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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNI

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GOLETA UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT; et al.,

Plaintiffs,

ANDREW ORDWAY; et al., 14

v.

Case No. CV 99-07745 DDP (Ex)

ORDER GRANTING IN FART AND DENYING IN PART THE CROSS-MOTIONS FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT BY CROSS-CLAIMANT AND COUNTER-DEFENDANT DIANA RIGBY

[Motions filed on 10/21/02]

AND RELATED COUNTER-CLAIM.

This matter comes before the Court on the counter-claimant and counter-defendant cross-motions for summary judgment. Having considered the materials submitted by the parties, the matters raised at oral argument and the issues raised thereby, the Court adopts the following order.

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Background

This action stems from an administrative hearing appeal 26 regarding alleged violations of the Individuals with Disabilities The defendants 27 Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, et seq. ("IDEA"). 28 are Andrew Ordway ("Andrew"), and his mother, Cynthia Ordway.

1 Andrew has been a special education student since 1993. (Counter-2 claimant's Statement of Genuine Issues, p. 1.)

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The plaintiffs and counter-defendants filed this action on July 27, 1999, appealing the April 30, 1999 decision of a California Special Education Hearing Officer (the "Hearing 6 Officer"). The Hearing Officer found, inter alia, that the 7 plaintiffs failed to offer Andrew a free and appropriate public 8 education ("FAPE") as required by IDEA, and that one or more of the 9 plaintiffs should be required to reimburse Cynthia Ordway for 10 Andrew's residential placement. (See Compl., Ex. 1 at 19-21.) 11 plaintiffs sought to set aside the Hearing Officer's findings, as 12 well as additional declaratory relief and attorney's fees. (See 13 Compl. at 13-15.)

On September 24, 1999, defendants California Department of 15 Education and California Special Education Hearing Office answered 16 the complaint. On October 18, 1959, defendant Cynthia Ordway filed 17 an answer and a counter-claim. The counter-claim named the 18 plaintiffs as counter-defendants, as well as Marcia McClish, both 19 individually and as the director of SELPA, and Diana Rigby, both 20 individually and as the Director of Student Services for the SBHSD. 21 The counter-claim included the following allegations and causes of 22 action: (1) the counter-defendants violated Ms. Ordway's rights 23 | under IDEA; (2) the counter-defendants violated Ms. Ordway's rights 24 under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; (3) the counter-25 defendants "acted in bad faith in denying Counterclaimant [sic] her 26 statutory rights under IDEA, and thereby violated Section 1983"; 27 (4) the counter-defendants "acted with intentional disregard for Counterclaimant's [sic] statutory rights under IDEA, and thereby

1 violated Section 1983"; (5) the counter-defendants "acted in bad 2 faith in denying Counterclaimant [sic] her statutory rights under 3 Section 504 [of the Rehabilitation Act] and thereby violated Section 1983"; and (6) the counter-defendants "acted with 5 | intentional disregard for Counterclaimant's [sic] statutory rights 6 under Section 504 [of the Rehabilitation Act] and thereby violated 7 Section 1983." (Counter-Compl. at ¶¶ 97-108.) Subsequently, Ms. Ordway agreed to dismiss her second, fifth, and sixth counterclaims. (See Opp. to Mot. to Dismiss at 8-9.) 9

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On August 10, 2001, the Court affirmed the Hearing Officer's findings in favor of defendants/counter-claimants on all grounds, 12 with the exception of the finding that the AB 3632 assessment was completed in a timely manner. The Court reversed the Hearing 14 Officer's decision regarding the assessment, and found in favor of 15 the Ordways on that issue. The Court affirmed the Hearing 16 Officer's monetary award and granted SEHO's and the Department of 17 Educations' motions for summary judgment. The Court affirmed the 18 hearing officer's decision that Andrew Ordway's rights secured by 19 the IDEA were violated.

