There is much to be concerned about with regard to the six-month long investigation and subsequent report submitted by the administration-hired attorney Elliot Field that was conducted in response to a letter signed by 75 teachers sent to individual board members in July, 2025 and then as a written public comment to the August 11, 2025 SPS Board meeting.

Before turning to the report, the board should ask district leadership to explain:

1. According to what policy did district leadership have the right to decide unilaterally that a letter submitted to board members and as a written public comment was a "formal complaint?"
2. Why did it take six months (instead of ten work days) for the investigation to be completed and a report to be issued?
3. On what basis did district leadership have the right to unilaterally change the timeline for an investigation from ten work days to six months?
4. What steps did the district leadership take to guarantee that an attorney paid by the school district would be an impartial investigator?
5. How much money was paid to the attorney or his law firm for an investigation lasting nearly six months?

Besides these questions, a piece of information found in a footnote deserves considerable attention apart from the other issues in the report. In footnote 2 on page 3, Field wrote:

> From among the 75 named teachers listed in the August 11, 2025 correspondence, I reached out via email to 22 different teachers to interview a cross-section of elementary, middle, and high school teachers from different school buildings throughout the District. Four teachers responded with a willingness to participate in an interview and I interviewed three of them. One teacher responded indicating they were no longer a signatory to the letter. **Three teachers responded with a message declining to be interviewed: one expressing discomfort with participating in an interview because of negative things occurring in the District, and two expressing fear of reprisal or retribution if they were to participate.** (Emphasis added.)

It is important to note that these three teachers who declined to participate shared quite upsetting reasons for not participating. It is highly likely that many of the teachers who did not respond at all to Field's request for an interview also shared concerns for the negative things occurring in the District and the fear of reprisal or retribution for speaking out. The board should be extremely concerned that teachers genuinely fear being open and honest due to the dysfunctional and autocratic attitudes of some people in the district administrative leadership. Those who collected signatures for the letter reported over and over how there were many teachers who declined to sign the letter while approving of its contents due to their very real fears of reprisal and retribution.

The following is a breakdown of some of the more significant flaws and issues that are contained in investigator Elliot Field's report.

Executive Summary

Field wrote: *"On August 11, 2025, 75 Springfield Public Schools teachers submitted a complaint to the Board alleging the District failed to comply with Oregon Department of Education ("ODE") rules related to District curriculum."*

This statement is incorrect. The letter signed by 75 teachers was not submitted as a formal complaint. It was an informational letter describing teachers' concerns and a demand for the school board to ask questions and take action. There is a specific process outlined in Board Policy for submitting formal complaints, and this letter was not submitted as part of that process.

District leadership improperly chose to classify a written public comment as a "formal complaint" instead of directing the signers of the letter to follow the process in Board Policy. Instead of allowing the school board to consider the information contained in the letter, this improper classification allowed the district administration to prevent the school board from asking any questions or facilitating any discussion of the information shared and the concerns voiced by teachers for at least six months.

Later in this section, Field wrote "*OAR 581- 022-2030 does not require a District's planned instructional program to be comprised of instructional materials formally adopted by the State Board of Education, nor does it require any set minimum amount of instructional minutes."* There are several issues that need to be understood when reading this statement.

First, while a district's instructional program does not need to be "comprised of instructional materials formally adopted by the State Board of Education", the district must either adopt curriculum approved by the State Board of Education, or they must properly complete the independent adoption process described by the Oregon Department of Education in the document titled *Independent Adoptions of Instructional Materials*.

On page 3 of *Independent Adoptions of Instructional Materials,* in the section titled "Requirements of an Independent Adoption," it states:

> *Without prior notice to the State Board of Education, the district school board of any school district,* ***with the assistance of teachers and administrators of the district****, may adopt independently instructional materials for use in place of or in addition to those adopted by the Board, provided they* ***meet the guidelines and criteria established by the Board****. The* ***district school board shall involve parents and citizens in the process****.* (Emphasis is from the original document)

The school board did not involve parents and citizens in the independent adoption of the K-5 curriculum for science, social studies, or the arts, because it does not appear that the members of the school board were informed by district leadership that this was required.

Second, while the Oregon Department of Education does not mandate a "set minimum amount of instructional minutes", common sense would lead one to believe that zero minutes of instruction of a subject listed in OAR 581-022-2030 is not reasonable. One contention in the letter from 75 teachers was that zero minutes were allocated for art instruction at the elementary level during the 2023-24 school year.

