

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Meeting of October 23, 2025

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<https://www.youtube.com/live/Bxrh3lNYuRA?si=MA2EyAw5SJ6Q8eS1>

Here's a summary of the Santa Monica Board of Education meeting:

Core Points

1. Settlement Agreement and Meeting Formalities

- The district agreed to provide 100 hours of compensatory academic services with a non-public agency (NPA) and pay attorney fees up to \$8,750. The settlement was approved unanimously.
- The meeting included roll call, the pledge of allegiance led by local Boy Scouts, and approval of the agenda and minutes with minor changes.

2. United Against Hate Week and Student Voices

- Celebrations highlighted the importance of inclusion, respect, and kindness with student poetry projects expressing themes of belonging and diversity.
- Students Charlotte and Cassie shared poems emphasizing that everyone is special and belongs regardless of differences, reinforcing community solidarity against hate.

3. School Site Presentation: Smash Schoolhouse Model

- Principal Jessica shared the philosophy of a multi-age, community-driven school environment fostering connection, belonging, and shared responsibility for student growth.
- Activities like community groups and field day encourage social skills and inter-age collaboration.
- Focus on writing instruction includes modeling, reflection, peer feedback, and real audience engagement to enhance motivation and self-expression.
- Multilingual learner focus groups are conducted to tailor support and improve writing experiences.
- Collaborative efforts address chronic absenteeism with therapeutic service partnerships focusing on anxiety-related barriers.

- Parent involvement is strong, with many adults volunteering and participating in community-building activities.

4. Superintendent's Report: District Accomplishments and Events

- Six district schools received recognition on the 2025 California Honor Roll for closing achievement gaps and preparing students for college and careers.
- The district participated in the California Great Shakeout earthquake drill emphasizing preparedness and safety.
- Roosevelt Elementary hosted a successful Hispanic Heritage Month community festival celebrating cultural pride and unity.
- Grant Elementary marked major milestones with a groundbreaking for new classrooms and ribbon-cutting for a modernized transitional kindergarten facility.
- A delegation from Fujinomia, Japan, visited to celebrate a 50-year sister city relationship, showcasing strong cultural and educational exchanges.
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month was acknowledged, honoring survivors and those affected within the community.
- The superintendent promoted district Instagram as a platform for timely updates and celebrations.

5. Santa Monica Education Foundation Fundraising Update

- The Foundation aims to raise \$2.5 million annually to support arts, academics, athletics, mental health, and scholarships.
- As of mid-October, 51% of the annual fundraising goal was met, with 18% family participation.
- Recent pledge week raised over \$200,000 aided by flash matches and community partners.
- Upcoming fundraising events include wine tastings and Giving Tuesday campaigns, with a major wine auction scheduled for April.

6. Certificated Staff Hiring, Induction, and Retention Programs

- The district hired 67 certificated staff including 49 classroom teachers, 22 special education teachers, and 8 math/science teachers.

- Emphasis on hiring a diverse workforce reflective of the student population is a key district goal.
- The induction program supports new teachers with mentorship, professional learning, and reflective practice, and is offered free to attract talent, especially in high-need areas.
- 75% of teachers completing induction achieved tenure and remained with the district.
- Reasons for leaving include non-reelection, commute issues, relocation, health, and other personal reasons.
- The district recently launched an administrative induction program to similarly support and retain new leaders.
- Data shows gradual improvement in staff diversity, though Hispanic/Latino representation remains the most underrepresented group.
- Strategies to increase diversity include partnerships with HBCUs, targeted recruitment, and expanded onboarding support.

7. Transportation Policy Updates and Future Planning

- Six transportation policies and administrative regulations were updated to align with current laws and district practices, including fee waivers for certain student groups and driver qualifications.
- New drug and alcohol testing regulations for bus drivers comply with federal requirements.
- The district is preparing for upcoming state mandates requiring 75% of its bus fleet to be electric by 2035, though geographic challenges, especially in Malibu, pose constraints.
- Currently, the district has about 25 buses with only one electric vehicle. Planning and budgeting for electric fleet transition are underway.

8. Board Bylaws Update Process

- The district is undertaking a comprehensive revision of board bylaws, updating governance standards, public statement protocols, confidentiality rules, electronic communications, and board self-evaluation policies.

- These updates reflect changes in laws, best practices, and CSBA recommendations.
- The goal is to complete these updates over several board meetings, with final actions scheduled in coming months.

9. Public and Board Member Comments

- Public comment included a call for expedited implementation of a new cell phone policy and a request for a special school permit option for families displaced by the Palisades fire.
- Board members discussed recognizing the Diwali holiday in schools and expanding cultural celebrations.
- Concerns were raised about security and safety at board meetings, especially following incidents in Malibu and Santa Monica, with calls for security presence and clear emergency protocols.
- The Visual and Performing Arts District Advisory Committee reported progress in parent engagement and coordination with facilities for ensemble venues.

Key Conclusions

1. Strong Emphasis on Inclusion and Student Voice

The district prioritizes fostering belonging, respect, and student expression through programs like United Against Hate Week and multi-age community schools, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives and empowerment.

2. Comprehensive Support for Teacher and Leader Development

The induction programs for teachers and administrators are critical tools for recruitment, retention, and professional growth, creating a supportive culture that aligns with district values and promotes reflective, equity-centered practice.

