Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education
Special meeting of December 18, 2025

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

Core Points

- Property Acquisition for Franklin Elementary Expansion
    - The board approved the purchase of the property at 814 2th Street adjacent to Franklin Elementary School for $2.88 million.
    - The acquisition aims to address the campus size, which is currently half the recommended size for its enrollment and projected growth per California Department of Education guidelines.
    - Funding comes from one-time capital outlay project funds, not from general obligation bonds or general funds.
    - The current occupants may continue using the property until November 2027.
    - The district will propose future use plans for the site to the board, ensuring all entitlement requirements are met before any changes.
- McKinley Elementary School's Progress and Initiatives
    - McKinley Elementary has experienced significant progress during the school year, highlighted by strong collaboration among staff and meaningful instructional improvements.
    - Key initiatives include hiring a full-time instructional coach funded by Title One funds to support teachers and instructional assistants with coaching and professional development.
    - Designated English Language Development (ELD) has been strategically aligned across classrooms to serve multilingual learners effectively while providing targeted support to all students using a "what I need" block.
    - The phonics program, UFLY Foundations, has been fully implemented in grades K-2 with professional development and coaching to ensure fidelity and early positive results.
    - Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been strengthened with weekly cycles focused on collaborative conversations and instructional adjustments informed by data.
    - Tier 2 reading interventions are provided before and after school by volunteer teachers, benefiting about 10% of students, reinforcing literacy support.
    - McKinley was named to the 2025 California Honor Roll, reflecting high achievement and successful instructional work.
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Whole Child Education at McKinley

    - SEL is a longstanding priority at McKinley, enhanced by collaboration among classroom teachers, counselors, district partners, and community organizations.
    - The school has implemented the Second Step program for eight years and continues refining it with tailored professional learning and classroom practices such as Responsive Classroom strategies.
    - Tier 1 SEL practices include weekly explicit instruction on growth mindset, empathy, emotion management, and kindness.
    - Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports are provided through a full-time counselor, counseling interns, and partnerships with mental health organizations to support individual needs.
    - The school has three wellness spaces dedicated to therapeutic counseling and small group interventions.
- Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Environmental Education
    - McKinley is in its second year of refining PBL, emphasizing essential elements like sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice, and public presentation of work.
    - Examples include a fifth-grade capstone puppet-making and storytelling project and watershed discovery projects linked to the Safe Clean Water LA grant.
    - Students engage in real-world environmental problem-solving, incorporating grade-level appropriate investigations related to native plants, ocean ecosystems, and community impact.
- Focus on Collaborative Conversations and Guaranteed Curriculum Access
    - The school's current implementation plan emphasizes structured, collaborative conversations to improve students' listening, speaking, and reasoning skills.
    - These conversations foster empathy, belonging, and community, addressing concerns about screen time and promoting face-to-face dialogue.
    - Families are involved in extending this work at home through modeling and guidance on meaningful dialogue.
    - Students are observed actively collaborating and talking in classrooms to access rigorous content.
- McKinley Campus Construction Update
    - A new elementary education and administration building will be ready for occupancy by March 30, featuring flexible indoor-outdoor spaces to support instructional practices like small group ELD and PBL.
    - Staff will have flexible moving options aligning with testing schedules.
    - The old office space will be converted into a staff lounge to promote wellness and collaboration.
    - The design includes a revamped life skills room tailored for vulnerable and medically fragile students, equipped with adaptive skills facilities like a kitchen and laundry.

        - The construction team has actively engaged with the community through support activities and holiday sponsorships.

- English Learner Progress and Attendance Improvements at McKinley
    - McKinley has the second-highest percentage of English learners in the district and has shown significant progress in ELD proficiency and reclassification rates since 2019.
    - Collaboration between general education, special education, and intervention staff has aligned language instruction and data analysis.
    - Attendance rates have improved over three years, with a 12% reduction in chronic truancy, supported by proactive strategies like attendance conferences, awareness campaigns, and a dedicated attendance team.
    - Student engagement through programs like maker space workshops and TK-5 dance supports attendance.
- Community Engagement and Support at McKinley
    - The school community is highly active, hosting over 50 events annually such as picnics, literacy nights, festivals, and talent shows.
    - PTA membership has grown significantly, with robust participation in site council, special education groups, and family engagement events.
    - Collaborative literacy initiatives include a family literacy night, a Spanish reading book club for adults, and weekly literacy tips shared via newsletters.
    - The community has demonstrated strong mutual support by organizing emergency preparedness training, care kits for unhoused neighbors, and holiday gift sponsorships.
- Board Leadership Transitions and Recognitions
    - The board elected Alicia Minano as president and Lori Lieberman as vice president for 2026.
    - Recognition was given to outgoing President Jennifer Smith for her leadership, commitment to equity, and consensus-building.
    - New transportation supervisor Crystal Gonzalez was introduced, bringing extensive school transportation experience and a family perspective.
- Updates on District Policy and Curriculum
    - Multiple board policies and administrative regulations were updated or newly introduced, including:
        - Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) emphasizing academic and behavioral supports.
        - Curriculum development process and world language instruction, including dual immersion pathways and state seal of biliteracy achievements.
        - Advanced Placement course offerings and fee reductions for low-income students.