District leadership is fond of using the phrase "guaranteed and viable curriculum" to describe the *Wonders* English Language Arts and Ready Math curricula. According to Robert Marzano, the educational scholar who is credited with coining the phrase "guaranteed and viable curriculum," a curriculum is NOT viable if there is not sufficient time allotted for teaching it.

> *"It is important to note the two parts in the concept of guaranteed and viable curriculum: The fact that it is* ***guaranteed*** *assures that specific content is taught in specific courses and at specific grade levels, regardless of the teacher to whom a student is assigned. The fact that it is* ***viable*** *indicates that there is enough instructional time available to actually teach the content identified as important. (Leaders of Learning* by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano, p. 91)

This appears to be part of the rationale behind OAR 581-022-2030, namely, that districts would naturally allot the amount of time needed to provide sufficient instruction based on the recommendations from experts.

A contention in the letter from 75 teachers is that sufficient time for science instruction in grades K-5 was not being allocated, which means that the District was not providing a "guaranteed and viable curriculum." This begs the question of what would count as sufficient time for science instruction, and ODE answered that question in the 2023 document titled "Science Standards FAQ"

> *A5: Are there specific instructional minutes for elementary science?*
> *No. The Oregon Department of Education does not specify the number of minutes spent on science instruction in elementary classrooms… However, all students, including elementary students, must have access to high-quality science instruction. Ensuring educators have time, resources, and support to engage all students in meaningful science experiences is critical for broadening participation in science and building a scientifically literate population...*
>
> *A recent Fordham Institute Report (2021) suggests elementary schools must protect instructional time for science education, specifically to address the unfinished learning due to the impacts of the global pandemic. The evidence indicates that schools should commit to forty-five minutes of daily science lessons, and connect literacy skills with science, social studies and other content areas to increase students' engagement and build important foundational scientific understanding.* (Emphasis in the original document)

Introduction

It states that the investigation was initiated by Dustin Reese, Human Resources Director. It seems odd that the head of Human Resources has the power to unilaterally make decisions about whether or not a letter about curriculum issues can be classified as a “formal complaint” meriting an investigation.

Furthermore, the report says that the law firm hired to conduct the investigation was not retained until September 3, 2025, more than three weeks after the letter was submitted as a written public comment. One of the reasons that the letter was sent to board members in July, 2025 and as a written public comment on August 11 was to provide time for the District to start a process to make necessary changes before the start of the 2025-26 school year. The twenty -three day delay from declaring the letter from 75 teachers a “formal complaint” to taking the first step to investigate is troubling.

Investigation Process

Field does not indicate that he reviewed three sets of documents that are essential to an understanding of the issues presented in the letter signed by 75 teachers: 1) the Oregon Science Standards (also called the Next Generation Science Standards or NGSS), 2) the documents from ODE that define and explain the independent adoption process and criteria for instructional materials, and 3) the 2023-24 elementary school building schedules. This is a fundamental flaw in his investigation. A thorough review of these sets of documents is crucial to having an understanding of why elementary teachers assert that they lack the necessary curriculum, support materials, and time for addressing the NGSS at their grade levels.

The Next Generation Science Standards are qualitatively different from previous iterations of state science standards for a number of reasons, and the adoption of NGSS in 2013 made a great deal of science curriculum obsolete. An introductory-level, easily readable document from ODE titled *K-12 Science Learning Best Practice Guide* explains what the NGSS are as well as what science instruction must look like in order to meet the NGSS.

NGSS are written as performance expectations, and students are assessed against these standards by completing work that demonstrates mastery of three things: 1) science and engineering practices, 2) disciplinary core ideas, and 3) crosscutting concepts.

For example:

NGSS 3-PS2-1 Motion and Stability: Forces and Interactions

(This is a third grade, physical science standard in the NGSS)

> Plan and conduct an investigation (*science and engineering practice*) to provide evidence of the effects (*crosscutting concept*) of balanced and unbalanced forces on the motion of an object (*disciplinary core idea*).

Because of the inclusion of science and engineering practices in these standards, it is impossible for this standard to be fully met, in this case, by solely reading about balanced and

unbalanced forces. Students must do the scientific work of planning and conducting an investigation (which takes a substantial amount of class time.)

This third-grade science standard also requires that the students have something that they can refer to as a means to gain understanding of the disciplinary core idea, and reading materials would be helpful here. In this case, it would be necessary that the ELA curriculum provides reading passages that describe and illustrate the ideas of balanced and unbalanced forces, but the ELA program *Wonders* does not do so in its third grade curriculum.

