

BARKE: Welcome everyone. Thanks for joining us tonight. It's nice to see everyone after hopefully everyone had a happy and healthy holiday season. Darou, do you want to do roll call?

SISAVATH: Trustee Sparks?

SPARKS: Here.

SISAVATH: Trustee Valdes?

VALDES: Present.

SISAVATH: Trustee Shaw?

SHAW: Here.

SISAVATH: Trustee Barke?

BARKE: Here.

SISAVATH: Trustee Williams?

WILLIAMS: Present.

BARKE: Okay. Wonderful. Let's see. Anyone want to adopt the agenda?

VALDES: I'll make a motion to adopt the agenda for today.

BARKE: Thank you. Do we have a second?

SHAW: Second.

BARKE: Okay. Wonderful. All those in favor?

SPARKS, VALDES, SHAW, BARKE, WILLIAMS: Aye.

BARKE: All right.

WILLIAMS: I'll make a motion for the approval of the December 3rd minutes.

SPARKS: Second.

BARKE: Thank you. All those in favor?

SPARKS, VALDES, SHAW, BARKE, WILLIAMS: Aye.

BARKE: Wonderful. Thank you. All right. And next, I'd like to invite Pastor Christina Williams to the podium of Harbor Light Church in Costa Mesa. Thanks for being with us today.

PASTOR CHRISTINA WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. What an honor. Will you bow your heads with me? Dear Lord, as we begin this first board meeting of the new year, we take a brief moment to acknowledge you and our desperate need of you. We recognize the responsibility and trusted to this board, to our educators, administrators, staff, and families. Decisions that are made in this room can shape lives, policies, classrooms, especially the lives of our children. And we look to you for guidance. We look to you for protection. And we look to you for the thriving of our children. As we enter this new year, we ask for renewed wisdom and clarity because your scripture reminds us, oh Lord, that if any of us lack wisdom, we can ask you and you will give it generously to all of us without finding fault. So may you give us that wisdom, guide our conversations, guide our ability to listen.

And Lord, most of all, we ask for wisdom in these decisions. In a season filled with both opportunities and challenges, we ask that you would support students' wellbeing, strengthen academic growth, and care for those who are serving in our schools. May you help us walk in unity and rise above division. Grant peace in moments of disagreement, humility and moments of learning and courage to act with integrity. We give special thanks to you, Lord, for the teachers and staff throughout Orange County who faithfully serve each day. May they be encouraged, supported, and strengthened in this vital work. For our students, we pray that our schools will remain safe, places where their curiosity is nurtured at education is excellent and every child is seen and valued. May we move forward in this year now. Through tonight's agenda and may our work be marked with fairness, accountability, and a shared commitment to the wellbeing and success of our students. We pray all of this in your name, O Lord. Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

BARKE: Thank you, Pastor Williams. Appreciate your words. Do we have any introductions? No.

SHAW: Oh, the pledge?

BARKE: Oh, sorry. Yes. Next, we'll have Tim Shaw lead us in the pledge.

SHAW: Thank you. Please stand if you're able. Please join me in saluting the flag of our great nation. Ready? Begin.

AUDIENCE: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

BARKE: Thank you, Trustee Shaw. Do we have public comments? We do. All right.

SHAW: Darou, these were all general? Okay. Looks like we have a reasonable number, so perhaps we'll do three minutes each. I will call a name and also who's on deck. So if you hear your name on deck, you can get ready and we'll move through our public comments. We're going to start with Allison who will be followed by ... Oh, heavens. I don't have my glasses. And you wrote really small. Haoyu. Allison followed by Haoyu. Forgive me if I'm messing up your name.

CAREY: Hello. My first board meeting, so you'll have to forgive me. Y'all aren't students, so it's nerve-wracking. I wanted to speak tonight and talk about how the OCDE ACCESS teachers are

at impasse and how much I hate that right now. My job in particular with students is a classroom full of probation youth. It's not drug use and stealing cars anymore. These young men have charges of attempted murder. They all carry guns. Several in-face tattoos, but they're my students and I love working with them. There's no university experience or student teaching that could ever have prepared me for the teacher I am today. It's just been years of experience with these youth and with our partner agencies, healthcare agency and probation agency. It took these 20 years of service for me in 2025 to earn a chief's award from probation. And in my area, probation schools and ACCESS earned teacher of the year.

Thank you. But it's more than that. It's not even the recognition. It's a job I love to do, but it's also a job that is dangerous or fraught with constant decision making. While I'm delivering direct instruction in math and science, I am also looking at the body language between youth. I'm looking at the sheriff's department's in here, so they're like, "Oh yes, tactical thinking." And this is a teacher talking about that. This is me having to know line of sight. This is me having to know what a chin up means or what hand symbolism or signals mean. This is knowing what body movements mean and it's also knowing which of my youth are engaged in the lesson. So, who is turning on in learning math and learning science and then where to invest my time while I'm also watching the 10 other students in my classroom.

So, I guess my bigger point in all of this is being at impasse. It can be a distraction because as a teacher, I'm thinking, well, maybe they just don't know about my job. Maybe they don't know that this percentage is lower or maybe not worthy of what I do and that for all of my career, my title will only ever be classroom teacher, which I love, but it won't be chief or administrator in order to trigger or initiate a raise. Thank you.

SHAW: Thank you. Haoyu will be followed by Katherine. Haoyu Jiang. Sorry if I'm messing up your name. And then Katherine on deck.

HAOYU: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Haoyu. I'm here to ask a question that as a student right now in University of California of Irvine, we observed that there's not amount of opportunities and limited opportunities for students to actually participate in nonprofit organizations, which supports for clean energy and for zero carbon environment. So here we formed a new organization called Life Without Water, which we already registered as a US nonprofit organization. And we found in 2025 by group of students from both from UCI and from UCSB and all UC schools in other schools. Our work begins a very real challenge. Even today, many areas still lack with reliable access to power grid and experience unstable and non-existent electricity. What we find is that this condition directly affects public safety, continuity of education, emergency response and ecological protection and community resilience.

These especially truth in wildlife production and rescue areas, low income communities and public spaces such as community parks and walking trails, which traditional energy solutions are often costly and maintenance intensively dependent on fluid or compass infrastructures. As a result, other will be focused on the practical adoption of upgrade energy technologies, solutions that require no fuel, no break connection, and can operate independently over the long term while minimizing long term environmental impact. As I mentioned before, we are a very young lead nonprofit platform that we only have college students and high school students in this

organization. We aim to help more and more people such as colleges or high school students to not only learn about clean energy, but also actively to participate in that participation. Also, through hands-on project that can help them understand why zero carbon energy and sustainable energy choices matter in a world with limited resources and environmental constraints and how energy decisions directly affect ecosystem, community safety and social equity.

Our members come from various majors such as economics, environmental science, biology, engineering, and public policies. We emphasizing learning through practice rather than theory on classes or just learning in our textbooks. We want to stand on the world and just see more and more about a society. We believe that the most meaningful education happens where as students, we see real challenges meet real actions. We looking forward to continue with dialogue with the education communities and help more young people such as to get involved. Thanks so much.

SHAW: Thank you. Katherine will be followed by Javier.

KATHERINE: Okay. I'm going to speak a little slower because I know you're interpreting and it's kind of hard. Good evening, members of the board. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. I'm a teacher and I am here on behalf of ACCESS and Connections educators. Professionals who show up every day for our students, our families, and our community. We do this work because we believe in public education, but believe alone does not pay the rent, the mortgage, the gas, or the grocery bill. The cost of living in Orange County has gone up dramatically. Housing, insurance, healthcare, and basic necessities are more expensive than ever, yet educators' salaries have not kept pace. Financial strain has become part of the job. Tonight, I want to address the budget realities. OCDE's publicly available financial documents show that the Department maintains substantial reserves. The budget book shows OCDE earn \$19 million in reserves.

At today's rates, that's roughly \$4 to \$500 million to earn. That's how much you have to have in the bank to earn \$19 million. That's how much OCDE has under reserves. Let's just pause and think on that. While the reserves are met for stability, they also represent capacity, the ability to invest in people without jeopardizing operations. We are not asking for anything unreasonable. We're asking for compensation that reflects the rising cost of living in this region. If we say we value education, especially for our most vulnerable youth, that value must appear not only in our mission statements, our 5321 plan, but in our financial priorities. A fair raise is not an expense. It is an investment in student success, in program stability, and in the long-term strength of Orange County schools. We ask you the board tonight to stand with the educators who stand with the students every day, especially those who need us most.

Please show our community that this Orange County Board truly values public education by investing in the professionals who make it work. Thank you for your time and your commitment to our students. I would like to ask our OCSCA members, please stand up. Please stand up. We're here. Hear us. Thank you for your time.

SHAW: Javier will be followed by Heidi.

JAVIER: Good evening. Trustee, Board President Barke, trustees and Superintendent Bean. I'm the orange county local advocacy director for the California Charter School Association, CCSA.

CCSA is a statewide membership and professional organization representing more than 1,250 public charter schools across California. Our mission is to support high quality nonprofit charter schools and to advocate for fair, equitable charter policies that expand excellent public school options for students, families, and communities. I'm writing to express CCSA support for agenda items six, seven and eight Samueli Charter renewal petition, as well as material revision requests submitted by Ednovate Orange County and California Republic Leadership Academy, Orange County. Samueli Academy, Ednovate and California Republic Leadership Academy are all members in good standing of the association. CCSA has worked closely with the leadership of each of this organization and is confident in the quality of the educational programs they provide. These schools are meeting the needs of their community and offering learning environments that families value and choose.

Approval of the Samueli Academy renewal and the request material revisions for Ednovate Orange County and California Republic Leadership Academy will allow these schools to continue and where appropriate to expand their ability to serve students effectively. For this reason, CCSA respectfully urges to Orange County Board of Education to approve the Samueli Academy charter renewal petition and the material revision request for Ednovate Orange County and California Republic Leadership Academy, Orange County. Thank you.

SHAW: Thank you. Heidi will be followed by Chris.

HEIDI: Hi, good evening, esteemed board members and Superintendent, Dr. Bean. It's truly been an honor to represent Suncoast and to speak on behalf of our dedicated staff and families at each board meeting. We are deeply grateful for the way you've consistently spoken on behalf of our school community and supported our families through your role as our authorizers. Over the years, you have heard reports reflecting our growth and transformation from strengthening our special education department to expanding weekly classes and field trip experiences to increase student participation and success in state testing. And our high school program continues to grow as well, offering students meaningful opportunities and community involvement, the arts, leadership, and career exploration. Last month, we offered the young men and women's civic leaderships to conference through OC courts, and we'll also be offering a high school leadership conference in March through APYLP, Asian Pacific Youth Leadership Project.

We have had some fun field trips in the past months as well from our Rube Goldberg Machine Event to a tour of OC Sanitation. Some especially exciting updates on the art front. I had our eighth-grade student, Beatrice Urst's art, was submitted to the OC Department of Ed's Arts for All program. It was recognized in their showcase as well as fifth grade students, Eliana Fagara and Silver Domenico being selected to showcase their art and the OC United Way student art contest and showcase. Their work will also be featured at the Bowers Museum from February 17th through the 24th in the John M. Lee Court. Coming up soon, we had an entrepreneur, actually, this was just recently, an entrepreneurial fair and classes in career exploration and financial literacy for a winter wonder session. We will be attending the Orange County College and Career Pathways in the arts event at Santa Ana College on January 28th.

We are also promoting a middle school scholars leadership program for sixth and seventh grade girls through Santa Catalina School in the spring and the OC Rise Poetry Competition in February. We also have a field trip to the OCC Planetarium in February and a campus tour of

CSULB in March. As we begin 2026, we are grateful to start the year grounded and strong partnerships, clear purpose, and continued collaboration. These accomplishments reflect a shared commitment to student-centered education, accountability, and service to families. On behalf of our staff, our students, and the families we serve, thank you for your leadership, your advocacy, and for continuing to stand alongside our school.

SHAW: Thank you, Heidi. Chris will be followed by Ronna.

GONZALES: Hello. Good evening, members of the board and Dr. Bean. I'm Chris Gonzales, and I have been an employee for 30 years of OCDE and probably the only teacher in the history to work at the DHH program, Connections, work for ACCESS individual sites, and also work in juvenile hall. I'm here to speak directly to the question that Trustee Barke asked regarding teacher retention, and I'm here to speak about teacher retention and why compensation for experienced teachers must be part of that conversation. I spent nearly 30 years with OCDE, and during that time, I watched teachers continually grow, earn additional credentials, attend conferences, develop specialized skills, taking on additional responsibilities, yet after eight to 10 years, I hope you realize that teachers cannot move without penalty to another district. Okay. Even OCDE has rules in place that do not allow a teacher coming in to earn anything over eight to 10 years, and I don't know what that is exactly.

In a recent board meeting, it was stated that the OCDE union requested a 9% raise for new hires. I want to respectfully clarify that this is not an actual accurate representation. What the proposal actually reflects is the district's OCDE's desire acknowledgement that our pace schedule has become uncompetitive. Increasing starting pay may help attract new teachers, but when meaningful raises are limited to new hires, experienced staff are left behind. This creates a system where teachers are encouraged to enter, but once established face diminishing recognition for long-term service. Teachers who consider changing districts later in their careers are often allowed to bring only eight to 10 years of service credit with them, regardless of their actual experience. Where in corporate America does that happen? The policy discourages mobility and contributes to burnout rather than true retention. A personal example illustrates this clearly. While I was working for the DHH program at University High School, OCDE, excuse me, lent my services to the general education campus.

