

Charter leader fired over questionable bidding

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Atop executive at a national charter school organization with a Rochester location has been fired over improper bidding involving a company she coowns.

PUC (Partnerships to Uplift Communities) Schools has 15 schools in California. This year, it opened PUC Achieve Charter School on Mark Street in Rochester, starting with fifth-graders. It will eventually expand to grades 5-8.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a recent investigation by the California Department of Education showed that the school network contracted with a food vendor co-owned by Jacqueline Duvivier Castillo, PUC's director of business and development, even though the company did not meet some requirements to gain the contract and even though it was not the highest bidder.

Duvivier Castillo also did not disclose her affiliation with that company to other school officials.

A written report from the investigation was not immediately provided by the California Department of Education, but PUC President Jacqueline Elliot confirmed that Duvivier Castillo has been fired. In a statement, Elliot said: "We have always worked diligently to be in compliance with all regulations regarding all aspects of the implementation of our food program. Due to issues that were brought to our attention regarding the appearance of conflict of interest, we believed that it was in our best interest to part ways with Ms. Duvivier Castillo, and we did so (May 2). There has never been any misuse of funds and our students have always been fed well." The company, Better 4 You Meals, is co-owned by Duvivier Castillo and her husband and provides more than 34,000 meals a day to charter schools in Southern California, according to its website.

The California Department of State is also requiring PUC to improve its bidding and conflict-of-interest procedures, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Elliot also called Duvivier Castillo a "great champion for kids" and credited her with helping grow the school network. She was prominent in the establishment of PUC Achieve Charter School in Rochester last year.

Heather Donnelly, the principal of PUC Achieve, said Tuesday she had not heard about Duvivier Castillo's departure.

"That's actually news to me," she said, noting that Duvivier Castillo has not been involved at the Rochester school since it opened. She otherwise declined to comment.

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