

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Special meeting of December 1, 2025

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

Core Points

- **Background and History of the Unification Effort**
 - The unification of Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) into two separate districts—Santa Monica Unified School District (SMUSD) and Malibu Unified School District (MUSD)—has been discussed for many years, with formal efforts dating back to at least 2014.
 - The Malibu Unification Negotiations Committee (MONK) was formed in 2014 to explore practical, logistical, and fiscal separation.
 - Malibu filed a petition to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization in 2017; the petition was denied at the county level and is pending before the state board.
 - A 50-year revenue sharing plan was approved by SMMUSD in 2018, and a subcommittee was formed to shepherd the process.
- **Mediation Process and Guiding Principles**
 - The city of Malibu and SMMUSD engaged a neutral third-party mediator, Tina Mahrez, to facilitate negotiations.
 - Two guiding principles framed the mediation:
 - a) Formation of two independent districts is in the best interest of all students.
 - b) Both successor districts must retain sufficient funding to maintain the same level of educational programs and services as prior to separation.
 - Key challenges addressed in mediation included creating an equitable revenue-sharing mechanism, allocation of assets and liabilities, and logistics of the operational transfer.
- **Three Key Agreements Forming the Unification Framework**
 - **Property Tax Revenue Sharing Agreement (PTRSA):** Defines how funding is split between the two new districts, roughly 88% to Santa Monica and 12% to Malibu, based on enrollment figures, with target funding growth mechanisms and protections for local revenue losses.
 - **Operational Transfer Agreement:** Addresses the division of assets, liabilities, staff, equipment, and operational logistics including transitions in IT, transportation, and special education services.
 - **Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Agreement:** Establishes a governing body with members from both communities and a neutral party to oversee implementation,

dispute resolution, and recommend adjustments to revenue sharing to mitigate fiscal strain.

- Extensive Stakeholder Engagement and Review
 - The agreements were developed through extensive mediation, review, testing, and robust outreach involving district departments, finance teams, advisory groups (such as the Financial Oversight Committee and site councils), labor unions, community organizations, and Malibu city officials.
 - Feedback from these groups was incorporated, leading to numerous modifications ensuring the agreements are realistic, equitable, and operationally sound.
- Next Steps and Legislative Considerations
 - Approval by the SMMUSD board is only one step; the Malibu City Council must also approve the agreements.
 - Following local approvals, special state legislation will be required to implement the unification, addressing issues such as parcel tax preservation, labor protections, and proper characterization of revenue transfers.
 - The process will take several years, and unification will not happen immediately after the agreements' approval.
- Board Members' Perspectives and Voting
 - Board members expressed deep appreciation for the extensive work and collaboration involved.
 - Despite some concerns and risks, all board members supported the agreements, emphasizing the guiding principles of protecting students and ensuring fiscal stability.
 - The vote to approve the three agreements was unanimous.
- Public Comments Reflect Mixed but Generally Supportive Sentiments
 - Several community members, including parents, teachers, and union representatives, spoke in favor of the agreements, highlighting the importance of local control, student-focused outcomes, and a fair transition.
 - Concerns were raised about declining enrollment, potential staffing reductions, and the need to protect educational quality and staff job security.
 - Malibu representatives acknowledged the complexity and compromises but expressed readiness to move forward for the benefit of local autonomy and community-specific educational governance.