After I had taught a variety of CTE classes for Irvine, the principal there, the general education principal there, offered me a full-time CTE position at IUSD, and that's with full pay, which OCDE does not do. Teaching website design, coding, robotics, video production, I seriously considered the opportunity. However, because I had accumulated nearly 20 years of service with the county, sorry. Anyway, last sentence, since transferring districts would have resulted in me with a \$100,000 loss between that point and retirement. Thank you very much.

SHAW: Thank you for your comments. Before we move on, I know we moved some, we have some seats available up here for those who are standing if you were looking for a seat, so you could take advantage of that. Okay. Ronna, followed by Brittanie.

RONNA: Good evening, board members. My name is Ronna Yelin and I'm part of the school support leadership team at Suncoast Prep. As I've shared in the past, several other educators and lead support staff and I are clearing our CTE credentials through the OCDE and have really

appreciated the support of your staff. We have just started CTE 100 for English learners. I'm enjoying how it's tying in with the work that we're doing with Scott Fitzpatrick, the OCDE arts coordinator and Jen Salas from Project GLAD. We're continuing to work on building our CTE program, and we are excited to offer more opportunities for our students. I've also been grateful to be part of the art administrator's monthly meetings led by Scott Fitzpatrick. Currently, we are working on getting as many students in our school to participate in OC Arts for All and OC Arts and Disabilities. We've had such a positive experience last year with that behind with our first year participating.

One of our support staff members, Caitlin Bustamante, who's also a graduate of a California charter school, just shared with us a few hours ago that she was accepted into the Education policy initiative internship at UCLA. She's currently a student there studying ed policy. She shared that her experience working with our dedicated staff at our charter school and direct experience in Sacramento that she's receiving from us that is helping her grow as a student and will be a future ed policy advocate. We're so proud of her and grateful to be a part of her journey at Suncoast. Here's a sweet letter from one of our Suncoast families. "To our Suncoast leadership team, Oliver and I just wanted to send a little note of gratitude for all the wonderful things that you guys do for us. We really love and appreciate you. When we first started homeschooling, we never thought that it would be this much fun. We've had so many great experiences with you guys at the Discovery Cube and the Dr. Seuss experience, and again, with all the field trips that Suncoast helped sponsor us for. With so much gratitude, we just wanted to send a quick note and say thank you again for all that you do for our families because we couldn't do it without you. From the bottom of our hearts, mom and son. Thank you guys so much." And we at Suncoast couldn't support our families with diverse needs without all of you. Thank you all so very much.

SHAW: Thank you. Okay. Brittanie, followed by Laurie.

FLAUDING: Good evening, members of the board. First of all, I'm going to give a shout out to my husband right now. He's at home with my sick baby so I can be here to address you guys. So, this is clearly an important night. You have all of us here in red with passion because we love what we do and we have something to say and I appreciate your time and hearing us out. So here we go. My name is Brittanie and I'm an ACCESS teacher. At the last board meeting, questions were raised about whether there is a retention issue. I want to be clear, OCDE does not have a teacher retention issue. We also have not had retention issues with superintendents with classified or administrative positions, yet they continue to receive substantial raises. What we do have is a fairness and priority issue. Over the past two years, OCDE has invested in keeping administrative and classified positions competitive with raises, COLAs, and new positions being approved to ensure stability.

As teachers, the ones who carry the daily responsibility for instruction, compliance, engagement, and student success, we are excluded from that same logic. This discrepancy matters and it actually kind of hurts too, because we give it our all. We are the backbone of this organization. When experienced teachers are not valued equitably, the impact is real. It shows up in classrooms, in relationships, and in student outcomes, because stability and experience are what make OCDE work. We're not asking for extraordinary increases. We're asking for equity to be treated with the same rationale applied to every other group within OCDE. Keeping positions competitive is an investment in stability and student success, which is our bottom line. We want

our students to be successful when they leave our program. Financial responsibility is also important, but it is using our resources to support those who directly serve our students is also just as important. When reserves continue to grow while educators fall behind financially, this is a choice and one that shapes the future of OCDE. I'm asking Dr. Bean and the members of the board to recognize this inequity and invest in the professionals who make this program work, day after day. Thank you.

SHAW: Laurie, followed by Michele.

MARTINEZ: Just walking slowly to give her a break. Good evening. I've been with the Department for over 25 years, as have 66% of our certificated staff. This also means that 66% of our certificated staff will be retiring within the next couple of years. That's over half. In this case, it will be necessary to attract new certificated staff. Looking at our salary schedule in comparison to all other salary schedules in the county, we are nowhere near the upper quadrant. Our starting teacher's salary is number 28 of 29 districts in the county. In each successive column of our salary schedule, our salary ranks 25th to 15th in the county. If the Department's goal is to remain competitive with salaries in the upper quadrant, we are nowhere near achieving this goal unless that goal was meant for everyone except certificated staff. What is interesting to me is the difference in standards for certificated staff compared to everyone else at OCDE.

Our superintendent enjoyed an 8% salary increase with a 2% COLA, along with an increase in his car allowance before even completing one year of service. The reason given he was the lowest paid superintendent in the county. When a classified salary study was done, many were given raises between five to 28% depending on the position and a 2% COLA was given in addition. Why? Because the Department wanted to make sure their salaries and titles remained competitive. Well, our certificated staff were only offered up to a 3.5% COLA, and the Department said it could go no further. How does this make sense?

How should certificated staff, the boots on the ground who interact with students every single day, feel about this discrepancy? In order to raise our salaries to a competitive level, we would need raises between 24% for the first column all the way to 6.2% for the last column. The Department proposed a 9% increase to the first column. We have one person in that column. We agreed, even though it will affect exactly one person. Over 75% of our certificated staff have master's degrees, putting them in the last column where a 6.2% raise is necessary to be in the upper quadrant of salary schedules in the county. This is a fair ask. What is not fair is denying us our raises because enrollment is down. Enrollment has been going down since 2013. We've been told there's a budget deficit in ACCESS for years. We've seen budget presentations for most of our careers.

Interestingly enough, every budget presentation has shown ACCESS with a deficit of at least \$1 million or more. While certificated staff are being told there's not enough money for anything other than a COLA, thank you.

SHAW: And Michele.

HOLLIS: Good evening board members. My name is Michele and I'm a teacher with the ACCESS program. I've been here for 29 years and I'm here to discuss and talk about ADA being

considered as part of our salary increase. ADA is not a valid basis for denial. Declining ADA in ACCESS has been a known and budgeted condition since 2013. And it's neither new nor unexpected and has been incorporated in OCDE's fiscal planning for years. Certificated salaries are paid from the unrestricted general fund, which is not tied to ACCESS ADA. OCDE's financial position does not reflect fiscal distress. Reserves continue to grow. Hiring has expanded and there have been no RIFs, SERPs, or hiring freezes. Linking certificated salaries to ACCESS ADA is therefore a false premise that is inconsistent with the actual budgeting practice.

Over the past two years, OCDE and ACCESS have significantly expanded administrative and management staffing while continuing to grow reserves. OCDE maintains reserves at approximately 115% of its annual budget, far exceeding peer county offices. Additionally, OCDE generates approximately 19.3 million annually in interest. These facts demonstrate clear capacity to invest in certificated staff compensation. Certificated staff currently lack longevity pay, advanced degree stipends, or national board certification incentives, common in neighboring districts. Ranges three through five where the vast majority of educators are placed. While the union has identified what would be required to be fully competitive countywide, we're only requesting a modest 6.5% increase plus a 2% COLA, far below increases granted elsewhere in the organization. As a significant portion of certificated staff approach retirement, failure to address competitiveness now risks future recruitment and retention challenges. OCDE has demonstrated its commitment to maintaining competitive compensation for leadership and classified staff.

Certificated educators who work directly with students inform the instructional backbone of ACCESS and Connections deserve the same commitment. A fair competitive salary increase is fiscally responsible, consistent with OCDE's financial strength and essential to sustaining high quality educational services for Orange County's most vulnerable students.

SHAW: That's it.

BARKE: All right. Next, I'd like to motion to approve the consent calendar.

WILLIAMS: I'll make the motion.

VALDES: Madam President, if you would, can we take number four out of the consent calendar so we can talk about it?

BARKE: Sure. All right. I'd like a motion to approve the consent calendar putting number four aside to look at independently.

SPARKS: So moved.

SHAW: I'll second.

BARKE: All right. All those in favor?

SPARKS, VALDES, SHAW, BARKE, WILLIAMS: Aye.

BARKE: All right. Passes unanimously. Thank you. All right. Now, would you like to start the discussion on number four, Trustee Valdes?

VALDES: I just wanted to get some more information about this group. I've been trying to sort of investigate on my own. I don't have a problem with the \$7,500. I'm just trying to figure out who they are in relation to us. Is this an organization that aligns with us putting kids first? I know the organization is somewhat new. I think we are already a member and when I saw this, I just wanted to have an open dialogue about this. I reviewed their website extensively. There's no red flags on the website that I could see. But I'd like to know a little bit more about what my other colleagues think about them and who they are and what they stand for.

BARKE: Well, I can start and then my colleagues can add what they know. I know Ken has done a lot of research. I did attend their meeting last fall with Brandon and felt that they were a very open nonpartisan group that listened to a lot of different voices. And I didn't agree with all of them, but they didn't agree with all of mine. And I just thought that the group was productive and that they put the students first. I believe that the annual dues is worth it. I think we used to pay a lot more to belong to other organizations, and this is newer organization. And I think as they grow and develop, we'll have a better feeling about who they are, but so far it appears that they are very open to putting students first in academic excellence, which is a priority for me. And maybe Dr. Williams, you'd like to add to that.

WILLIAMS: I'll give you a historical perspective. The California School Board Association for quite a many years, decades did have a subsidiary county organization that we were a part of for decades. And what happened a few years ago was that there was a internal power struggle between the county and people of this organization, as well as the CSBA people in charge of that. And there was some offensive language and untoward conversations that occurred. And the CSBA said, "Well, if you're going to be that way, we're going to say goodbye." They terminated the county boards of education at that time. Subsequently, a few years later, I think in 2023, they got together. Some of the individuals, I supported them because I always feel that at the state level, we need county boards of representation. They developed this totally separate county entity, and we happened to be one of the original counties to be a part of this organization.

As far as philosophically, I think you're spot on with your analysis of their public policy and governance positions. I think it's very much aligned for putting kids first and expanding the rights of parents. And I think they're aligned with us. Actually, they supported us on the, I can't remember the state senator this year who sponsored the legislation.

BARKE: Umberg?

WILLIAMS: Umberg, Tom, yes. They supported our position on that and they opposed that bill publicly. The leadership, we actually had, I think it was last month, a presentation and I thought it was a good presentation. I thought it was unbiased. I thought the information that they presented was consistent with the values that we have as a board and as a community, as in Orange County. The question then comes down to, do we support a state county board's organization? And I would be one to support the organization and to vote yes for this because I think we need that representation in Sacramento. As you know, the CSBA may have a little bit different approach to public policy and governance than we do. And I think we're pretty much

aligned, as Mari said, some are not. Some are very much on the other end of the political spectrum, but I think overall it's a good organization. Okay.

VALDES: I mean, that's basically what I wanted to ask some of the group who had more interactions with them. If you guys don't see any red flags, then I have no problem. It's not an overly large amount of money. I just, I'm always careful to not want to support someone who's clearly not aligned with us or who would oppose us.

BARKE: I think that you'll find they're aligned in some issues and not in others. And you'll have hopefully an opportunity to meet them because I believe in April there will be an event hosted here in Orange County so that our entire board could do that with very little, no expense travel.

WILLIAMS: Okay. They embraced us very early. In fact, we got Brandon to be on one of their early committees and help frame some of the public policies. They embraced us and really sincerely appreciated us.

SPARKS: So, the key is that it's county representation that otherwise we wouldn't have. And not that they agree on every issue, but that's part of building that relationship from what I understand, right?

WILLIAMS: Exactly, because we...

SPARKS: Otherwise, we wouldn't have any.

WILLIAMS: Right. We do have legislation that occurs in Sacramento each year, and this is the organization that would represent county boards of education.

SHAW: That Madam President, I would move approval of item number four if the discussion's finished.

WILLIAMS: Seconded.

BARKE: Okay. All those in favor?

SPARKS, VALDES, SHAW, BARKE, WILLIAMS: Aye.

BARKE: Excellent. Passes unanimously. All right. Moving along to number five. Do we have any charter submissions, Renee?

HENDRICK: Yes, you do.

BARKE: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Oh boy.

HENDRICK: The first one you have is Vista Condor Global Academy. It's a renewal petition.

BARKE: Okay, great.

HENDRICK: That will have the public hearing on February 2nd with board action on March 4th. We have Suncoast Charter Prep, which is a countywide petition that was submitted on January 2nd. Public hearing is February 2nd, board action on March 4th. And then we have TLC or Tomorrow's Leadership Collaborative, which is a renewal petition, probably the first one we've seen for many years, and a material revision. And so that would be a public hearing on March 4th with the board action on April 8th.

