



January 30, 2020

Superintendent's Message: New budget advisory committee

Dear parents, guardians, staff and community members,

As mentioned in a previous [letter](#), the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, like most districts in the state of California, has been challenged by a structural fiscal deficit spending cycle for the past 10 years. This means that our operational expenditures are greater than the revenues we receive from our combined state, federal and local funding. This is a function of many factors, including increases in healthcare, the cost of living, and general operations, such as costs of material supplies and services.

We have been able to survive the shortfall in previous years in a variety of ways. We owe thanks to our generous communities which have supported local funding measures, including Measure R, and YY and GS in Santa Monica. We greatly appreciate donations to support the goals of the Santa Monica Education Foundation and Malibu LEAD. Our district has also benefited from former Governor Jerry Brown's support for education through his "year-by-year" allocations of "one-time" state funds that helped increase our district's fund balance or "savings account." Up to this point, we've been able to slow down erosion of the fund balance without having to address our expenditures.

Current Governor Gavin Newsom approved the state budget for the 2020-21 year that reflects additional funding support for school districts. For SMMUSD, as a community-funded, or basic aid district, we are not the beneficiary of any state budget changes, therefore, this initiative, while great for the state, will not benefit SMMUSD. We are expecting a small amount of additional funding for our special education program.

We must now take a hard look at our district's expenditures and realign our practices in keeping with our district's mission and revenue going forward. SMMUSD's fund balance is extremely low at this point, and there is no indication in the near future that there will be an increase in revenue from state, federal or local sources of funding. Though a difficult and sometimes a painful process for a school community, I am optimistic that we will get through this and be even stronger following this realignment.

In the face of projected budget reductions over the next several years, we are forming a Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee (SBAC) to elicit meaningful input from a broad range of community stakeholders. This group will be comprised of teachers, principals, staff, parent representatives from mandated district advisory committees and leadership groups, community members, and high school student board members. Members have been selected to provide a balanced representation across schools, grade level, constituent and geographic location.

Prospective SBAC members have been notified and the first of six planned meetings will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2020 from 4 - 7 p.m., at the SMMUSD Professional Development Learning Center, (PDL), 2828 4th St., Santa Monica. SBAC members will work collaboratively with district executive staff to review, discuss and agree on a set of recommendations for budget priorities that will then be forwarded to the school board for review and consideration at future public school board meetings.



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee is committed to transparency and meetings will be open to the public for observation. Participation by those who are not official members of the SBAC will be limited to observation and posing written questions and comments to the SBAC. Minutes of meetings will be made available to the public online and responses to questions will be addressed in subsequent meetings.

SMMUSD schools are amongst the most highly rated in the state and nation. We will continue to provide exceptional programs taught by outstanding teachers, while following our goals and district mission, as we embark on this critical journey.

We are committed to this realignment process and look forward to collaborating with our committee to ensure that all stakeholder groups have input into budget planning that will impact the district for years to come.

Questions or comments? Please submit through [Let's Talk](#).

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent