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10 *State of California*

11 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
12 COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
13
14

15 **THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF**
16 **CALIFORNIA, EX. REL. ROB BONTA,**
17 **ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE**
OF CALIFORNIA,

18 Plaintiff,

19 v.

20 **NATOMAS UNIFIED SCHOOL**
21 **DISTRICT,**

22 Defendant.
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ELECTRONICALLY FILED
Superior Court of California
County of Sacramento

09/28/2026

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Case No. **26CV022865**

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE
RELIEF

The People of the State of California, by and through Rob Bonta, Attorney General of the State of California, allege on information and belief as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. The Attorney General conducted a comprehensive investigation pursuant to Government Code section 11180 et seq., and the California Constitution, article V, section 13 to determine whether Natomas Unified School District's ("Defendant" or "the District") policies and practices relating to school discipline and student privacy complied with state laws.

2. Upon conclusion of the investigation, in September 2025, the Attorney General’s Office found that the District’s policies and practices resulted in: (a) violations of student privacy laws; (b) suspensions for “willful defiance,” in violation of Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k); and (c) discrimination against Black students and students with disabilities in violation of the Education Code, the California Constitution, Government Code section 11135, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

3. The parties have cooperatively developed and agreed to a comprehensive remedial plan that addresses the violations found and other concerns identified by the Attorney General during the investigation. The District has taken a number of positive steps to address the issues identified in this Complaint and has already begun the process of implementing several of the terms agreed upon by the parties. The agreement is set forth in a [Proposed] Stipulated Judgment (Stipulated Judgment), filed concurrently with the Court.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

4. This Court has jurisdiction over the allegations and subject matter of the People's Complaint filed in this action and the parties to this action; venue is proper in this County; and this Court has jurisdiction to enter the Stipulated Judgment.

PARTIES

5. Plaintiff Rob Bonta is the Attorney General of the State of California. The Attorney General is the chief law officer of the State and has the duty to see that the State's laws are uniformly and adequately enforced for the protection of public rights and interests. (Cal. Const., art. V, § 13; Gov. Code, § 11180 et seq.)

6. Defendant Natomas Unified School District is a public school district located in Sacramento County, organized and existing under the laws of the State of California. The District is responsible for providing public education to its students. The District receives state education funds.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

7. All students, regardless of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, or disability, have a right under the California Constitution and state law to be treated equally in all aspects of education. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 7, subds. (a) & (b); Educ. Code, § 220; Gov. Code, § 11135; *Butt v. State of California* (1992) 4 Cal.4th 668, 684–685.)

8. In January 2023, the Attorney General began an investigation of the District pursuant to Government Code section 11180 et seq. and the California Constitution, article V, section 13, to determine whether the District's policies and practices with respect to school discipline and student privacy violated any California laws, specifically those laws protecting students from discrimination based on a protected characteristic and requiring the District to keep student education records confidential.

9. The District voluntarily cooperated throughout the Attorney General Office's investigation, which included the review of thousands of pages of documents and years of discipline data, as well as site visits and numerous interviews with stakeholders and community members.

10. Upon conclusion of the investigation, in September 2025, the Attorney General determined that the District's policies and practices resulted in: (a) violations of student privacy laws; (b) suspensions for "willful defiance," in violation of Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k); and (c) discrimination against Black students and students with disabilities in violation of the Education Code, the California Constitution, Government Code section 11135, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The investigation also revealed a number of other concerns about the District's practices with respect to school discipline, including use of contractual alternatives to formal expulsion such as abeyance contracts and the District's responses to complaints.

1 16. In addition, although educators may intend for discipline to promote positive
2 behavior, research has shown that using exclusionary school discipline policies increases the
3 likelihood of future criminality, increased negative behavior, and lower student academic
4 performance.⁵

5 17. In contrast to exclusionary discipline, evidence-based alternatives—such as
6 schoolwide culturally-responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (“PBIS”)—have
7 been shown to improve school climate, reduce behavioral incidents, decrease disciplinary
8 referrals and suspensions, and promote positive student outcomes.⁶

9 **C. The Investigation Found that the District Suspended Students for Willful**
10 **Defiance or Disruption**

11 18. The Attorney General’s investigation found that, contrary to state law, the District
12 issued out-of-school suspensions based on willful defiance under Education Code section 48900,
13 subdivision (k).

14 19. Prior to July 1, 2020, Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k), prohibited the
15 suspension of students in kindergarten through third grade for disruption or willful defiance and
16 prohibited recommendations for expulsion on that basis for students in grades kindergarten
17 through twelve. Effective July 1, 2020, the prohibition on suspension for disruption or willful
18 defiance was expanded to students in grades four through eight. Effective July 1, 2024,
19 Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k), prohibited the suspension of any student in grades
20 kindergarten through twelve for disruption or willful defiance.

21

22 ⁵ Mowen et al., *The Effect of School Discipline on Offending Across Time* (2019) 37 Just. Q. 739
23 (finding that school suspensions contribute to increased offending over time); Skiba et al., *Parsing*
24 *Disciplinary Disproportionality: Contributions of Infraction, Student, and School Characteristics to Out-*
25 *of-School Suspension and Expulsion* (2014) 51 Am. Educational Research J. 640.

26 ⁶ See Lee & Gage, *Updating and Expanding Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses on the*
27 *Effects of School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (2020) 57 Psychology in the Schools
28 783 (finding statistically significant reductions in school discipline and increased academic achievement
with schoolwide PBIS); Bradshaw et al., *Examining the Effects of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral*
Interventions and Supports on Student Outcomes (2010) 12 J. of Positive Behavior Interventions 133
(finding significant reductions in suspensions and office discipline referrals in schools implementing
schoolwide PBIS); Bradshaw et al., *Effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*
on Child Behavior Problems (2012) 130 Pediatrics e1136, e1142–e1144 (finding significant improvements
in aggressive behavior, concentration problems, office discipline referrals, emotion regulation, and
prosocial behavior due to schoolwide PBIS).

1 20. The Attorney General’s investigation found that between fall 2021 through fall 2025,
2 the District issued at least eleven (11) out-of-school suspensions based on willful defiance alone
3 during periods in which Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k), prohibited such
4 discipline, including two (2) imposed on students in grades kindergarten through third grade since
5 2023 and nine (9) imposed on students in grades four through eight since 2021.

6 21. Moreover, the Attorney General’s Office review of District documents found that the
7 District’s high school handbooks for the 2024–25 school year contained the District’s “Discipline
8 Matrix,” which listed willful defiance as an offense that could result in “suspension (or
9 alternative).”

10 **D. The Investigation Found that the District’s Discipline Policies and**
11 **Practices Resulted in Discrimination Against Black Students and Students**
12 **with Disabilities**

13 22. After a comprehensive investigation of the District’s policies and practices
14 the Attorney General’s Office determined that the District’s discipline policies and practices
15 resulted in discrimination against Black students and students with disabilities.

16 23. The Attorney General’s office analyzed discipline data collected and administered by
17 the District for a six-and-a-half-year period, from 2018–19 through the first half of the 2024–25
18 school year (“period analyzed”). This analysis included data regarding (1) referrals for discipline,
19 (2) dispositions for discipline referrals, including any exclusionary punishments such as
20 suspension and expulsion, and (3) exclusionary alternatives to expulsion.

21 **1. The District’s Discipline Policies and Practices Resulted in**
22 **Discrimination Against Black Students and Students with Disabilities**
23 **in District**

24 24. The data demonstrated that Black students are substantially overrepresented among
25 those referred for discipline. During the period analyzed, Black students comprised only 21.3%
26 of the student body, but they made up 45.1% of all referrals for discipline and 49% of all those
27 referred for “threat/violence.” During that time, Black students were referred for discipline at a
28 rate 3.4 times higher than White students. And based on an analysis that controlled for student
characteristics, school attended and school year, and prior disciplinary referrals, during the period
analyzed, Black students’ likelihood to be referred for discipline was 1.8 times greater than White

1 students in elementary schools, 2.0 times greater in middle schools, and 2.5 times greater in high
2 schools, all statistically significant differences.

3 25. The analysis also found that Black students in the District were also more likely to
4 receive harsher consequences in the form of exclusionary punishment (class suspensions, in-
5 school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsion). During the period analyzed, Black
6 students comprised 21.3% of the student body, but they constituted 46.7% of all out-of-school
7 suspensions, 54.3% of all referrals for expulsion, 47.4% of all stipulated expulsions, and 61.5% of
8 all expulsions following hearing. During that time, Black students were issued exclusionary
9 punishments at a rate that is 3.8 times greater than White students. And based on an analysis that
10 controlled for student characteristics, school attended, and school year, during the period
11 analyzed, Black students' likelihood of receiving exclusionary punishment was 2.3 times greater
12 than White students in elementary schools, 1.9 times greater in middle schools, and 2.8 times
13 greater in high schools, all statistically significant differences.

14 26. Similarly, the analysis found that students with disabilities are also substantially
15 overrepresented among those referred for discipline. Although during the period analyzed, only
16 14.2% of the student body was identified as having a disability, students with disabilities
17 represented 24.9% of all incident referrals and 27.3% of all incident referrals for threat/violence.
18 Based on an analysis that controlled for student characteristics, school attended, and school year,
19 during the period analyzed, students with disabilities were still more likely than their peers to be
20 referred for discipline: 1.5 times greater in elementary schools and 1.5 times greater in high
21 schools, both statistically significant differences.