The counter-defendant then filed a motion for summary judgment 21 on the issues of: (1) whether a civil rights action under § 1983 22 could be maintained based on a violation of IDEA; (2) whether the 23 11th Amendment barred the action against Rigby in her official 24 capacity; and (3) whether Rigby was entitled to qualified immunity 25 to the extent she is sued in her individual capacity. This Court 26 denied the motion on August 8, 2001.

In the instant motion for summary judgment, the cross-28 defendant, Ms. Rigby, asks the Court to (1) reconsider its ruling

that a civil rights action under § 1983 can be based on a violation 2 of IDEA; (2) find that the counter-claim based on California Law is barred by the Tort Claims Act; (3) interpret the previous orders in this case to constitute a ruling on the third and fourth counterclaims in that negligence is insufficient to sustain a claim under § 1983 for a violation of IDEA; (4) deny Cynthia Ordway's claims under IDEA inasmuch as they are based on rights held by her son Andrew; (5) find that the transfer of Andrew was not actionable conduct; and (6) read the "open enrollment" requirement of California law as a defense to Ms. Rigby's conduct.

The counter-claimant, Ms. Ordway, in her cross-motion, moves 12 for summary judgment on the question of whether Ms. Rigby is liable 13 under § 1983 for committing the following violations of IDEA: 14 (1) transferring Andrew to La Colina Jr. High without assessing 15 whether it was an appropriate placement; (2) transferring Andrew 16 without developing goals and objectives pursuant to an 17 Individualized education Plan ("IEP"); (3) denying Ms. Ordway's 18 right to meaningfully participate in the IEP; (4) failing to 19 convene an IEP meeting to develop an assessment plan and implement 20 a behavioral intervention plan and conduct a timely manifestation 21 determination; (5) failing to conduct a behavioral assessment and 22 develop a behavior intervention plan; and (6) failing to timely 23 refer Andrew for an AB 3632 placement.

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25 XI. Legal Standard

Summary judgment is appropriate where "there is no genuine 27 lissue as to any material fact and . . . the moving party is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law." Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c). 1 A genuine issue exists if "the evidence is such that a reasonable 2 | jury could return a verdict for the nonmoving party, " and material 3 facts are those "that might affect the outcome of the suit under 4 the governing law." Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986). Thus, the "mere existence of a scintilla of evidence" 6 in support of the nonmoving party's claim is insufficient to defeat 7 summary judgment. Id. at 252. In determining a motion for summary judgment, all reasonable inferences from the evidence must be drawn 9 in favor of the nonmoving party. Id. at 242.

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11 ||III. Analysis

The Motion for Reconsideration is Denied

The counter-defendant, Ms. Rigby, first requests the Court to 14 reconsider its previous ruling that a § 1983 claim can be based on 15 a violation of IDEA. This, the Court declines to do. The cases 16 cited by the counter-defendant neither raise new issues of fact or 17 law, nor point to any issue that the Court has manifestly failed to 18 consider. There has been, contrary to the counter-defendant's 19 assertion, no Ninth Circuit case denying recovery under § 1983 for 20 violations of IDEA decided since Congress amended IDEA's 21 predecessor law in 1986. 20 U.S.C. § 1415(f). This Court's determination that a plaintiff can recover under § 1983 for 23 | violations of IDEA is founded on the Congressional intent evidenced 24 by this amendment. Therefore, the counter-defendant offers no 25 binding authority to support her position. The motion for 26 reconsideration is denied.

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Counter-claims Based on California Law \mathbf{R}_{-}

The counter-defendant moves for summary judgment on the counter-claims brought under the California Education Code \$ 56000 et seq., arguing that the action is untimely under the Tort Claims Act.1

