

APPROVED

MINUTES OF THE SAN MATEO COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Meeting Date: December 17, 2025

Meeting Location: San Mateo County Office of Education
101 Twin Dolphin Dr.
Redwood City, California 94065

Board Members Present: Susan Alvaro (remotely), Edith Arias,
Chelsea Bonini, Beverly Gerard, Patricia
Love, Mike O’Neill, Hugo Torres

County Attorney Present: Lisa Cho, Deputy County Attorney

Staff Officials Present: Marco Chávez, Deputy Superintendent,
Educational Services Division;
Jennifer Perna, Executive Assistant

Staff Officials Absent: Nancy Magee, Superintendent

Other Staff Present: Valerie Arbizu, Kevin Bultema, Joy
Dardenelle, Mefula Fairley, Gwenn Lei,
Tami Moore, Sarah Notch, David Rennie,
Kris Shouse, Jae Takahashi, Dhanya Unni,
Mary Yung

1. **OPENING ITEMS**

A. Call to Order

Board President Hugo Torres called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Board Member Alvaro noted she would attend the meeting remotely due to just cause.

B. Approval of Agenda

After a motion by Board Member Gerard and a second by Board Member O’Neill, the December 17, 2025, agenda as presented was unanimously (Alvaro, Arias, Bonini, Gerard, Love, O’Neill, and Torres) approved, by roll call vote.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The following speakers provided live public comment:

- Evan Leonard, community member
- Olga Zhuravskaya, community member
- Aaron Rubin, community member

3. **PUBLIC HEARING: OCEANLIGHT SCHOOL COUNTYWIDE BENEFIT CHARTER PETITION**

A. Receive Staff Analysis/Report and Board Options for Action

Joy Dardenelle, Executive Director, District Improvement and Support, Educational Services Division, provided the Board with the Staff Analysis/Report and Board options for action. She informed that the meeting was being held to conduct a second public hearing and make a decision on the Oceanlight School countywide benefit charter petition. Oceanlight School, operated by North Peninsula Charter School, Inc., submitted its petition on September 18, 2025, requesting approval from the San Mateo County Board of Education to open a countywide transitional kindergarten (TK)–8th grade public charter school beginning in August 2026. The school plans to start with 236 students ages 4–14 and expand to roughly 488 students with up to three locations by its seventh year.

Under California Education Code Section 47605.6(b), the County Board was required to hold a public hearing within 60 days of receiving a petition to assess community support from teachers, parents, and affected school districts. That meeting occurred on October 22, 2025. The Board is then required to approve or deny the petition within 90 days of receipt of the petition, with an optional 30-day extension if both parties agreed to the extension.

As part of its review, the County Office conducted a two-hour capacity interview with the petitioners on October 30, 2025, to clarify issues related to the educational program, operations, and finances. The petitioners also submitted a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on November 21, 2025.

Staff from multiple County Office departments, including Curriculum and Instruction, Human Resources, Business Services, Safe and Supportive Schools, and the Superintendent’s Office reviewed the petition, following state law and county guidelines. The Charter Review Team included specialists in areas such as students who are English learners, special education, alternative education, governance, and school finance.

Executive Director Dardenelle acknowledged the efforts of lead petitioner LiLing Pang and the Oceanlight founding team. She then presented the key findings from staff’s review and analysis, which identified the below deficiencies in the Oceanlight countywide charter petition:

- Lack of justification for countywide status: the petition does not explain why the school could not be authorized by a single district under Education Code 47605

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- Insufficient demonstration of unique benefit: the petition does not show that the targeted student population requires countywide services that a single-district charter could not provide
- Failure to provide required notice: petitioners did not give the Burlingame School District the mandated 30-day notice, even though it is listed as a potential future site
- Limited and localized support: support comes mainly from the Ocean Shore community within Pacifica, while all seven affected districts plus Burlingame have expressed opposition
- Unsound educational program: the petition lacks a reasonably comprehensive educational plan, resulting in an unsound program for prospective students
- Low likelihood of successful implementation: concerns include attempting too many initiatives at once, not effectively reaching the intended student population, inadequate startup funding, and incomplete descriptions of required charter elements
- Concerns about admissions fairness: the petition’s proposed admission preferences conflict with the requirement for a fair, open lottery
- Missing required elements: five of the 16 legally required components are not described comprehensively
- Operational and financial concerns: issues include unclear facility leasing timelines, administrative service plans, civil liability considerations, and financial statements
- Insufficient support for low-achieving students: the petition does not demonstrate the ability to provide robust learning experiences for academically low-achieving pupils, meaning it does not qualify for preference under Education Code

Executive Director Dardenelle emphasized that the County Board has broad discretion to approve or deny the Oceanlight charter petition and may base a denial on any justified grounds. Based on the findings presented, staff recommended that the County Board deny the petition for establishing Oceanlight School as a countywide charter.

