

**SISAVATH:** Dr. Sparks?

**SPARKS:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Valdes?

**VALDES:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Shaw?

**SHAW:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Barke?

**BARKE:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Williams?

**BARKE:** No. Due about 4:00 PM. And before we make a motion to approve the agenda, I'd like to amend it because number five was settled with our inter-district transfer. I'd just like to amend the agenda to remove number five and then look for somebody to make a motion to approve it.

**SPARKS:** So moved.

**VALDES:** Second.

**BARKE:** Okay, great. All those in favor?

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

**BARKE:** Great. We don't need to do roll call because he's just missing, right? Okay. And then a motion to approve the minutes.

**SPARKS:** So moved.

**VALDES:** Second.

**BARKE:** All those in favor?

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

**BARKE:** Okay. We're all set. So now we will go ahead and go into closed session for the interdistrict transfers.

[The Orange County Board of Education goes into closed session and returns.]

**BARKE:** Welcome everyone. So great to have a full house tonight. Greg, do we want to have a report out before we start?

**ROLEN:** We can do a report out at the start or we can do a report at the end.

**BARKE:** Whatever you prefer.

**ROLEN:** Why don't we do it right now?

**BARKE:** Sure.

**ROLEN:** For closed session item number one, the board matter of anticipated litigation received information. No action was taken.

**BARKE:** Thank you. And next, I'd like to invite up Reverend Sarah Fiske-Phillips from Live Oak United Church of Christ in Brea. Thanks so much for joining us.

**REVEREND SARAH FISKE-PHILLIPS:** Good evening, everyone. As we begin, I invite you to enter in in whatever spirit you wish. If you'd like to pray, if you'd like to sit quietly, if you'd like to take a few extra deep breaths in a crazy week, please join me in a spirit of prayer. Holy one, creator of beginnings and endings. We pause tonight at the edge of another school year drawing to a close. There are signs of ending all around us, classrooms being organized, graduation gowns being ordered and hanging ready, teachers counting final days, and students carrying both excitement and uncertainty about what comes next. And so, we pause to give thanks. We give thanks for every lesson learned, for every difficult conversation that helped someone grow. For every teacher who stayed late, for every staff member who showed kindness, for every bus driver who carries children safely, every counselor who listens, every custodian who prepares spaces for learning, and every parent and caregiver who did their very best with what they had.

We give thanks for the students among us. Each one carrying their own story, their own hope, their own possibility. Remind us that no child is invisible and no student is beyond care. In the season of endings, teach us the wisdom of release. Release what has wounded our communities. Release our need to always be right. Release bitterness and exhaustion and fear. And where there has been misunderstanding, grant us patience enough to keep listening. Bless this board with the courage and humility as they make decisions that shape lives they may never fully see. Give them wisdom that reaches beyond politics or pressure and roots itself in compassion and fairness and the shared good. Bless our administrators and our teachers, our aides, our coaches, our librarians, our nurses, office staff, and every person whose labor often goes unnoticed, but that matters deeply to these places. Help us to remember that education is not only about information, but about forming human beings who know they are valued and capable and connected and dependent on one another.

May we keep building schools and communities where every student has room to learn and grow and become fully themselves. And may peace and wisdom and compassion guide us in all of the days ahead. Amen.

**BARKE:** Amen. Thank you so much for your words of wisdom. We appreciate it. Okay. And next I'd like to announce that the Sunburst Youth Academy Color Guard presentation of the flags followed by the national anthem, and then we'll have that followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**STUDENT:** *O say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming, whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight, o'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming? And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there; O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

**BARKE:** That was beautiful. Now I'd like to introduce a Cadet Rosales to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**WILLIAMS:** Big boy voice, if it's not working.

**CADET ROSALES:** If you can please put your hands right over your heart. 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. Thank you.

**BARKE:** Thank you so much Cadet Rosales.

**SHAW:** Your mic's off there. Your mic's off.

**BARKE:** Okay. Next, I would like to check with Renee for introductions.

**HENDRICK:** We do. We have one student with us today, Michael from Beckman High School, who will be auditing our class for his high school program. If you can wave, Michael, so they can see you.

**BARKE:** Welcome, Michael. And next, I'd like to invite the Freedom Committee of Orange County to the podium.

**WILLIAMS:** Jim, come on up. Thank you, President Barke. This is the 12th annual Jack Hammett, a Memorial Day contest that the board is putting on. And to read what has been written by these students that we have in our classrooms throughout Orange County, it's quite eventful. It's quite meaningful. And we're going to be awarding, I think three people. Is it Renee?

**HENDRICK:** We actually have three from alternative education, three from Connections, and three artists.

**WILLIAMS:** Okay. We have nine individuals that we're going to be honoring who participated in this essay. And the essay is about what does Memorial Day mean to you? And some of the essays and what they said are quite eventful, quite moving. And we want to give credit to the

Freedom Committee who inspired all this 12, 13 years ago. We have Mayor Jack Hammett, if some of those are old enough, you may recall that Jack was the mayor of Costa Mesa for many years, and he is a spiritual leader of the Freedom Committee. And for those who don't know what the Freedom Committee is, it's a group of veterans who participate in community education and they go out to schools, they go out to many organizations and they talk about World War II. Do we have any World War II veterans still left the Freedom Committee?

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Just lost our last active member. There are still some, but we lost our last active member in January, Bill Stewart. He lived on Balboa Island.

**WILLIAMS:** And then we have Korean veterans still in the Freedom Committee, and then we have Vietnam veterans. And we have the Iraq veterans too that are now participating. So, this is a committee that goes out and teaches the values of what it's like to be an American, the idea of freedom, liberties. And I'm going to be introducing Jim, who is, he's a former warrant officer with the US Army. He is a Vietnam veteran, helicopter pilot from 1967 to 1972, and a former law enforcement officer with the Orange County Sheriff's Department as a helicopter pilot from 1971.

**JIM:** LA County.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, LA County. Okay. I'm partial to Orange County. Okay. Yeah.

**JIM:** Madam President, thank you. And the board of directors, thank you. Ken, thank you very much. I really didn't expect to speak first, but as far as the Freedom Committee and what our charter is, is really truly to go to the schools, pass the living, the torch of freedom to the kids because they want to hear about our experiences. So, we try to tone it down a little bit so we don't tell the whole story, but we tell them enough to excite them about the military, because there's so many opportunities in the military today. It started with Jack Hammett, and I think that Scott Williams has a lot more to say about it than I do, because I met Jack on a fluke. I was invited by a World War II veteran to come to a freedom committee meeting, and this gentleman told me, he says, "You have to come and see this man run this program." This was Jack.

And he says, "The gavel hits at 12 noon," starts this meeting, and it hits again at 1:30, it's over. And that's how he ran his meetings. I think he did the same thing as mayor and probably some other things, but he was truly a leader in terms of what he did for us. Jack, when he passed the baton to Scott Williams, who will come up next, I believe, he actually came to me and he said, he grabbed me, he says, "You will support Scott, won't you? " And it was just the way he was. He was just the type of man who would say, "You will." And I said, "I will." So I became the executive VP for a number of years and Scott was the president, but we've passed that baton on to other people at this point too, because we are a growing organization and we have a lot of activities going on and I can't say much more really.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, the board is going to be honoring the Freedom Committee. We're going to be getting some pictures here in just a moment. I'll have Scott come up. But if I can, those young men and women who were just up here, they're from our charter school that is there in Los Alamitos at the Joint Command Center there. And to tell the story about each and every one of

them is truly an amazing story. What they've been through to get where they are, the good Lord knows he has their hand on them because some of them, most of them probably would be incarcerated because of what has happened in the past, but they're blessed to be able to go into a program at Sunburst and under the care of the great cadre that they have here, they have mentors, they have people who they can look up to and they get to learn values, they learn to understand what it's like, to love liberty and freedom.

And we have one of the best teachers and the principal here, we're so blessed to have you, but thank you for getting all your kids here, for educating them, to imparting upon them the idea and concepts of liberty and freedoms and what it's like to be an American living under a US constitution and a declaration that says all men are created equal. What you did is truly amazing. Thank you so much for that. So, I'm going to introduce Scott Williams. Scott Williams, when Jack Hammett passed away, took on the responsibilities of being the leader for the Freedom Committee and Scott himself is a former first lieutenant with the US Army. He's from UC Santa Barbara with a Bachelor of Arts. And I just learned this today that he graduated from law school at Western States University. I'm very impressed with that. So, Scott, if you can say a few words about Jack and what he represented in the Freedom Committee, and then we're going to get a photo with everybody.

**SCOTT:** All right. Thank you. I just want, as a disclosure, I just received my ballot this past week. Which district am I in? Costa Mesa.

**BARKE:** That would be my district, but I'm running out of [inaudible]. Nobody chose to challenge me.

**SCOTT:** Oh, okay.

**WILLIAMS:** I might get in trouble, dear council, if I may?

**ROLEN:** You're going to do it before I let you stop. Ask for forgiveness. Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. I'm going to ask for forgiveness, but we have one of the best county superintendent of education right here. He's on your ballot. Vote for him. Dr. Stefan Bean.

**SCOTT:** I've already marked it. Thank you. So just to follow up on the conversation, I appreciate the president and the trustees for running such a good operation in this district, so best of luck to you. So, Jack was very, very thorough and just to follow up what you said. So, he, at the board meeting in 2013, I think it was, he introduced himself as the chairman of the board, and so we voted and he became the chairman of the board, and I became the president of the Freedom Committee. So, he maintained the overview on the president until he passed away in 2014. And also, we had General Mall, who was one of our members. So, he told Bill Mall and also the same thing he told Jim that they're going to make sure we get through this. So, I was the president from 2011 until very recently. And I did, because of my law degree, I did was the creator of the bylaws and created the bylaws at no charge. We had two bids from attorneys, and it was the total amount we had in our budget. When we started the process of creating the corporation, we reported, I think it was \$6,535 for that year.

So let me proceed. Jack Hammett certainly was a very special person. In July of 2009, I volunteered to work shifts at the TNT fireworks booth operated by the Youth Services Association, because my son was a Boy Scout. The YSA was led by Bud Hole, World War II mustang pilot, United States Marine Corps, and Ted Marinos, World War II, United States Marine Corps. The YSA financially supported the local Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations from the proceeds of the fireworks. Bud and Ted spoke about another veteran's organization, the Freedom Committee of Orange County that was run by Jack Hammett. Jack Hammett, World War II veteran, United States Navy, Pearl Harbor Survivor, and the former Costa Mesa mayor. For those that you don't know, the Pearl Harbor survivor was in 1941 when we were attacked by the Japanese beginning World War II. The speaker that day was Herb Guinness, a World War II Army Air Force B-29 bomber pilot. Captain Guinness, the pilot, was 20 years old.

He told of losing power on a return from a bombing run and landing in the AGMC with nine of his 10 crew surviving the crash. So, they were responded by a GI fighter plane and were eventually rescued, but I'll have to tell that story later. Well, I was hooked by this story. I scheduled to meet Jack at his home in Costa Mesa to apply for military membership. Jack's den was converted into the Freedom Committee headquarters, two desks, two printers, and a computer. Jack was 87 at that time and worked circles around us 60-year-olds. He was passionate about the success of the Freedom Committee. I had just retired and I knew, I thought I was pretty sharp. I knew PowerPoint and Jack was already ahead of me, so I couldn't believe it. Jack introduced me to the love of his life. His wife, Mary Jo, who was bedridden due to Alzheimer's and her caretaker. Jack and Mary Jo were married for 70 years. Jack and Mary Jo adopted four children. The Freedom Committee vetting began with Jack's view of my military records, DD 214, and our Secretary Tim Richards, United States Army engineer and Freedom Committee secretary in attendance. The focus was on combat versus a rear area echelon. Now remember, we had World War II veterans, a lot of Air Force pilots, so they were all in the front lines. So, I had to convince him that an ordinance officer really does end up in the battle scene.

As an ordinance officer, my initial assignment was to the 709th Maintenance Battalion, Ninth Infantry, Dongtam, Makon Delta, South Vietnam, Freikorps. Freikorps was at the very bottom or the south of Vietnam. Shortly after that, I then went to a forward support company, Delta at Ben Luck. The unit had 103 soldiers where we provided our own defense twenty-four seven and slept in bunkers. Then I was accepted into the Freedom Committee. Jack was excellent at recruiting veterans and associate members like the ladies who provided office support and meeting organization and specialists like Ryan Custner, webmaster. And Ray Wong passed away in 2019, PhD Caltech, who improved our meeting sound systems and provided every meeting speaker with a copy of their presentation in a DVD, a disc or a thumb drive. And I've passed out—Jack had a baseball card that gave his name and then on the back of the baseball card gave all of his statistics.

Membership attendance quickly rose to 120 while school visits reached 30 schools with 10,000 students per year. The specific purpose of our organization is to enhance education of our community's youth through personal history presentations in schools and assemblies. Our promise to the schools, and this is our contract with the Newport-Mesa School District, our veterans are vetted. That means our president and a member of the board will interview them. The veterans will provide an official military record called a DD 214 or similar validation, and

they will attend the Freedom Committee Living History Speakers training at no charge and at no charge to the schools. The Freedom Committee of Orange County was incorporated in California as a public charity status. I won't give you the details. May 11th, 2011, Jack R. Hammett was voted by the board of directors to the chair of the board and with Scott Williams, the president in 2013. Jack R. Hammett passed away at his home on December 13th, 2014. Jack had gone to the hospital because he was in such bad condition, but he insisted on leaving and coming home to die at home, which he did. The city of Costa Mesa, all of our meetings were at the neighborhood center in Costa Mesa, and they knocked that building down and then we had no other place to go. We looked at the Orange County Fairgrounds Heroes Hall and OCC, but they could not provide facilities for our monthly meetings. At that time, we were having monthly meetings about 120 people.

The Freedom Committee brought, in 2019, the Orange County Freedom Committee brought the wall that heals, a two-thirds Vietnam wall replica to the Balearic Park April 11th through the 14th in 2019. The wall that heals honors the more than three million Americans who served the United States Armed Forces in the Vietnam War, and it bears the names of more than 58,000 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam. Harbor Lawn, Mount Olive Memorial Park and the Stanley W. Ekstrom Foundation provided financial support. Thank you. Orange County Board of Education for keeping American history alive and well with the 11 years of this event, Jack R. Hammett Memorial Day essay contest. Thank you.

**WILLIAMS:** Thank you. If the board wants to come down, we'll get pictures. And please come on up. Everybody. Thank you, Mr. Williams. And if you don't mind, just introduce yourself. Tell us who you are real quickly here.

**RAY:** I'm Ray Wallace, veteran of Vietnam, a military policeman, '69 through '72.

**WILLIAMS:** Nice. Thank you, sir.

**LUCKY:** Lucky Walsh, United States Navy. I enlisted in 1959, served till 1965 as a destroyer sailor.

**WILLIAMS:** Thank you, sir, for your service.

**TIM:** Tim Grimm, again, helicopter pilot, combat and instructor pilot, US Army. Thank you very much.

**WILLIAMS:** Sir, you're last.

**DWIGHT:** Dwight Hanson, United States Marine Corps '87 to '93, El Toro. But my oldest daughter's a captain airborne artillery jump master in the Army. My son was a combat photographer in the Marine Corps. My youngest will go to OCS this summer, so I'm way more proud of their service than mine. And thank you so much for having us here.