BARKE: Okay, great. Well, thank you. Okay.

HENDRICK: If you're not able to carry the many binders we have left for you, we can have those delivered to your home also.

BARKE: Yeah. With our agenda, that would be great. I don't want them to make a special trip, but as long as you're coming by, that would be wonderful.

HENDRICK: Yes, might as well. Yes. Save the binders.

BARKE: Yes. Yes. Sounds great. Okay. Next, I'd like to invite Aracely, please.

SHAW: Madam President, before we begin number six, I would just like to indicate I intend on abstaining from this item, number six only.

BARKE: Okay. Do you want to explain why?

SHAW: No.

BARKE: No? Okay, great. All right. Thank you. Appreciate that.

CHASTAIN: Good evening, President Barke, trustees and Superintendent Bean. Today, the board will hold a public hearing to receive input regarding the renewal petition for Samueli Academy, a countywide charter school that was last renewed in 2018. Samueli Academy operates a grade seven through 12 charter school with one site located in the city of Santa Ana. Based on applicable state performance criteria, Samueli Academy is classified as a middle performing charter school and its renewal is being considered under the renewal standards set forth in education code 47607. Consistent with those standards, the board will consider academic performance as well as the school's educational program, fiscal condition, governance, practices, and compliance with applicable laws. Before public comments, charter representatives are allotted 15 minutes to address the board. I now invite the representatives from Samueli Academy to the podium.

ANTHONY: Good evening, honorable trustees, Anthony Saba, executive director, Samueli Academy. I've got the honor of representing Samueli Academy tonight along with our board chair, Chris Shitower, Head of School, Lee Fleming, a handful of alumni students and parents who you'll hear from shortly. When I thought about how to do this renewal again for the third time, I thought to maybe mix it up a little bit and in lieu of walking you through a presentation that would carry much of the data that you have in the binder before you, we wanted to create a video in your honor. So if we can queue up that video and play, please.

[Video playing]

SANDI: The passion for education is a wonderful value to have and the realization that education is at the bottom of everything. It's a game changer, which is why we started this school.

SUSAN: We knew that if we created the right school, that students would thrive. And it doesn't matter your socioeconomic because kids of all nature have talent and potential. You just have to give them that opportunity. I think we saw in the first year, especially Anthony's ability to build this school.

ANTHONY: When students know that the adults truly care, and I mean truly care, it's not important where they came from, what they've done, their grades they got previously. What's important is their heart moving forward. And you combine the caring nature that we have on campus with this unique, innovative, hands-on, project-based learning approach, and then magic happens and you get that level of engagement that so many others have talked about.

SUSAN: And we knew even in the first year that it was something special because we could see the students thriving and feeling like this is their home.

SANDI: As we kept adding and the school is growing, the impact has grown.

SUSAN: All in all, we're fulfilling the purpose that we dreamed of, and I think it's beyond our dreams because look at the success.

YARETZI: Thank you, Orange County Board of Education for approving Samueli Academy's charter 14 years ago. You have opened the door for us to have new opportunities in life. We've met so many teachers and professional adults that want to support us in our careers. We've learned to work together to build things. We've designed shirts for professional sports teams. We've made new friends, and over a thousand alumni are thriving across the nation and across the globe.

ANTHONY: We wear the fact that we were the first ever charter authorized by the Orange County Board of Education like a badge of honor. We're so appreciative of the relationship and the support we received from the board and the staff through the years, and we look forward to many more decades together for the benefit of these amazing students.

STUDENTS: Thank you.

[Video ended]

ANTHONY: I hope that you get a sense of pride in that because 15 years ago I stood at this very spot with only a vision. Didn't have a school yet. We didn't have a building yet, not one student, not one staff member. And you believed in that vision and you supported that vision. And between this board and this amazing staff, we're doing some pretty darn good work for these kids. You heard about some of it, right? A 99% graduation rate, 92% of these kids go to college, 85% are persisting through and graduating. That's more than twice the national average for this demographic. We have innovative programs like the way we teach hands-on project-based

learning, work-based learning where every student is given an internship. It's a graduation requirement. We have social emotional support with full-time school psychologists, a robust athletics and afterschool program. I mean, these kids are thriving and it really is thanks to that original vision and innovation that this board had and continues to have.

From the bottom of our hearts, from the over a thousand alumni we have, 800 current students, staff, thank you for your continued support. I know you don't get to see it like we get to see it every day, but know you're helping us make a tremendous difference in the lives of kids who really deserve it. So, with that, I know we have some people here who would like to speak with you as well, and then I'll come back up with my head of school for questions.

CHASTAIN: The hearing is now open for 15 minutes to receive public comment regarding the charter renewal. Trustee Shaw, please call for the first speaker.

VALDES: Well, since Trustee Shaw abstained, I will be pitch hitting for him.

HENDRICK: Jorge, can you tell me how many speakers you have? Because we do have, I think we talked about 90 seconds, I think. Is that what we said, Anthony?

ANTHONY: Roughly per person.

HENDRICK: Because we have more than the 15 minutes.

BARKE: Okay.

VALDES: Seven, eight, nine, 10. I count 12.

HENDRICK: It's up to the board's pleasure.

BARKE: I'm fine with 90 seconds, a minute and a half each, if everyone is okay.

SPARKS: Sure.

VALDES: Okay. Kiara Redman or excuse me, Redman.

KIARA: My name is Kiara Redman and I'm a 2025 graduate of Samueli Academy. What made Samueli Academy really impactful for me personally was how it intentionally prepared me for life beyond high school through the work-based learning program that we have and the real world learning in almost every class. I learned how to write a resume and a cover letter. I did an internship at my local library. I even know how to address professionally an interview, which serves me in my professional life today like nothing else. I also even learned how a business operates in my senior virtual enterprise class and I learned how the stock market works in my sophomore year of high school. Just really random things that serve me in every single, every day of my life that I live today. Another defining part of my experience was the project-based learning at that school.

I struggled with anxiety growing up, but with the frequent professional presentations that I did throughout all my time at Samueli Academy and getting into the growing performing arts

program, I learned how to collaborate, communicate, and lead, which are skills that are vital in my life today. The supportive staff at Samueli are something that I also really would like to highlight because they've made a lasting difference on me and will continue to for the rest of my life. Though I'm aware that I've discussed a couple different things in my time here, please know that I've only scratched the very surface of what Samueli Academy has done for me and what they offer to the community. I will forever be grateful for my high school experience because I'm now set up on a road to success that I honestly don't think I would have gotten anywhere else.

BARKE: Thank you.

VALDES: Okay. Margie Aguilar, followed by Amy Lee.

MARGIE: Good evening, everyone. My name is Margie Aguilar. I'm the proud parent of a 10th grader and a class of 2023 graduate at Samueli Academy. Instead of giving you and telling you all the wonderful things that I think of Samueli Academy, I'm going to give you the point of view of my two kids. My 10th grader, I asked them to share with me what it is that he thinks about Samueli Academy, and this is what he said. "My experience at Samueli Academy has been great. The teachers make sure to encourage students whether they're interested on the subject or not. The project-based learning was an interesting concept when I started attending Samueli Academy, but I learned to embrace it and look forward to working on projects every time we get a chance to do so. I also take advantage of my teacher's office hours, which helps me keep my grades up. I cannot see myself attending a different school."

These are the words of a 4.0 plus GPA student. My 20 year old who graduated in 2023 is currently attending graduate school at Cal State Fullerton and looking to enroll in the teachers credential program. He shared that the multiple presentations that Samueli prepare him to deal with anxiety when presenting at Cal State Fullerton. Compared to my younger son, he likes to keep comments short, but thank you so much. I really enjoy having my family be part of the community.

BARKE: Thank you.

VALDES: Okay. Amy Lee, followed by Brandon Palma.

AMY: Good evening. My name is Amy and I have an eighth-grade son, Owen Lee at Samueli Academy, who has been involved in ASB, Toastmasters, cross country, you name it. Owen loves his school and learning, and almost every day he asks if I can pick him up later. He stays to school till five on most days, and on this Thursday, it'll be till seven. And one of the afterschool programs that we wouldn't have been able to afford is Toastmasters, where Owen learned to write his own speeches. He took that skill, and over the summer, he traveled to India and gave inspirational speeches to hundreds of children at various schools on how times of adversity have been opportunities of growth, and he talked about his long COVID experience. I have loved the devoted teachers at Samueli and the teachers at Samueli are unique in that they put so much into their teaching, offering creative project-based assignments, staying after school regularly.

They are trauma informed, and the students there told me, what sold me on the school is they told me the teachers here, they really listen. They really care for every child as an individual. What makes them unique is it's not just one teacher that's like this, but all of the admin and

leadership and teachers work to help each kid reach their fullest potential. Samueli also offers support for teens in foster care. Our family recently went through certification process and we would've never done it without their support, and now we're learning how to support the students that live on campus there. Samueli offers all kinds of no cost and low-cost enrichment, which really helps families like ours and underserved families in the community. Thank you.

VALDES: Brandon Palma, followed by Diana Espinea.

BRANDON: Good evening. My name is Brandon Palma. I am a fourth-year architecture student at Cal Poly Pomona, and I'm part of the graduating class of 2021 of Samueli Academy. So it's been almost five years since I graduated, and I find myself coming back very frequently, just about every month when I'm on break, and just about every week when I'm in class, which, yeah. So, one of the things we're taught when we graduate is the mantra for alumni. And that mantra says, "Wherever you go, the pack will follow." And Samueli adheres to this perfectly. Whether I'm out at school, having 10-hour days, 12-hour days, or I don't come home at all, Samueli always keeps in touch saying, "Hey, how are you? How's your mental health?" They're always letting me know that they're here for me. I feel supported, whether it's through the services that they provide, whether I need help searching for a job, building a resume, or whether it's just a social gathering, "Hey, come over, let's go bowling, or come over for dinner with all the other alumni." Samueli does a very good job of keeping us very connected after graduation, and that's how I felt supported after five years of not being at the school as a student. Thank you.

BARKE: Thank you.

VALDES: Okay. Diana Espinea is up with Owen Lee next.

DIANA: Hello, I'm a parent to both an alumni and current student at Samueli Academy. I'd like to share one of my favorite things about student life at Samueli. On any given day, you can see students dress professionally, which is a clear indication they have a presentation that day. Students learn the power of public speaking, which is incredibly valuable. Students also create and maintain their own individual resumes, which is another example of preparing students for success beyond Samueli. My oldest son is now a student, a junior at Cal State Fullerton majoring in computer science. Attending Samueli gave him the tools he needed to further his education beyond high school and the confidence to know that he can accomplish whatever he sets his mind to. The resilience of our students comes great in great part from our faculty at Samueli. My younger son is currently a freshman. He began attending Samueli in seventh grade, and I can honestly say Samueli's transitioned to not just a high school, but rather junior high as well has benefited their students greatly.

The relationships and trust that students build with their teachers carry for an additional two years, and that amount of support only makes students stronger and better prepared, not just in education, but for life in general. I'm sincerely thankful that our family and community at large has the option to send our kids to Samueli. I hope you will continue to support our school, to offer the relationships, real life experiences, and the whole student approach that Samueli offers to their students. Thank you.

VALDES: Owen Lee and Martin Zambrano is up.

OWEN: Okay. Thank you for having me. My name is Owen Lee, and my mom already said most of this stuff about me. So, I've been a student at Samueli Academy for two years now, but I've seen how the teachers at this school act differently than a lot of teachers at the other schools. So let me explain. All the teachers stay after school twice for one hour each day, or twice a week for one hour, and they invest into students by making connections. They host and administrate clubs, sports, extracurriculars, giving so much time to students. So, when people from Samueli ask for money or a raise or donations for their school, they aren't just asking for themselves. They're asking to invest in their students. Thank you.

VALDES: Martin Zambarano is up with Isaac Marquez on deck.

MARTIN: Good evening, everyone. I'm a proud graduate of Samueli Academy's first graduating class in 2017. Growing up in Santa Ana, I attended several different elementary and middle schools and often struggled academically. My immigrant parents wanted something better for me. And fortunately, for me, Samueli Academy was opening its doors to its first 120 students in 2013. I was grateful to be accepted and it was there where my life truly began to change. At Samueli Academy, I discovered my passion for helping others, which were helping others who face similar challenges as those that I experienced growing up. After graduating, I went on to attend Santa Ana College and later Cal State Fullerton, where I earned my bachelor's degree. Today, I am proud to say I have come full circle and I am back at Samueli Academy serving as the alumni success coordinator. In this role, I have the opportunity to support and guide students towards success, just as the staff and mentors once did for me. Thank you.

VALDES: Isaac Marquez is up with Claudia Hernandez Magee on deck.

ISAAC: Hello, board. My name is Isaac Marquez, and I am from the graduating class of 2025. Coming into Samueli, I wasn't really much of a social person, especially entering right after COVID. I was afraid of not being able to find my community, but I was so fortunate to be attending Samueli Academy because right at arrival, the environment was so welcoming and it allowed me to participate in sports and extracurriculars where I met my friends that I consider now as family and still see every single day. Not only that, but Samueli Academy has prepared me greatly for my post-high school education with the curriculum and staff that has real world experience in the engineering field where they gave me a head start in many of my college classes. From freshman year, learning how to code and use Arduino, to senior year building a whole lunar rover with 3D printed parts.

