

I urge you to reject the proposed salary increase and contract extension for Vice Chancellor of Human Resources, Mr. Ibrahim "Abe" Ali. During Mr. Ali's tenure, there have been ongoing concerns about employee morale, and the District has faced substantial HR-related financial challenges. Approving a \$280,000/year three-year contract extension (which exceeds the KCCD salary schedule maximum by \$40,000) could be viewed as fiscally irresponsible and insulting to Kern County taxpayers and the many KCCD employees who have voiced concerns about the workplace culture and costly settlements. I urge you to reject this proposed contract renewal when the Board meets on September 12, 2024.

My concerns regarding Mr. Ali's leadership in Human Resources include:

- Mismanagement of Investigations:** California legal standards require the inclusion of the accused in investigations prior to dismissal. Despite this, Mr. Ali did not consult me regarding any of the allegations presented to the Board in April 2023--allegations that were often disproven by unambiguous evidence. Whether this failure to consult the accused is Mr. Ali's ordinary practice or if I was uniquely singled out, it raises serious concerns that, in my opinion, suggest a need for new leadership.
- Failure to Discipline Misconduct:** There are widespread concerns that some individuals have engaged in improper conduct without disciplinary consequences. An obvious example is the individuals who made allegations regarding the diversity committee, particularly the instructor who later testified that she used class time to coordinate student complaints that were ultimately found to be baseless. The 2024 Workplace Culture Survey responses reveal that quite a few employees expressed this concern about seemingly protected bad actors who seem to disrupt the workplace with impunity.
- Low Morale and Retaliation:** Employees report low morale and widespread fear of administrative retaliation, with some citing HR as a significant factor. In at least one court ruling, concerns about Mr. Ali's conduct were noted as a factor in the ruling against KCCD. Even when Mr. Ali is not the immediate cause, it is reasonable to hold HR leadership responsible for the ongoing concerns about a culture of retaliation.
- Excessive Turnover in HR:** Under Mr. Ali's leadership, there has been a noticeable turnover in HR, with approximately eight key employees leaving the department or leaving the District altogether in the last two years. This raises concerns about the management and leadership in the department.
- Costly Legal Actions:** During Mr. Ali's tenure, the District has faced repeated legal troubles stemming from Human Resources debacles, resulting in millions and millions of dollars in settlements (eg. Einhaus; Kalivas; Garrett). There are also a number of current KCCD suits alleging retaliation (eg. *Miller v. Hine*; *Johnson v. Watkin*) and I am aware of quite a few forthcoming suits. It also appears that Non-Disclosure Agreements may have been used to address still other cases during Mr. Ali's tenure. This raises questions about how many HR issues KCCD may be addressing with NDAs and the extent of any potential problems under Mr. Ali's management. How much money is KCCD spending to resolve Human Resources matters under Mr. Ali's management?

For these reasons, and because I care so deeply about the impact on students and colleagues trapped in this unbearable working environment, I recommend seeking new leadership over Human Resources. Regardless, Kern County deserves an administration that is financially responsible and committed to fostering a positive work environment. Please vote against the proposal to extend Mr. Ali's contract as Vice Chancellor of Human Resources.

Sincerely,
Matthew Garrett, PhD
Retired Professor of History & Ethnic Studies, Bakersfield College

PS. I urge you to review the (now redacted) employee responses in the 2024 Workplace Culture Survey. For your ease, I have listed some of them below:

- "I have seen the college administration and the district railroad individuals voicing a different opinion than that of the status quo. The climate in the last few years has been the worst. . . . This fear of retaliation is through every college and contingency group." (p.119)
- "scared for retaliation and have anxiety just waking up to go to work." (p.33)
- "there is a general sense that if one speaks up on issues/concerns they could be retaliated against." (p.115)
- "Bullying and retaliation are big issues here. The culture of fear has been prevalent for way too long. That was unfortunately created and cultivated at the Chancellor position." (p.44)
- "It is a hostile work environment. I fear everyday. . . Even with complaints made to human resources nothing is done and the work environment has not changed. . . . When human resources refused to act because they want to protect management it only make the matter worse." (p.51)
- "There is no follow up on formal complaints of discrimination and/or retaliation" (p.88)
- "Administrators target faculty they do not like and make their lives unbearable. Human Resources never even opens emails that are sent complaining, does not investigate grievances, and flat out ignores discriminatory behavior, even when there is proof it exists. This makes working at BC toxic." (p.63)
- "The Vice Chancellor is also untrustworthy and protects his bad behavior. The entire culture at BC and KCCD is toxic, unhealthy situations. . . [in] what used to be a thriving happy place to work. . . . I recently decided against filing a lawsuit as my concerns have been ignored and I have been retaliated against but decided it was not worth my health." (p.53)
- "everyone is afraid of retaliation" (p.54)
- "everyone is afraid of the bullying of the activist faculty" (p.53)
- "everyone is afraid to speak up because Admin and KCCD have protected him" (p.52)
- "The fear of retaliation for speaking up further discourages collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being." (p.86)
- "that just translates to continued incompetent leadership in Human Resources"
- "absolute toxic work environments, retaliation." (p.28)
- "if things are shared with HR or other management it still gets leaked." (p.24)
- "These are issues we can not address because, we will be labeled as a disgruntled employee, 'blacklisted' or, reprisals." (p.35)
- "Abusive supervisors that go on too long and are protected by Executives, due to race fear of being labeled racists." (p.36)
- "The constant berating from some managers." (p.36)
- "It appears yelling, berating and speaking to staff in a demeaning way is becoming the norm with some Directors on the BC campus." (p.37)
- "The culture of KCCD in the past has been more about silos and group mob mentality. This mentality has led to false narratives, bullying and retaliation of employees who challenge the norm." (p.39)
- "You could not, however, speak up for fear of retribution. It was so bad that people were terminated for no reason other than being a threat." (p.40)
- "The Associate Vice Chancellors have been some of the poorest leaders we have. You will find demeaning and condescending behavior, violations of classified rights and accommodations, putting staff in dangerous environments (lack of care for personal safety), misuse of funds, out of compliance issues, disrespectful comments and favoritism, absolute toxic work environments, retaliation." (p.41)
- "People in powerful positions are not held to proper standards." (p.41)
- "Bullying and retaliation are big issues here. The culture of fear has been prevalent for way too long. That was unfortunately created and cultivated at the Chancellor position." (p.44)
- "Bullying of administrators from different levels is more common than ever where these administrators could not even make a report to the (job title redacted) because he clearly already chose sides. BC is at its worst in terms of being divided because people were allowed to cause havoc as they pleased." (p.46)
- "it is a hostile work environment where I fear everyday that the dean over our area will retaliate against me and others. . . . I am appalled deans and vice presidents can not stop the bullying. It is my opinion no one will step up until someone get hurts. There is no one to talk to the dean doesn't speak to those he doesn't like and (name redacted) goes right back to him when and if she is here. When human resources refused to act because they want to protect management it only make the matter worse." (p.51)
- "HR which uses own investigators and investigations to cover up and protect those in power. (name redacted) refuses to make investigations public. (name redacted) wants to give his own opinion and redact as he sees fit rather than make the results available. I know this because I have asked for reports and he has said the report isn't public and you will get "my version"." (p.52)
- "Ignoring conflict and intolerance of differences of opinion at the district level has led to a culture of hostility and division at Bakersfield College (I cant speak for other colleges). Students have been weaponized against faculty to advance agendas and policies. There is no meaningful dialogue that can occur without hostility resulting, which it completely unnecessary and disheartening. I have talked to numerous faculty who are afraid to speak up for fear of reprisal by both administration and bullying by other faculty. The effort put into painting BC as a racist institution is absurd and pushing a false narrative. We should be teaching, not indoctrinating." (p.52)
- "My administrator at BC has created a hostile work environment and nothing has been done to fix the situation. . . . He is unethical, vindictive contradicts himself constantly, is a bully and people are afraid to speak up because he retaliates against them they do not feel protected. Those of us that do, he creates an even more hostile environment. . . .and everyone is afraid to speak up because Admin and KCCD have protected him. . . . The Vice Chancellor is also untrustworthy and protects his bad behavior." (p.52-53)
- "The Human Resources Department on this campus has made so many egregious mistakes and swept them under the rug, I am surprised KCCD has not seen a class action lawsuit. This is not the fault of the hardworking employees within human resources, but again, a complete lack of competent leadership." (p.53)
- "The (job title redacted) does not keep confidential matters private and leverages his position to retaliate against those he does not like. BC leadership is similarly problematic. . . . Those who challenge (names redacted) are targetted with retaliation." (p.59)
- "Bullying administrators who view faculty as an obstacle to their "vision" for the college" (p.59)
- "Administrators target faculty they do not like and make their lives unbearable. Human Resources never even opens emails that are sent complaining, does not investigate grievances, and flat out ignores discriminatory behavior, even when there is proof it exists. This makes working at BC toxic." (p.63)
- "The board meetings where employees and board members were verbally attacking employees took a toll. Much trust was lost. Trust is hard to regain. The attempt to require only hiring POC can't be erased. Blaming white people for student failure (sent in an e-mail) can't be erased." (p.47)
- "I've been at BC for several decades. Morale amongst faculty, staff and administration is at an all-time low. There is fear of being called a "____ist" if anyone questions the validity, stance, opinion or dissent of DEI, Dual Enrollment or other programs and projects. We've lacked the leadership that promotes and protects civil discourse. There have been several occasions (in open forums) where faculty and staff did not behave collegially. Having certain viewpoints would lead to being punished and/or admonished. It also appeared that unprofessional behavior was ignored or condoned as long as they supported certain viewpoints." (p.51)
- "Last year a professor was fired over speech issues. This would make anyone fearful of expressing a dissenting opinion, lest they be fired as well. I saw instances of multiple people attacked personally last year for raging questions regarding practices." (p.51)