**WILLIAMS:** It's a pleasure and we get to honor some of the best here in Orange County. Pictures and let me get this to you, Randy.

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Three, two, one.

**BARKE:** Okay. Next, I would love to call up Analee Kredel, associate superintendent of Connections and Dr. Martinez-Poulin, chief of ACCESS to facilitate the Memorial Day essay and Art awards. Thank you so much. Thank you for your patience.

**KREDEL:** Good evening, President Barke, Board Trustees and Dr. Bean. As you said, my name is Analee Kredel and I have the privilege to serve as the associate superintendent of Connections. ACCESS and Connections students and staff deeply appreciate the opportunity for our students to participate in the 12th annual Jack R. Hammett Memorial Day essay contest. Students were invited to participate across both ACCESS and Connections. And this evening, I'm here to present the winners of the essay and art contest, which is our fourth year of participating with our Connections group for our Connections students. And I'm proud to report that we had 11 written essays that were submitted and 47 art entries, which is the most we've ever had, which obviously you can tell I'm very proud of. So, with that in mind, this allows us an opportunity to fully participate in this contest when it was expanded to include the art, as some of our students are more challenged in expressing in written form.

And so, they can respond to the prompt, what does Memorial Day essay mean to me through art. So, you will see that tonight. So, for the audience and for those that are not familiar with the OCDE Connections program, we serve approximately 350 students, including students with extensive support needs and deaf and hard of hearing students referred to us by all 28 school districts. And occasionally we get a student from the surrounding areas, but primarily our focus is on our 28 school districts and charter schools that make referrals to us. We have 13 school sites that are hosted on district campuses between Fullerton and Mission Viejo, and we serve ages three to 22. Before I introduce our contest winners, I would also like to take a chance or opportunity to introduce some of our Connection staff that are here this evening. So, all of our Connection staff, if you would stand and be recognized.

So we have our director, Kamika Barnes, our assistant director, Molly Fults, Christa Paul, principal, Richelle Garcia, who is one of our school psychologists, David Longo, principal, Ana Diaz-Millan, one of our assistant principals, Dave Van Sutphin, teacher, Kirsten, one of our paraeducators we're so happy to have you here. Laurie Drago, our teacher. And we also have a number of family members here. So, let's have a round applause for our families that we're here to support our students. So now on to our winners. So first I'm going to introduce the winners of our art contest. And you will see this is some amazing artwork. It's posted in the back and it's also in, Dr. Bean, it's in your remarks as well. So, if you have a chance, people can see it on the big screen as well. So, in our third-place winner is An Dinh from our Connections program at Hillview High School.

And his teacher is Erin Roe. Unfortunately, An was unable to attend this evening, but we will have his assistant principal, Ana Diaz-Milan come up and accept his award. Yes. Stay in position. Our second-place winner is Bryan Vera from our Connections at Golden West College. His teacher is Joe Arnold. So, congratulations, Bryan. Let's take a quick picture, Bryan. And our first-place winner, and again, I really hope you get a chance to take a peek at it before you leave. Our first-place winner is a little bit different. It is the students of Angelica Pulido's class at

Connections at Hillview High School. And those students are Redvine, Nicolas, Miguel, Rashi, An and Amin. And they all work together to create this amazing multimedia project. And so, it was hard to beat that. So, we're going to have Christa Paul, their amazing principal, and Ana. Come back up, Ana.

So super proud of the art, but equally is proud of our essay winners, including our third-place winner, which is Phelo Hanna from our Connections at University High School. His teacher is Laurie Drago who is signing for him and for the other students and his principal is David Longo. So please come forward. Congratulations, Phelo. And our second-place winner is Emmalie Echevarria from our Connections at University High School. And her teacher is also Laurie Drago and Principal David Longo. And I'm sorry to report that Emmalie isn't here this evening, but I think you're all going to appreciate this, that she's currently in Washington DC with our group of students that we send there and every other year. And she is with not only with her deaf peers from school, but her deaf peers from all over the country learning about our nation. So, I think she has a good excuse, but her mother is here to accept her award. And now our first-place winner is Savannah Henry, and she's from our Connections at Harbor Learning Center South. And her teacher who's with her this evening, Dave Van Sutphin, and the principal is Christa Paul. And Savannah is prepared to read her essay. Okay, that's excellent. Pictures first. Savannah. Okay, Savannah, we're ready for you. You're going to all be very impressed.

**SAVANNAH:** What's up, everybody? My name is Savannah. Memorial Day. Memorial Day is a day to honor fallen soldiers. On Memorial Day, I feel grateful for the soldiers for being heroes. The reason that I'm grateful for the soldiers is that they went into war to keep us safe. It made me feel sad for those who died in the war, but it made me feel safe because they did it for us. Memorial Day show us we can honor fallen soldiers that fought for us. When I think of Memorial Day, I think of what it was like during the war. I think of the risks they took. They made a sacrifice for their entire life for America. I think and hope they felt proud of their bravery. They risked their lives, but they were brave for our country. Country's freedom. I feel proud and thankful for the soldier's sacrifice.

**KREDEL:** Savannah. Congratulations. Congratulations again to all of our winners. And now I will turn it over to Maria Martinez-Poulin.

**MARTINEZ-POULIN:** Thank you for that. I'd like to say that ACCESS team deeply appreciates the opportunity for our students to participate in the annual Jack Hammett Memorial Day essay contest. This year, we received 64 submissions from ACCESS students, each one reflecting thoughtful perspectives, personal voice, and a deep respect for the meaning of Memorial Day. It was truly a pleasure for our team to read these essays and an incredibly rewarding experience to see the depth of reflection and sincerity in our students' writings. Opportunities like this are meaningful, not only for our students, but also for the staff who have the privilege of supporting their growth and amplifying their voices. We are incredibly proud of our students, as well as the teachers, administrators, and staff who support and inspire them every day. If our ACCESS staff are here with us this evening, I'd like to invite you to please stand so that we can recognize and thank you for your dedication. I see two of our teachers, Mrs. Pettite. I see Katherine Lu. I see. There we go. Sunburst. Excellent. Happy to see you. We also extend a sincere thanks to the board, Dr. Bean and the Orange County Department of Ed Cabinet

for your generous financial contributions, which make these awards possible and meaningful to our students. It is now an honor, my honor, to recognize the top three essays from our ACCESS program. Our third-place awardee receiving \$75 is not able to be here today, but I believe her teacher may be here. I'm not—is the student here? Awesome. I see you. Okay. Excellent. Excellent. And so, if we could have Rylie Garcia, student of teacher Kee at Harbor Learning Center South.

**SHAW:** All right. Congratulations. We wanted the teacher.

**MARTINEZ-POULIN:** Our second and first place winners awardees are actually from Sunburst Youth Academy. They are at Promise Youth who have volunteered to improve themselves, and I will share that it's a surprise. They don't know. They don't know that they're in second and first place. And so, starting with our second-place awardee receiving \$150 is Cadet Armando Juarez, student of Elizabeth Wilson at Sunburst Youth Academy. I want to also thank our teacher who was a big champion of the essay process. Teacher Mrs. Sydoruk. So, give her a round of applause. She did an amazing job helping us. We also have our military partners here with us. We have Sergeant Munoz, who's here. If we could give them a round of applause and Sergeant [inaudible]. If you could come forward, partners, come on up. Sergeants? Okay. Awesome. Okay. Excellent. Okay. And so, our first-place awardee receiving \$250 is Cadet Titus Foreman. Also, a student of Elizabeth Wilson at Sunburst Youth Academy. With that, I would invite Cadet Titus Foreman to come to the podium and share his winning essay.

**HENDRICK:** Can you just give us a second?

**MARTINEZ-POULIN:** Yeah, wait a second.

**CADET FOREMAN:** Good afternoon. I'm Cadet Foreman from Sunburst Youth Academy. The title of my essay is Beyond the Uniform. What is Memorial Day? What is the meaning behind it? To me, Memorial Day 2026 feels different. For a long time, this day was defined by the living, specifically, by my grandfather. But since his passing in 2021, after fighting pancreatic cancer, this holiday has shifted from a celebration of his stories to acquire meditation on his absence. As a 17-year-old young black men trying to navigate a world that feels increasingly loud and divided. I realized that Memorial Day isn't just about the old days. It's a modern living bridge between the sacrifices of the past and the reality I'm living now. My grandfather was my anchor. He was part of that generation of black veterans who served with a quiet, steady dignity, even when the country didn't always serve them back. When he died in 2021, it wasn't on a battlefield, but the discipline of a soldier never left him, even in a hospital bed. Watching him fight cancer was like watching his final tour of duty. He stayed strong for us until the very end. Now, when our neighborhood fires up the grills and the music starts drifting through the streets, I found myself looking at this picture in my living room, him and his military uniform with the flag displayed in the background and the memory of the 21 gunshot salute that was given to him at his funeral. He was and still is a well-respected individual. For many, Memorial Day is about the abstract concept of “the fallen”. But to me, it's about the specific faces of black men who fought for a freedom abroad that I often have to fight back once again when I got home.

My grandfather taught me that service isn't just about a uniform. It's about a commitment to something bigger than yourself. As I look toward graduation and my own future, think about the

weight of that. Being 17 in 2026 means I'm inheriting a world that's still wrestling with the same questions of injustice and equality in my granddad face. I think about the soldiers who never made it back to see the progress we made and those who came back only to be forgotten. To me, Memorial Day is an act of reclaiming that history. It's about making sure the names of our brothers and sisters who serve in silence are spoken out loud. Their sacrifices wasn't just for a flag. It's for the hope that a kid like me grew up with options they never had. The loss of my grandfather five years ago stripped away the "holiday" feeling of this day and replaced it with a sense of duty. I realize now that my life is a direct result of his resilience and the bravery of those he served with. Memorial Day is a reminder that my "today" was paid for by their yesterday. Today to be grateful, sure. It's also a day to be intentional. I owe it to him and to every soldier who never got to grow old to make sure my life counts for something. Thank you.

**WILLIAMS:** And that is the concluding portion of this program. To the Freedom Committee members who are here. That young man that you heard, that's because of your legacy, what you're sharing and passing down through generations. Mr. Foreman, congratulations. That was very touching. These men served before you and you're the reason in what you said was about them. And thank you so very much for sharing that. That's a very poignant story that you shared.

**BARKE:** Okay. I'd like to call for a motion to adopt the Memorial Day resolution.

**WILLIAMS:** Make that motion.

**BARKE:** All right. I have a motion. Do I have a second?

**SPARKS:** Second.

**BARKE:** And a second. Okay. Any discussion? All those in favor?

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

**BARKE:** All right. Passes 5-0. Okay. Yeah. We'll take a short break for anyone who wants to leave. Nobody has to leave, but we'll give you a short break in case you want to leave and you won't feel as though you're disrupting what's going on.

[The Orange County Board of Education takes a break and returns.]

**BARKE:** Welcome back. We're thrilled to have all of you here. And next up is public comment, and we only have six, so I guess we'll do three minutes each.

**SHAW:** Perfect. I will read a name. Who's going to speak? And then the second name is the person on deck. If you're the on deck person, make your way towards the microphone over there. And as a reminder, we are the Orange County Board of Education, so we ask that your comments be germane to education. That's our topic here. So, we won't go too far afield from that. We will be led off by Wendi, followed by Heidi.

**WENDI:** I'm always afraid I'm going to break that. Okay. Hi, my name is Wendi Eklund and I'm the director of Suncoast, the public charter school serving homeschool families across the county. I'm here tonight in support of this board and the charter schools you oversee and to speak against the JLAC audit initiated by Senator Umberg. As a charter school leader who works directly with the OC charter office, I can say firsthand that OC already provides strong and thorough oversight of its charter schools. The charter office conducts detailed fiscal reviews, annual oversight visits, governance monitoring, LCAP reviews, facility and safety checks, and ongoing accountability throughout the school year. In many ways, OC already goes above and beyond what many authorizers across the state are doing. What is especially important is that many of these practices were already in place long before they became part of statewide conversations around charter school reform and accountability. The oversight approach OC has been using already aligned closely with recommendations that were later made by FICMAT and with language proposed in bills like AB84, SB414, and the governor's recent trailer bill.

Discussions around charter oversight. OC was not reacting to political pressure or waiting to be told what to do. They were already proactively implementing strong oversight practices because they understood the responsibility that comes with authorizing charter schools. What concerns me is that this audit feels less about improving oversight and more about politics. This type of targeted legislative audit of an elected county board overseeing charter schools is unprecedented. It appears to be a broader political effort against the board members themselves and their voice for families and the school choice in our county. This board has continued to support educational options that families in our county are clearly asking for and need. And I appreciate you guys. Many of our families came to homeschooling through independent study charters because traditional systems were not meeting their children's needs. They deserve to have their choices respected and not politically targeted. From my over 12 years of charter school experience, I can say that the oversight here is already extensive and responsible. Thank you for your time.

**BARKE:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** Heidi will be followed by Ronna.

**HEIDI:** Good evening, esteemed board members and Dr. Bean. My name is Heidi Landgraf and I'm an education specialist with Suncoast. On behalf of Suncoast families and staff, I wanted to express our heartfelt gratitude for your continued belief in our charter school with the approval of our new county charter. Our entire school is bursting at the seams with excitement and gratitude for collaboratively working as our authorizers, providing strong oversight and keeping us accountable as a school. Suncoast staff continually hears how grateful our families are, that they are provided an environment through Suncoast that honors school choice, and now you've had the pleasure of meeting quite a few of our families. As a board, you believed in us every step of the way, and we truly value your leadership support and guidance as we continue to thrive as a community. I love sharing our journey along the way every month and reporting the exciting events happening with our school. Suncoast truly could not thrive as we do without your support. So once again, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

**BARKE:** Thank you Heidi.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Ronna will be followed by Rudi.

**RONNA:** Good evening, Dr. Bean and respected Board Members. I'm Ronna Yelin from the school support team at Suncoast, a non-classroom-based public charter authorized by the OCBE. We are supporting parent choice and education. I'm here tonight in support of the Orange County Board of Education and to express concern over Senator Tom Umberg's request for a state audit. At a time when families are worried about academic recovery, school safety, and the rising cost of living, it is disappointing to see taxpayer dollars directed toward what appears to be a politically motivated investigation rather than meaningful support for students and schools. The OCBE is already subject to public transparency laws, financial reporting requirements, open meetings, and elections. Board members are accountable to the voters of Orange County. If the public disagrees with the board's direction, elections are the appropriate place to decide that and not a costly state intervention. This audit will consume public money, staff time, and resources that could otherwise be focused on serving students.

Litigation and policy disagreements are not unusual for public agencies, especially when local leaders are advocating for parental rights and local control and education. Disagreement is not misconduct. Many Californians are growing tired of political theater replacing productive governance. Our schools need collaboration and solutions, not headline driven investigations that divide communities and waste taxpayer funds. I thank this board for remaining focused on the students and families who elected you to serve and for continuing to prioritize educational opportunity and local accountability. You're appreciated by many families, teachers, and administrators throughout the state. Thank you.

