

**Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District
Board of Education Meeting
ADDENDUM TO THE AGENDA**

February 21, 2013

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- A.31 School Safety, Support, and Communication related to February 25 Westboro Baptist Church Protest
ADD: New item on the agenda (*pages 2-4 of this addendum*)

INFORMATION ITEMS

SW

TO: BOARD OF EDUCATION

ACTION/MAJOR

02/21/13

FROM: SANDRA LYON

ADDENDUM

RE: SCHOOL SAFETY, SUPPORT, AND COMMUNICATION RELATED TO
FEBRUARY 25 WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH PROTEST

RECOMMENDATION NO. A.31

It is recommended that the Board of Education adopt this open letter to the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District community to communicate our support and belief in the intrinsic value of each and every member of our community and to urge peaceful and non-confrontational exercise of First Amendment rights by all who choose to protest on February 25.

COMMENTS: The Wesboro Baptist Church has publically stated that it will protest at Santa Monica High School (Samohi) on February 25, 2013, spreading a message, as stated on their website, "opposing the homosexual lifestyle of soul-damning, nation-destroying filth."

As a school district, we understand that individuals and groups are entitled to their own opinions and beliefs about homosexuality; however, we find hateful speech directed at any students or other community members to be offensive and potentially dangerous. Staff is aware that counter protests are likely to occur.

While we recognize that this is an excellent real life lesson about the First Amendment, we also know that such an assembly can put students and other citizens at risk. The Samohi principal and other site administrators, along with administrators from the District Office, are working with the Santa Monica Police Department (SMPD) to supervise surrounding neighborhoods and gates that morning to make sure our students are safe. Security will be tight that morning, but we do not expect any problems. In addition, District administrators and the SMPD are working to ensure that any student and/or community counter protest that occurs will be conducted in a safe and peaceful manner. The District urges all of those who choose to participate in any counter protest do so in a way that demonstrates the power of a peaceful, respectful assembly.

MOTION MADE BY:

SECONDED BY:

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTE:

AYES:

NOES:

Open Letter to the Santa Monica-Malibu School Community:

You may have heard that the Westboro Baptist Church is planning protests throughout the Los Angeles area on February 25. Timed to garner attention from media that will be gathered to cover the Academy Awards, these protests will be staged in many places, including Santa Monica High School. To be clear, according to its own web-site, the Westboro Baptist Church engages in these sidewalk demonstrations as an expression of opposition to “the homosexual lifestyle of soul-damning, nation-destroying filth.”

As the leadership team of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, we have an unwavering commitment to teach tolerance, acceptance and compassion for others. It is the mission of the Santa Monica-Malibu School District to ensure that all students are cared for, supported and educated to their highest potential.

To support this mission:

- We believe any action that demonstrates intolerance toward others is unacceptable.
- We believe in the fundamental dignity and intrinsic worth of every one of our students.
- We believe that each and every member of our learning community deserves respect, compassion and appreciation, regardless of his or her sexual orientation, race, religion, gender, national origin, or immigration status.

We condemn any action that purposely attacks, harasses or devalues any student, staff or community member.

Our entire district leadership team stands united in opposition to messages of intolerance and bigotry. We will continue to be a district of inclusiveness, caring and compassion. However, as long as the protesters operate within their constitutional rights, we cannot stop this event.

We are proud to share that the dedicated education professionals at Santa Monica High School are preparing to use this demonstration to deliver real-life lessons about the First Amendment and freedom of speech.

We understand that some members of our community will exercise their First Amendment rights by participating in a counter-protest. We urge counter-protesters to conduct themselves in a peaceful, non-confrontational manner consistent with our District’s educational mission and values.

We will be working closely with the Santa Monica Police Department to ensure that our students and staff have safe access to our campus and that the assembly does not compromise campus safety.

This situation provides an opportunity to stress to our students and our school community that peaceful protests are part of American democracy, and that tolerance and respectful acceptance of cultural diversity is essential in civilized and educated society.

Respectfully,

Laurie Lieberman
Board President

Maria Leon-Vazquez
Board Vice President

Ben Allen
Board Member

Oscar de la Torre
Board Member

Jose Escarce
Board Member

Ralph Mechur
Board Member

Nimish Patel
Board Member

Sandra Lyon
Superintendent