According to the requirements listed in ODE's *Independent Adoptions of Instructional Materials* document:

> "If a district chooses to select materials that are *not* on the ODE approved list, they must conduct an independent adoption, as outlined in OAR 581-022-2350, using the adoption criteria for the content area under consideration."

In the ODE's *Instructional Materials Review Criteria* adopted by the State Board of Education in January, 2023, it lists legal requirements for the independent adoption of science materials. Here is the first one:

> Basal Instructional Materials Criteria:
>
> > The submitted materials must make up an organized system of instruction that aligns with 2022 Oregon Science Standards, including the Science and Engineering Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Disciplinary Core Ideas.

The second page in the *Instructional Materials Review Criteria* contains an evaluation rubric titled "Part 1: Oregon Science Baseline Criteria" which explains what it means to meet the above criteria. A brief examination of this rubric followed by a brief examination of *Wonders* ELA materials would quickly lead one to the conclusions contained in the letter signed by 75 teachers: *Wonders* is grossly inadequate as a curriculum meant to address grade-level science standards. While the idea of integrating reading and science through one teaching resource is good, this ELA curriculum does not deliver.

Finally, a central issue raised by the teachers is that the building schedules did not allow time for adequate instruction of science, social studies, health, and the arts. This issue cannot be understood without carefully examining the elementary building schedules for 2023-24. OAR 581-022-2030 states that "each school district shall provide a planned K-12 instructional program," and it is self-evident that such a program would include allocating sufficient time in the instructional day to address the "Common Curriculum Goals" adopted by the State Board of Education. Again, the District does not live up to its own standard of "guaranteed and viable curriculum" for science, etc. if sufficient time is not allocated for student learning.

Factual Findings: Background of the District's Use of *Wonders* to Deliver K-5 Science and Social Studies Instruction

It is concerning, as Field notes in this section of his report, that district administrators did not start with an examination of the Oregon science and social studies standards, and then check to see which of them are addressed or not addressed in *Wonders*. In contrast, this is what classroom teachers routinely do when they are assessing how they will make use of a curriculum. They carefully read the standards for that subject area, and then they judge how well the teaching materials address those standards. This process ensures that the state standards drive instruction, rather than a particular curriculum that may claim to do something that it does not do very well, if at all.

In #18, Field states the District purchased the online resource *Mystery Science* in 2020. However, at first, *Mystery Scienc*e was not purchased for all elementary schools to use, and most elementary teachers did not have access to it during the 2023-24 school year. The license for *Mystery Science* was not made available district-wide until the 2024-25 school year.

In #20, Field begins laying out the District's case with regard to how social studies standards might be met using *Wonders.* It is quite telling that he fails to report that elementary teachers did not have any standards-aligned, ODE-approved social studies K-5 curriculum going back before 2017.

In #23, Field shares that with regard to social sciences, the District developed "Unit Overview" documents that described what *Wonders* covers well and also identifies areas that require supplemental instruction. Elementary teachers who have used *Wonders* would report (if they were ever asked) that *Wonders* is very poorly aligned with Oregon social studies standards. In particular, the Oregon social studies standards for grades K-5 contain frequent and specific references to topics like the geography of Oregon, local (e.g., the city of Springfield) history and government, the struggles and achievements of all the various groups of people who live in Oregon, particularly the people native to Oregon, the histories and governments of the state of Oregon and the Native American tribes in Oregon, etc. *Wonders* does not provide reading and writing work specific to Oregon and its culture, so any claims that it could simply be "supplemented" show a complete lack of understanding of the Oregon social studies standards.

In #38, he refers to a conversation between Whitney McKinley and the science specialists at ODE "about conducting an independent adoption of your locally developed materials, and how to apply the science criteria rubric." As has already been stated, it does not appear that the district followed the instructions from ODE about doing an independent adoption for science (*Independent Adoptions of Instructional Materials*), nor does it appear that the District used the science criteria rubric (*Instructional Materials Review Criteria*.)

In #42, McKinley notes that "they have not done a good job of integrating the science standards at elementary" but that a subcommittee was working on reviewing what the science connections were in each of the K-5 units in *Wonders*. It appears she was referring to a group of elementary teachers led by science TOSA Dara Brennan (and paid by the District) met for a week in

August, 2023 to design science lessons that could be used in conjunction with the *Wonders* ELA curriculum to integrate reading, writing, and science.

