

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Meeting of September 18, 2025

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

Core Points

1. Immediate Dismissal of Classified Employee

- The school board took action in a closed session to immediately dismiss a permanent classified employee effective September 19, 2025, following specific education code sections and personnel commission rules. The dismissal was unanimously approved with six yes votes and one absence.

2. Lincoln Middle School Presentation: Academic and Cultural Initiatives

- Lincoln Middle School showcased its academic achievements, including strong English Language Arts (ELA) and math scores, though there was a slight recent dip in math proficiency.
- The school expanded its Career Technical Education (CTE) offerings with new classes such as forensic science and "Behind the Scenes," focusing on media and theater production.
- A new reading intervention class was introduced targeting struggling readers not identified for special education or English Language Development (ELD).
- Facilities upgrades including fresh paint and a new mural were highlighted, with appreciation extended to the maintenance team.
- The school adopted a project-based learning (PBL) approach aligned with district initiatives and culturally responsive teaching practices aimed at fostering inclusivity, equity, and student engagement.
- Goals for 2026 include measurable improvements in reclassification rates, reading scores, and proficiency in ELA, math, and science.
- Emphasis was placed on relationship-building, cultural identity recognition, and restorative justice practices replacing traditional punitive discipline methods.
- Middle school athletics and extracurricular programs such as theater, band, and Extended Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP) were noted as key student engagement strategies.
- The school ranked in the top 1 percentile among California and national middle schools.

3. Superintendent's Report: Facilities, Celebrations, and Challenges

- The new early elementary building at Will Rogers Learning Community was officially opened, featuring modern classrooms and outdoor learning spaces.
- Grant Elementary celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with culturally rich storytelling, emphasizing diversity and inclusion.
- Malibu High School's new campus building is completed ahead of schedule, featuring state-of-the-art facilities and inspiring learning environments.
- The importance of completing Free and Reduced Price Meal applications was stressed for funding and additional educational benefits.
- Acknowledgment of the valuable role of PTAs/PTSA and the financial oversight committee in supporting district transparency and resource management.
- Launch of a new district website with improved navigation, security, and consistent design across school sites was announced.
- A significant power outage affected Malibu schools, leading to delayed starts and early dismissals. The superintendent apologized for communication failures and described ongoing efforts to improve emergency protocols and infrastructure, including the installation of emergency generators.

4. Maintenance, Operations, and Facility Improvements

- The district conducted an extensive summer work blitz focused on cleaning, landscaping, wildlife trapping, and facility repairs across multiple schools.
- Introduction of robotic floor-cleaning equipment to improve efficiency.
- Major maintenance projects included repairs of ceilings, walls, plumbing, HVAC, roofing, and restoration of damage from vandalism and fire.
- Specific school projects such as mold remediation, kitchen upgrades, and playground improvements were completed.
- The district implemented a work order blitz reducing outstanding maintenance requests from 661 to 184, significantly improving facility inspection tool (FIT) scores.
- Facility use improvements involved theater upgrades, e-waste disposal, and safety inspections of rigging systems.
- Bond program updates detailed ongoing and upcoming construction projects including new buildings, pool facilities, and phased removal of portable classrooms.

5. Public Comments: Malibu Community Concerns and Demands

- Numerous Malibu parents, PTA representatives, and community leaders voiced strong dissatisfaction with the district's handling of local issues, especially power outages, water problems, and communication lapses.

- Calls for increased emergency preparedness plans, consistent communication protocols, and reliable infrastructure were emphatic.
- Parents described chaotic early dismissals due to power outages with insufficient notice and inadequate support.
- There was widespread demand for local representation or autonomy for Malibu schools to better address unique community challenges.
- Advocacy for a full 50-meter Olympic size pool at Malibu High School instead of the planned 40-meter pool was a recurring theme, citing competitive disadvantages and community pride.
- Concerns about health and safety due to inadequate cleaning and remediation post-wildfire smoke exposure at Webster Elementary were raised.
- Requests for improved communication technology, including automated calls and dedicated contact numbers during emergencies, were made.
- The community expressed frustration with perceived inequity, lack of prioritization, and the negative impact on student learning and family logistics.

6. Board and Superintendent Responses and Follow-Up

- Board members acknowledged the community's frustrations, reiterating commitments to improved communication and infrastructure timelines.
- Superintendent Dr. Shelton accepted responsibility for communication failures and described ongoing efforts to procure and install emergency generators and enhance protocols.
- The district emphasized that power and water issues in Malibu are complicated due to geographic and infrastructure challenges but assured ongoing collaboration to improve conditions.
- Plans for phased removal and refurbishment of portable classrooms were explained, aligned with ongoing construction projects.
- Continued focus on cultural responsiveness, equity, and student engagement was reaffirmed.