The Court finds that the Tort Claims Act is inapplicable under these circumstances. The purpose of the Tort Claims Act is to provide governmental agencies with notice of the claims against 9 them and provide them with sufficient information to investigate and settle claims, if appropriate, without the expense of litigation. City of San Jose v. Superior Ct., 12 Cal. 3d 447, 455 There is no requirement to file a claim under the Act 13 where the statute in question prescribes different claims filing procedures. Weil & Brown, Cal. Prac. Guide: Civ. Pro. Before Trial 15 1:660 (The Rutter Group 2001). For example, in Snives v. City of 16 Bakersfield, 145 Cal. App. 3d 861, 865 (1983), the court held that 17 claims under the Fair Employment and Housing Act ("FEHA") do not 18 implicate the Tort Claims Act as the FEHA contains its own claims Likewise, where 19 filing procedures, insuring adequate notice. 20 parties requesting monies from a state created fund were required 21 to first file a claim with the fund, the Tort Claims Act was found 22 inapplicable. Becerra v. Gonzales, 32 Cal. App. 4th 584, 592 (1995).23

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The Court is confused by the counter-defendant's assertion that a plaintiff cannot simultaneously maintain an action for violation of state and federal law where both apply. The counterdefendant cites no case to support this argument and, without more, the Court declines to rule on it.

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California enacted §§ 56500-56507 of the Education Code to comply with the exhaustion requirement of IDEA. 20 U.S.C. § 1415; Porter v. Board of Tr., 307 F.3d 1064, 1068 (9th Cir. 2002). cross-claimants followed the procedures outlined in California law, 5 | including participating in a full hearing before a Special 6 Education Hearing Officer. The Hearing Officer is under contract 7 with the California Department of Education to provide due process hearings for claims under California Education Code § 56000 et seq. 9 The State and its employees, therefore, were on notice of the 10 claims before the filing of the instant action and the Tort Claims 11 Act is inapplicable.

A § 1983 Claim for Violation of IDEA Does Not Require a C. Showing of Heightened Culpability

The counter-defendant moves for summary judgment on the counter-claims maintaining that she cannot be held personally liable under § 1983 for violation of IDEA because mere negligenee 17 on the part of a government official is insufficient to support 18 such a claim. The counter-defendant interprets this Court's 19 previous ruling to be definitive on the subject of her culpability. This Court found that the counter-claimant failed to create a 21 triable issue of fact as to whether Ms. Rigby acted with reckless 22 or callous disregard for the rights of others. (10/15/01 Order.)

The language of § 1983 does not contain a state-of-mind The Supreme Court, however, has explored the issue of 25 what level of culpability, if any, is required to establish a 26 \parallel § 1983 violation where the claim was predicated on a violation of a 27 |constitutional right. In Daniels v. Williams, 474 U.S. 327 (1986), the Court explicitly held that the negligent acts of a government

1 official could not sustain a due process claim under § 1983. Court reasoned that § 1983 does not create or establish any right but, instead, provides only a remedy for the violation of federal rights created by another source. As such, "in any given § 1983 suit, the plaintiff must still prove a violation of the underlying 6 constitutional right; and depending on the right, merely negligent 7 conduct may not be enough to state a claim." Id. at 330; see also Pink v. Lester, 52 F.3d 73, 74 (4th Cir. 1995) ("the requisite intent in a given [§ 1983] case turns upon the standard necessary to establish a violation of the underlying constitutional or statutory right"). Considering the source of the constitutional 11 12 right at issue, the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, 13 the Supreme Court found that negligent conduct could not support a 14 8 1983 claim. Id. at 332.2

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In contrast to Daniels, the underlying right at issue here is 16 not constitutional, but statutory. The proper approach, therefore, is to look to IDEA. A showing of heightened culpability is not 18 required to establish a violation of IDEA. Thus, all that is 19 required to establish a § 1983 claim is proof of a violation of IDEA under color of law.

Parents May Sue Under § 1983 For All Violations Of IDEA The counter-defendant moves for summary judgment on the majority of the counter-claims, asserting that Ms. Ordway cannot

Ninth Circuit case law also requires a showing of heightened culpability to sustain a 3 1983 claim based on a Stevenson v. Koskey, 877 F.2d 1435 (9th constitutional violation. Cir. 1989) (holding that an officer's handling of an inmate's mail was at most negligent and, thus, did not reach the level of culpability necessary to permit a finding of personal liability under § 1983); Woodrum v. Woodward County, 866 F.2d 1121 (9th Cir. 1989).