        - Civic education policy promoting balanced instruction and student voter registration activities.
        - Visual and performing arts expansion including media arts integration.
        - Controversial issues policy clarifying teacher conduct and student rights in classroom discussions.
        - Service learning and community service class descriptions.
    - Additional accountability and local control policies were updated to comply with state law changes and reporting requirements.
- District-Wide AI Integration and Training Initiatives
    - The district has established a generative AI task force and piloted AI tools (Gemini and Brisk) with over 75 teachers.
    - Updated technology use policies include ethical guidelines and guardrails.
    - AI literacy training is underway for staff and parent groups, with planned expansion to secondary schools and student pilots in 2026.
    - Ongoing collaboration with unions and PTAs is prioritized to ensure comprehensive understanding and responsible use of AI.
- Community Schools and Student Support Highlights
    - Santa Monica High School hosted a successful UCLA Health blood drive and maintains a Vikings Hub providing essential resources.
    - ASB clubs showcase events and holiday fundraisers promote student engagement and school spirit.
    - Olympic High School is transitioning to a permanent new facility, with recognition for its continuation school model and student resilience.
    - Classified workers represented by SEIU Local 99 voiced concerns over wages, job security, benefits, and working conditions, seeking collaborative solutions with the district.

Key Conclusions

- Strategic Property Acquisition Will Support Long-Term Campus Growth
  The board's decision to acquire adjacent property for Franklin Elementary addresses critical space constraints, positioning the district to better accommodate current and future enrollment while maintaining prudent fiscal management by using non-bond funds.
- McKinley Elementary Exemplifies Effective Instructional Leadership and Innovation
  Through intentional investment in instructional coaching, aligned ELD programming, and robust phonics and reading interventions, McKinley demonstrates a replicable model for improving literacy outcomes and supporting diverse learners in an inclusive environment.
- Comprehensive SEL Integration Enhances Student Well-being and Academic Success
  McKinley's multi-tiered SEL approach, embedded in classroom culture and supported by counseling and community partnerships, creates a holistic educational experience that addresses students' emotional and social needs alongside academics.

- Project-Based Learning and Environmental Education Connect Students to Real-World Issues
  The school's PBL initiatives foster critical thinking, creativity, and civic engagement by grounding learning in authentic problems and community collaboration, preparing students to be active, informed citizens.
- Collaborative Conversations Promote Equity and Deeper Learning
  Structured opportunities for dialogue support not only academic growth but also social skills and empathy, reinforcing the district's commitment to inclusive, student-centered education.
- Infrastructure Investments Align with Modern Educational Practices and Accessibility
  New construction at McKinley and other sites reflects a thoughtful balance of historic preservation, flexible learning environments, and special accommodations for vulnerable student populations, enhancing both instructional quality and community pride.
- Positive Trends in English Learner Achievement and Attendance Signal Effective District Support Systems
  Data-driven, coordinated efforts across staff roles contribute to measurable gains in language proficiency and sustained student engagement, demonstrating the value of integrated intervention strategies.
- Strong Community Partnerships Are Vital to District Success and Student Support
  Active family involvement, PTA leadership, and community collaborations enrich educational programs, promote equity, and provide essential supports that extend beyond the classroom.
- Board Leadership Transitions Emphasize Continuity, Equity, and Collaboration
  The election of new board officers and recognition of outgoing leaders highlight the importance of thoughtful governance grounded in shared values and community engagement.
- Policy Updates Reflect Commitment to Compliance, Equity, and Educational Excellence
  The comprehensive revision of educational and accountability policies ensures alignment with state mandates, clarity for educators and families, and support for diverse student needs, including language development, arts education, and civic responsibility.
- District's Thoughtful Approach to AI Integration Balances Innovation with Ethical Considerations
  By establishing task forces, piloting tools, and expanding literacy training, the district proactively prepares staff and students for responsible AI use, involving all stakeholders in shaping its educational impact.
- Recognition of Classified Workers' Concerns Points to the Need for Ongoing Dialogue and Support
  The voices of essential staff demand attention to fair wages, job security, and respect, signaling an area for district collaboration to sustain a healthy, motivated workforce.

