

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Special meeting of March 3, 2026

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

Core Points

- Meeting Opening and Administrative Actions
 - The Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) board convened a regular meeting, beginning with roll call, approval of the agenda with changes, and approval of prior meeting minutes.
 - Several agenda items were removed or continued from prior meetings.
 - The board unanimously denied a late claim application during closed session.
- Will Rogers Learning Community Presentation
 - Principal Llaya Derudi presented an overview of Will Rogers Learning Community's achievements and initiatives.
 - Highlights included growth in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, teacher collaboration, and fidelity in curriculum implementation.
 - The school has actively worked on improving English learner progress, climate and culture, student behavior frameworks, and community partnerships.
 - Emphasis on a culture of belonging and attendance through empathetic dialogue and welcoming morning routines.

- Plans underway for a new innovation lab focused on STEM for TK through 5th grade students.
 - The school community demonstrated strong parental involvement and support, including fundraising efforts for families in crisis.
- Student Board Member Updates
 - Haley and other student representatives provided updates on Samo High activities including the spring musical “Hello Dolly,” ASB elections, upcoming events, and outreach to middle schools.
 - Newly elected ASB executive board members for 2026-2027 were introduced, highlighting student leadership and involvement.
- Union Reports and Community Concerns
 - CLA Bautista Nichols from the Santa Monica Malibu Classroom Teachers Association emphasized the importance of collaborative budget discussions and protecting educators from layoffs.
 - She highlighted the community’s diversity and the emotional impact of recent global events on students and staff, urging collective care and support.
 - Local 99 union representative Dorian Vance criticized the district’s handling of custodial staff layoffs and called for better wages, benefits, and engagement in bargaining.
- Superintendent’s Report
 - Dr. Antonio Shelton highlighted recent collaborative meetings with the Education Foundation and PTA leaders focused on budget challenges.

- Celebrated cultural events such as African-American community gatherings and Black History Month activities.
- Announced the upcoming 75th annual “Stairway to the Stars” arts and music festival featuring nearly 900 students from the district.
- Recognized the new Malibu High School building for a state design award and the COO for a service award.
- Acknowledged Women’s History Month theme focused on sustainability and leadership.
- Celebrated Santa Monica High School boys’ soccer CIF championship.
- Addressed the emotional impact of the Middle East conflict on the district community, offering support resources.
- Emphasized continued commitment to custodial services and collaboration with staff.
- Santa Monica Education Foundation Quarterly Report
 - Executive Director Raymer Flynn reported strong progress toward the annual fundraising goal of \$1.8 million with increased family participation and corporate donations.
 - Highlighted grants supporting mental health, academic enrichment, arts, athletics, and library programs.
 - Detailed upcoming fundraising events including the Santa Monica Wine Auction and summer adventure programs.
 - Encouraged community donations and volunteer involvement.
- Introduction of Short-Term Academic Therapeutic Supports (STATS) Program

- Presented by Victoria Hurst and Frank Dusan, STATS is a proposed six to eight-week therapeutic academic program for grades 6-12 students experiencing emotional or behavioral challenges.
- The program aims to provide a short-term, structured continuum of care with integrated academic and therapeutic support to prevent out-of-district placements.
- Emphasizes family involvement, ongoing evaluation, and a goal of reintegrating students into their home schools successfully.
- Program will be housed at Obama campus and designed with safety and trauma-informed spaces.
- Collaborations include UCLA Psychiatry Department and local mental health providers for clinical expertise and evaluation.
- Funding strategy includes cost savings from reducing placements in expensive residential treatment centers and billing through insurance reimbursement systems.
- Pilot capacity planned for 8-10 students, with potential future expansion.
- The program is positioned as a Tier 2 intervention aimed at preventing more intensive Tier 3 placements.
- Board Resolutions and Recognitions
 - Several resolutions were unanimously adopted, including:
 - Release and non-reelection of temporary certificated employees and administrators.
 - Recognition of Women's History Month with emphasis on gender equality and instruction.

- Support for Arts and Music in Schools Month, pledging program growth.
 - Declaration of National Middle Level Education Month focused on adolescent needs.
 - Recognition of Cesar Chavez Day, honoring his legacy and contributions to social justice and labor rights.
- General Public Comments
 - Special education teacher Peggy Omeira expressed strong support for the STATS program citing the need for in-district mental health care and family-inclusive approaches.
 - Community member Nikki Kolhoff addressed concerns about athletics fundraising, transparency, gender equity, and nepotism allegations within the district's sports programs. She called for the board to take action, improve oversight, and support equitable fundraising models.
- Board Member Comments
 - Board members reflected on the emotional toll of international conflicts on families in the district, emphasizing the importance of community care and inclusivity.
 - Discussions included thoughts on honoring school social workers, and suggestions for enhancing school environments with student-focused displays.
 - Members expressed unanimous support for the STATS program and recognized the effort of district staff and community partners in developing it.