**BARKE:** Thank you, Ronna.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Rudi will be followed by Cara.

**RUDI:** Hi, my name is Rudi Krause. You want this speech to be related to education. So, it's related to education, Islam. What you don't know about Islam is that the Quran is written as a reverse psychology. It is not written to follow verbatim. It is a very dangerous book with dangerous ideas. Dangerous ideas. Dangerous ideas.

**BARKE:** Rudi, could you please stick to the subject matter of the meeting?

**RUDI:** I'm sticking to the subject of education and the dangerous ideas in the Quran and Islam which you teach. So, I reclaim my 10 seconds for your interruption. That's a postdoc fallacy, what you're dealing with. You sound like the two Capistrano Board of Education people.

**DEPUTY TONY:** Rudi we're not going to have you be in this room and insult the board.

**RUDI:** Okay.

**DEPUTY TONY:** If you're going to insult the board, your time is done.

**RUDI:** I didn't think I insulted her.

**DEPUTY TONY:** I believe you did.

**RUDI:** How?

**DEPUTY TONY:** And we're not going to allow that. So, no more insults, or you're done.

**RUDI:** Okay. And how much time am I on? Okay. Are you stopping it?

**DEPUTY TONY:** No, you're on a minute and 30 seconds.

**RUDI:** Okay. All right. But we're talking about, can I say dangerous ideas? Have you read the Quran? Do you know what's in the Quran? Of course.

**DEPUTY TONY:** A minute and 18 seconds.

**RUDI:** Okay. So how do we stop this dissemination of information of dangerous ideas that the Board of Education teaches to the elementary school students and throughout the entire United States? Man has no rights beyond reason. These ideas are not reasonable. They are immoral. You cannot allow pedophilia. You cannot allow people to spread hate speech like a convert or die. If you avoid that issue, then your omission of action is admission of willful participation. What we do, the only rational solution is to set up the congressional hearings for the Muslim ideology trials in Congress, where the Muslims' ideologies as documented in the Quran, that's what they think are called into question. And then psychologically analyzed with the diagnostic statistics manual for mental disorders. For example, convert or die homicidal ideations.

**DEPUTY TONY:** Sir, your time is done. Thank you. You're free to leave.

**SHAW:** Cara will be followed by Bill.

**CARA:** Do we need a moment?

**BARKE:** I think we're okay. Thank you.

**CARA:** My name is Cara Pettite. I am a teacher with the ACCESS Program. I am at Harbor Learning Center North. As you may not know, the site is called a hub. We have lots of different activities that happen there. We have our area administrative office. We have all of the area enrollments for students. For our site and four other sites, we have multiple classes. We have day school and we have independent study. We also have Skyview program that runs through our site. They have K through eighth grade. We also have Spyder Lab, which is really cool. It's a STEM lab. We've got other sites that also utilize it. In fact, some of the Sunburst students, they come and they use it as well. We have food pantry that's available to community members. We've got families, students who will utilize that. We also have a community boutique with clothing. We have diapers. We have hygiene products, backpacks, because we serve the community. We also host Padro Unidos, college and career fairs, open house, and other events for parents, again, for students as well.

We have a lot of people who come through our site on a daily basis. We're open from 7:30 to 4:30. We have people coming through our front office all the time, but for the past six months, we have not had full-time front desk coverage. It's been a patchwork quilt. We have administrative assistant. We have various paraeducators who are supposed to be in the classroom. We have our restorative justice person. We have program specialist. Our social service clinician steps in on occasion. Various substitute staff come in on occasion. We are the only area to only have one administrative assistant. Every other area has two. A couple of areas actually have three administrative assistants. We're not looking for more. We're not looking for more than our fair share. We're looking for equity in terms of our administrative assistant coverage. For six months, we have been requesting coverage. We've been asking for an additional staff member. For six months. This has not been resolved. Why? Why has this not been resolved? Thank you.

**BARKE:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** Last but not least, Bill.

**BILL:** Thank you, Board Members and Dr. Bean. My name is Bill Masters. I'm a resident of the city of Orange. I'm going to be talking to the camera up here. I want to talk to you dads that are out there. Are you paying attention to your children's education? Do you know what's being taught in the schools? Not all teachers are bad, but there's a few of them that are just like a cancer. And they're ruining the chances of these kids being successful at the direction that they're going to be going. The teacher's union is not your friend. Let me say it again. The teacher's union is not your friend. They have an agenda. Washington DC, you've got the Department of Education. What are they about? They're about money and power. There's only about 10% of the federal money that actually gets down into the classroom. Where's the rest of the money go?

Somebody's pocket. That needs to stop. Just like what they're doing with this audit. A half a million dollars due to an audit. That's a really good example right there. The wasted money. They don't want conservative board members like the board members here. Like they did with the city of Orange many years ago. They got rid of Linda, Marty, and Kathy. And they didn't like the conservative board members. Conserve means conservative, conserve money. Liberal means they just spend. I mean, and spend. Department of Education, once it's gone, okay, there's going to be plenty of jobs for them at waste management. Picking up garbage, because that's what they're doing right now is spewing garbage. I'm going to pick on one particular school district, okay? Orange Unified. To me, my daughter went there. I was a single dad. I raised her from the time that she was seven, a full-time single dad. I had a personal experience with a teacher that called me into her office. She's sitting there and she's—now this is a little over the top. She's wearing garter belt with no panties and she's giving me full view. That was gross. I could not wait to get out of there. Dads, you need to be paying attention to the education. What's being taught? Too many teachers are teaching hate speech. They're teaching words, but they can't tell you what those words mean. They just generalize everything and it poisons your children to make good, rational decisions. Lost my train of thought. Dad, just pay attention. Listen to your kids. Ask them about general questions about life and things that are going on. They can't tell you because some of the teachers are just not teaching it. Most of the teachers out there are great teachers, but there's the poisonous ones, the bad ones, and they just ruin it for the rest of them.

The other thing is once they're gone, those teachers, when they're gone, Starbucks, I'm sorry, I meant to talk about the students. Pay attention to your students because there's only so many jobs available at Starbucks.

**SHAW:** All right.

**BARKE:** Thank you. All right. So, let's see. Next, I'd like a motion for the consent calendar.

**SPARKS:** So moved.

**BARKE:** Is there a second?

**SHAW:** Second.

**BARKE:** All right. All those in favor?

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

**BARKE:** All right. Any opposed? Okay. Passes 5-0. Renee, do we have any charter submissions?

**HENDRICK:** We have none today.

**BARKE:** Okay, wonderful. And Aracely, would you like to come up to facilitate our charter? Thank you.

**CHASTAIN:** Good evening. President Barke, Trustees and Superintendent Bean. The board will now conduct a public hearing on the countywide charter petition submitted by California Online Public Schools, Southern California. CalOPS Southern California proposes a non-classroom-based program serving students in transitional kindergarten through grade 12 for an initial charter term from 2026 to 2031. The charter operator notified seven school district of intent to open facilities, Buena Park, Brea Olinda Unified, Capistrano Unified, Fullerton, Fullerton Joint Union High, Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified, and Newport-Mesa Unified. The public hearing is being held pursuant to Education Code section 47605.6 to consider the provisions of the charter petition and the level of support for the proposed countywide charter. Prior to public comment, representatives from CalOPS Southern California will have up to 15 minutes to address the board. I invite the petitioners to the podium.

**RICHE:** Well, thank you very much for the opportunity this evening. President Barke, Board of Trustees, Dr. Bean and staff. We appreciate the time and we value the opportunity. As mentioned, we are here representing CalOPS and our countywide petition. We are currently chartered with Capistrano Unified. We've had a wonderful relationship with them and we are looking forward to the possible opportunity of getting to work with you. With us tonight—well, first of all, I am Richie Romero, co-superintendent. With us tonight, we have Leslie Dombeck, director of educational services, Dan Hertzler, director of operations, LaChelle Carter, director of finance, and Mackenzie Duran, director of student services. As you can see on this screen, we have our mission written out in words, but I will save you the trouble of reading, and I will show

you that our mission is truly those pictures. It is those students that we serve every day, helping them to maximize their potential. Here is a brief timeline of our charter. We are actually 20 years old. We started in June of 2004. In June of 2009, we had 14 graduates. If you fast forward to this June, we're looking at almost 700 graduates from our program. We are actually a network of six charter schools that serve 32 counties throughout the state of California. Our largest being this charter here, currently with Capistrano, looking to move to the county. And we operate under a shared use model, which may bring questions later.

This slide is just to give you an idea of the staff that we have on hand. We are a traditional school district. We basically have every particular job category that you would have in a traditional school district, except maybe janitorial and maintenance and operations, being that we are an online school. If you were to ask us what a day in the life is for our students, it's varied. That's why we have here multiple pictures showing you the different activities and opportunities that we provide for our students and families. But we have prom, we have graduation, we have field trips, we have all of the things that a traditional school would have. This next slide is to give you a feel for where our students live throughout our attendance area, which is Orange County and the contiguous counties. As our CBEDS in October, we had approximately 4,400 total students, or rather almost 2,600, receiving free reduced lunch through almost 350 EL students and about 2,700 unduplicated students. The next slide is going to give you a breakdown in pie chart form, one of my favorite chart forms. On the left, you'll see a chart that gives you basically the percentage breakdown across our grade levels, about 25% in elementary, 25% in middle and 50% and high. The middle gives you our race and ethnicity breakdown. And on the right, you'll see we are honored to serve almost 20% of our population are students with IEPs. With that, I will hand it out to our next presenter.

**MACKENZIE:** Hello. My name is Mackenzie Duran and I'm the director of student services here. I'm going to share more with you guys about the students that we support. We serve a wide range of diverse learners, ensuring equity and access to all learners, including students with disabilities. Our special education population is, like Dr. Romero said, almost at 20%, representing over a thousand students. We prioritize the least restrictive environment for all of our learners and make sure that our students are supported along the full continuum of services. While our model is primarily online, it's not one size fits all. We meet students where they're at, adapting supports to ensure meaningful access and progress. And when appropriate, this means we provide services in person to make sure that students are getting what they need. We do this through a blended support model of internal providers and external specialists.

In addition to our students with disabilities, we also serve English learners within our model. Students receive both designated and integrated ELD to build listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students also receive English language support tailored to their grade level and language proficiency. Throughout the week, they have opportunities to attend Culture Cafe, which is a safe, supportive space where English learners can practice their speaking and listening skills in a low stress environment. Throughout the week, they also receive targeted instruction and core subjects, and our ELAC committee, our English language advisory committee provides an opportunity for parents to advise the school on programs, services, and policies that support the academic success and language development of our EL students. Additionally, we also support students in temporary living situations. Students experiencing housing instabilities are

quickly identified through enrollment, staff referrals, and data review. Through this, we are able to provide targeted academic, social, emotional, case management supports based on the level of student need. We do this through a coordinated team approach, which includes our social worker, our interns, and our site liaisons who collaborate, monitor, follow up, and support students across all of our grade levels. Additionally, we also make sure that our families have the resources that they need. This can include internal access to our resource hub, 211, FindHelp.org for housing, transportation, and basic needs. And throughout all of this, there is ongoing tracking of engagement and outcomes to ensure that we're guiding specific interventions to support our students. Thank you. I will pass it on.

**LESLIE:** Hello there. I'm Leslie Dombeck. I'm the director of educational services, and I'm going to talk to you more about our instructional program. Our instructional program is supported by a streamlined set of aligned platforms, oh, sorry. Switched the slide. That ensure consistency and access across all grade levels. These tools are intentionally selected and to support instruction so teachers can focus on meeting student needs. This alignment allows us to provide cohesive and predictable learning experiences for all students. There we go. There's our instructional programs. Switch over to the next one. Our instruction is grounded in California standards, ensuring all students have access to grade level content. With that structure, we personalize learning to meet individual students' needs. Teachers use ongoing data and progress monitoring to adjust and provide targeted supports, ensuring access and growth for all learners.

To support this model, we use consistent assessment and progress monitoring. Students complete diagnostics and interim assessments three times per year with about 95% participation. This data feeds directly into our PLCs where teachers collaborate and adjust instruction in real time. We also maintain strong student engagement with synchronous instruction to ensuring students stay connected and supported. Our data shows strong academic growth with significant gains in both ELA and math. At this time, our CAASPP participation has increased significantly from the low 70% to around the high to mid 90% in the year 2025. Reflecting strong systems and access, these results demonstrate not just improvement, but accelerated progress towards standard. When compared to the state, we see clear strengths and focus areas. Our English language learner progress exceeds the state, and we are making gains in math as we work close to close that gap. Our graduation rate remains stable while chronic absenteeism and college career readiness are key focus areas for us. Our partnership with OCDE through differentiated assistance supports that targeted work. Our data reinforces both our progress and our priorities. Chronic absenteeism in college and career remain key focus areas. At the same time, we are seeing strong academic growth and high levels of engagement across our systems. Programs like project success are supporting credit deficient students with a 96% pass rate, and our diagnostic data shows students moving into tier one over time. Overall, our aligned systems are driving both engagement and academic growth. I'll pass it along.

**DAN:** Good evening. My name's Dan Hertzler. I'm director of operations. Good to see you all again, and I'm glad to be here. Input from our families is extremely important to us. As a virtual school, support from parents and learning coaches is vital, especially when it comes down to our younger grades and grade levels. We seek feedback from our families on a regular basis, and the results for our past two years of our YouthTruth survey can be found here. Not only have we outperformed what YouthTruth describes as a typical California school, but in the past two years,

and we've outperformed ourselves this year in our recent survey, so we're very proud of that. We have an enrollment team of about 15 employees that work internally and are often the first contact that our parents that are seeking to enroll with us or come to contact with.

We strive to provide a best customer service as possible for our families and are proud of our less than two-minute wait times for the families that do call in for support. Our annual enrollment opens in the spring and generally runs through late fall. We intentionally start our school year the day after Labor Day, which is usually after most schools start, to give students an opportunity to still enroll with us if they do need a separate choice or something different. Graph here shows the enrollment counts over the last 20 plus years on our CBEDS count day in October. Seeing as how we do not have a building that families can go to or the general neighborhood recognition of a neighborhood school, we drive awareness and enrollment through all digital platforms. Search engine optimization, digital platforms and social media advertisements are key. We are in peak marketing season for next year already, and we've had millions of impressions on various platforms over the last 90 days. All of these marketing platforms actually drive our families to our website. Our website is robust, has a multitude of information about our school, what's it like to be a day in the life of a virtual student, as well as resources for prospective and current families. All the lately required notices is there, as well as this is the focal point for our enrollment process. Our next slide here actually has about a one-minute marketing video that I'm going to, for the sake of time, pass over, but you guys can watch at your leisure.