Samueli Academy has prepared me more than enough for my journey now at the University of California Irvine. I'd also like to add, Mr. Pelizi, he has guided me and mentored me to the point where as a freshman, I have joined the chemical engineering car at University of California Irvine, working on the PCB of this vehicle. Thank you.

BARKE: Thank you.

VALDES: Claudia Hernandez Magee is up. Cristina Martinez is on deck.

CLAUDIA: Good evening, board trustees. My name is Claudia Hernandez Magee, and I'm a caregiver at Samueli Academy. In addition, in my supporting of my scholar, I also participate on the caregiver advisory committee currently as a secretary and formerly as the co-chair. As I

reflect on our family's experience, I wanted to highlight a couple of ways that Samueli has directly supported our student. While my scholar has one year left, she has truly flourished academically, socially, and personally since joining the school five years ago in seventh grade. The engaging teachers and their approaches have pushed her to think creatively while also demonstrating thoughtful, objective dialogue that she deeply values. Beyond the school classroom, Samueli has presented several opportunities, which we've already shared from some of the parents, but dual enrollment courses as well as honors courses, collaboration among her peers, as well as leadership opportunities such as through ASB, are some of the things that have helped her forge her path and her education at Samueli.

The individual experiences reflect something larger. Samueli is a community asset, one that not only supports student successes, but also fosters engagement and builds strong partnerships and empowers families and the alumni. For these reasons, I sincerely hope that the county considers support of the charter so that Samueli can advance innovation in teaching, elevate academic performance, and preparing students for success. Thank you for your time and opportunity and your consideration.

VALDES: Okay. Cristina Martinez is up. Isela Villanueva is on deck.

CRISTINA: Good evening, board members. My name is Cristina Martinez and I'm a parent at Samueli Academy. I've been part of this community since 2016 when my oldest son joined school. And I have currently a sophomore at the academy. And as I mentioned, actually two alumni who've benefited from this magnificent school. There are really some countless things that I can really say about how the school has supported my students, but I want to highlight a couple. There are, first of all, all the hands-on opportunities that are given to our students or to my students have been invaluable in helping to prepare them in the real world. Having those experiences has really positioned them to be ready for the university and my two alumni who have gone on to university. We're ready from day one to really hit the ground running. My oldest, I'm very proud to say, is graduated with his bachelor's in mechanical engineering recently and now is doing graduate work at the University of Stuttgart in Germany.

So really helped him to be very independent, very collaborative. And as you can see, him being in Germany, really able to work in diverse environments. Second, really the bonds that my children have formed with staff have been invaluable as well. Many of them have continued beyond their time at Samueli. Many of them have become mentors to my children. And so I just want to say that in closing, as I'm running out of time, that I hope that you'll consider supporting this school for all the things that have noted by me and others in the group. Thank you.

VALDES: Okay. Isela Villanueva is up and Mark Castruita is on deck.

MARK: This is a collaborative project-based effort. So, Mark Castruita is here too. Hello, my name is Mark and this is Isela, my wife. We are the parents of two students at Samueli Academy. We're also volunteers, engineering path advisors. I'm the assistant coach on the basketball team. We won today, hence the orange shirt. What's amazing about the school is the unwavering support of teachers and staff. Teachers connect with students to support their passions at every single level. One example of many is related to my son. Ms. Vining and Mr. Peterson lead the design pathway. They're not broadcasting people. However, their support has enriched my son,

Zach's broadcasting experience. They even brought an internship to his attention and helped him with the application. Because of that, he was recently selected as co-host of a national podcast through PBS. The small class size and emphasis on collaboration has helped our daughter, Nora. She's a ninth grader. With project-based learning, she has the opportunity to work with her fellow students to own their learning. This has made it easier to build her community and find her passions. It's also a very dynamic environment. Parents are welcome to participate on campus in many different ways. The parent-driven programs are always supported and the administration takes parent input very seriously, even if we may look silly in bright orange shirts. Thank you.

VALDES: Okay, that's it.

CHASTAIN: The public hearing is now concluded. The Orange County Department of Education staff will publish recommendations, including recommended findings by January 18th. At the February 2nd meeting, the board will conduct a subsequent public hearing and take action to grant or deny the charter school renewal petition. President Barke, I now close the public hearing and turn the meeting back over to you.

BARKE: Thank you, Aracely. I appreciate it. Do my colleagues, would you like to ask some questions? Maybe I'll start down with Dr. Sparks and move our way across.

SPARKS: I'll pass for now.

BARKE: Okay. Trustee Valdes?

VALDES: I have a few.

BARKE: Okay.

VALDES: Anthony. Come on and take the podium for a second.

ANTHONY: Sure.

VALDES: So, 99% graduation rate.

ANTHONY: Yes.

VALDES: Did I hear that right? 92% go on to college?

ANTHONY: Correct.

VALDES: 85% graduate from college?

ANTHONY: Persist, correct.

VALDES: And the 85% is double the national average?

ANTHONY: For this demographic, that is correct.

VALDES: I wanted to ask you exactly that about the demographic.

ANTHONY: Yes.

VALDES: Do you have any numbers or anything that you can share with us about the demographic that you serve at the school?

ANTHONY: Sure. Specifically, 92% of our students are Latinx students. Give or take a few percentage, on any given year. So those would be the ones specifically we're referring to in the study. UC Irvine actually does this research. We don't do it internally. We contract with UCI to track our alumni.

VALDES: Latinx means a little less to me than perhaps what their socioeconomic level is.

ANTHONY: Sure.

VALDES: Can you explain that?

ANTHONY: Yeah. Yeah. So, we waffle in between roughly 70% to 80% of our students are free and reduced lunch students, meaning ... I mean, the board knows what that means clearly. Does that help?

VALDES: Somewhere between 70% to 80%.

ANTHONY: Yes.

VALDES: Okay. Why does Samueli have a caregiver?

ANTHONY: Why do we have a care? Are you referring to the...

VALDES: Someone spoke and said they were a caregiver at your school.

ANTHONY: Yeah. So, we have a parent group called parents and caregivers. Well, we don't only have parents. Some people care for a child and they're not their parent. And so, we try to be inclusive of all different types of people. We have a lot of foster youth and they may or may not want to go by parent. It could be a caregiver. So, some people would rather identify as a caregiver than they would a parent because, well, transparently they're not the parent.

VALDES: Oh, I see. Okay. All right. Well, thank you for answering my questions. In the years that I've been here, so since August of '22, I have had zero complaints come in about this school. Nothing has come to me from parents. So, I mean, that shows to me that you're taking care of your kids, you're satisfying your parents, and that probably is the biggest sell on this school, at least for me. So, thank you for...

ANTHONY: Thank you. Thank you for your support.

VALDES: I just wanted to mention to my board members that Samueli was, I think, one of the first schools that I toured. It's a very impressive school for the middle of Santa Ana. It's a very impressive building. It almost looks like a junior college to me. I liked the, I think it was a soccer

field in the middle of the campus. And Anthony, I think you were the one that told me that there was some housing that you were going to start on the campus. Can you talk to me about that?

ANTHONY: Yeah. We have dorms on our campus specifically for foster youth. Foster youth have always been at the heart of our mission. When the board originally approved the charter, there is an admission preference for students living in foster care. And some of our foster youth live on campus in our dorms while other foster youth don't need the dorms and they come as day students. So, we actually, yeah, we have students living on our campus right now.

VALDES: So how many foster youth are on campus? I feel it's important that the public knows more than just the video and...

ANTHONY: Sure. Just the foster youth who live on campus. We have beds up to 48. The reality is that we've never been full. It goes in and out. One of our charges is actually to get them out of the dorms and get them with the family, get them adopted. And so that happens. So, they kind of go in and out. I think we're anytime 10 to 14 students on foster youth living on campus, but again, once we get them adopted or they graduate or things change and they move off campus. So, to answer your question, 10 to 14 who live on campus with us currently within that number's rising, we have more on our pipeline.

VALDES: Okay. Thank you very much.

ANTHONY: You're welcome. Thank you.

BARKE: Dr. Williams.

WILLIAMS: Yes. Let me first say that my reaction to the video was one that I shed a few tears.

ANTHONY: Oh good.

WILLIAMS: That was very moving. Mrs. Samuelli's words were very comforting and I think we're descriptive. We know that what makes a charter successful is leadership. And you sir have been a leader, a great leader since 2013 when I first voted for this way back that many years ago. And so, your leadership plays a great role in making and creating the success of the school. So let me first say those few words. You've been exemplary. In every way as a human being and your students and your parents and your teachers who shared a few words under public comments were very meaningful. Jerry, where are you? I was so impressed with you. Your professionalism, your demeanor, your character, how you presented yourself and what you shared with us was very meaningful. And I can tell you that in the decades and years ahead that you're going to be very successful at what you do and always give credit to your school and your alumni and I wish you Godspeed.

To many of the parents that came up and talked and shared about their children's experience, thank you very much. This is all just very wonderful. I was particularly impressed with Isaac Marquez. Isaac, I'm a UC Irvine alumni myself. I know you're around the corner there, but I'm impressed with what you're doing and don't stop. And Martin, thank you for coming back and being that mentor to the schools. That's a real story and accolades to you, Tony, that you have one of your student graduates come back, get his bachelor's and come back and teach.

ANTHONY: He defines what we stand for.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Amazing.

ANTHONY: He's an amazing young man.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. So, nothing but kudos. And just like I have done for your original application 2013 and the renewal, this is your third time, right?

ANTHONY: This is the second renewal. COVID just messes with the timeline, right? But yeah, second renewal after the original. I think that's right.

WILLIAMS: So, I will be voting for your school.

ANTHONY: Appreciate your support sir.

WILLIAMS: Thank you.

BARKE: Well, there's not much left to say after the comments by my colleagues, but I absolutely agree with all of them. I believe you were the first charter school I visited when I was just learning what a charter school was before I ran for office. I was checking it out.

ANTHONY: I recall you need to come back and you're all always invited. Schools finally, would love to show you any time, but yeah, I recall that visit.

BARKE: I look forward to it. I'd love to come again. It's very impressive. The video was great and we appreciate the work you do in Orange County. It's quite amazing.

ANTHONY: Appreciate your support. Couldn't do it without you.

SPARKS: Yeah, I'll just jump on that comment.

BARKE: Sure.

SPARKS: In 2018 when Mari and I were elected, you were one of the first charter schools we went to and we were blown away. I mean, I just have nothing to say because you guys just do what you're supposed to do and you do it amazingly well. We're proud of you.

ANTHONY: Thank you. Thank you very much.

BARKE: All right. I think that's all we have for you. So, thank you.

ANTHONY: Thank you very much.

SHAW: On number seven.

BARKE: Okay. Onto number seven. Thank you.

CHASTAIN: This evening, the board will conduct a public hearing to gather input regarding a proposed material revision to the charter petition of Ednovate OC College Prep, which will open in fall of 2026. The charter school is requesting a material revision to its charter seeking to establish locations within the boundaries of Orange Unified School District and Irvine Unified School District. Before opening the floor for public comments, representatives from Ednovate OC College Prep will have up to 10 minutes to present their proposal to the board. I now invite representatives from the charter school to the podium.

KATIE: Good evening, President Barke, a distinguished trustees and Superintendent Bean. My name is Katie Hart and I serve as the chief operating officer for Ednovate Charter Schools. First, I just want to share my sincere gratitude for your partnership and continuous support throughout the years. This evening, I'm here on behalf of Ednovate Orange County College Prep to respectfully request approval of a material revision that would expand our authorized geographic area to include the cities of Irvine and Orange as stated. And we have complied with all of the requirements for this material revision, including formally notifying both respective authorizers. This request reflects what we have learned through years of diligent facility scouting across Orange County. Despite extensive outreach to school districts, higher education partners, private property owners, and municipalities, high quality, appropriately zoned, and financially viable school facilities remain extremely limited. To responsibly meet both the spirit and timeline of our 2030 growth commitments and to remain good stewards of public resources, it has become clear that we must evaluate locations where realistic and mission aligned opportunities exist.

Based on this work, we are currently advancing two promising options, one in the city of Irvine and one in the city of Orange. And I'd like to briefly update the board on the status of each of those. Alongside our facility search, we also have been engaging with the community by attending local events, connecting with families and participating in community fairs to build relationships and deepen our understanding of the community needs. For the past year, we have been working on developing a partnership with Orange County Music and Dance, often referred to as OCMD, as they plan the design and construction of a new facility at the Great Park in Irvine. The vision is to co-locate with an essentially located shared facility, maximizing space utilization and creating an innovative community centered hub for education and the arts for students throughout the county, regardless of their zip code or economic status.

