

Summary of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education Meeting of July 15, 2025

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The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education held its regular meeting on July 15, 2025.

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

1. District Personnel and Community Updates

- The meeting began with a report on a settlement agreement involving a classified employee's resignation and severance payment. The board unanimously approved this action in closed session.
- A significant tribute was paid to the late Stephanie Schwarz, a recently retired teacher and assistant principal with over three decades of service in the district. Schwarz was remembered for her dedication to science education, positive energy, and deep commitment to her students, colleagues, and family. Board members and community members shared heartfelt memories and emphasized the profound loss to the district community.

2. School and Student Updates

- Although no representatives from some high schools were present, the Associated Student Body (ASB) executive team at Santa Monica High shared updates on their summer retreat and preparations for the upcoming school year, including orientation and registration efforts.
- The district welcomed Joe, the new Director of Leadership Giving at the Education Foundation, who has a background in sports and philanthropy, and Manuel Ramos, the new Director of Fiscal and Business Services. Ramos highlighted his personal journey as the son of Guatemalan immigrants and his commitment to combining financial expertise with advancing educational equity.

3. Superintendent's Report and Facilities Improvements

- Dr. Shelton reported on recent leadership development efforts, including a leadership institute focused on team building and vision setting for the district's executive team.
- The district is actively engaged in multiple facilities improvement projects funded by bond measures QS and MM, including classroom modernizations, library renovations, and STEM upgrades across various schools. These upgrades reflect community support and aim to improve learning environments.
- Dr. Shelton addressed concerns about free and reduced-price lunch applications, emphasizing the importance of filling out these forms—not just for meals but to secure Title I funding, which supports critical educational programs. The universal meal program remains in place, but completing applications is essential for maintaining funding that benefits vulnerable students.

4. Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) District Advisory Committee Report

- Janice Gabbert, the VAPA DAC co-chair, provided an extensive overview of the committee's work and the importance of arts education as part of the core curriculum. The report detailed both accomplishments and challenges, including gaps in arts instruction across grade levels and schools.
- Highlights included the use of Prop 28 funds to expand arts programs, notable student performances and achievements in music, theater, and visual arts, and the district's recognition as a "Best Communities for Music Education" for the 23rd consecutive year.
- The committee expressed a desire to revive the six-year arts education strategic plan, which stalled due to the pandemic, and emphasized the need for adequate funding and continuous support for comprehensive arts education.

5. Board Policy Updates and Administrative Actions

- Discussion was held regarding the revision of Board Policy AR 3350 on travel expenses, specifically expanding allowable expenses to include tips, gratuities, and service charges up to 20%, aligning with government codes and audit recommendations. This change aims to reflect social norms and practical considerations for staff traveling on district business.

- The board approved the hiring of a classroom teacher under a provisional intern permit, allowing the district to employ individuals working toward full teaching credentials, reflecting changes in state credentialing processes.
 - The board adopted a resolution to accept a grant deed related to Roosevelt Elementary School and clarified a licensing easement issue with Southern California Edison necessary for upcoming school construction projects.
6. Other Administrative and Board Member Items
- Gerardo Cruz, the district's finance director, informed the board of a clerical error regarding gift acceptance dates in the consent agenda, which was corrected prior to approval.
 - Board members expressed appreciation for staff and administrators, including recognition of a recent successful tour of Santa Monica High School for prospective students and families transitioning from private schools.
 - The meeting concluded with procedural matters, including roll call votes, approval of minutes, and scheduling of future meetings.

Key Conclusions

1. Stephanie Schwarz's Legacy Reflects the District's Community Values

The tribute to Stephanie Schwarz underscored the district's tight-knit community and the impact dedicated educators have beyond the classroom. Her legacy of enthusiasm for science, kindness, and support highlights the district's core values of student-centered education and community care.

2. Leadership and Fiscal Expertise are Vital for District Growth and Equity

The introduction of key leadership figures like Manuel Ramos and Joe at the Ed Foundation signals a commitment to both fiscal responsibility and community engagement. Ramos's background and emphasis on equity indicate the district's focus on ensuring resources are managed strategically to close opportunity gaps.

3. Facilities Improvements are a Visible Commitment to Student Success

Ongoing school modernization projects demonstrate the district's proactive approach to creating learning environments that meet contemporary educational needs. Community support via bond measures is critical, reflecting high local investment in public education infrastructure.

4. Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program Applications Impact Funding Beyond Meals

The superintendent's detailed explanation about the universal meal program and its ties to Title I funding clarifies misconceptions and stresses the need for all families to complete applications to maintain essential educational services. This issue is a priority for the district's advocacy and communication efforts moving forward.

