



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE**

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**SMMUSD School Board to Consider Implementing
a District-Based Early Learning Program to Replace Head Start**

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education will consider replacing Head Start with an in-house expanded early learning program committed to continuing to serve Head Start-eligible families, and all families in the SMMUSD service area. The discussion and action will take place at the regular school board meeting on Jan. 17, 2019. The public meeting starts at 5:30 pm. The school board previously discussed this plan at its Dec. 13, 2018 meeting.

Given the five-year decline in local families who qualify for Head Start program enrollment, it has become extremely challenging for SMMUSD to meet the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Head Start requirements. The LACOE reapplication requires a five-year commitment, with a mandate to maintain a certain enrollment number.

Rather than reapply for the grant, the district plans to create a program that serves Head Start-qualified families, and also provides options for all families residing in SMMUSD. This new program will operate on a multi-tier payment system with some families qualifying for full subsidy, some on partial pay and others on full pay. In addition, SMMUSD remains a state-funded local service area for families who may not be residents, but qualify based on financial and work need.

The new program aims to continue to serve all current Head Start-eligible families, new families who reside within SMMUSD boundaries and provide expanded support to other families in Santa Monica and Malibu. The services offered will be comparable services to those currently delivered for Head Start-eligible families and will include health services, mental health, special education support, academic opportunities, family engagement and community connections, all in alignment with district goals of ensuring improved kindergarten readiness and closing the achievement gap.

SMMUSD plans to incorporate social justice standards into preschool programming while creating vertical alignment with elementary schools, providing for a smooth and successful transition into transitional kindergarten or kindergarten within SMMUSD. Community liaison support will be incorporated into the program, as well as supports by literacy and early learning coaches. Family engagement, including parent programming, will be expanded. In addition,

professional development for pre-school teachers will be provided and opportunities for collaboration with TK and K will increase.

“Early learning experiences provide the foundation for a student’s strength and ultimate success,” Superintendent Dr. Ben Drati said. “We believe that all students deserve to be part of a system that supports the whole child, including social, emotional, academic and physical considerations.”

SMMUSD estimates that approximately 70 SMMUSD students are likely to qualify for Head Start, while the current LACOE Head Start program proposal requires 112 Head Start students, ages 3-4, and the addition of 16 early Head Start students, ages 0-2.11 years. Based on this commitment, SMMUSD would receive \$1.6 million in funding.

SMMUSD projects that the district support program will cost approximately \$800,000 per year. In Santa Monica and Malibu, the Head Start qualification restrictions prevent many families from becoming eligible for the program. The district’s goal is to reach all families, regardless of need. Whether paying full fee, qualifying for full or partial subsidy, the district aims to be inclusive and to provide coherent opportunities for all students.

“We understand that some community members may be concerned about this change for future families who may live outside of our boundaries,” Dr. Drati said. “We are committed to providing these families with connections to nearby Head Start programs, while focusing on SMMUSD families and the long term preschool through 12th grade experience.”

Autonomy may also provide more opportunities for SMMUSD to further cultivate and expand partnerships with Santa Monica College, the City of Santa Monica’s Cradle to Career program, the City of Malibu, the Early Childhood Task Force and the Early Learning District Advisory Committee.

SMMUSD currently operates 17 preschool classrooms, including Seaside Neighborhood, State and Head Start operated programs. The district is in the process of converting all preschools to Seaside Neighborhood programs, which focus on creating matriculated opportunities from preschool through elementary school. The Seaside programs place emphasis on STEAM enhanced experiences, Reggio-Inspired learning opportunities and a focus on social emotional development.

“We are enthusiastic about this shift and believe it provides access and opportunity to more families, create meaningful community partnerships and will enhance the learning experience of all children we serve,” Dr. Drati said.

If approved by the school board, the new program will go into effect for the 2019-20 school year. The school board agenda is available [online](#).

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