Key Conclusions

- **Commitment to Student Wellness and Mental Health Support**

The board and district leadership demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing the increasing mental health needs of students through innovative programs like STATS, emphasizing prevention, continuity of care, and family involvement to reduce the need for costly and disruptive out-of-district placements.

- **Strengthening School Culture and Community Engagement**

Will Rogers Learning Community's focus on belonging, positive behavior, parent partnerships, and STEM innovation exemplifies district-wide priorities on nurturing inclusive, supportive school environments that promote academic growth and social-emotional well-being.

- **Financial Challenges and Community Support**

The district faces ongoing budget deficits requiring difficult decisions, but is supported by active fundraising efforts from the Ed Foundation and parent organizations. Collaborative efforts aim to sustain essential programs, retain educators, and maintain high-quality services for students.

- **Recognition of Diversity and Inclusion as Core Values**

The district acknowledges and honors the diversity of its community, including heritage celebrations and support for families impacted by global conflicts. Commitment to equity, inclusion, and recognizing contributions of women, Latinx leaders, and other marginalized groups is embedded in board resolutions and district activities.

- **Need for Transparent and Equitable Fundraising and Resource Allocation**

Public comments highlighted concerns about athletics fundraising and

governance, signaling a need for the board to review policies, ensure transparency, and promote gender equity in funding and program support.

- Collaborative Leadership and Community Partnerships as Foundations for Success

Partnerships with UCLA, local nonprofits, parent volunteers, and community donors are critical to advancing district priorities in mental health, arts, academics, and student leadership. The district values ongoing collaboration and shared responsibility in supporting students.

Important Details

- Will Rogers Learning Community Achievements
 - IB program alignment and rigorous inquiry-based instruction with provocations and collaborative unit design.
 - Regenerative farm partnership with the Kaitton Children's Museum and grant funding from Sprouts.
 - Increased English learner progress by over 35% through targeted interventions and parent-led initiatives.
 - Positive behavior framework emphasizing safety, responsibility, and respect with monthly awards and community care slips.
 - New early learning building and plans for an innovation lab focusing on STEM concepts like pulleys and levers.
 - Attendance initiative centered on building belonging and empathetic family dialogues.
- STATS Program Specifics
 - Targets grades 6-12 students with emotional and behavioral dysregulation needing short-term intensive support.

- Designed to keep students enrolled in district while providing therapeutic and academic continuity.
- Includes individual and group therapy, mindfulness, yoga, gardening, and expressive arts.
- Strong family engagement through parent coaching and participation in treatment plans.
- Anticipated annual cost under \$400,000 with potential savings of \$600,000 by preventing out-of-district placements.
- Utilizes insurance reimbursements via California Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) to sustain funding.
- UCLA involvement for clinical guidance, program design, and evaluation.
- Upcoming Events and Programs
 - Santa Monica High's spring musical "Hello Dolly" running through March 8th.
 - 75th annual Stairway to the Stars festival on March 14th featuring almost 900 student performers.
 - Santa Monica Education Foundation's Wine Auction on April 26th and Summer Adventure enrichment program at Roosevelt Elementary.
 - Parent tours at Samo High scheduled for March 11th.
- Board Actions and Approvals
 - Resolutions regarding personnel changes effective June 2026 passed unanimously.

- Resolutions recognizing cultural heritage months and significant historical figures adopted.
 - Consent items approved with unanimous board support.
- Union and Staff Perspectives
 - Teachers' union stresses transparency and collaboration in budget decisions to protect educators.
 - Local 99 highlights challenges faced by custodial staff and calls for improved wages and working conditions.
 - Special education staff emphasized the importance of sustained funding for small, critical programs serving vulnerable students.
- Community Input and Concerns
 - Parent testimony underscores the value of in-district therapeutic programs to reduce disruptions and emotional distress experienced by students and families.
 - Advocacy for improved oversight and equitable distribution of funds in athletics to address gender disparities and administrative concerns.
- District's Response to Current Events
 - Recognition of the impact of Middle East conflicts on students and families, with emphasis on providing support and fostering an inclusive environment.
 - Encouragement of self-care and reflection for staff and students during stressful times.
- Facilities and Recognitions

- Malibu High School's new building awarded the 2026 Leroy Green Design and Planning Award of Excellence.
- Chief Operations Officer Carrie Upton recognized for statewide leadership in school facilities.
- Planned upgrades at Obama campus to accommodate the STATS program with thoughtful design for safety and therapeutic needs.
- Student Leadership and Engagement
 - ASB elections concluded with student leaders stepping into key roles for the 2026-2027 school year.
 - Student board members actively participate in meetings and represent student interests.
- Future Planning and Board Priorities
 - Continued dialogue and development of innovative programs to meet student needs.
 - Emphasis on evaluating new initiatives like STATS with data and feedback to inform expansion and sustainability.
 - Board interest in recognizing social workers and enhancing visibility of student achievements and district resolutions within school environments.

This comprehensive overview captures the essential themes, decisions, and community dynamics expressed during the SMMUSD board meeting, reflecting the district's ongoing efforts to support student success, mental health, inclusion, and community partnership amidst financial and social challenges.

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.