And finally, here, I want to talk briefly about our plan and strategy for enhancing our program through a countywide benefit charter with the OC Department of Education. As a single district authorized school, we can serve students in Orange County and we can serve students in adjacent counties like Dr. Romero spoke of earlier, but what we can't do is operate resource centers outside of the district boundaries of Capistrano Unified. With a vast number of students residing outside of Orange County and not within close proximity of Capistrano Unified, we've never really even entertained the idea of having a physical site as a virtual school. As we started to ponder this opportunity of a countywide with the Orange County Department of Ed, the potential opportunities for building our career and technical education programs, offering in-person services more easily for special education students who need them, as well as having a community hub for student socialization, started coming to light, and really the next iteration of student support at CalOPS started to really come into focus. So, as you can see on this slide, we're proposing to open resource centers over the next five years that are strategically located across Orange County, where students who reside both in and outside of Orange County would have access to these resources that we would be able to provide. So, from here, I'll pass it over to LaChelle Carter.

**LACHELLE:** All right. Thank you, Dan. All right. So, for the sake of time, I'm going to try to simplify all of these numbers. So, if we start with our middle section and goal, that is our current financials as a second interim. So that's where we're at. If you move over to the orange, that is the past. And our blue section is what we're projecting as the future that is based off of our graduating classes, our data surrounding retention rates, as well as our expected to return rates. Overall, that slide and this current slide shows that we spend less than what we bring in, and that is on purpose. Our school focuses on the expenses from a shared model, meaning that we're able to expense our allocations across our network of six schools to maximize the resources across

our total organizational population. In that, we focus on expenses that cater to our students and our families so that they can get the best service possible in every area. And I will pass it along.

**RICHE:** Well, to conclude our presentation, I'd like to give you three points. We feel like we are worthy of your vote because we have a student center approach, a proven track record, and a foundation for the future. We thank you for your time and we appreciate it.

**BARKE:** Thank you for the presentation.

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

**SHAW:** All right. We got 15 minutes set aside for this and 14 speakers. So, I think it's...

**BARKE:** A minute each.

**SHAW:** We're just going to do a minute each, and so I'll call a name followed by who's on deck. All right. Santino will be followed by Heather.

**SANTINO:** Testing, testing. I'm ready to speak. Good afternoon. My name is Santino. I'm currently in seventh grade, and this is my second year with CalOPS. I like to share a few words on how CalOPS has helped me in my educational life. Firstly, being in an online school has made sure I don't have to deal with the distractions I would usually deal with in public school. I essentially like loud noises in the cafeteria or any potential drama I might encounter. Also, its flexible schedule has allowed me to do my courses at any time I wish, and this has worked to my advantage as I've been able to visit relatives who live far away as I can bring my school with me. Also, it's allowed me to take up a bit of a side gig in background acting. I'm actually doing a commercial tomorrow, and its flexible schedule has actually allowed me to attend this very board meeting. That's all I have to say. Thank you for listening.

**BARKE:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** Heather, followed by Kristen.

**HEATHER:** Hello. My name is Heather Tamayo, and I am the middle school principal. I thank you for your time and consideration this evening for our amazing school that I have had the honor to work at for the past 14 years next month. Having come from a brick and mortar campus and experienced some of the limitations and restrictions that are placed upon us in dealing with some of the issues that we know that we face in this day and age, it is a pleasure to be part of a school that provides a home for children who may be that square peg that you're trying to fit into the round hole of a campus and they don't feel like they have an educational home. We are able to provide that to thousands of children and we support kids from the student who has special needs through their IEP to the child who is excelling and looking for more and wants to explore more through their academics or outside interest. Thank you for your time. I appreciate you all immensely for considering our school.

**BARKE:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Kristen, followed by Rebecca.

**KRISTEN:** Good evenings. My name is Kristen Roberts and I'm a senior here at California Online Public Schools. When I first enrolled, I did not quite know what to expect considering I was coming from a private high school. I grew ecstatic to learn that CalOPS' flexibility makes it excessively more beneficial. Their individualized learning pacing system allows me to balance my personal and academic life. I utilize the abundance of personal time to babysit, tutor, foster charities, and co-own a bakery business with my twin sister, all while excelling in my classes. I also utilize the time to earn over 250 service hours in the Gold President's Volunteer Service Award. I completed an individual service project in CalOPS' National Honor Society where I created a Bright Children's Club nonprofit organization at my former elementary school. I highly relish impacting my community. California Online Public Schools boost independence, allowing students to learn in a comfortable environment. Because of CalOPS, I get to share a piece of myself with the world. A beautiful experience every student worldwide deserves to encounter. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Rebecca, followed by Jorgelina.

**REBECCA:** Hi, I'm not used to talking to adults. I normally talk to the youngest students. I'm a TK teacher, so I prepared a little thing for tonight. I'm really proud to be in my 18th year of teaching, and I truly feel like I've found my home at California Online Public Schools. In fact, I felt a lot of pride watching our presentation tonight. Over the years, I've had the joy of teaching second grade, kindergarten, and now transitional kindergarten, and each step has deepened my passion of early learning. What I love most about teaching TK, now being part of those very first school experiences, it's where curiosity begins and confidence grows, and students start to see themselves as capable learners. In an online public charter setting, I get to partner closely with families and create flexible, meaningful learning experiences that truly meet each child where they're at. And I still get to maintain that high quality of education guided by our California state standards. I believe strongly in school of choice because every child learns differently. Oh. I had more, but thank you so much, everyone. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Jorgelina, followed by Austin.

**JORGELINA:** Hi, my name is Jorgelina Corral. I am a middle school math teacher at California Online Public Schools, and this is my fourth year with CalOPS. What keeps me here is not just what we do for students, but how we do it. I feel deeply supported by our administration to innovate, to lead, and to truly meet students where they are. And that support allows me to focus on what matters most, which is providing a high quality, equitable education to every single student I serve. In my classroom, that looks like students revising their work. It looks like learning from mistakes and continuing to learn until they reach mastery. It even looks like flexible structures that allow students to keep working and learning even when life doesn't follow a traditional schedule. And it looks like building relationships so students feel safe enough to come to class, to show up, ask questions, and keep going. Our students are not one size fits all, so

neither is our school. We are intentional about creating access, honoring students' experiences and holding high expectations. I also had more, but thank you so much.

**BARKE:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** One minute does go by fast. Austin followed by Ethan.

**ETHAN:** Good evening, everybody. I'm Ethan Davis. I've been in CalOPS since I was in third grade, and this year I'll be finishing up fifth grade. Now this is my brother, Austin.

**AUSTIN:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Austin Davis. I've been with CalOPS since I was in TK and now I'm going to be in first grade.

**ETHAN:** I just want to thank our parents for enrolling us into this school because we get to learn how our brains like to learn. We also get to learn in different places, not just at a classroom. We can learn at our house. We can learn in an airplane, sometimes even the cruise ship. Now you also.

**AUSTIN:** I like it because I get to spend time with my family like play with my brother and my dogs at, and that's it. Thank you.

**SHAW:** All right. Jennifer, followed by Beth.

**JENNIFER:** Okay. So, I'm going to focus on staff and then student relationships. I guess I have 30 seconds for each. So, I started my journey at CalOPS in 2013. I was a science teacher and I've been a high school assistant principal for the last five years. And not to sound corny, but as far as the staff, I have honestly never worked somewhere this amazing. Not one day goes by that I am not grateful to be in this job and at this school. I've been mentored by so many amazing people, some of which are in this room, and I have some also lifelong friendships. One of my best friends is also in this room. So, I know that's something we hear from the staff often is that it's just an amazing, supportive place to work. As far as the students go, some highlights for me are working with our CHAMPS population, which are the moderately credit deficient students to get them back on track. And then new this year, I'm running all of our in-person It's an events, which has been a fun new challenge. So, I think that's it. I did it.

**SHAW:** All right. Beth, followed by Saul.

**BETH:** Good evening. My name is Beth Probeus and I've been a middle school homeroom and English language arts teacher at CalOPS for the past 11 years. I've also worked with our middle school's volunteering club with some of our speakers here tonight, the National Junior Honors Society. My parents and grandparents were also public school teachers here in Orange County. My mom actually taught with Orange County Department of Ed for 35 years in what was once known as Horizon and then called ACCESS. And that independent study program has proven itself to be an essential option for students. And our school is too. I'm here to share why schools like ours matter, not just for teachers, but for the students and for the families across this county and state. In our online model, I've been able to build deep, meaningful relationships with my

kids and their parents. I'm running out of time. I'll just say I love our school and it is an essential option. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Saul, followed by Shannon.

**SAUL:** Good evening, Trustee Members. I want to take a different approach with how I've come to embrace CalOPS. As a first generation Mexican American, I got to serve as a student teacher at Santa Ana Unified School District. I really appreciated everything they did for students, how they embraced that culture. And I think that's what we really strive for at California Online Public Schools. We not only recognize a student and where they come from, but we embrace that and encourage them to share that. The Culture Cafe is just the opportunity for them to grow, for them to just share their beliefs and just basically provide a sense of community. As a high school, we provide them with multifaceted directions. From students that are going into the workforce, to students that are going to military, to students that are college or university bound. We try to make all the support very individualized and very directed towards what that student needs to succeed in life. Thank you for your time.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Okay. Shannon, and I don't know what this card is. It's 558 Tri Net.

**SHANNON:** Anoxx. It's my son.

**SHAW:** Okay.

**SHANNON:** My name is Dr. Shannon Decker. I have a PhD, a double MBA, and two masters in education. I'm also a formal high school teacher. I taught English and history to ninth, 10th, and 12th graders, and was an administrator for 15 years. Today, I'm CEO of a company, but I still serve as adjunct faculty, mentoring doctoral students in the field of education. I shared this with you because this is the lens that I applied when determining where I would send my children to school. And so, we've been at CalOPS for over four years. My daughter started as a freshman. I'm happy to say that she's a graduating senior attending the pre-med program in UCLA in the fall. I also have three boys that attend in the 10th, eighth, and fifth grades. Two of my children have IEPs, and so I can definitely appreciate the ability for CalOPS to be able to provide for diverse student needs. I know a criticism of charter schools is both academics and socialization, but I can tell you, as an experienced educator, I have not felt any limitations in that area. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Thank you. I'm going to say Shannon's son, followed by Ashley.

**ANOXX:** Good evening. My name is Anoxx Decker-Knealing, and I'm a student at California Online Public Schools and vice president of our National Junior Honor Society chapter. CalOPS has become a place where I've been able to grow and take on responsibility. Through NJHS, I've served my community, represented my peers, built confidence in my leadership. I also play travel hockey, and the flexibility at CalOPS helps me balance school and my sport, improving me both academically and athletically. CalOPS is special to me because of the teachers who care and the students who support each other. As an eighth grader, I feel prepared for high school,

academically, mentally, and socially. I'm proud to represent my school, and I'm grateful for the difference CalOPS has made in my life. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Ashley, followed by Lauren.

**ASHLEY:** Good evening. My name is Ashley Taylor. I am one of three elementary assistant principals at CalOPS. This is my 13th year with the school, 18th year in education. I've also worked in public schools and private schools as well. One of the greatest things I've witnessed at CalOPS is creating an environment where children thrive through strong relationships with intentional support and systems put in place and meaningful family partnerships. I think that's one thing that's really special about our school is we partner with the whole family to ensure that the child is supported in every way possible when they're enrolled in our school. With that, families are active and ongoing as a part of their child's education, and we honor and look for open communication and constant communication with parents to ensure that we're doing everything we can so that their child thrives and is successful in our school.

**LAUREN:** Hi, good evening. My name is Lauren Weed. I am currently a middle school assistant principal and I've been with CalOPS for 17 years and some change. I've had the privilege of working at elementary. I was a high school assistant principal, and like I said, now on the middle school team. It really is, I want to echo what some of the other people have said, like a privilege to work as part of this school staff. I want to spend some time talking about our students and that a lot of times people will ask what's your average student? We really do not have an average student. People choose our school because they have a unique need. People who choose CalOPS, they are not choosing us because of a preference. They are truly choosing us because it's a need. And I work with these families daily and a lot of our families have a lot of complicated needs and they need the distractions eliminated to be successful and focused on their education. So, thank you. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Madam President, that was the end of our comments.

**BARKE:** Wonderful.

**CHASTAIN:** The public comment period is now concluded. The staff report will be published by May 19th and the board will take action on June 3rd. President Barke, I now close the public hearing and return the meeting to you.

**BARKE:** Thank you so much, Aracely. I'll start with Dr. Sparks.

**SPARKS:** A couple things, a couple comments and then a couple questions. The comments are, I love hearing from all of you all with your public comment and I loved hearing that you're supporting the entire family. I think that's so important that you're not sort of singling out the student and not thinking about the greater system that he or she or they are a part of. And so, I really appreciate you saying that that's a big part of the way you approach student learning and outcomes. Next, I have a couple questions for the financial gal. What was your name?

**LACHELLE:** LaChelle.

**SPARKS:** LaChelle, would you mind coming up for a second? And pulling up her presentation, her PowerPoint, if you remember, it's the financial one. Yeah, if you go backwards. It was like about the third slide in from where you started.

**RICHIE:** These are the two.

**SPARKS:** Okay.

**RICHIE:** Do you want this one or the other?

**SPARKS:** No. That one. That one. Yeah. Okay. So, I'm curious about under the surplus from '26-'27, I see 52 and then \$52,000 change. And then 2027-28, I see \$2.2 and then \$2.8. Can you explain that big jump or what's going on there?

**LACHELLE:** Yeah. So, this year we have, as stated, we have a large graduating class. So, when we looked at the projected ADA, we consider factors like our graduating class, our intent to return, as well as our conversion rate of prospective students. And so, we're still early in that process. We're always conservative in our budgeting. We've seen impacts in '24-'25 where we had a little dip, where it has been helpful to be more on the conservative side since we don't have all the data just yet. So very conservative for our enrollment to start the '26-'27 school year, considering the factors that I stated before. But historically, our So Cal school has experienced growth, and so that's why you see the continued jump of once we start settling back into our historical trends, that we'll continue to grow at a consistent rate.

**SPARKS:** For the most part, except of course from '23 to '24 to '24 to '25, you saw a drop there for some reason.

**LACHELLE:** Yes. And so, we transitioned. We had a back-office service provider that essentially provided everything to us. And so, for the '24-'25 school year is our—so, the orange is really what I like to consider our pre-transition, the first column and the second one is our transition year. So, in our transition year, we brought on everything new, new platforms for our enrollment, new curriculum. And of course, as in any transition in any organization, there's going to be some bumps. And we experienced some bumps early in the year, made some quick pivots with our conservative budget plan. We were able to sustain ourselves. And so, in '25-'26, you see that growth build back up that we anticipate being able to go across time.

**SPARKS:** Okay. And then thank you for your explanations. That makes a lot of sense. And then my final question to you would be, which I think is brilliant that you're thinking about the countywide and you're thinking strategically about having a place for people to—what'd you call it? Not a residence, but...

**BARKE:** A resource center.

**SPARKS:** Resource center. Yeah. Not residence. Anyway, these three resource centers, but those are going to cost money. So how is that going to factor into the numbers here?