Important Details

- Board Vote on Property Acquisition

    - Approved 5 to 1, with one board member absent.
    - The property use remains undecided pending further recommendations.
- Instructional Coaching at McKinley
    - Funded by Title One funds.
    - Coach works side-by-side with teachers and assistants providing professional development and data analysis support.
- Designated ELD Scheduling Innovation
    - Aligns ELD blocks across grade-level classrooms enabling flexible grouping.
    - Supports multilingual learners alongside small group interventions for others.
- Phonics Program Implementation
    - UFLY Foundations adopted in K-2 with coaching support.
    - Third grade teachers adapting practices to their standards.
- Professional Learning Communities
    - Weekly 30-minute meetings focused on student learning and instructional adjustments.
    - Use of shared professional texts to ground discussions.
- Tier 2 Reading Interventions
    - 5 volunteer teachers provide before/after school reading support to 38 students (~10%).
    - Uses evidence-based practices supported by coaching.
- SEL Practices and Programs
    - Weekly explicit lessons on social-emotional competencies from preschool onwards.
    - Activities include mindfulness clubs, culturally responsive read-alouds, student-led assemblies, therapy dog visits.
    - Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with three behavioral expectations (safe, responsible, respectful).
- Project-Based Learning Examples
    - Fifth-grade puppet storytelling project with a public assembly.
    - Watershed discovery and green school planning via Safe Clean Water LA grant.
- New Building Features
    - Italian revival architectural homage.
    - Flexible learning spaces to support small group instruction and PBL.
    - Life skills room with kitchen, washer/dryer, and bathroom for medically fragile students.
    - Staff lounge created from former office space.

- English Learner Progress Data
    - 10% increase in students improving at least one ELPAC level since 2019.
    - 5% decrease in students declining at least one level.
- Attendance Strategies
    - Attendance team meets weekly to review data and develop personalized plans.
    - Campaigns and student-centered conferences help reduce chronic absenteeism.
- Community Literacy Initiatives
    - “Drop Everything and Read” (DEAR) tradition as a shared literacy practice.
    - Spanish adult reading book club meets weekly.
    - PTA literacy tips regularly shared with families.
- Board Leadership Details
    - Alicia Minano elected president by acclamation.
    - Lori Lieberman elected vice president by acclamation.
- Transportation Supervisor Introduction
    - Crystal Gonzalez started December 1.
    - Background includes school bus driving, dispatch, labor relations, and bilingual skills.
- Policy Updates Specifics
    - 154 high school graduates earned the state seal of biliteracy last year.
    - AP courses expanded with fee reductions for low-income students.
    - Civic education includes student voter registration options.
    - Media arts incorporated into career technical education pathways.
    - Controversial issues policy restricts teacher advocacy and protects student expression.
- AI Program Timeline
    - Task force established fall 2024.
    - Staff pilots and policy updates spring 2025.
    - Staff literacy training ongoing, secondary rollout and student pilots planned for 2026.
- Community Schools Highlights
    - Samo High’s Vikings Hub resource center open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
    - Over $10,500 raised in holiday gift card drive supporting 90+ families.
    - Olympic High School recommended for California Department of Education approval.
- Classified Workers’ Petition Demands

        - End poverty wages.
        - Prevent job outsourcing.
        - Increase work hours to qualify for benefits.
        - Improve healthcare coverage.
        - Ensure respect and voice in workplace decisions.
- Upcoming Board Meetings and Elections
    - Board approved 2026 meeting schedule.
    - Election of representatives for Los Angeles County School Trustees Association and CSBA delegate assembly conducted.
    - New policies and administrative regulations to return for final approval in January 2026.
- Facility Project Updates
    - Measure QS projects on schedule and on budget.
    - New drop-off lane and traffic improvements planned for Edison Elementary, designed by EYRC architects.
    - Plans to improve school branding and visibility underway.
    - Temporary relocation plans for classrooms during construction are in place.
- ADA Accessibility Considerations
    - District is compliant with ADA for all new construction.
    - Concerns raised about ease of door access for students with mobility challenges, including requests to evaluate retrofitting older buildings for automatic door openers or push-button access.
- Community and Board Reflections
    - Recognition of resilience and hope in the face of recent tragic events globally and locally.
    - Emphasis on kindness, solidarity, and community care during challenging times.
    - Encouragement to rest and recharge over the winter break to prepare for 2026.

This comprehensive overview synthesizes the key themes, decisions, and programs discussed throughout the meeting, highlighting the district's commitment to student-centered education, community engagement, equity, and continuous improvement across academic, social-emotional, and operational dimensions.

Please be aware 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.