

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Special meeting of February 19, 2026

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

Core Points

- **Memorial and Opening Remarks:**
The meeting began with a tribute to Steve Rouse, a beloved community member and Pepperdine professor who recently passed away, highlighting his contributions to education and community spirit.
- **Meeting Administrative Procedures:**
The meeting included standard procedures such as roll call, pledge of allegiance, approval of agenda with some items postponed, and approval of minutes with one abstention.
- **Settlement Agreements and Legal Reports:**
The district reported on settlement agreements regarding reimbursements for educational services and independent evaluations, with motions passed unanimously by attending board members.
- **School Presentation - Olympic High School:**
Principal Cynthia McGregory presented Olympic High School's achievements including its designation as a California model continuation high school, focus on social-emotional learning (SEAL), project-based learning (PBL), dual enrollment with Santa Monica College, and recent facility transitions. The school demonstrated improved attendance, strengthened community and parent involvement, and emphasized academic language and writing skills.

- Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Shelton acknowledged cultural celebrations such as Lunar New Year and Black History Month, recognized civil rights leader Reverend Jesse Jackson's legacy, and highlighted upcoming Public Schools Week to celebrate public education's role and reaffirm commitment to equity and student success.

- Public Comment Procedures and Speaker Management:

The board discussed managing a large number of public speakers, including limitations on speaking time, prioritization of in-person comments, and rules to maintain decorum during public input.

- Public Comments – Major Themes:

- Nepotism and Hiring Concerns: Criticism was raised about alleged nepotism in athletics staffing at Santa Monica High School, with calls for independent review and pause on certain hires.
- Joint Use Agreements: Opposition to premature extension of joint use facility agreements with the city, citing lack of transparency and fiscal concerns.
- Cutting Early Reading Intervention (LLI Program): Numerous parents, educators, and staff strongly opposed cuts to the Literacy Language Interventionist (LLI) positions, emphasizing critical support for struggling readers, especially multilingual learners and students with disabilities. They highlighted the program's positive impact on student confidence, achievement, and equity.
- World Language Program Support: Speakers urged retention and prioritization of world language programs, emphasizing cognitive,

cultural, and academic benefits, and expressed concern over proposed reductions.

- **Counselor and Support Staff Layoffs:** Concerns were voiced about the proposed elimination of counselor positions at Olympic High School and layoffs among custodial and classified staff. Speakers stressed the essential role of these positions in student well-being, school safety, and maintaining clean and supportive learning environments.
- **Custodial Staff Layoffs:** Custodians and cafeteria workers spoke passionately about their critical roles, the negative impacts of layoffs on school operations, safety, and morale, and called for no cuts to these essential classified positions.
- **Consent Agenda Items:**

Consent items included purchase orders for facility repairs, personnel hiring with some items pulled for further discussion, and approval of the joint use agreement extension with the city of Santa Monica for facility funding through 2038.
- **LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan) Presentation:**

The district reviewed progress on four LCAP goals including college and career readiness, multilingual learner support, safe and inclusive environments, and targeted support for Olympic High School students. The presentation covered professional development, instructional coaching, equitable access, family engagement, and social-emotional learning initiatives.

- Policy Updates - Special Education:

Updates to board policies addressed seclusion and restraint, suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities, graduation standards, individual education programs, and non-public agency/school coordination, aligning with new laws and terminology changes.

- Policy Updates - Immigration Enforcement:

In response to recent state and federal legal changes, the district updated policies on responding to immigration enforcement, access to district records, confidentiality of immigration status, and protections for students and staff, with a March 1, 2026 deadline for compliance.

- Discussion and Board Deliberation on Literacy Language Interventionists (LLI):

Extensive discussion focused on the proposed reduction or restructuring of LLI positions. Presenters clarified the role and criteria for LLI support, the shift from pull-out to classroom-embedded interventions, and the emphasis on tiered instruction models (MTSS framework). Board members and community expressed concerns about timing, communication, clarity, and the need for a broader strategic plan on reading intervention.

- Board Debate on Next Steps for LLI Positions:

Board members debated whether to vote on the LLI reduction resolution at this meeting or continue discussion to a future meeting to allow more community engagement and program review. The majority favored continuing the item to the March 3, 2026 meeting to provide more information and consider broader reading intervention strategies.

- Resolutions on Layoffs and Seniority:

The board adopted amended resolutions relating to certificated layoffs, seniority determinations, and competency standards with modifications excluding some positions from the current reduction process.

- Classified Staff Layoff Discussion:

The board considered a continuance for classified staff layoffs to March 3, 2026, pending further consultation with the union. Legal counsel guidance and collective bargaining considerations were noted.

- Closing Remarks and Adjournment:

Board members shared community event highlights, including a cultural event at Lincoln Middle School, and adjourned the meeting.

Key Conclusions

- The District Is Undergoing Significant Programmatic and Policy Updates:

The district is actively updating educational programs, policies, and administrative regulations to reflect new legal requirements, instructional best practices, and community needs, particularly around special education, immigration enforcement, and reading intervention.

- Recognition of the Value of Early Literacy and Intervention Services:

The public and board acknowledge the critical importance of early reading intervention, particularly for multilingual learners and students with disabilities, but there is debate about the structure, delivery, and funding of these supports.

- Shift Toward Classroom-Embedded Tiered Instruction:

The district is moving from pull-out intervention models toward supporting

tiered, differentiated instruction within the classroom, increasing teacher capacity through professional development and curriculum resources.