1 maintain a cause of action under § 1983 for violations of IDEA that do not specifically implicate the enumerated rights granted to a parent. This approach requires dissecting IDEA into categories of rights, some of which belong to the parents and some of which belong to the child.

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Under § 1983 "[e] very person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage . . ., subjects, or causes to be subjected any citizen of the United States . . . to the 9 deprivation of any rights, privileges or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured." 11 Frazier v. Fairhaven Sch. Comm., 276 F.3d 5z, 58 (1st Cir. 2002). 12 The key question is whether the actions of the party deprived the 13 plaintiff of a federally secured right. Id. This Court has 14 already ruled that \$ 1983 can support an IDEA claim. However, the 15 approach used to determine whether a specific statutory scheme 16 supports 8 1983 claims is instructive in answering the question 17 presented here.

The Supreme Court has used a three factor test to determine 19 whether or not a statutory provision creates an enforceable right 20 | (1) whether the plaintiff is an intended beneficiary of the 21 statute; (2) whether the plaintiff's asserted interests are not so vague and amorphous as to be beyond the competence of the judiciary 23 to enforce; and (3) whether the statute imposes a binding 24 obligation on the state. See Wilder v. Virginia Hosp. Ass'n, 496 25 U.S. 498, 509 (1990). In Suter v. Artist M., 503 U.S. 347, 357

The Court notes that this issue could be easily avoided by 27 adding Andrew as a party to the counter-claim and questions why this has not been done.

(1992), the Supreme Court again addressed whether a statute created a right that could form the basis of a § 1983 claim and held that the statute in question must unambiguously confer upon the intended beneficiaries a right to enforce the provisions of the statute. determine the intended beneficiaries, one looks to the statutory language to see whether it is "'phrased in terms of the persons Victorian v. Miller, 813 F.2d 718, 720-21 (5th Cir. benefitted.'" 1987) (quoting Cannon v. University of Chicago, 441 U.S. 677, 692 n.13 (1979)).

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The IDEA statement of purpose recognizes that the goal of the statute is "to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected." 20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(B) (emphasis added). Moreover, IDEA unambiguously confers upon the parent beneficiaries of the statute an enforceable 15 | right to the procedural mechanisms that secure their disabled 16 children a free and appropriate public education. Courts have 17 consistently recognized the importance of parents to the proper Porter v. Board of Tr. of Manhattan Beach. | functioning of IDEA. 307 F.3d 1064 (9th Cir. 2002); Amanda J. v. Clark County Sch. Dist., 267 F.3d 877, 882 (9th Cir. 2001). The IDEA, therefore, 20 l intends to protect and benefit not only disabled children, but 2.1 their parents, by recognizing that there is a unity of interest

Ms. Rigby makes much of the requirement that § 1983 rights be "personal", citing to numerous cases wherein a parent was unable to bring a claim for violation of a child's civil rights. These cases, however, do not address § 1983 claims based on statutory violations. In the context of an alleged violation of a right guaranteed by federal law, the Supreme Court has looked to the language of the statute to determine the statute's intended beneficiaries.

1 between the parent and the child in obtaining a free and 2 ∥appropriate education.

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Moreover, the Court can find no precedent to support a parsing 4 of IDEA into separate rights for parents and children. 5 contrast, the Supreme Court, analyzing the National Labor Relations 6 Act ("NLRA") in the context of § 1983, held that the NLRA created 7 rights in both labor and management. Golden State Transit Corp. v. 8 City of Los Angeles, 493 U.S. 103, 108 (1989). Next, the Court 9 found that the petitioner, a taxi cab franchise owner, was an 10 intended beneficiary "of a statutory scheme that prevents II governmental interference with the collective-bargaining process. . 12 ." Id. (emphasis added). The enforcement mechanism of IDEA 13 evidences an intent to create a comprehensive statutory scheme 14 benefitting both parents and children without distinction.