In a letter of support shared with the board, OCMD leadership mentioned that they strongly support Ednovate's expansion efforts and believe this partnership represents a meaningful opportunity to enhance educational and cultural offerings throughout Orange County. Last fall, the city of Irvine approved Ednovate as a potential sublessee for this project and has expressed clear support for our proposed school use at this site. This option remains highly compelling from a location and programmatic standpoint, allowing Ednovate to truly provide a county-wide benefit to students who may not have the opportunity to access this type of programming due to financial or selection criteria limitations. Currently, we are still in the design and diligence phase of this project. We remain focused on thoroughly vetting the facility scope, associated costs, and operational assumptions, so any final decision reflects responsible long-term stewardship. In the city of Orange, we have been working closely with the president of Santiago Canyon College and the district team to explore a potential facilities partnership via excess space on the college campus that would support a dual enrollment high school and create aligned pathways from high school to community college, university, and the workforce.

There is strong alignment around providing students with early college experiences, transferable credits, and exposure to career pathways, and conversations remain active and constructive. That said, the timing of a potential lease at the college is still in flux as the college works through internal planning and approvals on their end. In short, these partnerships strengthen our region's educational ecosystem, expanding dual enrollment opportunities, responsibly stewarding facilities, and creating new access to arts and workforce pathways that would not otherwise exist. Both opportunities remain active, aligned to our mission, and worthy of continued pursuit. Approval of this geographic expansion will give Ednovate the flexibility needed to responsibly advance these options as timelines clarify, while continuing to seek additional opportunities allow us to serve students well and grow sustainably. Thank you for your consideration.

BARKE: Thank you.

CHASTAIN: The hearing is now open for 15 minutes of public comments. Trustee Shaw, please call for the first speaker.

SHAW: Thank you. We will have Isela followed by Genesis. There was three, only three, so we'll do three minutes.

ISELA: [several inaudible words] and I'm a proud parent of students at Legacy College Prep. Currently, the only Ednovate school in Santa Ana. My twin boys, Mateo and Max are in 10th grade. I'm also an active member of the Orange County community, and I'm here today because Legacy has provided our family with great academic opportunities. My twin boys may be identical, but they could not be more different. Mateo is a joker who loves horses and stays very active at school. Max is calm, passionate about music, rarely without his guitar and gets lots of crowd. Because they learn differently, they have unique interesting findings.

Excuse me. Finding the right school environment was critical for our family. I chose Ednovate Schools because small schools work. At Legacy, students are known, supported, and valued as individuals. Teachers truly pay attention. Meeting students where they are helping them grow both academically and personally. And yes, they can even tell my twins apart, which says a lot. Legacy has been part of a family journey for years. My two oldest daughters also graduated from Legacy. They're now attending Cal Poly Pomona. Even now, the college counselor continue to support them. When Ednovate says to and through college, they truly mean it. As a parent, what matters to me is most knowing my children are safe, supported, and academically challenged. At legacy, they are not just names on a roster. They are truly seen. I was born in Michoacan, Mexico and moved to Santa Ana when I was only one.

I'm a proud 50-year-old resident of Orange County and graduated of a local school. Having witnessed Santa Ana's growth and changing landscapes of education, I want my children to have access to school opinions that meet their individual needs. And I believe that every family in Orange County deserves that opportunity. I spoke with other parents who feel the same way that Ednovate offers are needed and want in our Orange County community. That's why I strongly support growing communities like Irvine and Orange. Thank you for listening and for considering the voices of parents like me and see impact of these schools every day.

SHAW: Thank you. Genesis will be followed by Alex.

GENESIS: Good afternoon, board members and superintendent. My name is Genesis Dominguez and I'm a community engagement manager for Orange County with Ednovate Schools, which I've been working with for the last five years. Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to immerse myself in diverse communities of Orange County. I've attended many community events, local school board meetings, and built relationships with incredible communities and organizational partners. Through these experiences, I've learned not only what makes Orange County unique, but also what families in these communities truly need. Being on the ground, I've heard directly from the families and the message is clear. They want small schools, personalized learning and ongoing transparent communication. Surveys we conducted across OC like Santa Ana and Orange, reaching about a hundred families confirm the same thing. Schools like ours are not just needed, they are welcome. And what they're looking for Ednovate delivers.

Ednovate Schools provide safe and vibrant communities where every student is seen, supported, celebrated, and are encouraged to create positive multi-generational change. Families entrust us not only with their child's education, but with nurturing their unique potential. And with 100% four-year college acceptance rate across our network, Ednovate delivers rigorous academics, personalized support, and ongoing communication, and also leadership opportunities. The need is clear and support is growing. Our partnerships extend beyond our classrooms. We have connected with key community partners, including the Orange County Rescue Mission, Mix Academy, Boys and Girls Club, and Think Together, who are all eager to collaborate as we expand. In a letter of support, Mix Academy affirmed that our strong sense of community and academic results reflect a deep commitment to student success and aligned well with OCBE's goals for educational excellence. Our partners are inspired by the empowerment and leadership our students demonstrate.

We are confident that Ednovate's Schools will be a transformative asset to the unique communities of Irvine and Orange. We are ready to share our mission, a mission of positive multi-generational change. Thank you.

SHAW: Thank you. And Alex.

ALEX: Good evening, esteemed board members, Dr. Bean and to our extended community. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Alex Carpenter. I'm the proud founding principal of Ednovate OC College Prep, our eighth campus and next chapter of our organization's story. Speaking of stories, I believe our reason for existing and for expanding in Orange County is grounded in real stories of real families dedicated to the best possible educational choices for their children. I'm reminded of a call I received from a mother who told me that her son had never been more excited about attending a brick and mortar school after being homeschooled for his K-8 experience. He had never been more excited until after attending our presentation where we presented a vision of what a family-style school could look like and represent for him and for his family. I think about another conversation with a mother who was considering her next move for their family.

She told me she was moving in with her grandmother. After living her entire life in Los Angeles, she was going to move in with her grandmother into a small apartment in Orange County, not because of a job, not because of housing costs, but because she wanted her child in Orange

County for one reason, stronger educational opportunities than what was presented to her in her surroundings and a fresh start for her and the rest of her children. And at a recent information session, a mother and a father told us that they read our organizational values and after hearing it from ourselves in that time, they shared with us that one value stood out to them in particular, joy. "This," they said, "is what we've been looking for."

An organization and a school that makes joy and explicit and lived out value every single day. In fact, this family, the Alcantara family who lives in Orange, have given me their permission to read this statement on their behalf. "Our family is drawn to Ednovate because of its strong alignment with our family's academic values and its commitment to designing learning environments that prioritize student wellness and holistic development beyond the classroom. The school's ability to provide personalized support and adapt services with flexibility ensures that students are fully supported and as parents, it's clear that students have a voice and that families will always find an open door." Our why here has never been clearer. These aren't outliers. These aren't exceptions to the rule, but these are patterns and signals. That's only half the story. Parents deserve excellent options, and the keyword there is excellent. The promise that we make is to always provide families with what lies at the heart of our mission, positive, multi-generational change.

That's what this material revision represents. That's the standard we are holding ourselves to, and we thank you so much for your time and space.

BARKE: Thank you.

CHASTAIN: The public comment period is now concluded. The Orange County Department of Education staff will publish recommendations, including recommended findings by January 18th. The board will take action to grant or deny the charter school at the February 2nd meeting. President Barke, I now close the public hearing and return the meeting to you.

BARKE: Thank you so much, Aracely. This time I'll start to my left, Dr. Williams.

WILLIAMS: I have no questions.

BARKE: Okay. Trustee Valdes. We're moving quickly.

WILLIAMS: Oh, if I may. I'm sorry. Just one question. You mentioned about a possible school lease at the Irvine Unified School District that you're involved in negotiations. Is that true?

KATIE: That is with the Santiago Canyon College.

WILLIAMS: Okay. You're doing nothing at the IUSD?

KATIE: We are not actively involved in any lease negotiations with them this time.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Maybe I heard you wrong. I'm sorry.

KATIE: No worries.

WILLIAMS: That's it.

SPARKS: I just have something to say. Yeah. Again, I just want to congratulate you all on dotting all your I's, crossing all your T's. I've been following you for many years. Another just excellent, excellent. I'm just so proud of what you guys have been accomplishing and look forward to supporting you as we move forward.

KATIE: Thank you.

BARKE: And I will agree with all of Dr. Spark's comments. Thank you for being here and thank you for all of you that came out to speak.

VALDES: Could I ask a few? May I?

BARKE: Yeah, I thought you passed. I'm sorry.

VALDES: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't pass.

BARKE: Okay.

VALDES: Katie and Alex. Alex, you're the principal?

ALEX: Yes.

VALDES: Oh, come on. Come on up. So, the expansion that you guys want to do, it's not necessitated by losing your existing facility, you just want to grow into other areas of Orange County?

KATIE: Correct. So, when we originally came to you about a year and a half ago now with our petition, a lot of the work that we were doing was engaging with communities, looking at demographics to make sure that we were selecting areas that we felt we could best serve and execute on our mission. Well, as many of you know and have gone through this journey, it's really incredibly difficult to say this is where the community is asking for our programming and our support and here's a facility that we can move into and grow responsibly in because we do what we call a slow growth model. So next year when Alex founds the school or at the end of this year, or later this year, sorry, we'll just start with the freshman class and then grow one, a new freshman class each year until we're fully enrolled.

So that has been a huge challenge, not only for us, but many of our charter partners as well. So we've had to get very creative. We have been very tenacious in the communities that have asked us as Alex was referring to all these stories, but we have to match where there's a realistic, feasible and affordable facility and we can still execute on our mission. So, we, although these are not solidified, they're not inked, we believe these are promising opportunities and it's a bit of a chicken or the egg, but we want to make sure that we are authorized to also seek that location within our charter petition. So, we're coming early to the board to share that and make sure that we can move forward if the opportunity does come to fruition.

VALDES: So as a businessman, anytime I see someone who wants to expand, I sort of look at what you're currently doing. The one concern I have, and I want to ask you, frankly, is the CAASPP test scores for your math are in the teens. I wanted you to speak about that and why are they on the lower side? I mean, that's pretty low. How can we get them up? And then I want to ask you about your graduation because test scores are not the only way to determine what a student outcome is. So, I want to ask you about your graduation rates, your college rates, everything the Samueli folks just talked about. But first I want to talk about the math scores.

KATIE: Sure. So, math has been a huge focus and is one of the top priorities on our strategic plan, both this year and for the next five years. It's certainly a challenge and we've taken it head on. We have put a lot of resources into our math programming and hiring a new math program manager. And all of our schools are aligned on curriculum and supports across the board. Of course, you can't change math scores overnight. And you also have to understand what students are coming in with into our schools as well. So, I think we share your laser focus on improving those scores and offering all of the supports that we possibly can. I don't know, Alex, if you want to talk any more specifics.

ALEX: Yeah. I think part of that process also involves just a lot of humility on our end as well. So, a lot of us as principals across the board have dedicated a lot of our time and our focus, including going to math conferences that we might not otherwise attend, for example. And just really understanding how it is that we as leaders can drive this learning, these improvements and these outcomes across the board.

VALDES: Okay. That is a significant, I just want you to know that's a significant concern for me. As we approve these, I understand that we have a lot coming down the pipeline for this year. I think it's important for myself, I'll just speak for myself, that we continue to approve and allow the expansion of schools that are really doing a good job academically. And I know that test scores are not the only way to gauge a student outcome, but a math pass score in the teens is problematic for me. And I would ask, really, is there any way to meet with our team in the Department? We have a lot of resources. I think her name is Trish Walsh, who can come in and perhaps provide some recommendations on how we can get those up. But it's not an insignificant issue to me. You're asking for an expansion and for me that says...

CHASTAIN: I just want to clarify, which is why I came back up here, that currently you are hearing a material revision request for Ednovate OC College Prep. They are a brand new countywide charter school that has not opened yet. So, I think what the school you're referencing is Ednovate Legacy, which is a different charter school. I just wanted to make sure that you're clear on this.

VALDES: All right, my bad. Thank you for clearing that up. All right. I will move on. Thank you.

BARKE: Okay. So anyway, I was saying thank you for being here and I agree with Dr. Sparks and I appreciate that Trustee Valdes has questions and is always concerned about academics because that certainly is important. We want to make sure that those things are in line as well. Thanks for being here today and we look forward to seeing you again soon.

KATIE: Thank you very much.

BARKE: Of course.

CHASTAIN: All right. The board will now conduct a public hearing to gather input regarding a proposed material revision to the charter petition of California Leadership Academy Orange County. The charter school is requesting to add an independent component or the classical education flex program as an additional educational model offered by the school. The school is scheduled to open in fall of 2026. Before the opening the floor for public comments, representatives from CRLA Orange County will have up to 10 minutes to present their proposal to the board. I now invite representatives from the charter school to the podium.

GARY: Good evening, Madam President, board members, Superintendent Dr. Bean. I'm Gary Davis, the executive director of the California Public Leadership Academy of Schools. You just approved this school in October and you're probably tired of seeing me. So, I have a brief presentation. I want to walk through the mechanics of what's in the material revision and why we're requesting it. Just as a quick reminder, CRLA is a virtuous leadership classical education program, and our vision includes bringing that program to any student in Orange County who desires it. And that's part of what we're trying to accomplish here tonight. As a virtuous leadership classical education program, our curriculum is classical education at the foundation with the leader in me servant leadership curriculum on top of that. And then on top of that is our 10 virtues that we have in our virtue tree here that we focus on.