3. Ongoing Commitment to Diversity and Representation

While progress has been made in diversifying certificated staff, challenges remain in achieving representative Hispanic/Latino staffing, prompting targeted recruitment and partnerships to build pathways for diverse educators.

4. Investment in Facilities, Safety, and Community Engagement

Significant investments in school facilities, safety preparedness, and culturally responsive events demonstrate the district's commitment to creating welcoming and safe environments for students, families, and staff.

5. Financial Stability Supported by Active Fundraising

The Santa Monica Education Foundation plays a vital role in supplementing district funding for programs and scholarships, with ongoing efforts to increase participation and meet ambitious fundraising goals.

6. Transportation Services Evolving to Meet Legal and Environmental Standards

Updated policies and plans for transitioning to electric buses reflect the district's responsiveness to legal requirements and environmental sustainability, balanced with geographic and operational challenges.

7. Governance Practices Reflect Transparency and Accountability

The methodical update of board bylaws ensures that governance aligns with legal standards and best practices, fostering transparency, ethical conduct, and effective communication among board members.

8. Heightened Awareness of Safety and Security Needs

Recent incidents have raised concerns about the safety of board meetings, prompting discussions on security measures, emergency protocols, and the importance of community trust and relationship-building to maintain a safe environment.

Important Details

1. Settlement Specifics

- 100 hours of compensatory academic services funded directly by the district.
- Attorney fees capped at \$8,750.

2. Student Poetry Highlights

- Charlotte's poem emphasized individuality and belonging despite differences.
- Cassie's poem encouraged perseverance and inclusion in diverse activities and communities.

3. Smash Schoolhouse Writing Instruction

- Use of graphic organizers, sentence starters, rubrics, and peer feedback.
- Focus on writing for multiple purposes: informing, persuading, inspiring, entertaining, and self-understanding.

4. Chronic Absenteeism Intervention

- Collaboration with therapeutic service providers and counselors.
- Anxiety identified as a key factor for chronically absent students.

5. Schools Recognized on 2025 California Honor Roll

- Edison Language Academy, Franklin Grant, McKinley Elementary, John Adams Middle School, and Santa Monica High School.

6. Grant Elementary Facilities Enhancements

- New two-story classroom building with six classrooms and rooftop garden.
- Modernized transitional kindergarten building emphasizing exploration and outdoor connection.

7. Fujinomia Delegation Visit

- Celebration of 50-year sister city relationship with student performances and cultural exchanges.

8. Education Foundation Fundraising Data

- \$2.5 million fundraising goal; 51% achieved by mid-October.
- 18% family participation in donations.
- \$200,000+ raised during pledge week, including a \$50,000 flash match.

9. Certificated Staff Hiring Breakdown

- 67 new hires: 49 teachers, 6 support staff, 12 management.
- 22 special education teachers; 8 math/science teachers; 6 transitional kindergarten teachers.

10. Teacher Induction Program Details

- Free for teachers, a recruitment incentive.
- Weekly one-hour mentor meetings.
- Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) guiding professional growth.

- Candidates move from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction.
- Focus on student voice and equity-centered teaching.

11. Administrator Induction Program

- Newly accredited, two-year job-embedded coaching model.
- Emphasizes technical and adaptive leadership skills, especially listening and equity.
- Early positive feedback on leadership growth.

12. Transportation Policy Updates Include

- Fee waivers for unduplicated student groups.
- Electronic bus pass sales.
- Requirements for contracted student transportation providers.
- Enhanced driver qualifications and training, including drug and alcohol testing.
- Procedures for accident reporting and compliance.

13. Electric Bus Fleet Transition

- Law requires 75% electric fleet by 2035.
- District currently operates one electric bus among ~25 total.
- Geographic challenges, especially in Malibu's canyons, affect vehicle selection and operations.

14. Board Bylaws Major Updates

- Governance standards expanded with CSBA guidance.
- Public statements policies clarify spokesperson roles and social media disclaimers.
- Confidentiality definitions broadened to include closed session information.
- Electronic communications policies address Brown Act compliance and public records.
- Board self-evaluation processes updated to align with CSBA tools.

15. Public Comments and Board Dialogue

- Request for accelerated cell phone policy implementation and AI pilot tests in schools.
- Proposal for special fire-related school permits for displaced families.
- Interest in formally recognizing Diwali in school activities and curriculum.
- Calls for enhanced security presence at board meetings in Malibu and Santa Monica.
- Discussion of protocols for emergency situations and multi-agency coordination.

16. Visual and Performing Arts Advisory Committee

- Membership increased to 14 active members.
- Positive feedback on leadership and communication from Dr. Wang.
- Concerns about facility repairs impacting ensemble fundraising and scheduling.

17. General Meeting Notes

- Board meetings include active participation from community partners, students, and staff.
- Emphasis on continuous improvement, collaboration, and transparency across district operations.

This summary captures the breadth and depth of the meeting content, highlighting the district's focus on inclusivity, educational excellence, staff development, operational improvements, community engagement, and governance integrity.

Please note that this transcript/summary was generated by an AI and may contain errors or omissions. For complete and accurate information, please consult the original audio or video recording of the meeting.