22 27. The analysis also found that students with disabilities were also more likely to
23 receive harsher consequences in the form of exclusionary punishment (class suspensions, in-
24 school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsion). Although 14.2% of the student
25 body was identified as having a disability, students with disabilities accounted for 32.5% of all
26 classroom suspensions, 22% of all in-school suspensions, 26.5% of all out-of-school suspensions,
27 49.1% of all expulsion referrals, 25.8% of all referrals to law enforcement, and 25.0% of all
28 arrests. Based on an analysis that controlled for student characteristics, school attended, and

1 school year, during the period analyzed, students with disabilities had a likelihood of receiving an
2 exclusionary punishment at rates 1.6 times greater than their peers in elementary schools and 1.7
3 times greater in high schools, both statistically significant differences, and 1.1 times greater in
4 middle schools.

5 28. Exclusionary discipline practices are associated with adverse educational outcomes,
6 and can lead to loss of instruction, higher drop-out rates and lower student academic performance.
7 (See *infra* ¶¶ 13–16.)

8 29. In addition to the data analysis, information obtained during the investigation from
9 stakeholders and community members supported the Attorney General’s findings. For example,
10 some individuals believed Black students and students with disabilities were treated differently
11 than other students, and they felt these concerns were not adequately addressed by the District.

12 **2. Less Discriminatory Alternatives for Non-Exclusionary Practices** 13 **Exist and Are Inconsistently Implemented**

14 30. There are comparable less discriminatory alternatives that would meet the District’s
15 educational goals with less harmful impacts on Black students and students with disabilities.
16 These alternatives include, amongst other things, incorporating social-emotional learning
17 practices into the curriculum, such as improving instructional practices to focus on student
18 engagement, cultural relevance, and opportunities for practice and feedback, as well as consistent
19 implementation of PBIS and restorative practices, which the District has identified as part of its
20 district-wide approach to discipline.

21 31. The investigation found, however, that the District did not consistently implement
22 PBIS and Restorative Justice across its schools. For example, the investigation found that the
23 District had a practice of sending students out of class to “buddy classrooms” or the school
24 administration office for behavior incidents, sometimes for hours at a time, which is inconsistent
25 with the values of PBIS. Staff were also not provided with consistent and clear guidance and
26 training with regard to when and for how long students could be sent to “buddy classrooms” or
27 how to document when they did so, leading to staff confusion, inconsistent implementation and
28 documentation of the practice, and the risk that students would be subjected to discipline for

1 behavior that resulted from their disabilities rather than receiving the proper supports and
2 services.

3 32. As a result, the Attorney General's investigation found that the District did not
4 consistently provide Black students and students with disabilities access to the alternatives to
5 exclusionary discipline such as PBIS and restorative practices it had identified as part of its
6 disciplinary framework.

7 **E. Agreed-Upon Remedial Plan**

8 33. The parties worked together cooperatively and came to an agreement regarding a
9 comprehensive remedial plan that addresses the violations found and other concerns identified by
10 the Attorney General's office during the investigation.

11 34. The agreed-upon remedial plan includes, among other terms: (1) a two-year
12 monitoring term; (2) changes to District policies; (3) staff training, including training related to
13 the confidentiality of student education records; (4) engagement of a PBIS technical assistance
14 provider; (5) creation of District-wide PBIS leadership team; (6) annual information sessions for
15 education rights holders; and (6) reporting to the Attorney General's Office.

16 35. Plaintiff now respectfully requests that the Court enter judgment as set forth in the
17 proposed Stipulated Judgment as agreed to by the parties.

18 **CAUSES OF ACTION**

19 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

20 **(Violation of Education Code section 49076)**

21 36. Plaintiff realleges all paragraphs set forth above and incorporates them by reference
22 as though they were fully set forth in this cause of action.

23 37. School districts and personnel are required to keep student education records
24 confidential, and it is generally unlawful to release information in a student's education record to
25 a third party without parental consent, a court order, or a subpoena. (Ed. Code, § 49076, subd.
26 (a).)

38. The District violated Education Code section 49076, subdivision (a), by releasing confidential student records to third parties without the required consent from the students' parents or guardians and in the absence of lawful exceptions allowing disclosure.

39. Injunctive relief is the appropriate remedy for these violations.

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k))

40. Plaintiff realleges all paragraphs set forth above and incorporates them by reference as though they were fully set forth in this cause of action.

41. The District violated Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k), by issuing out-of-school suspensions based on willful defiance to students for whom such discipline was prohibited by statute.