Key Conclusions

- The Unification Agreements Represent a Historic and Significant Milestone

- The agreements mark the culmination of over a decade of complex negotiations and efforts to create two independent school districts, fulfilling long-standing community aspirations, especially in Malibu.
- The Agreements Provide a Fair and Equitable Foundation for Separation
 - By ensuring comparable funding levels, addressing asset division, and establishing a joint governing authority, the agreements aim to support educational continuity and fiscal sustainability for both successor districts.
- Local Control Is a Central Driver, but Student Welfare Remains Paramount
 - While Malibu seeks greater local autonomy, all parties agree that the educational needs and well-being of students in both communities must remain the foremost priority throughout and after the transition.
- There Are Risks and Challenges Ahead, but the Agreements Allow for Adaptive Management
 - The JPA's role in dispute resolution and revenue-sharing adjustments provides a mechanism to respond to unforeseen fiscal strains or operational issues, reducing the likelihood of abrupt negative impacts.
- The Process Requires Ongoing Collaboration and Communication
 - Continued partnership between Santa Monica, Malibu, labor groups, and community stakeholders is essential to implement the agreements successfully and address concerns such as teacher job security and program stability.
- Legislative Action Is Necessary for Final Implementation
 - State-level special legislation must be secured to address legal gaps and protect various interests, indicating that full unification will be a multi-year process.
- The Board's Unanimous Approval Signals Strong Institutional Support for Moving Forward
 - Despite historical tensions and complexity, the board's consensus demonstrates a shared commitment to advancing the unification initiative responsibly and thoughtfully.

Important Details

- Revenue Sharing Mechanism
 - The PTRSA allocates roughly 88% of funding to Santa Monica and 12% to Malibu, reflecting student enrollment distribution.
 - Santa Monica's funding is set to grow by 4% annually, with provisions to manage delays or funding tightness in early years.
 - Local revenues, donations, and foundation funds are excluded from the revenue-sharing formula to protect fundraising efforts.

- The sharing arrangement is designed to last through 2042, with a planned gradual taper to avoid fiscal cliffs.
- Operational Transfer Considerations
 - Most site-level resources will remain at their respective schools; district-level shared resources will be divided equitably.
 - Transition teams will manage critical operational areas such as IT migration, transportation, and special education services to ensure continuity.
- Joint Powers Authority Composition and Role
 - The JPA will have seven members: three from Santa Monica, three from Malibu, and one neutral member.
 - Its responsibilities include overseeing property tax revenue transfers, facilitating dispute resolution, and advising on revenue-sharing formula modifications if fiscal strain occurs.
- Community and Labor Engagement
 - Teachers' unions expressed concerns about enrollment declines and job security but acknowledged progress in addressing some concerns through the agreements.
 - The majority of teachers voted neutral or in support of the agreements, signaling cautious optimism.
 - Union representatives emphasized the need to maintain fully funded schools and protect programs essential for students' academic and emotional safety.
- Public Comments Highlight
 - Malibu families emphasized the importance of local control and autonomy after waiting for over 15 years.
 - Santa Monica community members underscored the need for fiscal stability and protection of students and staff.
 - Both communities expressed hope for continued cooperation and focus on educational excellence beyond the separation.
- Board Members' Reflections
 - Members expressed gratitude to all involved, including staff, consultants, mediators, labor partners, and city officials.
 - Several board members acknowledged personal journeys from skepticism to support, emphasizing the process's complexity and importance.
 - Concerns about potential risks and unknowns were acknowledged, with commitments to ongoing oversight and legislative efforts to protect staff and students.
- Acknowledgment of the Long and Difficult Journey
 - The process involved numerous false starts, setbacks, and emotional moments yet was sustained by a shared commitment to students.

- The agreements are seen as imperfect but the best achievable outcome to date, providing a workable path forward.
- Next Steps After Approval
 - Malibu City Council's approval is required to move forward.
 - Special legislation must be drafted and passed to enable full implementation, including protections for parcel taxes and labor contracts.
 - A future community vote on unification is anticipated, reflecting the democratic process and community engagement.
- Typographical Correction Noted
 - A minor typo on page nine of the agreements ("fiscal Y" instead of "fiscal year") was noted and agreed to be corrected prior to final approval.
- Overall Tone and Outlook
 - The meeting concluded with a sense of cautious optimism and readiness to tackle the challenges ahead, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and the shared goal of benefiting all students in both communities.

This summary encapsulates the key factual content, conclusions, and details from the video transcript of the SMMUSD school board's December 1st special meeting on the Malibu-Santa Monica unification agreements. It highlights the complexity, collaborative efforts, and shared commitment framing this historic education governance transition.

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.