**LACHELLE:** Again, so we do share allocations. And so yes, we are going to see some, and that is budgeted slightly, but you're not quite seeing it yet until we hit the '28-'29 school year that

you'll start seeing those. But by then, our reserves are going to be catching up to this transition and this new. In addition, there is the funds that the current So Cal school has, making that shared across as we have to donate those funds moving forward into our other schools.

**SPARKS:** Okay. I mean, I'm sure you've thought that through. I just want the public to understand and board members to have a grip on how are we going to pay for those wonderful resource centers that are going to come about.

**LACHELLE:** Yeah. They're new items for us. We have not traditionally had operations items like that. So definitely starting to work with other vendors and making sure that we are getting those bids and proposals and being able to slot those into our budget effectively and strategically.

**SPARKS:** Wonderful. Well, that'll be something I think we'll be looking at and looking forward to hearing more about.

**LACHELLE:** Absolutely.

**SPARKS:** Thank you.

**BARKE:** Jorge.

**VALDES:** LaChelle.

**LACHELLE:** Okay.

**VALDES:** Different question, but on the same chart. So, it looks like your revenues for the '25-'26 year was \$69 million. Am I reading that right?

**LACHELLE:** Yes.

**VALDES:** Okay. So, and 4,400 students, so you receive around \$15,680 per student?

**LACHELLE:** Yes. So that's on the next slide per ADA. And that's not enrollment, that's our average daily attendance, which is the driving factor for our revenue.

**VALDES:** Okay. Is there any other, besides income from the state of California, is there anything else that is a factor in that \$69 million?

**LACHELLE:** Yes, actually. So, we recently got awarded the employee retention credit, so that is in there as well. So, you have LCFF funds, we have federal dollars. We do get Title I, two, and four funding, and then we have some prior year revenue as well, prior year adjustments. And the prior year adjustments...

**VALDES:** So, it's not just ADA for the year? Correct. There's some other stuff.

**LACHELLE:** Yes.

**VALDES:** So, I guess the next question I have is, it's a little bit surprising to me that your revenues are \$69 million, but your costs are \$63 million for a school that has no hardware, no physical presence. What is the driver of \$63 million of costs?

**LACHELLE:** Yes, absolutely. So, the next slide talks about our top expenses. So, our top expenses is salaries. Over the last four years, we've done a big effort to increase our salaries to make them competitive. And then our curriculum, as well as technology, we also moved to a one-to-one Chromebook model that was a huge expense for the school, and it's a huge expense to maintain as well. Before the transition, we weren't at a one-to-one Chromebook model. It was a one per family. Many of our families have multiple students, and that also has allowed us the one-to-one to test our students.

**VALDES:** So, every student gets a Chromebook, is what you're saying?

**LACHELLE:** Correct.

**SPARKS:** You're providing that?

**LACHELLE:** Yes.

**VALDES:** All right. And that's a major driver of the \$63. Well, I mean, it's at least to me a little concerning because you only have \$6 million left and you want to open up these resource centers. It doesn't seem that much if you're already spending \$63 million, but that's my thought. Now I'd like to talk to the two teachers that came.

**LACHELLE:** Absolutely.

**VALDES:** The middle school and the TK teacher, because I'm fascinated about these online schools. I had nothing like this. I went brick and mortar, football, baseball teams, 1200 students per class.

**LACHELLE:** And to your point, I just want to make sure that it's unknown that we do share our expenses across the district. So that's helpful too, even though you see that six million difference, that is just for the So Cal, but when we start splitting the allocations, it definitely helps in the long term.

**VALDES:** Okay. First to the TK teacher. Please explain to me, okay? Everyone's in their own house, right? You're working out of your house.

**REBECCA:** Yes.

**VALDES:** Okay. How do you teach a four-year-old child over a computer?

**REBECCA:** I have that question every day. And I answer that every day.

**VALDES:** I'm curious to hear this.

**REBECCA:** Okay. So, I can explain what a daily model might look like for a typical family. All students are provided with a computer and it's a school of choice. So, they have a parent that's decided to choose this model for them. Daily, what they would have each day is our curriculum. It's online based and then they do receive also some materials. So, there are materials sent to our children as well. They get math books that are physical math books. They have different math manipulatives as well. And then they have online curriculum-based models. We go through Canvas and have found...

**VALDES:** Student gets online at 8:00 AM. Do you have 20 little kids on the screen?

**REBECCA:** Well, currently I have 32 students in my class and each day I teach a lesson at 10:00 AM. We go through the Zoom platform to teach and I ask my parents to sit with them. It doesn't have to be a parent. It typically is a parent. You'll have a lot of stay at home parents, but it could be a grandparent, it could be technically an older sibling or another family member of their choosing. So, I say, "Your helper, have your helper with you." And I teach a full lesson for 40 minutes and they do surprisingly fantastic. And I wanted to speak to that a little bit. You'd be surprised how resilient and how amazing kids are with technologies these days. I know as a professional that's been doing this for 18 years, I know how to keep them engaged and we're not just sitting here like this for 40 minutes, 45 minutes. I mean, we are up, we have music, we dance, we sit down, we do a calendar time, we dive into our curriculum, we use our manipulatives over the computer, we see them on camera, they get out the Play-Doh, we do some coloring, some drawing, letters, numbers, everything. And then what the parent would do is after my lesson, they are free to do the remaining lessons online at any point during the day. So, a lot of my parents will tell me about their day.

**VALDES:** The rest of the lessons are scripted or videos?

**REBECCA:** They are. Yeah. They're wonderfully created. And the great thing about our school is that we have been able to select curriculum that we feel best meets the standards. And we've even from last year to this year, we've even gone through and replaced some of our curriculum with curriculum we felt is better. So that is scripted and it's all given to parents. They would walk through a page by page, very child friendly, child center, and it's very easy to walk through. It's very well organized.

**VALDES:** Your day of lecturing is basically less than an hour?

**REBECCA:** Yes, but that's not all that teachers do in our school. So, we have constant communication with our parents. So, I wake up in the morning and sit down. The first thing I'm doing is responding to emails. I'm assisting parents. I'm setting up meetings throughout my day to talk to families one-on-one and meet student needs. There's also talking with our PLCs, our grade level, talking about teaching...

**VALDES:** What's a PLC?

**REBECCA:** That's our grade band. So, meeting with your grade band, creating lessons themselves, looking over the curriculum, calling families, calling students, and then different

points of the year we'll have assessments that we'll do with students. We'll bring students in one-on-one. So, we do a lot of different things throughout the day.

**VALDES:** I want to talk to the...

**SPARKS:** Can I jump in for one second before you move to the other one? In terms of instruction, during the instruction time with elementary students, I know you try to be as interactive as you can. Now I'm teaching university level, so it's totally different. I get that. But are they able to use the chat function?

**REBECCA:** Yeah, we do have a chat function. Now they are the youngest grade level. So oftentimes when they come into the Zoom room, I have them mute automatically on for them. Otherwise, they would scream into the microphone because they love to hear themselves talk on the mic. But yeah, I ask lots of questions in there. I can call on their name. They can do the raise your hand. And they have a parent sitting there with them. So, they can do the raise your hand model. A lot of the first week or so of school, we're practicing all our Zoom tools and the Zoom model and how we can play with our tools and raise our hand and use the microphone. And so, by the time, I mean, we're in May now and our school year ends in June, they are experts.

**SPARKS:** And you'll use the share screen, I'm sure as the instructor.

**REBECCA:** Yes, they do.

**SPARKS:** Do they sometimes share screen or is that too chaotic?

**REBECCA:** I don't have children share the screens, but actually very often with my, I would call them the learning coaches or the adults and the families, if they need help and guidance through lessons and the model of our online platform and the curriculum, I will have parents share screen so I can direct them and walk them through how I would do something or what to do. And that's really helpful tool for me to have them share screen.

**SPARKS:** Yeah like if they were going to give a mini presentation, which would be probably for the older kids, right? So elementary probably not so much, but I always like kids to be up and speaking all the time.

**REBECCA:** Yes.

**SPARKS:** However, you can work that out. Even elementary.

**REBECCA:** Lots of speaking, lots of writing. When they're in their Zoom, I say, everyone hold up your pencil. Let me see your pencil grip. I get to see how they're modeling their pencils and we work on all of that stuff. So, it's a lot of fun.

**SPARKS:** Awesome, thank you.

**REBECCA:** Any other questions?

**VALDES:** I wanted to hear from the middle school teacher. Either one of you would be fine. Now you guys, I understand what you probably do a little bit more, but because now you're talking about a child who's 10 or right?

**JORGELINA:** 12 and 14. I teach seven, she teaches eight.

**VALDES:** I mean that I kind of understand. But tell one of you, please tell me what your day looks like as teacher.

**JORGELINA:** Right now, we have similar positions where we're both also supervisors. So, we also supervise a set of teachers within the middle school. So, my typical day...

**VALDES:** And you're working out of your house?

**JORGELINA:** Yes, working out of my house. I have a home office. And doors closed. I have my own kids. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for example, for math, I teach math on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I am meeting with students one-on-one. I have a set of 30 homeroom students. So those are the kids that are mine and mine only. I meet with them either weekly or biweekly, depending on their needs. And they're scheduled into MySchedule. So, they know when they're coming in, I'm setting up their calendars, we're reviewing all of their classes. Middle school students take at least six classes. So, during a typical homeroom meeting, it's a 30-minute meeting. We review grades. I show them navigation. So sometimes, for example, they'll have an essay due and I teach math. So, I will share my screen. They will share theirs. We'll go through their Canvas. They'll show me their graphic organizer. I'll make sure it's filled in. So, I support them in all their other courses. Those are my 30 homeroom kids. And then I have about 150 math students who are the ones that come to my live class.

**VALDES:** For the homeroom kids, you're sort of like, they have other classes, but you're helping them with the other classes.

**JORGELINA:** Right. And then, so that's about 30, but I meet with them either weekly or biweekly. And then the rest of my calendar is open for students in my math class to book one-on-one appointments with me for math support. So, for example, if one of my...

**VALDES:** And when does your day end?

**JORGELINA:** It typically ends around four o'clock officially, but sometimes I stay until five or six, depending on whether I'm grading or—I do have families that work late and if they want to come in and meet late with me, I am always happy to do that as well, but officially it ends at four.

**VALDES:** Okay. And the last question I have is for Dr. Romero. And thank you, ladies. Really just curious more than anything else as to how something...

**RICHIE:** I was too before I started working here.

**VALDES:** I received, so I guess all my colleagues received, we got a letter. These are always at the 11th hour, so it's dated today from Newport-Mesa School District opposing the approval of this school. I'd like you to get a copy of this letter before you leave. You have legal counsel, right? The letter basically goes into there's no benefit to Newport-Mesa USD pupil population by this school. They give their reasons, which I don't really understand. The second section is the fiscal impact on their district is one of the reasons they oppose. I don't really understand that because it's a basic aid district that's funded by property taxes, yet they say that every student that would go to this school would impact them and I don't see that at all. And then non-classroom based are suspect, schools are suspect and there's concerns of fraud and there's this link. So, you have a legal counsel.

**RICHE:** We do.

**VALDES:** I'm asking you to please get a copy of this letter, have your legal counsel write a response to this because I'd like to see the response. Okay.

**RICHE:** Absolutely. And I love the flattery of all the things they said in that letter, but the most interesting part is that we're already fully authorized to operate within the entire county of Orange. So, your authorization wouldn't impact whether or not our student, their attendance boundary students may come to our school because that actually could happen today. So that's no problem. We will absolutely respond and I'll get you a copy.

**VALDES:** Please send it to all of us.

**RICHE:** Absolutely. I'll get it to Dr. Bean and I'll...

**HENDRICK:** Yeah. Why don't you send it to me and I'll...

**RICHE:** Yeah, I gotcha. Anything else? Well, again, we thank you for your consideration. We thank you for your time and we'll see you next month.

**BARKE:** Oh, you know what? I just want to make sure just everyone did. Dr. Williams, do you have any questions? Anything? You okay? Tim, did you want to ask a question?

**SHAW:** Oh, sure. Okay. We hold elected office up here, and so it's fun when you open the mail and see someone's attacking you. You kind of think, "Wow, I guess someone's paying attention to me." It's almost flattering in a way to be attacked. It still hurts, but it comes with the territory, I suppose. I just wanted to maybe take a step back and make sure I completely understand. I know the difficulty with so many of our charter schools is facilities, so can you speak a little bit more about the vision of having these centers and how far are you as far as identifying where they might be? I know that's always great in theory to get a facility, but it can be quite challenging out there in the marketplace.

**RICHE:** No, absolutely. So, we currently have an office in San Juan Capistrano. That is the planned beginning of our resource centers because then we can change the function of what we do there right now. It's simply administrative and students don't attend in any way, shape or form. We're not in a rush. We want to do this right, and we want to make sure that we have the

program and we have the desire in terms of the families that want to utilize the program. We know that there's a call for more, but we want to make sure we understand what that more is as we begin to design out the facilities. We're not beholden or we don't have any specific sites or locations picked out yet. That's what we're studying the geographics. You saw some pin maps. We do a lot with that to understand where the population density is. And we're prepared to hit some roadblocks. We're prepared to get some nos, but we're going to keep pushing and make sure that we provide the greatest level of service that we can for our families and all the modalities that are available.

**SHAW:** And then in those centers, just let me make sure I completely understand the idea. So, your students are still primarily online, but they could have these centers to just come in for the occasional in- person learning or...

**RICHE:** Yeah. Yes. Let me use proper grammar in front of elected officials. But yes, so we have different activities that we already currently do with the children, and we do them in different facilities. We can do some testing, which now we sometimes do in libraries or different places like that. We're very interested in expanding our career technical education and looking at the resource centers as a hub for that, being that those activities are not daily. We're not looking to have students show up on a regular cadence. We're looking to do it with an ability to just bring in some specialized help. We also would like to make some state-of-the-art production classrooms so that we can have our teachers come in and have more technology tools available for particular lessons if they wanted to really make sure they get a particular topic across. So, we're looking at any number of things, also including, I should say, if a need for a child with special needs that has in- person services, we sometimes struggle for facilities with that or the home is in a suitable place. We recognize that a singular facility in one county doesn't help all of our students, but it's a start and we're looking to see where our remaining strategy might take us.

**SHAW:** If we were to grant the charter, obviously it's been countywide, you're no longer chartered with Capistrano, and you would have to have these resource centers still within Orange County, but that gives you a lot more real estate to work with.

**RICHE:** Absolutely.

**SHAW:** But you still are getting students from other counties, but maybe if you live in LA County and you have to come to North Orange County as opposed to...

**RICHE:** Exactly. And looking at the Eastern for our Riverside and San Bernardino students, things of that nature. Absolutely.

**SHAW:** Got it. All right. Very good.

**BARKE:** And you've had a lot of questions, so I envision this is maybe someplace where you might have a lab that would go along for the course, something like that.

**RICHE:** Absolutely. We actually transitioned for our A through G high school students. We transitioned to virtual labs when that was made available around 2020. But if our science

teachers wanted to have a more in depth exploratory, and then also with the technology to still allow a hybrid experience, obviously those that are not there in person aren't going to get the true sense of it, but maybe just enhancing their learning just a bit more.