42. The Attorney General’s investigation identified unlawful suspensions imposed over multiple school years, and the District’s 2024-2025 Discipline Matrix continued to identify willful defiance as conduct that could result in “suspension (or alternative),” notwithstanding the restrictions imposed by Education Code section 48900, subdivision (k).

43. Injunctive relief is the appropriate remedy for these violations.

THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of Education Code sections 200, 201, and 220)

44. Plaintiff realleges all paragraphs set forth above and incorporates them by reference as though they were fully set forth in this cause of action.

45. Under California law, students in public schools—regardless of their race, ethnicity, disability, or other protected characteristics—are entitled to “equal rights and opportunities” in education, (Educ. Code, § 200) and to participate fully in the educational process “free from discrimination and harassment,” (*id.*, § 201, subd. (a)). The law further provides “[n]o person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic” protected by law “in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance, or enrolls pupils who receive state student financial

aid.” (*Id.*, § 220). To effectuate these policies, the Legislature requires California’s public schools to take affirmative steps to “combat racism, sexism, and other forms of bias.” (*Id.*, § 201, subd. (b).)

46. The District receives state funding.

47. The District’s disciplinary policies and practices resulted in discrimination of Black students and students with disabilities. Black students and students with disabilities are subjected to exclusionary discipline at disproportionately higher rates than similarly situated students outside those protected groups, and such disparities are substantial, have persisted over multiple years, and are statistically significant after controlling for student characteristics, school attended, and school year.

48. The District’s disciplinary policies and practices are not necessary to meet a legitimate educational purpose, and the District has less discriminatory alternatives to address student conduct, such as PBIS, which it failed to consistently implement.

49. As a result, Black students and students with disabilities were deprived of equal educational opportunity, in violation of Education Code sections 200, 201, and 220.

50. Injunctive relief is the appropriate remedy for these violations.

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of California Constitution, Article 1, section 7)

51. Plaintiff realleges all paragraphs set forth above and incorporates them by reference as though they were fully set forth in this cause of action.

52. Article I, section 7 of the California Constitution guarantees all persons the equal protection of laws. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 7.) The California Supreme Court has recognized that the right to education is a fundamental right and students have a right to equal protection with respect to its provision. (*Serrano v. Priest* (1971) 5 Cal. 3d 584, 608–609, 616–617.)

53. The District has not satisfied its affirmative obligation to implement programs that avoid discriminatory results by subjecting Black students and students with disabilities to more severe disciplinary punishment than similarly situated students, which resulted in an adverse impact on such students.

1 54. The District’s disciplinary policies and practices are not necessary for the District to
2 meet a legitimate educational purpose, and the District has less discriminatory alternatives to
3 address student conduct, such as PBIS, which it failed to consistently implement.

4 55. Injunctive relief is the appropriate remedy for these violations.

5 **FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION**

6 **(Violation of Government Code section 11135)**

7 56. Plaintiff realleges all paragraphs set forth above and incorporates them by reference
8 as though they were fully set forth in this cause of action.

9 57. Government Code section 11135 prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity,
10 and disability in state-funded programs and activities. Violations of the Americans with
11 Disabilities Act (“ADA”) constitute violations of Government Code section 11135, subsection
12 (b).

13 58. Title II of the ADA provides: “[N]o qualified individual with a disability shall, by
14 reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the
15 services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such
16 entity.” (42 U.S.C. § 12132.)

17 59. The District is a public entity subject to Title II of the ADA. Title II’s implementing
18 regulations require public entities to “make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or
19 procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of
20 disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would
21 fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.” (28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(7)(i).)

22 60. The District failed to modify its school discipline policies and practices with respect
23 to students with disabilities by failing to consider and consistently implement positive behavioral
24 supports, restorative interventions, and other measures to address the conduct of students with
25 disabilities arising from their disabilities. As a result, students with disabilities were denied
26 meaningful access to the District’s educational program, including classroom instruction. The
27 District violated Government Code section 11135 by discriminating against students with
28 disabilities in violation of the ADA.

1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

2 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully prays for the Court to enter judgment as follows:

3 61. For the Court to issue an order enjoining Defendant from engaging in the unlawful
4 practices challenged in this Complaint, requiring Defendant to implement the injunctive relief
5 provisions as set forth in the proposed Stipulated Judgment, and entering final judgment pursuant
6 to the terms of the Stipulated Judgment;

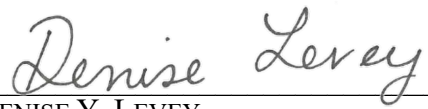
7 62. For the Court to exercise, pursuant to the terms of the Stipulated Judgment,
8 continuing jurisdiction over this action to ensure that Defendant complies with the judgment; and

9 63. For such other further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

10
11 Dated: September 25, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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13 Attorney General of California
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