- **Community Concerns and Communication Needs Are Significant:**

The volume and passion of public comments on topics such as reading intervention cuts, nepotism, and classified layoffs reveal a high level of community concern and a need for improved communication and engagement regarding district decisions.

- **Board Preference for Deliberative Process Over Immediate Action:**

Due to complexity and community input, the board favors postponing the vote on LLI position reductions to allow time for further analysis, community engagement, and a comprehensive review of reading intervention strategies.

- **Fiscal and Legal Constraints Frame Decision-Making:**

The district faces structural budget deficits requiring difficult personnel decisions, but legal obligations around layoffs, seniority, and bargaining require careful compliance and timing.

- **The Importance of Classified Staff and Counselors Is Emphasized:**

The essential role of custodians, cafeteria workers, and counselors in supporting student safety, well-being, and learning environments is widely recognized, with calls to avoid layoffs in these areas.

- **Joint Use Agreements with the City Are Key Funding Sources:**

The extension of joint use agreements with the city of Santa Monica is critical for maintaining funding streams and access to key athletic and recreational facilities for district students.

- **Ongoing Monitoring and Reporting of District Goals Necessary:**

The LCAP presentation underscores the importance of continuous

monitoring of student outcomes, equity goals, and resource alignment, with future updates planned.

Important Details

- Steve Rouse Tribute:
Remembered for 28 years of psychology teaching at Pepperdine, community involvement, and family legacy within the district.
- Settlement Summaries:
 - \$42,499 reimbursement for educational services plus \$7,500 for neuropsychological evaluation.
 - Funding for non-public school placement and 40 hours of educational therapy for 2025-26 school year.
- Olympic High School Achievements:
 - California model continuation high school designation.
 - Implementation of SEAL and PBL.
 - Increased attendance by 13% after facility transition.
 - Upcoming return to permanent campus at Obama Center with facility upgrades.
- Superintendent's Acknowledgments:
 - Lunar New Year and Black History Month celebrations.
 - Reflection on Reverend Jesse Jackson's contributions.
 - Public Schools Week (Feb 23-27) to celebrate education.
- Public Comment Speaker Limits and Order:
 - Speakers allocated 1-3 minutes depending on sign-up.
 - Board may reduce speaking time if over 10 speakers per item.

- Public input taken for consent, J3, and J6 items with over 30 speakers total.
- Nepotism Allegations in Athletics:
 - Alleged conflicts of interest involving multiple family members in Samo High athletics.
 - Complaints reportedly dismissed or ignored by district.
 - Calls for independent review and hiring pause.
- Joint Use Agreement Details:
 - Extension from 2028 to 2038.
 - Covers specific facilities at Santa Monica High School and Los Amigos Park.
 - City Council approved extension January 27, 2026.
- LLI Program Role and Criteria:
 - 5.4 LLI positions currently.
 - Supports tier 3 literacy and designated ELD for 4th-5th graders scoring below 10th percentile on STAR and other assessments.
 - Changes from FastBridge to STAR in 2022 impacted eligibility criteria.
 - Shift from pull-out to push-in and embedded classroom supports ongoing.
- Concerns Raised About LLI Cuts:
 - Impact on vulnerable students, especially English learners and those with disabilities.
 - Potential widening of achievement gaps.
 - Need for early intervention in K-2 to prevent later struggles.

- Questions about communication and clarity of district plans.
- Board Policies Updated:
 - Special education policies include prohibitions on prone restraint and focus on inclusive, compliant services.
 - Immigration enforcement policies updated to protect student and staff privacy and rights, reflecting recent legal changes.
- Classified Staff Layoffs:
 - Proposed elimination of 21 custodian positions replaced by 13 supervisory roles criticized as reducing cleanliness and safety.
 - Union SEIU Local 99 opposes layoffs, citing lack of impact bargaining and district understaffing.
- Counselor Position at Olympic High:
 - Critical for supporting vulnerable students in independent study and continuation programs.
 - Board asked to maintain position despite budget pressures.
- LCAP Goals Overview:
 - College and career readiness with expanded dual enrollment and CTE.
 - Multilingual learner proficiency through new ELD curriculum and monitoring.
 - Safe, culturally responsive schools with enhanced mental health and family engagement.
 - Targeted supports for Olympic High's at-risk students funded by equity multiplier.
- Board Deliberations on Next Steps for LLI:

- Motion to amend and approve layoffs excluding 4.0 FTE multiple subject teachers made and passed.
- Discussion of delaying further action until March 3, 2026 to allow for more input and planning.
- Legal counsel confirmed timeline and meeting options for board action.
- Community Engagement and Transparency Needs:
 - Board members expressed desire for clearer communication and comprehensive reading intervention plan shared broadly with the community.
 - Recognition of public concern and emotional investment in reading and literacy services.
- Final Board Actions:
 - Consent agenda approved with some pulled items addressed separately.
 - Extension of joint use agreement approved unanimously.
 - CSBA delegate assembly votes cast for three recommended incumbents.
 - Continuance motions for classified layoffs and LLI reductions approved to March 3 meeting.

This detailed summary captures the key information, conclusions, and important details from the transcript of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District board meeting, providing a comprehensive overview of the discussions, community input, policy updates, and board decisions relevant to educational programming, staffing, and governance.

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.