Key Conclusions

1. Recognition of Progress Amid Persistent Challenges

- While the district has made significant strides in academic programming, facilities upgrades, and maintenance operations, critical challenges remain, especially in Malibu, where power outages, water issues, and emergency preparedness have caused severe disruption.

2. Importance of Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Education

- Lincoln Middle School's approach illustrates the district's commitment to culturally responsive teaching, project-based learning, and restorative justice as foundations for improving student outcomes and engagement.
3. Need for Enhanced Emergency Preparedness and Localized Solutions
 - The Malibu community's experience underscores the necessity for tailored emergency protocols, local decision-making authority, and faster, clearer communication to mitigate the impact of recurrent power and infrastructure failures.
 4. Infrastructure Investment and Facility Modernization are Ongoing Priorities
 - Substantial investments in new buildings, facility repairs, and technological upgrades are underway, with major bond-funded projects targeting long-term improvements across the district.
 5. Community Engagement and Transparency are Crucial
 - Active involvement of parents, PTAs, and community groups, coupled with transparent reporting by the district and financial oversight, is vital for maintaining trust and ensuring resources align with student and community needs.
 6. Equity Must Address Unique Community Contexts
 - Equity is not just about equal distribution but about recognizing and accommodating the distinct needs of different communities within the district, particularly Malibu's fire-prone, rural environment.

Important Details

1. Dismissal Action Details
 - Employee dismissed per Education Code Sections 45302 and 45304 and Personnel Commission Rule 14.1; effective September 19, 2025.
2. Lincoln Middle School's Academic Metrics and Goals
 - Math proficiency rose from 59% to 65% two years ago, dipped slightly by 2% recently.
 - Targets include a 3% increase in reclassification rates, 5% reduction in students scoring in red on STAR reading exams, and incremental gains in ELA, math, and science proficiency by June 2026.
3. Project-Based Learning Initiatives at Lincoln
 - Seventh-grade game night, student-led conferences, and eighth-grade field day redesigned to meet gold standard PBL criteria.
4. Restorative Justice Implementation

- Traditional detention replaced by restorative reflections involving circles, reflective assignments, and wellness rooms to support student behavioral growth.

5. Superintendent's Facilities Updates

- Early elementary building at Will Rogers completed with flexible, naturally lit classrooms and outdoor access.
- Malibu High School new campus opened early with ocean views and collaborative spaces.
- District website overhaul launched with improved security and user experience.

6. Malibu Power Outage Incident

- Power outage disrupted school operations with delayed starts and early dismissals; communication was delayed and insufficient, leading to parental frustration.
- Emergency generators are scheduled for delivery; issues complicated by construction zones and plumbing repairs.

7. Maintenance Blitz and Facility Repairs

- 477 work orders completed during summer blitz, reducing backlog from 661 to 184.
- Projects included mold remediation, ceiling repairs, tile replacements, plumbing upgrades, and landscape maintenance.
- Introduction of robotic floor scrubbers to improve cleaning efficiency.

8. Bond Program Projects

- Malibu High School pool construction underway; community advocates for a 50-meter Olympic pool instead of the planned 40-meter.
- Multiple school modernization projects ongoing or planned, including new buildings at Grant, Roosevelt, and others.
- Portable classrooms are being removed or refurbished in phases aligned with construction schedules.

9. Community Feedback Highlights

- Repeated calls for better emergency plans including a “playbook” for outages and communication protocols.
- Desire for local representation or control to ensure Malibu's unique needs are met.
- Concerns about student learning loss due to disruptions and lack of reliable infrastructure.

- Requests for improved health and safety measures post-wildfire, including thorough cleaning and testing at affected schools.

10. Communication Improvement Suggestions

- Use of automated phone calls with dedicated callback numbers for urgent messages.
- More timely and transparent updates during emergencies.
- Clear procedures for attendance and instructional time during disruptions.

11. Board Member Actions and Future Plans

- Commitment to provide regular updates on generator installation and infrastructure progress.
- Acknowledgment of community concerns and intention to improve communication and equity.
- Plans to continue fostering culturally responsive practices across schools.
- Ongoing professional development and collaboration with PTAs and community stakeholders.

12. Financial Oversight and Budget Context

- Nearly \$3 million spent out of \$5 million facility funds within the current fiscal year.
- Roofing projects alone estimated at \$6.5 million with about \$2 million budgeted for the current year.
- Deferred maintenance funds to be increased by half a million dollars to cover unexpected repairs such as water leaks.

This comprehensive summary captures the essential themes, findings, and community concerns presented during the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District board meeting on September 18th, emphasizing academic progress, facility improvements, ongoing challenges in Malibu, and the district's commitment to equity and responsiveness.

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