And it all comes together and we call that the CRLA virtuous leadership classical education. The material vision would do really just one thing. It would add a flex space program to our current program. It would take the CRLA's proven academic program. It's been successful and essentially we would make it available to families who desire a little more flexibility than a five day a week site-based program. There are two pathways. One is a homeschool pathway, one is a hybrid pathway, which I'll talk about in a minute. And our intention would be to launch in the north county, very small with just 25 students in the homeschool program in year one. Year two, we would add the hybrid program with 40 students and then we would steadily sort of increase based upon demand as we grow. So that's our request. I want to remind you where our students come from because it kind of gets into why we're here tonight.

You've seen this slide before, but 35% of our families were previously homeschooled before they come to our schools with either homeschool independently or homeschool through a charter school. Roughly 25% come from a private school and a lot of times those are hybrid-based programs also. So why are we here tonight asking to add a flex program? I want to just walk through an example. So last year our school, our two schools received 590 applications, which incidentally were open. We just opened enrollment for next year. We're in our third day and we're already up to 240. So, there's quite a bit of demand. For those 590 applications, we had 145 spots to offer last year. We ended up after things got sorted out when school opened, we ended up with 332 students on the wait list. I've shared that number with you before. But because such a large percentage of our families do come from a homeschool environment, we have found the last two years we have found, and I'll use this example of last year, that some of those homeschool families have an intention of enrolling in a five day a week program and we do

everything we can to make sure they know that, Hey, if you accept a spot on the lottery, you need to come.

Don't accept it if you don't intend to come. And as we get closer to school, they register or constant communication with them, but last year we lost about 35 students right when school started because they just sort of changed their mind and decided that they intended to go to a site-based program that they're going to stick with homeschooling. And I think that's something that's pretty common with homeschool families is they go and taking the step to enroll in a five-day week program is a big deal. But what happens with those 35 spots that opened up right when school started is we then have to start cycling through our wait list. And so, when a wait list spot opens up, the family has 72 hours to accept it or not, and if they don't accept it, then it goes on to the next one, et cetera, et cetera.

And if a family that is on the wait list had already enrolled in another school, oftentimes at that point they're not willing to change, which makes sense to me. I understand that. So, the reality is, is that we cycled through about 140 students on the wait list to fill those 35 spots and it took two months. And that has implications. Students are enrolling late, it's changing the dynamic of the class. And so, part of why we want to add the flex program is so that we can be upfront with our families and say, "Hey, if you really aren't ready to enroll in a five-day week program, but you do want our curriculum and our academic program, we have another option for you." So that's a big driver to why we're here tonight asking for this material revision. I'll also say that it is unique in Orange County.

What we're proposing to do doesn't exist anywhere else, and we have had a lot of requests, so we have strong family interest. Just a little bit more about the flex program, the two pathways I told you about, there's a homeschool pathway where parents are the primary instructors, but families are provided with our curriculum. They don't select their own curriculum, their curriculum pacing guide, and they will meet with a credentialed teacher on campus in uniform once a week. And the goal of that is to provide guidance and fidelity to our academic program. The second would be, again, we would do this in a year, year and a half from now, so our second year would be a hybrid pathway program where students attend two days a week to get core academic instruction, and then the other two days a week, they're at home working through the pacing guide and the assignments that they've been given to work on for those two days.

And then for both programs, there's a Friday enrichment day, so it's a day to come onto campus to get additional academic support, meet in small groups, get one-on-one teacher time, and other community enrichments. So, we'll plan to do field trips around that day or public speaking classes or things that sort of offer extra enrichments and opportunities for those students. So, both program pathways would be eligible for that. And again, anytime they're on campus, they're in uniform. Strict adherence to our academic program. As I mentioned, in our program, they wouldn't get to select their own curriculum. They're not given money to go spend on field trips and curriculum. They're literally handed a curriculum that is a classical education program, that's a CRLA program, and our expectation is that they would stick to that.

Both program pathways would have, again, full integration into the site. So not only uniforms when they're on campus, but they'd be able to participate in field trips, other activities we have on campus like donuts with dads and muffins with moms, two really popular gatherings. But the

goal is to sort of give them a little bit of a sense of that campus experience. And then finally, parent resources. So, we would do workshops and training with our parents to make sure that they know our curriculum well, that they're able to deliver it well. We would have a communication slack network so all the parents within the program can talk to each other and help each other out. And again, of course, crystal clear curriculum and pacing guides. So yeah, in summary, I would say that we believe the program meets a demand in Orange County that's not currently being met. It would help us to minimize the disruption in our site-based programs in a substantive way, and really it is unique to have a classical education program in a box with active guidance from credentialed teachers and to be able to integrate and wear your uniforms and be on campus. We think that's a totally unique experience and we'd like to be able to offer it. Thank you. Yep. It's probably a little longer than I expected, but I appreciate your time and happy to answer any questions you have.

CHASTAIN: The hearing is now open for 15 minutes of public comments. Trustee Shaw, are there any speakers?

SHAW: No. No speakers.

CHASTAIN: The public comment period is now concluded. Orange County Department of Education staff will publish recommendations, including recommended findings by January 18th. At the February 2nd meeting, the board will conduct a subsequent public hearing and take action to grant or deny the charter school material vision. President Barke, I now close the public hearing and return the meeting to you.

BARKE: Thank you. I'll start with you, Dr. Sparks, this time.

SPARKS: Okay. Yeah. I just want to comment on how impressed I am with the innovation and listening to parents and building in this flexible model. Really innovative, really forward thinking. More people should be thinking that way. I just am really impressed because I just think if I decided I wanted to homeschool, wouldn't it be great to have a curriculum ready to go and I could lead and guide that as an educator myself, but I wouldn't have all the tools for K-12 education. So that's a really, really cool model. I like it.

BARKE: Trustee Valdes.

VALDES: Gary, you always come here and do well. I don't have any questions. I'm fine with it.

SHAW: Looks like getting into CRLA. It's like getting into Harvard anymore. Geez, good congratulations. So could you help me understand the way you would go about selecting the students for the, I want to make sure I understand how that would work. So, if you indicate you're interested in the flex program and you have more applications than you can handle, how do you go about selecting the student on that?

GARY: Yeah, that's a really good question. We would do it the same way as our other enrollments. So now students, when they register for a CRLA school, they have three options. That's what we have open right now. This would add a fourth option and it will fill up fast because I think our intention is to start really small, but it would fill up fast. And if there are

more that desire, then we have spots, we would hold a lottery for them just like we do with the other programs.

SHAW: Can I ask you, how do you have such, how is the word spreading? Is it just word of mouth? Are you doing anything to, I mean, how do you, I'm just looking at that 590 applications for 145 spots. How did that happen? This word of mouth and your reputation?

GARY: Yeah. I mean, I do think it's a unique educational program and when families are drawn to us based upon the vision and mission and the values of the school. And most of the time they don't understand what a classical education is, but once they enroll their student, they become believers in it and they share it with others. So, I would say it is definitely, it's mostly, I mean, we do social media ads, we go in magazines and things like that, but honestly, most of it does come through word of mouth, which is why you see concentric, our concentric circles are getting bigger and bigger. So, where we currently are, it's like they're telling, we can kind of see it over time spreading out.

SHAW: Well, I've been on the board here five and a half years and I get, I mean, I still feel a little new. I guess that's been a little while, but just thinking about remembering when we first started CRLA to now, it's just very satisfying, rewarding to me just to kind of see this growth already and just wanted to congratulate you.

GARY: Thank you.

BARKE: Dr. Williams?

WILLIAMS: I think this is something that's been coming for a while. I think you've observed that. We've had many conversations about the great demand upon this school, so I think this is a wonderful opportunity that you've given. So just piggybacking on what Tim was asking, so you have a process by which kids will be attending full-time Monday through Friday, and then you're going to fill that list, and then this becomes an option for those on the overflow list. Can you clarify my misunderstanding or lack of understanding?

GARY: As the program grows, it will get easier for us to absorb those that move off the list, but part of this will be communicating with those that are interested in our school early on. So, if this material revision is approved in February, we will send a broadcast message out to everybody that's applied to let them know that this program is now an option for them. And again, year one, maybe it won't absorb as much because we're going to start small, but as we grow, we'll have the ability to absorb more and more of that, but it's about communication with families and making sure that they know and we'll explain to them that they do have an alternative option if this is approved.

WILLIAMS: So, this is a hybrid approach. Would that be the term that you would use?

GARY: Yeah, I think so. We call it a flex program with two pathways. So, a hybrid pathway, which again, two days a week, full instruction, two days a week at home, and then the homeschool pathway is five days a week at home, but you come on campus once a week to meet with a teacher.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

BARKE: Well, I love the model. I'm not surprised at all at how successful you are because I know there's a demand for classical education. We don't have a lot of it in SoCal and in Orange County. So, I think that you really found a niche that's important. I love the fact that classical education is source documents versus someone's interpretation and I think a lot of families appreciate that. And I love that you're meeting the community needs with your new flex program. So, thank you and look forward to hearing more and learning more and seeing you again very soon.

GARY: Quite too much I know that.

BARKE: No, never.

VALDES: I think a lot of their success is the guy standing right there.

WILLIAMS: Gary.

BARKE: Yeah, of course. I didn't want to embarrass him and say that, but of course.

SPARKS: Jorge did.

VALDES: It's okay, so I will.

BARKE: All right. We are good? Yeah. Okay. Well, great. Thank you. I appreciate coming tonight and presenting and appreciate everybody else who came and I think we're now to the part of our meeting. Oh, I'm sorry. We still have number nine, Dr. Williams, a resolution.

WILLIAMS: Yes, thank you. So, this is a resolution that boy I put on 25 years ago and then it kind of got lost a few years back. And so now it's back on the regular agenda for the January meeting as the National Black History Month is in November, I mean, in February as we recognize it. So, the language is older. It's been around for a while. I'm always open to changes or suggestion if anybody is interested in modifying it, but I just want to thank you for your vote and support of this very important concept of where this month came from. It originally came, if you read the resolution way back 100 years ago, something like that. So, it's interesting the evolution. I think it's academically spot on and I thank you for your support.

BARKE: Okay. Wonderful. Anyone have questions? Any further discussion? All right, then all those in favor? Oh wait, did we ... I don't know that we have

WILLIAMS: I'll make the motion.

BARKE: Thank you. And a second.

SPARKS: Second.

BARKE: Okay. We have a motion and a second. All those in favor?

SPARKS, VALDES, SHAW, BARKE, WILLIAMS: Aye.

BARKE: Wonderful. Passes 5-0. Thank you. Okay. Now we are to the part of the meeting where we have informational items and love to hear from our board liaison, Brandon.

GUEVARA: Well, good evening, board trustees, board president, superintendent. Happy new year. I haven't seen you guys since last year. I know it's the first time you've heard that joke, huh?

All right guys. I thought it'd be appropriate given this is now my sixth presentation as the board liaison. So, I thought it'd be appropriate to give you guys a quick semi-annual review. The purpose of this review really is just in keeping with our emphasis on transparency and accountability, just provide a quick snapshot of progress over the past six months, highlight a couple of key milestones and achievements and trend settings and shared priorities and strategic direction moving forward for us in this position. Where we started six months ago there was, in keep in mind, this is not a criticism, this is context. When I was brought on, this is kind of what we looked at. We had a limited or emerging public visibility and outreach capability. Our communication tools are very much in their early adolescent stages. We, like Trustee Sparks says they're an innovative board.

We value innovation here and the board decided there was a need for a clear messaging and consistency and further outreach and transparency, engagement and awareness. So that's kind of what we came into six months ago and kind of what we set out to do given those realities, we wanted to establish a consistent and professional public presence. We wanted to improve our communication with our stakeholders and our community and our grassroots, including nonprofits, all those, our charter schools, our local public schools, all that good stuff. We wanted to increase awareness of the board's activities and their priorities. We wanted to create systems that are not just sustainable, but scalable to whatever month. If we have more things going on, we can upscale it or less things we can downscale it. And we want to align messaging with the board's mission and values and make sure that is portrayed accurately.

What we've accomplished in that six months, we launched and maintained and are continuing to maintain our new social media accounts, our newsletter, our quarterly newsletter. We've established, I believe we've established more clear and effective functions and expectations for the position in terms of whoever, if I maintain the role, if someone else steps into it, what's expected of that position, what's expected of that individual, what skills they are expected to have, what's expected of them in terms of representing the board, schedule, stuff like that. I believe we have improved clarity and accessibility of the board's information. You can now view agendas online, on Instagram, social media, you can view it through the newsletter. There are more ways than just the Orange County Board of Education website to view stuff like this.

We've strengthened our coordination and messaging to make sure it all aligns with what the board wants, their priorities. And again, we built a foundation for long-term engagement that goes beyond just my tenure, I should say. Really quick, very brief where we're heading. We want to continue expanding on this reach and engagement. We're partnering a lot with our media department, our IT department to use data to direct that views, clicks, information such as that. We want to continue refining our messaging based on this data so that it's see how we can improve and better send that message out. And we want to continue aligning, just make sure

everything's accurate with the information we're putting out for the board. And very briefly, if there's any questions.