The group of teachers was broken into smaller groups of teachers working at the same grade level, with each group tasked with writing one lesson for their grade level that did two things:

1. The lesson addressed a science topic in the *Wonders* ELA curriculum that was also found in their grade levels' Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS.)
2. The lesson followed the research-based, tried-and-tested approach to teaching science recommended by the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) called the 5E model: ***Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate***.

Teachers reported that both of these things proved difficult for several reasons:

1. Reading passages in *Wonders* frequently did not align with *grade level* NGSS which narrowed down the possible reading passages to choose from at each grade level. In other words, a reading passage in *Wonders* that taught students about all the planets in the solar system could not be used, because learning about the planets in the solar system besides Earth are not part of NGSS for grades K-5.
2. The 5E model assumes a teacher is starting with an activity that ***Engages*** the kids, and then the kids are given the opportunity to ***Explore*** the phenomenon that ***Engaged*** them. The teacher does not provide any reading before students do ***Engage*** and ***Explore***. It is when you get to the third step ***Explain*** in the 5E process that the class would take on a reading passage, and it needs to specifically ***Explain*** some aspect of what the kids ***Explored***. It was frequently found that the reading passages in *Wonders* do not dive deeply into science topics, so they are not effective for helping the kids ***Explain*** what they ***Engaged*** and ***Explored***. For example, a reading passage in *Wonders* would talk a little bit about electricity and how it is important, but it would not help a student understand what happens when you close a circuit containing a battery and a light bulb.
3. The lessons that were created would take several days, because a teacher would ***Engage*** the kids on one day, spend time ***Exploring*** the next day, and then finally do some reading. Then the class would go deeper into the science topic over the next day or two as the teacher led the class through ***Elaborate*** and ***Evaluate***. The pacing guide for *Wonders* does not give the teacher sufficient time to linger for five days with a reading passage. They have to move on after a day or two which means the class is doing other reading work while trying to keep their brains engaged with a reading passage from a day or two or three ago.
4. Since the elementary building schedules for 2023-24 **only allowed a teacher to teach science for 20 - 30 minutes for *one day per <u>week</u>,*** and since they were strictly forbidden from using reading time for the kinds of science activities you need to do to ***Engage*** and ***Explore***, then the students would only be able to do ***Engage*** on week one, ***Explore*** on week two, etc. This means it could take four or five lessons (a month) to do the science work connected to a single reading passage.

Each group ended up writing at least one science lesson, and these lessons were collected by Dara Brennan. Each grade level team was responsible for teaching their lesson to test it out

with students. More than one of the teachers reported that the lessons their team wrote would take more time than they were permitted to devote to science instruction according to their building schedules.

In August, 2024, science TOSA Dara Brennan led another group of elementary teachers to find and document the connections between NGSS and *Wonders*, so science could be more easily integrated with English language arts instruction. The group was broken into small groups of teachers working at the same grade level, with each group first tasked with two things:

1. Become more deeply knowledgeable of the NGSS for their grade level as well as the 5E instructional model: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate.
2. Go through the *Wonders* textbook (Anthology) and workbooks (Reading/Writing Companion) for their grade level **page by page**, and analyze which reading passages address science topics at all and tell what part of the NGSS they are related to, and then document the findings on a spreadsheet.

The goal of this group was to create a spreadsheet that would be shared out to all elementary teachers, so that when a teacher decided that they were going to teach about a particular science topic, they would have a resource that would tell them where in *Wonders* that topic was addressed. For example, if a class of 2nd graders would be hatching salmon eggs in their classroom, this spreadsheet would help the teacher quickly find the reading passage(s) she would need. This is called “integration” of curriculum: teaching reading and science simultaneously.

After two days of work, everything came to an abrupt stop as each team shared that for the most part, there were very few reading passages in *Wonders* that taught science topics *at the correct grade level* and then those passages did not go deeply enough to be useful for teachers trying to use *Wonders* as a resource for integrated science instruction. Dara Brennan told the group she would be sharing this information with Whitney McKinley and Joyce Johnson.

Science TOSA Dara Brennan directed the teachers to finish the analysis in spite of the fact it would not meet the goal of facilitating the integration of science and the *Wonders* ELA curriculum.

As a result, the group had extra time on its hands, and it turned its attention to a different task. Brennan had been told that she had been provided eight professional development (PD) sessions of 2 hours each to meet with grades 3 - 5 teachers in order to help them become more familiar with the NGSS and get excited about teaching science to their kids. For about two and a half days, the group helped Brennan review science resources to help her come up with a game plan for teaching on these eight PD sessions. Only the first 2 of these PD sessions occurred during the 2024-25 school year, and the remaining six were cancelled and replaced with PD on math instruction without any explanation from district administrators.