**BARKE:** Well, great. Well, thank you all for your time. We really appreciate you. We love options for our students because we all know every student learns differently. So, thank you for bringing something creative and exciting to us and we look forward to seeing you next month.

**RICHE:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. And I'll be on the lookout for that letter. Can you help me get that? Thank you.

**SPARKS:** Thank you.

**BARKE:** All right. So next we have Dave. Yes. And thank you all for coming. We enjoyed the public comments and everything. Thank you. Now comes the exciting part. What we've been waiting for all night.

**SPARKS:** Oh yeah.

**GIORDANO:** Thank you. I appreciate that. All right. Well, again, thank you and good evening, President Barke, Members of the Board. So tonight is our budget study session. This does begin the preparation process for development of our budget for the upcoming fiscal year, so '26-'27. We've provided each of you a copy of our Department's current operating budget. If you want to pull that out and just follow along, I just want to review with you some of the key financial information contained in the budget book. In the first several pages of the budget book, this is pages B2 through B25. We have a detailed narrative with graphics that highlights some of the key historical information regarding the Department's operating budget. And this information includes details regarding the Department's federal, state, and other local funding sources, as well as some key expenditure data as well.

Also included is some other important information that's included within that report as follows. We have part one or tab one. It includes some of the key planning factors that we use to help develop the '25-'26 second interim report. Tab two of the budget book, that highlights some key changes between the first and second interim financial reports in a narrative format. Tab three highlights the major object code variances between the first and second interim reports, and it's in a summarized format. Tab four summarizes Department's adopted first interim and second interim general fund budgets on the state required SACS form 01. Tab five provides a summary of the Department's multi-year projection. Of course, we always include the current year and then the two subsequent years as well. Tab six represents the state required criterion standards form, which includes a trend analysis of some key budgetary information.

Tab seven reflects the Department's average daily attendance. That's on the state required SACS form A. And then Tab eight provides a summary information for all the Department's other funds. So, moving on now to tab number nine or form number 10, which reflects the North Orange County SELPA pass through fund and it's used to count for all the SELPA's financial activities and highlights the revenue and expenditure data for all the SELPA member districts.

Tab number 10 or form number 12, this is used to account for the Department's child development programs. Tab 11 or form 14, this is used to account for deferred maintenance needs, which includes a major facility repairs and system replacements. Tab 12 or form 17, this is a special reserve fund that's used for non-capital facility related projects and includes other post-employment benefits as well. We also have tab number 13 or form 35. This is the County School of Facilities Fund. It's used to account for state school facilities funding and some related construction. Tab 14 or form 40, this is a special reserve fund. It's used to count for capital outlay projects related to our Esplanade property. Tab 15, this is form 56. It's used to account for the debt service activities related to our Esplanade property. Tab 16 or form 67, this is used to account for self-insurance activities for Delta Dental Insurance Program. Tab 17, this is a listing of all of our entitlements, contracts, and grants. And this information, of course, is also posted on our website. Tab 18, this provides information on our holding account. This is object code 4399, and this is used to temporarily account for expenditure activity until project budgets have been determined. And then lastly, tab number 19, this contains all the other required state forms, such as the cash flow form and the indirect cost rate form.

This slide highlights some of the key components of the state's standardized account code structure. And of course, the two digit fund number and the four digit object code numbers, those are defined by the state of California. And what we're primarily used to seeing when we look at our SACS financial reports contained in the budget book. However, there are a total of eight other state and locally defined fields used behind each and every financial transaction. And these fields include the following. So first we have the resource code field, and this identifies federal, state, and other local funding sources that have specific restrictions on how those dollars can be spent. So, for example, the Title I program, we have the one-digit project year field, and this identifies projects whose reporting year is different from the fiscal year. We have the four-digit goal field, and this defines specific instructional goals and objectives such as regular ed, alternative ed and special education.

We have the four-digit function field, and this identifies the detailed activities or services performed for each of the goals and objectives, such as instruction, instructional supervision, and pupil related services. The three digit goal field, this identifies schools with a unique CDS code, such as our juvenile court schools and our Connections programs. We have the four-digit manager code field, and this identifies the respective manager that's assigned oversight responsibility for the budget. We have the four-digit cost center field, and this is what the Department uses to track different programs and special projects. And then lastly, we have the three-digit site field, which we use to track our major programs such as our ACCESS program and our Connections program.

Next, we're going to just provide a quick overview of the current US economic outlook. And this is based on UCLA's spring forecast. This was released back on March 4th. The good news is that UCLA is forecasting stronger economic growth. This is in 2026, and they're citing increased fiscal stimulus through the One Big Beautiful Bill, and then continued capital spending on artificial intelligence. GDP's forecast to grow at 3% in 2026 before slowing to 2.3% in 2027, and then 2.1% in 2028. University's also forecasting that the Fed is expected to hold interest rates steady through the first half of 2026 with a possible 25 basis point cut after the new Fed share takes office here in mid-May. And then there's good news on the inflation front as well with core

inflation forecast at 2.7% in 2026 before easing to 2.2% in 2028. And of course, the UCLA forecast was released back on March 4th.

And of course, just prior to that, we began the Iran conflict. So, I'd expect that their next forecast will include an adjustment to their inflation forecast. On the employment front, the unemployment rate in the US peaked around 4.5% in late 2025 before edging down to about 4.3% this year. Unfortunately, California's unemployment rate is not expected to peak until the early part of this year at 5.7% before declining to 4.4% in 2028. So, here's just a really quick recap of some of the key highlights contained in the governor's January proposal, and this is for next year. And of course, the proposal represents the start of the budget cycle for the coming year. So first, we know that the governor's estimating a modest budget shortfall.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Is that modest?

**GIORDANO:** For the state of California, \$2.9 billion, I think is actually modest when you look at the subsequent years.

**BARKE:** Okay. Yeah.

**SHAW:** A billion here, a billion there. Pretty soon you're talking about real money.

**GIORDANO:** There you go. When I go through some of these other numbers, you'll think that is modest. So, this is an improvement though since the approval of the state budget back in June and is largely due to an improved economic outlook as well as strong state tax collections in the current year. In fact, the Department of Finance is now projecting roughly \$42.3 billion more in state general fund revenues. That's over the three-year budget window since the state budget was approved back in June. Also important to note that the LEO's office, they are projecting revenues to come in lower than the DOF by about \$30 billion over that same three-year budget window. And this was primarily due to the LAO's assessment of a strong risk of a stock market downturn that was not reflected in the governor's revenue assumptions. So, with that said, this was back on February 20th.

The LAO updated its big three tax revenue estimates, increasing them by \$33.4 billion, and that's from their November projections, citing all the enthusiasm or surrounding artificial intelligence and the related stock market boom. However, the revenue outlook for '27-'28 and beyond remains very similar to their November outlook, continuing to reflect the high risk of a revenue reversal. Under their assumptions, the state would face structural deficits of around \$35 billion annually, beginning in '27-'28. So that two point, what is it? \$2.9 billion doesn't sound so bad. So, with all the uncertainty surrounding the state revenues this year, all eyes are definitely going to be on the governor's May revise. That's expected to be released late next week. And of course, we'll provide an update on the state's revenue outlook, as well as the governor's May revise proposal when we present the preliminary budget on June 3rd.

Here's a chart. This just highlights the key changes in the state's revenue estimates that impact the Prop 98 guarantee. And so over that three-year budget window, that's fiscal year's '24-'25 through '26-'27. You can see state revenues are up by about \$42.3 billion. That's as of the governor's January proposal, again, contained estimates contained in the governor's January

budget, or excuse me, state approved budget back in June. So, this chart just highlights the impact of the governor's revised revenue estimates on the Prop 98 guarantee for schools. Due to that improved revenue outlook, the guarantee's been revised up since budget adoption. Again, this is by \$3.9 billion for last year, '24-'25, \$6.8 billion for the current year, '25-'26, and \$11 billion for the budget year, '26-'27. So for a total increase, a \$21.7 billion over that three year budget window. And again, as we talked about at second interim, it's unfortunate, but the governor is proposing another subtle up maneuver, and this is regarding the Prop 98 guarantee for the current year, and we're going to talk about that more here on this next slide. This chart just highlights that proposed settlement maneuver concerning the guarantee for the current year. So based on those improved tax collections, the guarantee's been revised up by \$6.8 billion for the current year. However, the governor's proposing to appropriate the guarantee at \$115.9 billion, and that's instead of the currently calculated level of \$121.4 billion, again, \$5.56 billion below the Prop 98 guarantee, citing all the uncertainty regarding the state's revenue estimates. And so again, this is the same maneuver that the governor included in last year's budget, although it's at about three times the amount that he included last year, which was about \$1.9 billion. And the governor again states that if the revenues materialize, the funds would be owed to Prop 98 to settle up our one-time monies in '27-'28.

Here's a look at the Prop 98 guarantee. This is for next year now, '26-'27. The governor estimates the guarantee is \$7.7 billion now above the LAO's November estimate. This is again for next year, and this is due to those higher revenue estimates contained on the governor's January proposal. And just as a look at some of the key risks to the state budget as we move forward. And although the economic outlook and the state revenue collections have improved pretty significantly since the state budget was approved back in June, there are some pretty significant risks, including the risk of a stock market correction. And this is due to a potential bubble in the artificial intelligence as well as elevated asset prices. We have the administration's \$22 billion state operating deficit that's projected in '27-'28, and then large operating shortfalls each of the subsequent years as well.

And we know the LEO's offices is forecasting even higher deficits, almost \$35 billion beginning in '27-'28. The state's also dealing with sluggish job growth and the impacts of elevated inflation above the Fed's target rate of 2%. And that's not to mention the federal policy uncertainty, specifically related to immigration and foreign trade. Here's a look at our multi-year projection assumptions. And again, we always include the current year, the two subsequent years. And so, if you're to take a look at the salary line items in the budget book, we always like to highlight, it does include the increased cost for a step and column for all of our classified or certificated and management employees. And if you're to drill down and take a look at the statutory lines, you'll always see the increased costs reflected for the CalSTRS and CalPERS pensions. And then under the health and welfare benefit line items, we also have the increased cost reflected for health and welfare benefit premiums. And this coming year, renewal will be a fairly large increase for health and welfare benefits. We're forecasting about a 9.1% increase overall. Average daily attendance this year projected to come in at 4,464 ADA. That is up over the prior year, and it's due to an increase in our SIS students.

I skipped over COLA. The COLA this year is set at 2.3%, and in '26-'27, when we prepared our second interim, the estimate was 2.41%. That's been revised up and it's actually set now for next

year at 2.87%. So, we'll include that as part of our preliminary budget when we present that on June 3rd. Our LCFF revenue projections, you can see projected to come in in the current year at \$102.8 million. That is down about \$1.2 million over the prior year, and it has to do with the fact that that COLA of 2.3%, again, just not enough to offset the funded ADA declines over the last three years. And then the same holds true in '26-'27. The LCFF revenue's down again, about a half a million dollars to \$102.3 million, and then '27-'28 drops again, about \$650,000 down to \$101.6 million. Our tuition though for ACCESS and special schools projected to come in at \$49.5 million in the current year, and you can see that we are projecting small increases each of the next couple years.

Here's a look at our combined multi-year projection. And again, this is just a summarized report. You can find a detailed copy of this in the budget book. It is combined, so it includes all of our unrestricted operating accounts, our discretionary accounts, as well as all those restricted categorical programs, and we always include the current and two subsequent years. For the current year, you can see we're forecasting an operating deficit, just over \$10.5 million. Again, as we've talked about it at second interim, that's not a structural deficit. When you look at our ongoing revenues and ongoing expenditures, they do remain in alignment. That really is that plan spending on the one-time categorical dollars that were received in a prior year being spent in the current year, along with spending on some capital facility projects. And then the same is true in '26-'27. You can see we're forecasting a small deficit of just over \$3 million, and that's actually primarily related to a project I'm going to talk about later. That's the Rancho Sonado project. I want to give you an update on that project.

This slide just highlights the statutory COLAs going all the way back to 1983, 1984. As you can see from the chart, there have been large fluctuations from year to year in the COLA, which make it really difficult to try to anticipate the level of funding the school district will receive for the coming year. And so aside from fiscal years '22-'23 and '23-'24, where the COLA exceeded 6%, you can see the trendline for the COLA is beginning to normalize there at the lower end of the range. Another challenge that districts have faced is the expiration of all the one-time state and federal COVID-19 relief funding. In fact, the final round of ESSER III funds had to be obligated. This was by September 30th of 2024, and then liquidated by January 31st of 2025. It's well over a year ago now. At the same time, the benefits of the ADA protections that were implemented during the pandemic years, that's lessened.

In fact, most districts now are feeling the full impact of those ADA losses in the current year. Switching gears for a moment, here's a look at some of the major projects that we have planned for the coming fiscal year and beyond. First though, I'm happy to report that we did just complete a much-needed elevator installation project. This is over in building four at our Esplanade property. I also want to provide an update. This is on the Rancho Sonado project. There's been a lot of activity on this project over the past few months, but before I get into that update, I did want to try to finish up the budget study session, and then we can circle back. We are planning to replace three portable classrooms, and then one portable restroom building. This is used in our Connections program over at Fred Newhart School in the Capistrano Unified School District. And these new buildings are going to replace older units that have extended well beyond their useful life.

Additionally, this is in the following year now, '27-'28, the Harbor Learning Center South campus. We'll receive a fresh coat of interior and exterior paint, some new flooring campus wide, and then the replacement of some selected casework as well. Here's just a summarized look at the Board of Education's budget, and you can see we've included the actual expenditures. This is for last year, '24-'25. We've included the current year budget, '25-'26, and then the projected budget for next year, '26-'27. And I'm not going to go through all these line items, but I do want to highlight a few, starting with the salaries and the employee benefits. So, you can see coming from '24-'25 to '25-'26, that there was an increase in salaries and benefits, and that's specifically related to the addition of the short-term board liaison position. I also want to highlight the legal services fees on for the current year, I should say for last year, '24-'25, legal services costs coming in at just over \$455,000, but you can see in the current year, that number has been reduced to \$150,000 as we brought those services back in-house.

And then in '26-'27, you can see that those costs projected decrease again to \$100,000. Advocacy contracts you can see has also been reduced slightly from \$280,000 in the current year to \$110,000 in '26-'27, as we're moving forward with just one of those contracts in the budget year. And then you can see we also have the contingency still for the current year and the budget year as well. Here's a look at some of the challenges that we face moving forward. And we've shared this slide many times in the past, and these are challenges that they're not unique to us. They're most districts in the state and the county are dealing with these same issues. And so, we know cost for step and column movement, the CalSTRS and CalPERS pensions and health and welfare benefit premiums going to continue to place strains on our operating budget. We know that inflationary pressures and other items such as supplies, services, and equipment, that also remains persistent. We've got the challenges that include the expiration of all the one-time state and federal COVID-19 relief funding, our county office's minimum state aid excess tax status, as well as the continued decline that we're seeing in enrollment throughout Orange County. And we know that could have an impact on enrollment in our own programs.