SPARKS: I just have a comment. This is really cool because back again when we were first selected and then Ken and Mari and I were brainstorming the very small conception of this and it's still evolving obviously, but it's just so amazing to see it evolve, this position. And even when we appointed the position, was that last year, whenever it was. We didn't fully know, I mean, we had some ideas, but we kind of didn't know exactly how it was going to develop. And so, you've really evolved into it and you've really systematizing the role and I just really appreciate all the hard work you're putting into it.

GUEVARA: Thank you so much. That means a lot.

SHAW: When do you expect the next newsletter to go out?

GUEVARA: Quarterly basis. I might be exposing myself, but quarterly in terms of the years every four months, correct? Three months? Three months?

BARKE: Three months. Every three years. End of March.

GUEVARA: This one. Yeah. End of March. Yeah. Sometime in March.

SHAW: I know you and I had talked about the idea of kind of working more with our local districts as far as we can help tell their story, they'll help tell our story and having that synergy. And have we made any progress in that regard?

GUEVARA: Yeah, absolutely. So mainly that's going to be doing a lot through the mechanisms of social media and then using your resources as well, because I know you guys have a lot of resources with the superintendents, with the principals. So that'll cut back a lot of time for me. I don't need to reinvent the wheel. But yeah, there's definitely been some progress made on that in terms of story gathering. Essentially, it's highlighting stories and highlighting progress. If you read the, in the previous newsletter, like I said, we highlighted one of the charter schools has a transportation system, and so that's like an example of something we'll do for other schools as well. So, we'd highlight things like that that really exemplify what Orange County schools stand for and what the standard that we want to set and achieve with every school.

WILLIAMS: Brandon, do you anticipate or do we have currently a Facebook page or an Instagram?

GUEVARA: Instagram and X so far.

WILLIAMS: Instagram and X. Okay.

GUEVARA: We can discuss if you guys want to do other social media accounts, we could definitely add those to the document.

WILLIAMS: I think it's too much. If you just do those two, that would be fine.

SPARKS: Do people really use Facebook anymore?

GUEVARA: I don't.

BEAN: Hey hey easy now.

SPARKS: How old are you? I'm just kidding.

BEAN: Yeah, exactly.

BARKE: I use it as well. Well, I want to express my thanks. I appreciate everything you do and carrying our message and thanks. And I also use Facebook. I know. And I kind of feel like there's people who use it and as long as you're doing it, it would just be very simple to put it on there as well. So, I don't know what others think of that, but I always think the more the merrier, because there's some people that might only use Facebook and why not have a presence there?

GUEVARA: I'll take that and run with it.

BARKE: Because all you really have to do is like click a button, right? And it goes there as well?

GUEVARA: Well, the unique thing about them is they're, especially Facebook and Instagram, they shared on the same, it's called Meta. They're shared on the same kind of like, I'm not sure what the technical term is, but you can easily cross platform share.

BARKE: It. Yeah. So that's why if it's another minute's work, I don't know. I don't think there would be bad to be on there, especially since Dr. Bean is on there after all.

SPARKS: True, true.

GUEVARA: I'll definitely get on that.

BARKE: But in all seriousness, I appreciate your work in carrying the message. Thank you.

GUEVARA: Thank you.

BARKE: All right. We are now onto announcements. Superintendent Bean.

BEAN: All right. Why don't you want to reflect on a public comment that was made last month, I believe, heartbreaking story of the student who committed suicide. And I received weekly these flash reports of students across the county. And so, it made us really think at the department level, the whole idea around our 5-3-1 and our 5-3-1, that triangle called school and student safety. We have this amazing program at OCDE that we want to share with you. We think one way to really combat mental health is through prevention and being proactive and training our students and our peers. We have a program called Student Advocates for Mental Health, in which we support these efforts to have youths in schools lead the effort around mental health awareness, suicide prevention, and resources for wellness. Between 2020 and 2025, this program has partnered with 97 schools in 23 districts, serving over 5,900 student leaders we've trained.

And we have seen that when students communicate with other students, they encourage one another and they are better support in many ways than adults. And those student leaders have reached over 153,000 students in the past five years, including 23,000 parents and caregivers and then 6,400 school staff. And so, when we think about academic success, it really obviously starts with mental health, and I know that this board cares about mental health, and so just know that this is an amazing program that we want to continue focusing in on. However, the funding for this is actually ending in June. So just know though that because I know that the priority of the board is around mental health and suicide prevention, we will search for ways to continue this program. I wanted to lift this up in honor of what we heard last month and that was horrible, but know that we do have programs that do support our students.

VALDES: Can I ask a question about this, Dr. Bean?

BEAN: Yeah.

VALDES: It wasn't last year, it might have been two years ago, but we had a company who came here that was doing screenings at a reasonable cost.

BEAN: We do that Heads Up Checkup. We still have them. They're going to be expanding more than likely to other districts. It's a little bit of tailoring it to our program for ACCESS, but we're working on that. And actually Dr. Eaton might be coming in next month or the month after to share.

VALDES: Do we use that vendor?

BEAN: Yeah, we use them. We use Heads Up Checkup.

VALDES: Okay. Well, I would encourage you to continue whatever funding is necessary. How much is this going to cost?

BEAN: Well, I mean, we have one full FTE for it that works on this program. So, it's basically FTE.

WILLIAMS: Is there any more funding coming from the state for these?

BEAN: Not for this program, particular program, but we will find ways. This is priority. It's part of 5-3-1 and I brought it up as such under school and student safety.

VALDES: I think it's very important.

BEAN: Yeah.

VALDES: We have to know where our kids' mental health is when they're in our custody and care.

BEAN: Absolutely. So that's the report I wanted to give today just to share a little bit about that. I know that is a little heavy, but we are doing things to support our students across the county.

BARKE: Thank you. Appreciate that. Renee.

HENDRICK: Yeah, so a couple items. The next board meeting is February 2nd. The submission deadline will be Friday, January 16th. As a reminder, the 19th is a holiday, Martin Luther King Day. Packet delivery will be Wednesday, January 28th. And so also Dr. Williams had brought up quite a few questions to Dr. Bean and I know Mr. Valdes also had about charter school oversight. I'd like to kind of discuss a couple ideas that we have to see if that meets the board's needs. And so currently the charter group gives us reports twice a year. In the fall we receive the fall update, which is mostly financial in nature and it's telling them where we're at. And then in the spring is when you get their academic indicators and then updates of the budget also. But because we do have many districts coming up or charters coming for renewal, there is a renewed focus on the dashboard indicators and what that looks like.

We're wondering if you would find it helpful to get more timely reports maybe on a quarterly basis and that maybe we could tailor that to actions that would be highlighting some of those academic weaknesses. And so, and if they had, some of this also comes up during our annual oversight meetings with the charter school. We may see some deficiencies there. We're looking at their, the biggest ones tend to be the EL programs and special ed. Those are two biggest areas.

We are also giving notices of concerns during that time, asking for plans. We could probably flag those for the board and maybe you could have them come do presentations to kind of show what their path is. Also, if they are in the orange or red, we could highlight those for you and maybe have them come forward to give us what their plan is and do that to the board as a whole instead of it just being a written report. And so those are some of the ideas we're thinking of. Also, what we're finding is some people may have an increase in CAASPP scores for one year, but it doesn't hold. And then you see this downward. I think our concern also isn't just a number, but what is their trend line and are they improving and are they sustaining that improvement? We'd like to highlight those ones that are not able to do that right now either. We're wondering if that sounds appropriate, if you'd like to see more, less.

SPARKS: Are you doing that anyway?

HENDRICK: We are doing a lot of that work internally, but it's not necessarily coming to the board.

SPARKS: Yeah. So, I was just wondering, poor Aracely, we're going to pile a bunch of extra work on her. If you're already doing it, I think it would be kind of helpful.

HENDRICK: Yes, we do do a lot of this already, but I think it is just highlighting it. I mean, it's kind of a fine line we walk and we don't want to embarrass schools by any means. And sometimes they have stories they can tell to go with that, but it does feel like we don't want the board to be caught off guard as you're getting a renewal and we're showing you all this data also. We're trying to figure out how do we do that in a way that is meaningful for the board.

WILLIAMS: Part of the inspiration for this concept came from Jorge. We've had a couple conversations about the direction and academic scores of our charter schools. And I thought, well, there has to be a mechanism by which we can do this in a way that doesn't require us to be on this every month, but have a lot of the staff input that it comes to the board. When a school is

not performing well and they're in the orange and they're not in the highest category, we can have them perhaps come before us. I like the concept and I give credit again to my colleague, Jorge, for this. And through conversations with Stefan and Greg, this is something I wanted to present to the board to get the input. I think this is an important oversight protocol for us. I don't like it when charters like Unity come at the last summer and now there's an emergency, they're falling over the cliff.

I want to get to the bottom line before we get that far. We have a couple other charters that are almost over the cliff, and we'll be hearing from them probably next month. Okay. So, this is a mechanism by which we get the information earlier.

SPARKS: Do you think that quarterly is overkill, or do you think that's the right pace? Would it be, I guess what I'm thinking is quarterly too much or is that just the right amount or would it be like one in the fall semester, one in the spring semester, one in the summer? I don't know.

HENDRICK: Well, we already do fall and spring, but that doesn't seem to be giving.

SPARKS: I see.

HENDRICK: I think part of what could be helpful also is maybe like quarterly giving you all the notice of concerns we've issued, and then you'll be able to actually see those. And some of them are very simple, misassignments on credentials, things like that. And the schools rectify them as quickly as they can, but you'll also start seeing some patterns with that, right? If it's the same school consistently. And so maybe giving you, we have at times given you some of those when they've been multiple notices of concerns, but we don't do it for every single one, but maybe quarterly we can give you a recap so you're seeing that.

And then I think when the dashboards come up, I think actually hearing from the school of what is their plan to correct it. And so I think that could be very helpful. I mean, there's some other governance issues that I think we're going to try highlighting for you a little bit more because this is where we seem to be struggling with some of the charters is if their whole board changes or their leadership leaves, it creates a lot of chaos within that school, which then creates a whole bunch of different things, right? Making you aware of those maybe as they come up. And so maybe it's not quarterly for everything, but maybe highlighting things for you. And we could try something and see how that works for you. And if you want more than that, we will do whatever you need. It's just trying to synthesize in a way that's not too much, but also giving you enough information.

SPARKS: I like it.

VALDES: I like it. I agree with Dr. Williams, as I often do. We don't want to see a Unity coming here at the 11th hour when they're falling off a cliff. The issue of academic performance in the charters is extremely important to me. That is what I think our board not only does best, but needs a large amount of oversight over. We're essentially taking the responsibility of and overseeing 25,000 kids right now. When that number grows, as I anticipate it will, that oversight is going to be all the more important. So, I'd like to see their test scores. I'd like to see—if a teacher's not credentialed, I don't think, or they lose an accreditation and you think they're just

going to fix it. I don't think that's important enough for me to see it. So, I would ask that maybe you guys triage it a little bit more than that.

But if you see a red flag pattern in their test scores or something that they're clearly not doing, like enrollment, enrollment is going down, that's something I would like to see quarterly. I have no problem with that.

BARKE: Any other comments?

WILLIAMS: Tim.

SHAW: I don't have any comments on that. I did want to ask Renee a question off topic. Am I correct that it's this Friday the governor will release the budget? Is that happening in two days?

HENDRICK: Probably should, yes. Friday is the 9th, right?

BARKE: Yes, it is the 9th.

HENDRICK: Yesterday by the 10th, so yes.

SHAW: I think I read it was this Friday. And do we have any information on, I mean, last time I heard there was expected to be a pretty significant deficit that they'll be grappling with.

HENDRICK: Well, yes, the state budget has a huge deficit. Proposition 98 does not. So that's where we're going to see the song and dance starting about. What is Prop 98 and what's not part of Prop 98. And so the question will be whether he will ask to suspend Prop 98. I don't think he'll do that until later, honestly. I mean, Dave, he usually waits to do that closer to the day piece, but the state itself, yes, has a huge hole. But the way that Prop 98 is designed to protect schools, it is, and it's showing that there's actually more money for us. So, I don't, it all sounds good, but I don't know how he covers the other hole in the budget without increasing revenues in some format, which I hear there's some of those on the table also.

VALDES: Can I redirect the questioning a little bit, Renee, to our childcare reimbursement program, which I just recently found out about? So obviously the headlines are full over the last month of all this stuff going on in Minnesota. The president is now going to be looking very closely at California. Good governance to me means that we make best efforts to evaluate consistently within our Department for evidence of fraud, evidence of fraud from a vendor or somebody internally. Can you speak to, number one, what are the parameters of our child reimbursement program and then what efforts do we make to evaluate that the invoices coming in are appropriate services we're provided and that we're paying them properly?

HENDRICK: Right. It's a good question. And when you receive the budget, when you see that separate fund, that fund 12, that is our child reimbursement program. We are contracted right now for \$109 million, so it's a very important question to ask because it's a lot of money. We're probably not going to get there. That's what we're allowed to go up to. But last year, I think we were a little over 60 million. Now, a lot of the state funds, not federal funds, only about 20% are federal funds, but the way it works through us is Children's Home Society in the county is the actually lead agency. We are like a subcontractor to them. We both receive funding from the

state, but we really only reimburse. The parent has to qualify. They must bring in verifying documents. So they have to either be looking for a job, be working under the eligibility limits for money, for their salaries, or they have to be foster youth, or there's a list of items of where they fall in the priority, but we're not necessarily just paying a childcare vendor, which I think is kind of what's being accused in Minnesota, right?