It is important to note that the information about the work and findings of these groups of teachers was not shared with investigator Field. In fact, it is a major flaw in his investigation that

he did not meet with or have any discussions with the District's own knowledgeable and well-regarded authority on science instruction, science TOSA Dara Brennan.

In the latter part of the Factual Findings section, Field makes extensive references to changes and plans made after the 2023-24 school year. A key contention of the letter from 75 teachers was that the District was out of compliance with regard to OAR 581-022-2030 during the 2023-24 school year, and this is borne out in the District's needs to make changes with regard to District curriculum after the 2023-24 school year.

Teacher Observations of Integrating Social Science and Science Instruction with *Wonders*
In #54-57, it is important to note once again that only three teachers (out of 22 teachers contacted) chose to speak with Field. This points to the toxic and dysfunctional culture in which teachers must work, because it is evidence of how little trust and how much fear that SPS teachers have of the District's administrators.

Moreover, Field reports that each of the three teachers who spoke with him noted the shortcomings of using *Wonders* without extolling its virtues. If *Wonders* delivered the promises to the school board made by McKinley, you would expect that Field would have found teachers singing its praises. To support the District's assertions about the power and utility of *Wonders*, Field would have provided pages of testimony from teachers about how well *Wonders* works as a tool for teachers addressing the state science and social science standards, if that were the case. It seems clear that no one who actually uses *Wonders* on a daily basis was willing to describe how effective it is for science or social studies instruction.

K-12 Health
Once again, no mention is made by Field for the lack of time provided in elementary building schedules for health instruction. *The Great Body Shop* cannot be considered to meet the District's standard of "guaranteed and viable curriculum" if an elementary teacher has no more than 30 minutes per week for health instruction, nor can it be said that the district has a planned instructional program if sufficient time is not allocated for health instruction.

K-8 Arts
In #80, without having thoroughly reviewed the arts standards for the state of Oregon first, Field states that the District asserts that standards for dance, media arts, music, theater and visual arts are "embedded into classroom instruction, library instruction, PE instruction and music instruction." Field does not consult these standards, and so instead of comparing what is happening at the classroom level with what ODE expects, he relies on the district leadership's claims that these standards are being fully addressed in grades K-5.

For example, in #81, he states that "according to the district, many of the media arts are standards covered during Library" without acknowledging that Library is not "taught" by certified staff and without curriculum aligned with the Media Arts standards for the state of Oregon. A brief examination of the Media Arts standards followed by a brief examination of what is taught by EAs during Library would have made it clear that across the district, students are not learning

media arts as defined by ODE and that there is no “guaranteed and viable” media arts curriculum being delivered.

In #83, Field seems to accept the District’s assertions that “*Wonders* also addresses theater standards for grades K-5.” Once again, a brief examination of the Theater standards followed by a brief examination of what is being taught using *Wonders* would clearly show that there is a great disconnect between the two, disproving the District’s assertions.

In #84, Field appears to accept the District’s assertions that “visual arts benchmarks are met by classroom teachers, where schools are offered materials and time to integrate standards into their instructional program.” Once again, a brief examination of the Visual Arts standards followed by a brief examination of what is being taught as art would show that there is a great disconnect between the two, disproving the District’s assertions. Moreover, as was indicated in the letter signed by 75 teachers, elementary school schedules allotted zero minutes for art instruction in 2023-24.

It is clear that Field took a great deal of information from district administrators at face value without spending sufficient time to verify that information. He chose not to compare the documents and information that district leadership provided him with the state standards for science, social sciences, and the arts. What he reported from the (only) three teachers that would meet with him should have indicated to him that there was much that district leadership was not telling him. The letter signed by 75 teachers urged the school board to consider and value the experiences of educators who had first-hand knowledge of whether or not students were receiving the instruction that the District claimed they were. Due to the profoundly dysfunctional state of the District and the very real fear of retaliation and retribution expressed by teachers, Field was not able to conduct a balanced assessment of what is truly happening in SPS.

It appears that Field is incorrect stating that the district had a reasonable basis to report to ODE that it was in compliance with OAR 581-022-2030. With this information in mind, the school board should conduct its own investigation into the allegations and assertions made in the letter signed by 75 teachers.