And then lastly, for schools, even though Prop 98 funding is expected to increase moderately in the budget year '26-'27, we know the state's facing these very large structural deficits beginning '27-'28, and we know the governor and the legislature are going to need to develop a plan to address those deficits. And anytime you have a large structural deficit at the state level on the non-prop 98 side of the budget, there's always concern about cuts to prop 98. Here's just a recap of our budgeting cycle. Again, the board took action back in early December and approved the Department's first interim financial report. And again, that just represented the first official revision to the adoptive budget. And then in mid-February, our educational services staff presented an update on the local control accountability plan. And then in early March, we presented the second interim financial report, which of course represents the second official revision to the adopted budget and also included an update on the governor's January proposal. Tonight, we've got the budget study session, and then in early June, the first meeting in June, we'll hold the public hearing on both the LCAP and the adoptive budget and followed in late June, we'll present both the LCAP and the adoptive budget for the board's final approval. And we always, when we present the budget, we always base that budget on the governor's May revise, which should be out late next week and we'll be sure to include that information in the update as well. So that's the presentation in the study session, but I do have an update on Rancho Sonado

that I was going to go through unless there are questions on any of the budget study session items.

**SPARKS:** Can you move to the risk slide, the risk, you knew I was going to go there first.

**GIORDANO:** Yes.

**SPARKS:** You can just start with that next time. No, I'm just kidding.

**GIORDANO:** Here we go.

**SPARKS:** Okay. So, yeah. And you had one about the \$30 billion, I mean, all those, the deficits.

**GIORDANO:** Yes.

**SPARKS:** The \$30 billion...

**GIORDANO:** I do. Let me go to that one.

**SPARKS:** Yeah. Had it in red.

**GIORDANO:** There we go.

**SPARKS:** Yeah, there you go. Ooh. Yeah. So again, do you have a crystal ball of what's going to happen? It looks bad, but like how bad? Is that kind of where we are?

**GIORDANO:** It's been an interesting year to say the least, because when you look at state revenue collections, because of what's going on within artificial intelligence and the stock market, revenues are actually up even beyond the \$42.3 billion now. They're up in—the government released that in January, his January proposal, that included revenues probably through November, December, January, February, March, all the way through April, revenues continue to come in higher. So that's the good news then, that's the good news, but there's that concern that what's going to happen if we do see a correction in the stock market, because this is obviously, it's not something that we're going to see sustain over time.

**SPARKS:** Exactly.

**GIORDANO:** So, but right now the revenue outlook looks very good. And so Prop 98 looks good for schools, but when you look at the other side of the state budget where they're facing a \$35 billion deficit, that maneuver that they proposed again this year that they used last year, I think that's one of the ways they like to try and balance the budget on the nonprofit 98 side. So that's a big concern.

**SPARKS:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you for that extra explanation. And then I have just a couple of questions that are interesting, I think. First of all, who writes the description for the purpose of the funds? Like you have a grant and contract and then you have the description. Who writes those?

**GIORDANO:** For the purpose of the funds.

**SPARKS:** The purpose of the funds. So, you have entitlement contract, grant or title. You have learning recovery emergency and then you have four million and change to provide funding for learning recovery initiative, blah, blah, blah, that at a minimum support academic learning, recovery, staff and staff and pupil social and emotional wellbeing. It sounds really good, learning, recovery, emergency, and you think it's focused on learning recovery, but then you get to the description and it's focused on, and staff and people social and emotional wellbeing.

**GIORDANO:** Got you.

**SPARKS:** There's a lot of stuff like that in here if you start drilling down a little bit. So, I have a question about that and maybe, okay. Just let me finish my thoughts. And then the other thing that is I think difficult to track, not only for trustees, but certainly for the public, is you've got a lot of these things also that overlap. Right? You have a chunk of things that are going to literacy, but also to learning recovery, but also to literacy coaching and reading specialists, targeting literacy support. But also, and then if you go in the description, it's very loosey goosey. Like how do we know that things are going to where they're really supposed to and that things aren't just kind of flying in the air and landing wherever people think they should land?

**GIORDANO:** It's a great question. As a county office, we receive so many different types of funding and it is very unique. Most districts don't receive the types of funding that we do receive. We receive lots of different types of funding. I think Dr. Bean's done an excellent job of making sure that all of our staff know what the priorities are for the Department, our 5-3-1 strategic plan. So whatever source of funding that we do receive, everybody knows to make sure that it's aligned with that plan. We're not going to do anything that was outside that planning.

**SPARKS:** I know, but you understand where I'm going with this.

**GIORDANO:** I do.

**SPARKS:** There's a lot of overlap in a lot of these grants that are coming through, which I'm sure are well intentioned, but it's hard to know, does it really fit into this particular box? And then if you have this extra add on description, like in that one example, and there's a lot of them, a lot of those examples here.

**HENDRICK:** Can I add like, so sometimes, so like TUPE is an example, you may get the TUPE, which is tobacco drugs and stuff, but as a county office, we may get four components of that. So, we get the original grant and then we'll get a technical assistance grant for us to now train the districts or other county offices and then we get another add-on piece. So, it kind of looks like it's overlapping, but I also think the state does some of that very intentionally because—I'm trying to figure out how to say this in a politically correct manner, but they'll say literacy because people aren't upset about literacy. Exactly. But then when they write the parameters of it, it's wide open.

**SPARKS:** Exactly.

**HENDRICK:** And so that is the frustration I think all of us have. And so that's why it has a whole team that has to track this. And then what we have seen though is the change is that some of them are also very restrictive and you actually don't know it till you actually receive the funds sometimes and they'll say, "Oh, and you have a report due this quarter and you have to show us all these things." And we're like, "Well, it would have been nice if we would have known that ahead of time."

**SPARKS:** I'm not saying you can fix everything, fix Rome in a day, but I would like to see, and I think the constituents would like to see alignment in what the entitlement contract is intended for and more guardrails around the description and the purpose of the funds that are—because I know you have to put reports out like we all do when we have grants.

**HENDRICK:** Those are actually from the state reports. That's actually where that language comes from. I do think it is a big initiative for Dr. Bean has been really trying to—especially when we have staffing tied to it, is making sure that staff is doing that exact work. And when those funds go, that means the staff goes also.

**BEAN:** By the way, some of that fund is still funds from prior and running out. But as you know, our staff knows 5-3-1 is our strategic plan. We make all decisions on that. And so even our grants and funding team, they heavily vet along with my chief of staff, myself, heavily vet what kinds of grants come in and help.

**SPARKS:** Yeah, no, I know. I get it. And I think you guys know where I'm going with this. I mean, that's just one example. There are a bunch of examples here of overlapping categories for homeless, for foster youth, different programs, and ranging from teaching and training teachers, from literacy. Anyway, I think you guys can't solve this on your level necessarily, but you can definitely start to have, we can start to have the conversation about alignment so that you're not put at risk as a county where we got someone like some of these investigative journalists coming and doing audits on things. We don't want to get caught that, "Hey, well, the state didn't give us a very good description and alignment, so we did it this way." That needs to be solved, I think, over time. Anyway, not that we can fix it today, but I just the thought came to my mind and I wanted to throw it out there because I keep seeing it. Thank you. That's all I have.

**BARKE:** Okay. Anyone else?

**VALDES:** Are there any grants that Dr. Mijares was accepting that the current team declined, deliberately declined?

**GIORDANO:** The current team? I'd have to go back...

**VALDES:** Under Dr. Bean's leadership.

**BEAN:** There are grants that we actually continue still doing because we have to run out the grant, right? Like the MTSS. But the focus has shifted to more academics, but I don't understand your question in terms of like a grant we chose.

**VALDES:** I was very concerned when Dr. Mijares was leading the Department that funds would come in for things like healthcare services in school. And I wasn't really confident that he was either going to catch it or care about it, and I kind of thought he would support it. And I don't think that's going on now. And I'm just curious, did you find a grant for something that doesn't align with this board and did you decline?

**BEAN:** We only go after grants that align with our 5-3-1 and this board. I'm not sure—we don't purposefully look for a grant and decline it.

**VALDES:** Okay. I got it.

**BEAN:** Okay. Does that make sense?

**VALDES:** Yeah. Yeah. I get it. All right. The other thing I had a question about was obviously we had a negotiation with the teachers earlier this year. In one of our meetings, Dave, you told me that ACCESS was running in the red.

**GIORDANO:** Yeah.

**VALDES:** And I don't want to quote you because I can't remember, but I think you said it was like \$17 million in that range.

**GIORDANO:** It was last year's deficit was, I believe, over \$15 million, current year deficit, making some adjustment. We brought it down to about, that was \$10.5 million, I believe, before the increase in compensation. So there still is a deficit, yes.

**VALDES:** My question was, how did the negotiations and the final outcome of that affect how much ACCESS is running in the red? And the same question for Connections.

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. It's a great question. We'll go back and drill down and look at the numbers, but when you just look at the cost of 1% for our teachers, I think it's about \$400,000 roughly, right? And that just the salary component was, if you look at the average, it's close to probably 5%, right? So, you're looking at about \$2 million annual cost increase. Overall, about two thirds of the teachers are in the ACCESS program and a third is in Connections. You get a good sense of about how that would impact the ACCESS and Connections budgets, just looking at that component.

**VALDES:** But you just said that you made other changes to—was that like attrition or...

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. We were looking at other sources of funding that we could use to help address the deficits. We were able to shift some salaries, salaries and benefits to a different grant that would cover some of the costs. We closed some positions, but a lot of the work was really done by Dr. Poulin, our chief of our ACCESS program. She was the one that was really drilling down working with our fiscal team.

**VALDES:** This is probably catching you off guard. Do you know offhand where we are with ACCESS and Connections after the teacher, after the negotiations?

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. With Connections, because it's a billback program, whatever increase in costs that we incurred will ultimately end up getting billed back to districts. So, there shouldn't be a net difference there. But for the ACCESS program, when you look at the total increase, it's going to be significant. You just look at that, the \$2 million number, two thirds of those teachers are in the ACCESS program. You're looking at a couple million dollars, close to a couple million dollar increase in that deficit.

**VALDES:** What's the final number then?

**GIORDANO:** I can get you the number. I don't have it offhand, but I can get it for you.

**VALDES:** All right.

**BARKE:** Any more questions?

**SHAW:** I mean, I guess this was the slide that really jumped out at me. It just feels very remarkable. The Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst Office seemed to have such a wildly divergent path. These are smart people, and it just shows that you feel like they're just throwing darts at the wall. I read an article in the Wall Street Journal recently about, it was about the wealth tax being proposed in California. It said, how do I know if it's true, but I think the number was \$777 billion, had left the state of California this year alone in fear, as rich people are trying to take their money out of here before there is such a thing as a wealth tax in California. I thought that wasn't anywhere in your slides, but I would think something like that could be fairly significant. The news was out yesterday. I think that California's population overall is back to a decline overall. More people are moving out or dying than being born and moving in. The net balance is California's population is shrinking. We had that for a while. We kind of stabilized and maybe even slight increase the last few years, but we're back to a declining population, which probably ultimately affects our student population and therefore the ADA, our districts are receiving. So anyway, those were some of the things that jumped out at me.

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. Yeah. I hear you on the tax proposal. I don't know how that's going to generate additional taxes if people are...

**SHAW:** Well there was a study that even if it passes, the net effect will be more—the state will collect less money because more wealth will flee the state than the tax revenue that's left behind that it will yield. So that was...

**GIORDANO:** Seems pretty straightforward.

**BARKE:** Yeah.

**SHAW:** What can you say, huh?

**WILLIAMS:** Good presentation. A lot of questions have been answered. Thank you, Dave.

**GIORDANO:** Thank you, sir.

**BARKE:** Great presentation. And I do want to say, Dr. Bean, that I feel a lot more comfortable with you and your team overseeing the grants and a focus on academics. So, thank you. I feel like these budget sessions are much less stressful than they have been in the past. I appreciate that. And then I have just a silly question because I get this asked all the time and I see it here. People always ask me what happened to all the lottery money. People expect that the schools would be just flushed with lottery money and I see lottery funding here and just wondering what you can tell me about that so I can share that with the questions I'm always getting about lottery funding.

**GIORDANO:** It's a great question. We receive, and I have to go drill down and look at the numbers, but it's about a million dollars in lottery funds overall. I believe that's our unrestricted lottery. There's two components. You have restricted and unrestricted. I can get you the exact numbers, but it's a very small fraction of our overall budget. Our revenue's now almost \$400 million, so it's a really small portion, but it does provide some unrestricted discretionary funds that we can use to help support the classrooms. And so, one of the things that we'll be doing is when we're looking at that ACCESS budget and the Connections budget, one of the things that we've talked about is using a portion, a larger portion of those dollars to help fund our teachers that are in the ACCESS and Connections programs. So, but it's really should be used for teacher salaries and instructional programs generally.

**BARKE:** Okay, wonderful. Thank you. I appreciate that. I just appreciate having some type of answer for what happened to all that lottery money. So, it's a little bit, not a lot.

**GIORDANO:** Not a lot.

**BARKE:** Okay. Thank you. Appreciate your presentation tonight. Thank you. And I'll look forward to our next budget session.

**GIORDANO:** Thank you. If it's okay, I can move on to the Rancho Sonado update. All right. So, this is an update again on the Rancho Sonado project and the slides that follow were actually presented at the state's annual cash conference. So, this was back on February 27th, and this is where our architect actually received it, they call it an award of honor in the design category for the Rancho Sonado designs. Unfortunately, although the project has been delayed, and this is due to some issues surrounding approval of the easement and then some environmental permitting issues as well. You might recall there's an easement that's owned by the Orange County Parks, and it's actually controlled by the Nature Conservancy, which is a global nonprofit corporation. The easement runs through a parcel of land. It's located right along the project site entryway. And in mid-January, the Nature Conservancy approved the easement revision.

However, the final easement revision approval rests with the county. This week we received notification from the county that they're working on the draft amended and restated easement deed. And once it's completed, it will go through the county parks and county council for review. The other setback is actually related to a drainage channel, and this runs along Santiago Canyon Road, and this again is right at the project site entryway. The drainage channel connects with Santiago Canyon Creek, which is categorized as a sensitive aquatic feature, and it requires a special review and work permit that's issued through the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and then the California Department of Fish and Game. So, we expect to receive a response

regarding that required work permit by the end of this month. Here's a project rendering of the Rancho Sonado site, and you've seen this rendering before. In the lower left-hand corner of the slide, you can see the site access road that's located off of Santiago Canyon Road. It leads all the way up to the main base camp area, and you can see that highlighted here. It's in green with a blue overlay. The good news, our project team has received approval from the Orange County Fire Authority, and this is on the designs for that access road that takes you up to the main base camp. The mustard color lines, these are scattered throughout the diagram, represents some various walking trails on the property. You're going to notice that there are teaching stations positioned along those trails, and those teaching stations are highlighted in those blue oval shapes. And most of these teaching stations that you see here do include a covered learning space for students, and all these teaching stations were actually designed by the Inside the Outdoors program staff.