The IDEA gives parents the right to "present complaints with 16 respect to any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, 17 or educational placement of the child, or the provision of a free 18 appropriate public education to such child." 20 U.S.C. 19 | 1415 (b) (6). Parents are not limited to enforcing those 20 procedures which directly address parental participation but can enforce any matter that relates to the provision of an appropriate 22 education to their child. It was "[t]o ensure that the parents 23 would not be silenced by the very forces that had once excluded 24 disabled children from public education, [that] Congress granted 25 parents the right to seek review of their child's IEP." Heldman v. 26 Sobol, 962 F.2d 148, 151 (2d Cir. 1992). It is the parents, then, 27 who are specifically granted the right to an impartial due process 28 administrative hearing. 34 C.F.R. § 300.506; Radcliffe v. School

Bd. of Hillsborough County, 38 F. Supp. 2d 994, 998 (M.D. Fla. Upon the competition of the administrative process, party aggrieved by the findings and decision . . . shall have the right to bring a civil action with respect to the complaint." U.S.C. § 1415(i)(2). Parents, therefore, have standing under IDEA 5 to assert violations of any matter relating to their child's receipt of a free and appropriate public education.

Finally, to deny parents a free standing right to enforce all of the procedures of IDEA would be inconsistent with the structure 10 and format of IDEA. Although IDEA is designed to provide disabled 11 children with a "free and appropriate public education," Congress did not choose to establish precise substantive rights; instead, it created numerous procedures to ensure and protect that right. 20 U.S.C. § 1400(c).

> IDEA's procedural guarantees, however, serve not only to guarantee the substantive rights accorded by the Act; the procedural rights, in and of themselves, form the substance of the IDEA. . . . The central role of the IDEA process rights bears witness that Congress intended to create procedural rights the violation of which would constitute an injuxy in fact.

Heldman, 962 F.2d at 155. The parents are the critical component 20 in these procedures, and it is through their participation that the 21 process is successful. To separate out each procedure as a right 22 granted individually to one beneficiary or the other belies the 23 | intent to create a system of procedures, that, when functioning properly, secures to disabled children, and the parents responsible for them, a free and appropriate public education.

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The Specific Liability of Counter-Defendant Rigby E.

The remainder of the counter-defendant's claims, and all of the counter-claimant's requests for summary judgment, require opecific findings regarding Ms. Rigby's liability to Ms. Ordway.

Andrew's Placement at La Colina 1.

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The counter-claimant argues that there can be no judgment against her for the placement of Andrew in La Colina Junior High, because a transfor within the district does not require an IEP under IDEA.6

This Court has twice now stated that "SBHSD should have assessed independently the causes of Andrew's behavior and whether 12 moving him to La Colina would be an appropriate placement." 10/15/01 at 26 n.11 (quoting Order 8/13/01 at 19:11-13).) is, therefore, no need to revisit whether or not an assessment of 15 the appropriateness of the transfer was required. Moreover, this 16 Court held that the only conduct for which Ms. Rigby could be held

The counter-defendant makes separate evidentiary objections protesting any assertions by the counter-claimant that this Court's previous orders resulted in findings of fact. The Court may have found that there was no genuine issue of material fact, but these are not "findings" of fact. The counter-defendant further takes exception to any reliance of the SEHO order or evidence presented in support thereof as inadmissible hearsay. The counter-defendant is correct that this Court's review of the SEHO's decision essentially functioned as determination of cross-motions for summary judgment. In that sense, it does not contain findings of fact, but may have determined that no material issue of fact (Order 8/13/01 at 1.)