VALDES: Right.

HENDRICK: If we're paying a childcare vendor, we have a parent who's qualified and we verified their qualifications. In addition, every month, a signed time sheet showing the hours their children attended are done every month. As our unit has gotten bigger and bigger over the last so many years, and so I would say probably about eight years ago, we were at 20 million, so that tells you the growth that we've had there based on Governor Newsom's universal childcare and all of that. We actually have a compliance unit now. We have four members that sit in that, and so it's a compliance and audit unit for our...

VALDES: Just for the child reimbursement program?

HENDRICK: Yes.

VALDES: We have four full-time people that just do that?

HENDRICK: Yeah.

VALDES: Oh, okay.

HENDRICK: And so that is to check all that and to be ready for an audit because we are audited both by the state and the federal government, and it is part of a single audit that we receive. We have a lot of things in place. I think it's interesting when you hear the stories from these other states, because I'm thinking, I don't know how in the world they could do that because it's so strenuous for us and we spend a lot of time and a lot of effort in actually tracking all of that stuff. And it's a big issue for us because you don't want the parents to lose the funding and we obviously don't want to be responsible for that either.

VALDES: Yeah, of course.

HENDRICK: But it is a lot of money, so it's a very good question, right? I think it is important for us to keep on top of that.

VALDES: You're comfortable that we are on top of that issue and we are not being duped.

HENDRICK: We do not see that. And I think that's under Dean's area and they spend a lot of time and effort doing that. I think it would be different if you didn't have all the requirements in place in order to see like the monthly time sheets, that would make me a little uncomfortable. I think I would feel uncomfortable paying somebody without seeing the proof of that. Nothing is 100% proof from fraud. I get that, but I think having this new compliance area is helpful to really be testing that. And we've not really had any findings in our audits, and so I think that's important also.

VALDES: Okay.

BARKE: Great question. Thank you. Appreciate it.

WILLIAMS: If I can piggy back on that question for Jorge, obviously this is a big national issue that we're seeing happening in Minnesota, and it looks like it's going to be heading to other states as this question is posed. In my 30 years I've been here, we've actually discussed this several times about these funds. For the record, we've never had anybody that's going forward and made the allegations of fraud, so let me just state that here to my colleagues. So yes, this has been an area that potentially can be and it looks like it's done in other states. Dr. Bean, you and I briefly talked about this earlier. Is there anything else that we should know about internally with our systems here that does potentially open us up to these allegations or someone accusing us of not doing our due diligence?

BEAN: Well, just know that Orange County Department of Education has been around since 1889 and throughout the decades have built very robust fiscal policies and procedures. In fact, developed a whole plan a couple of decades ago in which FICMAT obviously reviewed it. And obviously FICMAT is the organization at the state level that really looks into these fiscal policies and procedures. We have lots of safeguards in place from Dave's team to Dean's team to multiple teams underneath them to always constantly scrutinize every contract that comes in, vendors that work with us, programs in which we get funding for. And since I've come in, I've even putting the clamps on even greater in scrutinizing contracts and vendors, because that's where the rub happens, right? Some of these things. I'm even challenging our directors when they approve a certain grant. We just sat a couple days ago with a list of details in terms of this huge grant that we want to apply for.

So, we are constantly monitoring those things and there are safeguards all around. And that's why we have typical districts have Dean and Dave as one person, but we're a county office, so we have those roles separated. And so that gives us another layer of protection. I think it's a fair question to ask certainly about the childcare, and if this board requests it, we can certainly have Dean come in and share with you all the safeguards in place for this over \$60 million funding for childcare reimbursement. But as far as these other things, again, we are independently audited annually. In fact, you have the audit report here in your board packet and very heavily scrutinized as a county office, and we have to cross our T's and dots our I's. And that is one thing that I'm very impressed with on Renee's team, is how they do that. I'm very comfortable, but they also know that I'm watching myself because I know what could happen, and I also understand the business side very well.

HENDRICK: And I will say under the childcare team, they have found fraud from parents and they do turn them in and they do prosecute if needed. There are times, and usually it has to do with they've maybe not been completely truthful in their eligibility, like maybe lied about that they had a job that they didn't. And once we find out, not only do they lose their funding, but there's also a whole state mechanism to go what they have to go through. And so, I'm not saying it never happens, but we have a lot of things in place to try and catch that. I think the other thing that Dr. Bean mentioned is, because I think looking at the Minnesota stuff, it's a little, it's scary for all of us that work in the business because you're kind of like, "What did we miss and what happened here?" And so even during the COVID funding where there was a lot of money,

California was really strict on schools. So, any capital expenditure of \$5,000, we had to get approval for that before we could spend it.

And listening to some of the stuff that happened, obviously they had none of those regulations in place. They were pretty strict on schools. I don't know how they were with other agencies or things like that, but with schools there was a lot of built-in guardrails and you guys saw all the quarterly and monthly reporting we were doing during that time also.

VALDES: I'm okay if we have a presentation. I don't know how my colleagues feel about that.

WILLIAMS: I think due diligence and transparency is very important in what we do. And I think we've always been about that. We've always defined that and advanced that concept. Maybe next month?

BEAN: Yeah, we can have Dean come in and share the guardrail.

HENDRICK: And I think it'd be helpful too. It is a large program. I mean, the other thing is we're always looking for families to qualify and some people don't know that if you're a family of five and you make less than \$104,000, you'd actually qualify for subsidized daycare. It may do two things for us, right? Show what we do, but also explain how that could help some of our parents and families.

WILLIAMS: Brandon, did you hear that? That may be a newsletter.

BARKE: All right. Moving on, any legislative updates? Report, I don't think much has gone on since our last meeting with legislative just being back.

SHAW: The only issue that I learned about, I'm still getting my brain wrapped around is, there's under the federal tax bill, the big, beautiful bill, there was the ability that there was a change to the tax treatment of those who might donate to, I guess there's a whole category here, scholarship granting organizations or SGOs, and it's given better tax treatment. I think it becomes a tax credit rather than a tax deduction. If you were to donate to an entity that's turning around and giving that a scholarship to a student to attend a school or whether they're charging tuition, but the state has to opt in to participate under that. California at this moment in time has not opted in. So, I've been approached about how we, if we can exert our influence and somehow encouraging the powers that be to opt California into that program. So that was an interesting conversation I had this week and I want to kind of learn more about that issue. And I believe we're going to be discussing this with our state lobbyists coming up and so stay tuned on that one.

BARKE: Yeah. I mean, to be more specific, we have to get our governor to opt in. That's the powers to be, is simply letting the governor know and it affects all schools. It's really positive. It's a win-win for everyone. So hopefully we can move on that subject. Thank you. Board member comments starting with Dr. Sparks? No?

SPARKS: No.

BARKE: Trustee Valdes?

VALDES: I have some questions, particularly related to some of the public comments made by the teachers. It's more of a question of Mr. Giordano, if I could do that, if he could come up to the podium. First of all, nice to see you again.

GIORDANO: Good to see you, sir.

VALDES: One of the teachers in her public comment today said that we had \$19 million of interest coming annually or received last year. Can you explain that? Yeah. First of all, is that an accurate statement? And I guess she did some basic math and said that would mean we had \$4 to \$500 million sitting somewhere. So, I'd like to hear from you if I could like an explanation of that.

GIORDANO: Yeah. So, I think that the comment was fairly accurate in terms of the interest income that we earn on our deposits in the Orange County Treasurer's Office. When you look at our total reserves for our county office, it is, and I'd have to go and look at the budget book, but it's north of about \$400 million. We are earning interest on those reserves that are sitting at the treasurer's office. One of the things that we've been watching real closely, and we made an adjustment with our first interim report, is a reduction in those projected interest rates moving forward, because we all know what's happening with the Federal Reserve, and they've reduced rates now a few times this year, and with a change in the Fed chair coming up, there's a really good chance there'll be reducing rates moving forward. It wasn't too long ago where we weren't earning any monies on our deposits at the treasurer's office, earning just about nothing.

When you look at the interest that we're collecting on those reserves, there's a good chance that that amount's going to be reduced significantly over time. It's one of those things where you wouldn't build in ongoing expenditures against those.

VALDES: You would not project that annually?

GIORDANO: We do project the interest income annually, and we have projected a reduction from what we received last year, and we're projecting additional reductions moving forward because of federal interest rate projections in terms of reductions moving forward.

HENDRICK: So, Dave, I'm sorry, can you maybe just explain though, like for our federal dollars and things that we have that we don't actually get to keep that interest also, and if those are for grants, they get assigned that interest gets assigned to the grant. So, it's not just a free, explain that part.

VALDES: What can we do with this?

GIORDANO: Well, it's a great point because you're ... Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Hendricks. So, when you look at our operating budget, you can split that reserve up into your restricted accounts and your unrestricted accounts. We do have a big portion of that reserve that we talked about, that \$400 million reserve, probably over \$100 million that's sitting in those restricted programs. And those reserves, that interest that we earn on those reserves has to stay within those programs. And in fact, when you look at some of our title programs, they monitor that interest income that we're earning.

VALDES: So, when you say it has to stay within a certain set of programs, give me an example of a program that it would have to stay in.

GIORDANO: Yeah. So, like for example, our Title I program, right? So, when we receive monies from the federal government to operate that Title I program, if we have monies that are sitting in reserve, we receive cash and we haven't spent it, they track that and we do federal cash reporting and we'll actually owe that interest back and penalties. So, we have to track it very, very closely. And so those restricted programs operate differently than the unrestricted monies, dollars that we receive that are sitting on the unrestricted side of the budget. So, it's a really good point.

VALDES: So, I mean, I think the implication by that comment is we have \$19 million of interest coming in that we can do whatever we want with, and presumably assign it to the teacher salaries. You're saying we can't do that?

GIORDANO: Yeah, that would not be a best practice. On the restricted side, absolutely not. Absolutely not. We wouldn't do that, but yeah, we couldn't do that on the restricted side. Even on the unrestricted side, again, I guess the point I want to make is, is budgeting against revenue that could disappear in those out years and likely will, would not be a good business practice. That's not something that you would traditionally do.

VALDES: Another comment that was made by one of our teachers was that our ... I think I got it correct. Starting salaries for our first year staff is 28th or 29th in the county. Did I get that right?

GIORDANO: I'd have to go back and look at the salary schedule again and compare it to our analysis. We've got School Services of California puts out some great information in terms of comparisons. We can report back on that data at a future meeting. But when you look at our salary schedules, there's five primary steps. And the lower end of the salary schedule in terms of salaries, we are on the lower end for that introductory step. And so that's one of the reasons why during negotiations, that was one of the areas we wanted to put more dollars towards is that entry level steps to bring those entry level salaries up. When you look at the information that was presented tonight, one of the things you have to take a look at is not just the salaries, but you have to take a look at the benefits that are offered as well.

You have to look at total compensation. So even when you look at that, the introductory step, that step one for our teachers, when you add in benefits, we're actually still in that top tier. And so that's one of the things you always have to take, you always have to take a really close look at is the benefits.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If I'm looking for a new job I'm looking at salary.

VALDES: Last question.

GIORDANO: Yes.

VALDES: So, and obviously this negotiation's going on, but I have a genuine interest of where we are and where they are and what amount of money will bridge that gap.

HENDRICK: I'm going to cut in here because this is a collective bargaining. We have issued the FAQs. We are not going to be able to talk about that openly at this point. Okay. We are in impasse and mediation, but that is not, you are not part of the bargaining, unfortunately. And so, I do not want to get us in a part where we're in trouble, right? And so that could be from [inaudible words]. But we did send you the FAQs that are on the website. And hopefully that helps you understand where we're at.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you for asking.

VALDES: Okay.

BARKE: Okay. Board member comments, Tim?

SHAW: Sure. I just was able to attend an event this week. I was very happy to attend. I met a friend in seventh grade, Sanji. After high school, we were part of La Habra High School class in 1995. He went off to the Air Force Academy, graduated, went full time at the Air Force and he's been in the Air Force Reserves a number of years now. His day job is being principal of Buena Park High School nowadays, but he finally retired officially from the Air Force and the ROTC program at Buena Park High School held an event for him, recognizing his 25 years in the Air Force and I was able to attend and it was a lot of fun. So, Dr. Sanji Berg, my buddy from childhood, was officially retiring from the Air Force. I just was able to attend that and wanted to acknowledge him and thank him for his service.

BARKE: Nice. I'll just mention that I attended Sunburst graduation, which is always one of my favorites. So, it was as moving as usual and I love what our teachers doing.

BEAN: Sunburst.

BARKE: Sorry, Sunburst. I meant Sunburst.

BEAN: That's okay.

WILLIAMS: We know what you meant.

BARKE: Thank you. Yeah, Sunburst. Yeah, a little bit. A little bit. And that's all for me. Dr. Williams?

WILLIAMS: I have nothing.

BARKE: Okay. Well, I think we're ready to conclude. All right. Thank you for attending. We appreciate you being here.