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"Antisemitism is not pervasive in Berkeley Unified School District," Enikia Ford Morthel, the district's superintendent, told a House subcommittee on education Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

Chief defends Berkeley schools

GOP lawmakers grill K-12 leaders over claims of antisemitism

By Shira Stein

WASHINGTON — The schools chief of Berkeley Unified was among a group of K-12 leaders who forcefully pushed back Wednesday against House Republicans who've claimed their districts are hotbeds of unchecked antisemitism, the latest in a series of GOP-led sessions probing liberal academic institutions.

Berkeley Unified School District Superintendent Enikia Ford Morthel told lawmakers she has received nine formal complaints of antisemitism since Oct. 7. "However," she said, "antisemitism is not pervasive in Berkeley Unified School District."

"Our babies sometimes



Jacquelyn Martin/Associated Press

David Banks, head of New York public schools, speaks next to Karla Silvestre, with the Montgomery County (Md.) Board of Education on Capitol Hill.

say hurtful things. We are mindful that all kids make mistakes. We know that our staff are not immune to missteps either, and we don't ignore them when they occur," Ford Montel told the House

Education & the Workforce subcommittee on early childhood, elementary and secondary education.

The hearing took place amid growing concerns about antisemitism in

both K-12 schools and on college campuses, as well as tense standoffs on university campuses across the country as pro-Palestinian protesters call for school officials to divest from companies linked to Israel and support a cease-fire in Gaza.

Berkeley was one of the first K-12 school districts to see a civil rights complaint filed against it — submitted by the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law and the Anti-Defamation League — since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel. Dozens of universities have faced similar complaints, including UC Berkeley, UC Davis and Stanford University.

Berkeley schools are facing allegations that

Claims continues on A8

SFUSD faces risk of going broke

Experts say district must close schools, cut jobs to stay solvent

By Jill Tucker

San Francisco no longer has full control over its schools, with state officials giving fiscal appointees veto power over spending last week after new deficit projections showed the district could run out of cash to pay the bills in just over a year.

State education leaders have been keeping tabs on San Francisco Unified School District for a few years, hoping district officials would pull out of the fiscal tailspin, but their watchful concern has turned to active angst.

Late last week, two fiscal experts — appointed a few years ago to give guidance to the district — were authorized to suspend or reverse financial decisions made by the superintendent or school board. It's an extreme action the state superintendent of public instruction can take when a district is in a "distressed financial condition."

District Superintendent Matt Wayne acknowledged there is a lot of work to do, but said he is confident the district will meet its fiscal obligations.

"We recognize there's still a long way to go," he told the Chronicle on Monday.

School board President Lainie Motamedi was more direct in her acknowledgment of the severity of the situation.

"While the structural deficit has been years in the making, this is the call to action to do the hard work to disrupt what isn't working and build the

SFUSD continues on A9

Students ejected from elite school win \$1M verdict

By Rachel Swan

A Santa Clara County jury has awarded \$1 million and tuition reimbursement to two former students who sued an elite Catholic high school in Mountain View, saying administrators forced them out over an alleged blackface photo that actually showed teens masked in acne medication.

The jury sided with the plaintiffs on two claims against Saint Francis High School, for breach of oral contract and lack of due process, said Frank Hughes, the father of one of the students. However, Hughes said, he and the other plaintiffs lost on three other claims alleging breach of contract, defamation and a violation of free speech.

"Our primary goal was to clear (our clients') names," the plaintiffs' attorney, Krista Baughman, said in an interview after the jury award, which was handed down Monday. "It was quite clear the jury believed these were innocent face masks. They are young kids, their internet trail is

Verdict continues on A9

First pandas on long journey to U.S. checked into S.F. hotel

Bears enjoyed special accommodations in Union Square

The first giant pandas arrived in the United States in the 1930s and early '40s, costing more than \$10,000 each and settling in zoos in Chicago and New York.

But before that happened they were San Francisco tourists, arriving by plane and ocean liner, with several staying in Union Square at the Hotel St. Francis on the way to their new homes.

When San Francisco Mayor

PETER HARTLAUB

TOTAL SF

London Breed returned from China two weeks ago with an agreement to send pandas to the San Francisco Zoo, the news broke with the background that pandas lived here only once previously: in 1984 and 1985, when a full-grown male and female stayed at the San Francisco Zoo for two

three-month visits as part of a global tour.

That's technically true. But there's a panda loophole. When the very first bears started traveling to the U.S. from China from 1936 to 1941, almost all touched down in San Francisco. They usually stayed a night or two — often in a special panda room at the Hotel St. Francis.

The very first panda to visit

Hartlaub continues on A8



The Chronicle 1941

John Tee-Van unloads two pandas in the Hotel St. Francis on Dec. 26, 1941, after their arrival by ship in San Francisco.