The counter-defendant also maintains that the "open enrollment" requirement of California law, which is translated into a school district policy granting parents permission to request an intra-district transfer, required her to honor Ms. Ordway's request for a transfer to La Colina without question. The Court finds no merit in this argument. The policy of a school district cannot serve as a defense to Ms. Rigby's failure to meet her responsibilities under IDEA.

personally liable under § 1983 was failing to investigate whether La Colina would be an appropriate placement for Andrew. (Order 3 10/15/01 at 24.) Further, the Hearing Officer found, and this 4 Court affirmed, that the plaintiffs, including Ms. Rigby, denied Andrew a FAPE by, inter alia, failing to offer him an appropriate (Order 8/13/01 at 19.) It was evidence of Ms. Rigby's placement. actions that supported this finding. Thus, the Hearing Officer, in a determination affirmed by this Court, already implicitly found that Ms. Rigby's conduct constituted a violation of IDEA.

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As well, this Court has already noted, twice, that "Ms. Rigby testified that she moved Andrew to La Colina at the request of Ms. Ordway. Ms. Righy did this without investigating whether La Colina would be an appropriate placement because she 'honor(s)' parental requests." (10/15/01 Order at 22 n.9 (quoting 8/10/01 Order at The counter-claimant offers no evidence to create a triable 119).) 16 issue of fact as to whether or not Ms. Rigby actually conducted an investigation into the appropriateness of La Colina as a placement of Andrew. As there can be no dispute that Ms. Rigby acted under the "color of law," the Court finds that the counter-claimant is 20 entitled to summary judgment on the § 1983 claim against Ms. Rigby

The counter-defendant would have the Court leave open the issue of qualified immunity for Ms. Rigby, claiming that the previous order denying summary judgment was not dispositive. As the counter-defendant offers nothing to refute the evidence offered by the counter-claimant in support of the initial order denying summary judgment or the current motion requesting it, she fails to create a triable issue of fact on this question. Summary judgment is therefore granted based on this Court's previous order, and the unrefuted evidence presented in support thereof, that Ms. Rigby is not entitled to the defense of qualified immunity for her failure to investigate the propriety of Andrew's placement. 10/15/01 at 19-30.)

1 in her individual capacity for failing to investigate the 2 appropriateness of Andrew's placement at La Colina.

The Remainder of the Claims Against Ms. Rigby 2. are Denied

The counter-claimant moves for summary judgment against Ms. Rigby, claiming that she was personally responsible for overseeing a variety of procedures required by IDEA in Andrew's The counter-claimant's request for summary judgment is based on the Hearing Officer's determination regarding SBHSD's responsibilities and duties. This Court has already held that 11 Ms. Rigby's liability under § 1983 cannot be premised on a theory of respondent superior. (Order 10/15/01 at 24.) Further, this Court held the Hearing Officer's findings implicating SBHSD's 14 cannot be translated into a finding of personal liability against 15 Ms. Rigby. (Id. ("Any findings on the part of the Hearing Officer 16 or this Court relating to the conduct of SBHSD may not be 17 attributed to Rigby herself.").) This Court specifically found 18 that the sole action that could be attributed to Ms. Rigby was the 19 failure to investigate the appropriateness of the placement of 20 Andrew in La Colina. (Id.) Summary judgment based on qualified 21 immunity is therefore granted to the counter-defendant on all of 22 the counter-claimants remaining claims.

24 IV. Conclusion

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In light of the upcoming trial, the parties are ordered to 26 meet and confer and prepare a joint statement summarizing any 27 remaining issues in this case. The statement shall be submitted 28 within two weeks of the date of this order.

Counter-Claimant's Motion for Summary Judgment

For the reasons above, summary judgment is granted for the counter-claimant on the question of Ms. Rigby's liability in her individual capacity for failing to investigate Andrew's placement at La Colina. Summary judgment is granted to counter-defendant Ms. Rigby for the remaining claims against her.

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Counter-Defendant's Motion for Summary Judgment В.

For the reasons above, counter-defendant's motion for 10 reconsideration is denied. Summary judgment is denied on the 11 California Education Code § 56000 et seq. cause of action. Summary judgment is granted on all issues of liability beyond Ms. Rigby's 13 failure to investigate the La Colina placement.

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IT IS SO ORDERED.

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PREGERSON

United States District Judge

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