Next, we're just going to drill down quickly and take a look at the base camp. Here's that aerial view of our base camp, and in the lower left-hand corner of this slide, you can see that access road that leads up to the main base camp area. And towards the center of the slide, you can see the bus turnaround area, and that's where the buses will park and drop off the students. To the far right, we have our administration building, and this will be modernized with a new office space for several staff workstations. We have a first aid room with a patient bed, a gender-neutral staff restroom. We have two small Zoom booths equipped with the TV and a small round table and chairs, a large staff lounge and meeting space, and then garage space for utility vehicles and equipment. And then directly adjacent to the administration building, we have a large covered outdoor dining pavilion with bench seating that we'll be able to accommodate up to about 125 students.

And then there's also this large communal hand wash station that's located adjacent to that outdoor dining pavilion. Located in the center of the slide, this is just above the bus turnaround area. This is the new multipurpose building, and we have, of course, two indoor classrooms. We have an outdoor covered learning space, a food prep area, we have four single stall student restrooms, and then one ADA accessible student restroom, as well as some storage facilities. And then at the very top center of the slide is the location for the new outdoor amphitheater, which is going to have, again, some really incredible views of the surrounding area there. Here's a nice rendering of the project, and this is just a view from that bus turnaround area right at the main base camp. And this is rendering one of the classrooms in the new multipurpose building. And this is just a partial view of the interior space and the administration building, along with a picture of one of the restroom facilities and a classroom in the lower left-hand corner. Here's a rendering of that covered outdoor learning space, and then there's also a small rendering on the far left in the middle of the outdoor amphitheater.

And then this slide just features some of the signage that's going to be positioned along the main access road, as well as along the walking trails. And so just to wrap up, the good news is, is that the project has been completely approved by the Department of State Architect and our staff plans to complete the bid process this summer during the months of June and July. And then in August, staff plans to bring forward a board recommendation for approval, which would include a 16-month construction schedule that would begin in September of 2026 and conclude in December of 2027. That's the tentative schedule. The bad news is, of course, is construction

costs have continued to go up. Construction costs have really gone through the roof. A lot of it having to do with the fire's obviously a big issue, tariffs have been an issue. And then you've got all these school districts that have approved bonds recently that are all going forward with their construction projects. We're anticipating a fairly large increase in the construction costs for this particular project. But of course, we'll present to you the bid information that we receive and we'll share all that with you probably in August of this year. So that was the update on Rancho Sonado. You're welcome.

**SHAW:** Would I assume correctly that we're building everything in a fire sensitive thought process, fire resistant everything and good clearance with keeping the shrubs away from buildings, all those sorts of things, right?

**GIORDANO:** 100%.

**BEAN:** OCFA comes in and consults with us on the fire hardening facility.

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. All the building materials will be fire resistant, triple pane glass, we'll have sprinkler systems inside, outside...

**SPARKS:** There'll be water in the fire hydrants?

**GIORDANO:** Yeah. We will have water in our fire hydrants.

**HENDRICK:** We have to build our own fire hydrant. We actually have to have water and our own fire hydrant on site, which we didn't have before.

**SPARKS:** Thank you.

**GIORDANO:** Thank you.

**BARKE:** All right. Aracely I think you're next up for our charter school review.

**CHASTAIN:** Okay. So, this evening I'm presenting the charter school spring update for the OCBE authorized schools. It includes enrollment and fiscal status based on current data and each school's unaudited actuals, as well as an update on upcoming oversight functions of the charter unit. So, you have that update in your folders. In addition to the spring report and your folders, per usual, we have printed out a binder with the annual oversight reports for the '25-'26 fiscal year for the charter schools authorized by the board for your review. We do only print out one binder. I believe each report is about 15 pages long. So, if you want to take a look at that, and if you have any additional questions on that, we can provide you more information as needed. So, going back to the spring report, as reflected in that report, OCBE currently authorizes 30 charter schools operating across 35 sites, serving approximately 14,000 students.

Overall, the portfolio remains stable with the majority of schools demonstrating strong financial health and positive fund balances. From a fiscal perspective, schools are categorized as good, fair, or poor, and that is based on key indicators such as budget balance, reserves, cash flow, and debt levels. Most schools fall within the good category indicating stable operations and sufficient reserves. However, there are a small number of schools that warrant closer monitoring. Four

schools are currently identified as being in poor financial condition. That's Explorer Academy, Magnolia Science Academy Orange County, Orange County School of the Arts, and Sycamore Creek Community Charter School II. While each of these schools remains able to meet current financial obligations, they're projecting negative end fund balances and have insufficient reserves. Staff is providing differentiated assistance oversight based on each school's circumstances. For example, for Explorer Academy, they continue to experience declining enrollment and ongoing structural deficits. The school is currently under a notice of violation, if you'll recall, and has submitted a fiscal stabilization plan. As part of the corrective actions, the school must meet an enrollment target of 105 students by May 15th, so they only have another week to do that, to demonstrate progress toward fiscal stability. Staff will provide the board with an update in June regarding the school's progress and the potential for next steps regarding the revocation of that school. Magnolia Science Academy Orange County is in its first year of operations, however, is not on track to achieve a positive fund balance by year three.

**VALDES:** Is that the Anaheim campus?

**CHASTAIN:** Which one are you referring to?

**VALDES:** Magnolia.

**CHASTAIN:** No.

**HENDRICK:** This is the Placentia Yorba Linda and the...

**CHASTAIN:** I can't off the top of my head think of where there are other campuses, but they do have two campuses, correct.

**HENDRICK:** It may be their Anaheim campus and the Placentia, not their original Santa Ana campus, which is a separate.

**CHASTAIN:** They'll be required to submit a fiscal stabilization plan. Orange County School of the Arts is projecting a significant deficit in the current fiscal year, primarily related still to that one-time legal settlement. The school continues to maintain strong enrollment and adequate cash flow and an administration has identified the factors contributing to the deficits, so we'll just continue to monitor them and provide updates to the board as needed. Sycamore Creek Community Charter School II is facing a structural deficit, primarily associated with facility related costs. The school's financial projections are dependent on meeting enrollment targets tied to facility covenants and continues to progress towards those enrollment goals. That's going to be important for the school's long-term fiscal stability. The school will be required to submit a fiscal stabilization plan as well. In addition, several schools have been identified in the fair category reflecting emerging fiscal concerns such as declining reserves, structural deficits, or enrollment related pressures.

Staff will continue to monitor these schools closely to support early intervention and corrective action as appropriate. I also wanted to briefly update the board that staff has been working on developing an enhanced academic monitoring process in response to the board's ongoing interest in strengthening oversight around charter school academic outcomes. The idea is to create a

more structured and consistent way to identify schools that may benefit from additional academic review and support before they enter the renewal cycle. We've been very intentional about aligning the process with education code and existing accountability systems like the Dashboard, the LCAP, and differentiated assistance, so that we're building on processes the schools are already using rather than creating something duplicative or burdensome. The overall approach is meant to be collaborative and improvement focused. It emphasizes multiple measures, school context, and consistency across the schools, while also remaining respectful of the charter school autonomy and avoiding a compliance driven approach. We have identified two schools up for renewal next year that we feel may benefit from this process. And currently we have, as we've mentioned before, for the '26-'27 school year, we have eight schools that are up for renewal. That concludes my report. I am happy to answer any questions.

**SHAW:** Just make a comment as I look through each of our schools, it's always striking to look at the number of kids and the students on the wait list. It's some of them in Orange County Classical Academy, over 1,000 wait listed.

**BARKE:** Yeah, more wait listed than they have inside the school.

**SHAW:** Right. Samueli Academy is the same thing. There's more on the wait list than is enrolled. It's incredible.

**CHASTAIN:** We did add that to this report this year, and we'll keep it on there if you're interested, if you continue to be interested in that information.

**SHAW:** That's very interesting.

**BARKE:** Yeah.

**CHASTAIN:** The ones that have an asterisk next to them, those wait lists carry over year to year. So those are not quite, we feel as accurate because you could have kids who, if you call them now, they may not be interested anymore because that year, that list never resets. But the ones that don't have that asterisk, those are for that year, that's the number of applicants that received and were not able to enroll.

**BARKE:** So how does that work? A school just keeps the wait list, they don't really update it. Other schools just say, "We're starting over."

**CHASTAIN:** Correct. And they have that ability to decide how they want to do that. I know for a school like Samueli Academy, they got some pushback from families who didn't want to have to go through that process. They wanted to keep their spot on the wait list. But then they always have families who maybe got on that wait list years ago and are just not interested anymore and they won't know that unless a spot opens up.

**BARKE:** Well, and I imagine after years they grade out too. If you go on the wait list in ninth grade, four years later, I mean...

**CHASTAIN:** Yeah, I would assume they probably are taking those students off of their list, but we're not exactly sure how they monitor those lists. But yeah, I would say that those that do reset

their lists every year though are definitely more accurate. And yeah, like a school like Orange County Classical Academy, that's a huge wait list for one year.

**SPARKS:** I think we should ask them to reset their lists every year.

**BARKE:** Or at least to clean it up and maybe somehow go through the list and check in with the parents and say, "You're on our wait list," because maybe somebody else—and I would think people would want to know what their spot is.

**CHASTAIN:** Yeah. We can get a little bit more information from those couple of schools that have those wait lists that carry over just to see how it is that they monitor that and clean those up and how accurate those numbers potentially might be.

**SPARKS:** Yeah, like a restaurant if the wait's an hour and you're on the list and then you're like, "I'm done. I'm going somewhere else." Right.

**CHASTAIN:** We can do that for you.

**BARKE:** Thank you. Any other questions?

**SPARKS:** Thank you for all your work on that.

**BARKE:** Yeah, appreciate it. This is really great information. All right. I think now we are going into, let's see, announcements, Superintendent Bean.

**BEAN:** Okay. So lost my contact in my left eye.

**BARKE:** Oh no.

**BEAN:** I'm going to look at this. One clear eye, one blurry eye. Just again, 5-3-1 under this whole umbrella of why we do this work, it's vision for students. So, a couple of awesome pieces of news, which you actually saw today is actually the piece of artwork for An Dinh that was one of the winners of Connections, beautiful artwork. This is the artwork for Bryan Vera, second place. And then it was a class project. The whole class won first place at Connections for this design here. It's pretty cool. I'm proud to report that at Sunburst Youth Academy, we have a paraeducator, Raelene. She was named as a 2026 California classified employee of the year at the state level. So that's really amazing. We have some—unfortunately, I cannot go up that day, but we have other staff that are going to go up and celebrate with Tony Thurmond as Raelene gets her national or gets her award. And then she's also selected as the state's sole nominee for the National Rise Award. So, we're very proud of Raelene. Amazing. Had the privilege last week to go to these six schools and award our Orange County Teachers of the Year, and we're hoping that you all can join us in November at the Disneyland Hotel.

**BARKE:** Do we have a date yet for that?

**BEAN:** I believe it's the 13th, November 13th. So, it was a great time. Those are the grosses, by the way. It's because of their generosity. Our finalists and even semi-finalists receive money from their foundation. Here are the six teachers. You notice it's five TK-12 and then one

community college teacher every year. My Rossmore Elementary School, where my kids went, that's one of the teachers that received that at Los Alamitos. Pretty cool. All right. Now in the areas of academics, instructional literacy, we are proud to join the city of Westminster as we dedicated the Mendez Freedom Trail opening. So that was pretty cool. The Westminster officials were there and so were the Mendez family. Also, as you know, last year was the inaugural school impact awards. So now we're opening up round two applications to assign and name impact schools across Orange County, Orange County, which aims to elevate effective practices and strengthen collaboration. We're happy to report that this year in the PLI, strong focus on academics, but also a strong focus on an executive leadership pathway. So, we're targeting sessions for superintendents, principals, district leaders to learn about leadership. If you guys want tickets, let us know so that we can make sure you're on the list to attend our professional learning institute.

**BARKE:** So, is it for all three days or is it the first day or what is it?

**BEAN:** The leadership pathway, the executive leadership is the last day.

**BARKE:** Okay.

**BEAN:** Under the area of ensuring student in school safety, I had the pleasure of partnering and being present with DA Spitzer as we address hate crimes together as two organizations and hate incidences in schools. We talked, they led a half a day professional learning with our staff and his staff around our responsibilities as schools, defining what hate instances and crimes are, and then providing resources to each other. We were highly complimented by DA Spitzer and their staff saying that we ran a very professional learning community that day. So, it was awesome. And that is my report for today.

**BARKE:** Wonderful. Thank you. Yep. Renee?

**HENDRICK:** So first of all, yes, teacher the year is November 13th. Nice memory, Dr. Bean. The next board meeting is June 3rd. As of right now, we probably will have at least seven interdistrict appeals for both June meetings. So, we know we have 12 already. So based on the deadlines, we're going to try and do maybe six or six on each one. Look at about a two o'clock start time again.

**BARKE:** Okay. And perhaps maybe some will settle. Perhaps.

**HENDRICK:** We have. We hope. Yes. We did have one settle at the last minute, so we'll keep our fingers crossed. The submission deadline is Wednesday, May 20th and board packet delivery would be Friday, May 29th. And that is all I have.

**BARKE:** Great. All right. Legislative updates.

**ROLEN:** [several inaudible words].

**BARKE:** Okay. All right. So, we'll move to any committee reports. All right. Any board member comments and we can...

**SPARKS:** I have a comment.

**BARKE:** Sure.

**SPARKS:** Yeah. I would like to just say extra thank you to our deputy here. What was your name?

**DEPUTY TONY:** Tony.

**SPARKS:** Tony. Thank you for your leadership during our public comment time period. I know that's not so easy to navigate and you really stepped up on behalf of us. I really appreciate that.

**VALDES:** I have a similar comment. We have a gentleman named Rudi who likes to come down here and make his public comments, which is fine. But he started saying today that we teach the Quran in elementary school and I'm just...

**WILLIAMS:** We don't.

**VALDES:** And I have no idea what he's talking about. I don't think that's about education in Orange County and I would have hit the gavel.

**SPARKS:** Maybe we could make an announcement before the comments to say...

**ROLEN:** We did.

**SPARKS:** I know we did. No, I know we made an announcement that it should be education related, but maybe we should even be more specific to say it needs to be related to Orange County public education.

**ROLEN:** The subject matter jurisdiction of the Board of Education.

**SPARKS:** Something like that. Did he say that exactly?

**VALDES:** And just to be clear, we do not teach the Quran in any elementary school that I'm aware of.

**WILLIAMS:** Nor do we teach the Bible either.

**VALDES:** Nor do we teach the Bible.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**SHAW:** But do we teach the Book of Mormon? I'm looking at my calendar. I will be out of, I'm in Washington DC on June 17th, so I suppose we'll have to do the fun of—and you're going to be gone too?

**SPARKS:** I'm teaching a course, yeah, overseas. Yeah.

**SHAW:** Are you going to try to Zoom into the meeting?

**SPARKS:** I'm going to try.

**SHAW:** Okay.

**SPARKS:** But probably not at two o'clock. I'll probably be able to do it at five o'clock whenever the real meeting starts.

**SHAW:** Okay. So don't let me forget, we got to set up a Zoom with my hotel and all that fun.

**BARKE:** All right. Any other comments? No. All right. Well, hearing none, thank you for your service. We do appreciate you. And with that, we will end the meeting.