5. Visual and Performing Arts Education Remains a Central, Yet Challenged, Pillar

The VAPA DAC report reveals both strengths and challenges: while there is a rich array of programs and student achievements, inconsistencies in curriculum and staffing persist at various school levels. The desire to renew the strategic arts plan and leverage new funding opportunities highlights an ongoing commitment to arts equity and excellence.

6. Board Policy Modernization Reflects Practical and Ethical Considerations

Updating travel expense policies to include tips and service charges recognizes evolving social norms and supports staff in conducting district business without undue burden. This change shows the district's attention to policy relevance and compliance.

7. Provisional Teacher Hiring Practices Align with State Credentialing Flexibility

The board's approval of a provisional intern permit hire reflects responsiveness to state credentialing changes, allowing the district to maintain staffing flexibility while supporting teacher development.

8. Attention to Administrative Details Ensures Smooth Governance

The correction of clerical errors and proactive inquiry about other potential deed/licensing issues highlight the district's diligence in governance and legal compliance.

Important Details

1. Stephanie Schwarz's Biography and Impact

- Hired in 1991, taught science and humanities at Lincoln Middle School, served as assistant principal, and returned to teaching at Olympic and John Adams schools.
- Retired in June 2025, passed away after a year-long cancer battle.
- Known for her science-themed attire, passion for science fiction and dragons, baking skills, and devotion to her four children and husband Mike Schwarz.

2. Leadership Introductions

- Joe: New Director of Leadership Giving, background in sports and philanthropy, returning to Santa Monica community.
- Manuel Ramos: New Director of Fiscal and Business Services, experienced in finance, strategic planning, and educational equity, holding degrees from Union College and Yale.

3. Facilities Projects Funded by Bond Measures QS and MM

- Modernization and new classrooms at Grant, McKinley, Will Rogers, Santa Monica High, Malibu High.
- Library renovations at Roosevelt Elementary.
- STEM classroom upgrades at John Adams Middle School.

4. Free and Reduced-Price Lunch and Title I Funding

- California Universal Meals Mandate provides free breakfast and lunch to all students.
- Families encouraged to complete applications by October 2, 2025, regardless of income, to help schools qualify for Title I and other federal funds.
- Title I funds support afterschool programs, academic interventions, teacher development, and parent engagement.
- District currently has four Title I schools, and maintaining funding depends on application completion rates.
- Estimated potential funding at risk is between \$2 million to \$3 million, including adult education funds still under federal review.

5. Visual and Performing Arts Program Specifics

- Gaps identified: lack of dance classes during school day at middle and high schools, no theater classes at JAMS and Lincoln during school hours, limited sequential visual arts courses at some middle schools.
- Olympic High lacks formal arts classes but offers afterschool music and theater opportunities.
- Prop 28 funds (\$1.1 million) have been used to start new arts programs, with a mandate that 80% be used for staffing and 20% for materials and partnerships.
- Significant achievements:
 - Samo High orchestra featured on ABC Good Morning America and performed with the LA Philharmonic.
 - Jazz students mentored by Grammy-winning bassist Stanley Clarke.
 - Samo High's music ensembles toured nationally and internationally.
 - Theater productions at multiple schools with competitive successes.
 - Visual arts exhibits and student publications recognized in the community.
 - 100% AP Studio Art pass rate at Malibu High.

6. Board Policy AR 3350 Travel Expenses Update

- Inclusion of tips, gratuities, and service charges as allowable expenses up to 20%.
- Aligns with government code and audit firm's technical guidance.
- Reflects practices in neighboring districts with tipping allowances ranging from 10% to 25%.

7. Provisional Intern Permit Teacher Hiring

- Allows hiring teachers who have not yet met full credential requirements but are on a path to full certification.
- This is a relatively new requirement to come before the board due to changes in credentialing regulations.

8. Grant Deed Resolution for Roosevelt Elementary

- Southern California Edison relinquishing an easement/license no longer needed for power supply.

- Necessary to update deed name from predecessor district name to current district name to complete the transaction.
- Board approved with a suggestion to proactively review similar district property issues.

9. Other Administrative Notes

- Correction of typographical error in gift acceptance dates for fiscal reporting.
- Board members expressed thanks to staff for school tours and engagement efforts.
- No public comments were made during the meeting.

10. Meeting Procedures

- Roll call votes consistently recorded for motions and approvals.
- Agenda and minutes approved without objection.
- Future agendas and strategic plans, particularly for the arts program, expected to be a focus in the coming academic year.

This detailed summary captures the essence of the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District Board meeting held on July 15th, 2025, highlighting personnel matters, leadership introductions, facilities improvements, critical funding communications, arts education advocacy, policy updates, and governance practices.

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.