

Visual & Performing Arts District Advisory Committee (VAPA DAC)

May 21, 2025 – in-person

MINUTES

Board Room, SMMUSD District Office, 1717 - 4th Street, Santa Monica 90401

Attendees: Annie Azzariti, Sarah Jane Barney, Janis Gabbert, Maria Leon-Vazquez, Zina Josephs, Domi Piturro, Bertha Roman, Emily Senchuk, Rebecca Terlizzi, Jim Wang, and Tom Whaley

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by Co-Chair Janis Gabbert.
2. While we waited for a quorum, two music parents, Sarah Jane Barney and Emily Senchuk, introduced themselves. They plan to apply to join the DAC.
3. **Minutes** from the February and April meetings were approved by unanimous consent. (Terlizzi)
4. **VAPA Coordinator update** – Tom Whaley spoke about his early years with the district. In addition to monthly meetings with all music teachers, he also began meeting weekly with the elementary music teachers. In 2006, the elementary music program was expanded to all 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders by introducing the block schedule to replace the “pull-out” system. The pilot program was at McKinley, then all Title I schools, then all elementary schools. One year, a proposed budget cut in state education funding threatened to eliminate the elementary music program, but that was averted following well-organized advocacy efforts by parents.

In his years with SMMUSD, Tom has hired all but 3 of the current music teachers. Samohi orchestra teacher Joni Swenson expanded the Samohi program to 7 orchestras. The Samohi Jazz Band program grew from one band to 2 bands and 2 combos, with students earning both high school and college credit. Tom has been speaking at all the elementary school concerts this year, praising the teachers. With help from Bertha Roman, he identified funds to purchase new risers for Edison and McKinley, with the old risers going to Pali High. The 2025 Samohi Senior Class Art Show was well attended, as was “The Addams Family” musical. Tom also visited Nicole Fisher, who teaches elementary art in Malibu.

The Samohi Jazz Bands participated in an adjudicated festival, with the Jazz Combo 1 and Jazz Combo 2 placing 1st. Jazz Band I placed 3rd, and Jazz Band 2 placed 4th. On

the same day, the “Mexico Magico” mariachi and folklorico festival took place at Samohi, and Tom was presented with a painting. Stanley Clarke is rehearsing with the Jazz Band I for their June 5th concert. The Samohi music composition Capstone event is scheduled for May 23.

Jim Wang reported that he’s creating a new VAPA Calendar that will be more accessible to the public. There were 30 applicants for the Samohi orchestra position he’s leaving. Jim narrowed the candidates down to 12, then Jason Aiello reduced the list to 6. Round 1 of interviews start next week. Round 2 with Marae Cruce will continue the following week. Sarah Jane Barney commented that Jim Wang’s vacancy left sad students in the Samohi Philharmonic Orchestra.

5. **DAC Year-End Report to the Board of Education** – The draft report was reviewed, with suggestions to add information about music ensembles that participated in the Heritage Festival over spring break: the Samohi Chamber Singers, Chorale, Madrigal Ensemble, and Philharmonic Orchestra. The report was then approved by unanimous consent. (Piturro) Domi Piturro announced that he’s not formally resigning from the DAC, but that after nearly 10 years on the DAC, teaching digital art at SMC, and helping develop the dual enrollment program with SMC, CTE is now including many of those classes at Samohi, he’s now involved in green tech design for solar energy and wind energy, and is implementing this in other school districts.
6. **Board of Education Liaisons** – Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein was unable to attend the meeting. Maria Leon-Vazquez reported on new administrators: Dr. Kelly is retiring; Gerardo Cruz is the new CFO; Dr. Doug Mesa is the new head of HR from LAUSD; new principals at Malibu Elementary and Franklin. Equity piece in education – Samohi no longer has Honors English in 9th & 10th grade – report has positive results, although test scores dropped among Latino students from last year CAASP testing. Inter-district permitting allows SMMUSD to have a diverse student population. We are a Basic Aid district now (funding based on property tax). Unification: Malibu has still not met the criteria to split the district. Construction of TK facilities at Grant has begun. The new Malibu HS facilities will open in the fall.
7. **Farewell to our longtime VAPA Coordinator** -- As this was his last meeting with us, Janis Gabbert presented Tom Whaley with a certificate of appreciation from the VAPA DAC. Rebecca Terlizzi brought refreshments for Tom and everyone to enjoy.
8. **Adjournment** -- The meeting adjourned at 8:44 PM. Respectfully submitted by Zina Josephs and Rebecca Terlizzi