Finding #4)
- R5. Review school safety protocols and procedures to address staff and public concerns regarding the effectiveness of current protocols by September 1, 2025. (Finding #5)
- R6. Enforce the protocol to ensure all gates remain locked. This should be accomplished as soon as possible. (Finding #5)
- R7. Hire additional security at both schools to ensure the safety needs of students and staff are being met by September 1, 2025. (Findings #5 and #15)
- R8. Hire additional counselors to provide emotional and academic support to students in need and to support PBIS efforts, by September 30, 2025. (Findings #3 and #7)
- R9. By September 2025, hire additional aides in Special Education to ensure compliance with student IEP's and General Education aide requirements. (Finding #10)
- R10. Ensure photocopiers are maintained in a timely manner to help teachers prepare for class lessons by August 1, 2025. (Finding #12)
- R11. Consider adding recognition programs for teachers, staff, and students at Board Meetings to help with engagement efforts at these meetings by September 30, 2025. (Finding #16)

NOTES:

- The Lakeside Union School District should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**
 - **Lakeside Union School District Board of Trustees**
Findings #1-16
Recommendations #1-11
 - **Kern County Superintendent of Schools**
Findings #1, #3, and #10
Recommendations #1, #3, and #9

RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF KERN
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
- **FOREPERSON**
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

DISCLAIMER:

This report was issued by the Grand Jury with the exception of two Jurors pursuant to Penal Code §916.2(a). The Jurors were excluded from all parts of the inquiry/investigation, including interviews, deliberations, and the writing and approval of this report.