

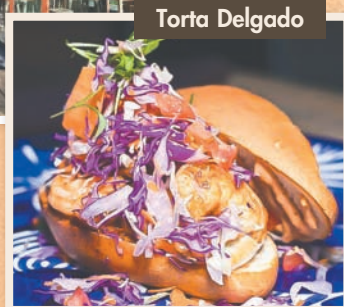
AN OASIS IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN



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Torta Delgado

"DRAMA HIGH"

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The special-ed teacher's attorney doesn't deny the specific allegation. Instead, in his answer to the claim, the attorney writes that his client acted "lawfully and with the degree of force necessary to prevent injury to him/herself and to others whom he/she was charged to protect and supervise."

According to court documents, the plaintiff has failed to appear for two of the last four court hearings, incurring a \$150 fine on April 4.

In California, information on teacher departures and firings is difficult to find.

Despite requiring schools to report reams of micro-specific data concerning student performance and demographics, the California Department of Education doesn't ask some pretty basic questions about the educators, administrators and support staff who are paid to help them succeed.

That makes individual school districts the lockbox of this information. Like law enforcement agencies, districts are reluctant to disclose even basic figures about personnel suspensions and dismissals. Unlike law enforcement agencies, there isn't a new law forcing them to provide information about substantiated misconduct. (Elk Grove Unified did not provide requested data on teacher suspensions and firings as of print deadline.)

What California does have when it comes to investigating and responding to teacher misconduct is the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing, which is the busiest it has been in at least four years.

The biggest reason is that there are just more people applying for teaching credentials, more than 2,800 applicants a month in the 2017-18 fiscal year.

At the same time, school districts and members of the public are leveling more complaints against teachers and other public school employees. The annual report of the commission's Division of Professional Practices, released in September, attributed the sharp rise to "some highly publicized cases of misconduct" starting in February 2012, and also to its own user-friendly website.

In 2017-18, the division investigated the most complaints in four years regarding serious crimes or felonies (942), sex crimes against children (331) and adult sexual situations (110).

Elk Grove Unified has experienced a raft of these alleged crimes, with eight employees arrested on suspicion of sexual battery and other inappropriate conduct involving minors. Laguna Creek High was among the latest schools in the district to join this worrying trend. In January, Elk Grove police arrested Lucas Donovan Melville, a 24-year-old marching band volunteer, for statutory rape of a student.

On April 9, Melville was sent to jail following a court appearance. He faces 28 felony counts for statutory rape and other sex crimes involving a minor.

The teaching commission's enforcement division had 5,895 open cases in 2017-18,

65% related to alcohol use or crimes, and says that number has steadily risen "based largely on an increase from applicants with a criminal history."

The commission took disciplinary action in 894 cases in 2017-18, also the most in four years.

Neither Goodenough nor the accused special-ed teacher have any adverse actions on their records from the commission.

One thing's for sure: California is hiring more teachers.

Nearly 21,000 teachers were hired during the 2018-19 school year, compared to 13,000 in 2012-13, according to a report from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Sacramento County estimated 807 new hires this year, and Elk Grove Unified 243, including 27 in the English/Drama category, state education data shows.

Depending on how the rest of this story unfolds, the district could be seeking one more next year.

ACT V: ALL SILENT ON THE DISTRICT FRONT

The *Midsummer Night's* show took place on a Saturday evening. The following Monday, Madeline and her mom delivered the student declarations to the principal's office.

Goodenough didn't show up to work that day. She stayed gone for five months. Then, on April 1, Craig sent out a brief email informing parents and guardians that Goodenough was returning from leave that Wednesday as a theater teacher, "but will no longer be the Drama Club Advisor."

Maya's father texted her mother: "Was it an April Fool's joke?"

It wasn't.

Maya remembers having a panic attack, then just shutting down when she learned Ms. G was coming back. "That was my biggest fear, having to see her again," Maya said.

Her mom tried to pull Maya from the class, but Brewer says the district told her the only way to do that was to withdraw her daughter from school entirely, setting her back at least a half-year.

"Effectively your solution is to punish the victim," Brewer said. "You've not only put them back in the room with an abuser, you've put them in a room with an abuser who has power over them."

Amy Pogue, Madeline's mother, says it can be hard for adults to remember that feeling of being trapped in a classroom.

"That's an incredibly unfair place to put them in, especially when they were brave enough in the first place to come forward," she said.

On April 3, Theater 3 was Maya's final period of the day. Several drama club members entered the classroom together. Maya snagged a seat at an angle so her back was turned to Ms. G and refused to look at her for the entirety of the 90-minute class.

"She was mostly acting happy and bubbly," Maya said. "She was acting like she used to."

Ms. G taught for only three days. By the following Monday she was MIA again. She

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