Executive Director Dardenelle noted that if the County Board instead chooses to approve the petition, staff advises that approval be conditional and limited to a five-year term (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2031). The petitioners would be required to enter into a MOU by February 27, 2026, addressing all staff concerns outlined in the analysis. A conditional MOU is necessary to ensure the school operates soundly, aligns with County Office best practices, and meets any additional requirements set by the County Board.

- B. Receive Presentation from the Oceanlight Charter School Petitioners (10 minute maximum)

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Oceanlight Charter School petitioners Dr. Kelly Mendoza, Don Burdette, LiLing Pang, and Shivani Ganguly presented on the Oceanlight School Countywide Benefit Charter Petition.

They explained that a written response to the staff analysis was provided in advance and many of the issues raised are typically resolved during the post-authorization MOU process. The petitioners urged the County Board to focus on which decision will expand opportunity and advance equity for students across San Mateo County. To guide the decision, they outlined three standards: whether the petition meets legal criteria for a countywide benefit, whether Oceanlight’s educational model is strong, and whether the founding team has the capacity to build a successful school.

The petitioners underscored that public stewardship requires ensuring equitable access to high-quality education regardless of a child’s address. The key legal question is whether there is a countywide need that cannot be met by a single-district charter. They asserted that such a need exists, pointing to long-standing gaps in northern San Mateo County where families in Daly City, South San Francisco, Brisbane, and San Bruno lack access to a TK–8 public school offering integrated, hands-on, real-world learning.

After surveying and meeting with families across these communities, the petitioners found widespread frustration with the limited options, with only 30% of families saying their current school meets their child’s needs and 83% expressing interest in a school like Oceanlight. They feel that families want more Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM), creativity, and environmental learning – programs they said do not currently exist in the area. They emphasized that this unmet need is regional and not confined to one city, and a single-district charter would restrict equitable access. Countywide authorization is what allows Oceanlight to serve students fairly across district boundaries, maintain open enrollment, and grow across multiple small campuses located where demand is highest. They stated that Oceanlight reflects the voices of families across more than six districts who are asking for an educational option that does not currently exist and could significantly improve their children’s lives.

The petitioners contended that Oceanlight’s educational model is strong, well-established, and grounded in decades of practice by experienced educators who have successfully used similar approaches in their own classrooms. The model integrates project-based learning, environmental stewardship, STEAM problem-solving, whole-child development, and family partnership into a fully immersive TK–8 program designed to serve diverse learners. They emphasized that this approach is research-based and has produced outcomes that exceeded both state and county averages. Currently, no public school in northern San Mateo County offers this kind of integrated model and families are actively seeking access to it because they believe in its effectiveness. The petitioners noted that even the staff report acknowledges the model’s strengths. They added that authorization would allow Oceanlight to begin hiring, securing facilities, and building systems to support all students, including those with special needs, and that the operational details and timelines are addressed in their draft MOU.

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The petitioners stated that the true measure of capacity lies not in documents but in people and their ability to work together. They stressed that Oceanlight’s strength comes from a deeply experienced community of educators and leaders who have long practiced this educational model. Twenty-seven educators submitted letters pledging their commitment and the team has years of experience designing and implementing a model for diverse learners. They highlighted the team’s ability to collaborate across disciplines, align instruction to state standards, and translate a shared vision into daily practice.

The petitioners said it is misguided to judge capacity by looking for every implementation detail at the petition stage; what matters is the soundness of the design and the expertise of the team bringing it to life. They noted that the enrollment policy is structured to support a stable launch and ensure equitable access countywide, with only a small number of founding-team students and limited first-year preferences. They underscored that Oceanlight will begin with a strong foundation and grow into a diverse community reflective of the county. This is an opportunity for the County Board to harness the team’s collective capacity and make Oceanlight a reality for families.

In summary, the petitioners argued that there is a clear legal basis for approving the petition. A “yes” vote would address a real educational gap, expand opportunities for families who have been historically overlooked across several districts, and demonstrate responsible public stewardship. They asserted that the petition is solid, the need is genuine, the educational model is strong, the team is prepared, and the community has voiced its support. On that basis, they respectfully urged the County Board to approve Oceanlight’s petition.

C. Receive Presentations/Responses from Districts (10 minute maximum per district)

Dr. Michael Milliken, Interim Superintendent, Brisbane School District, presented the District’s response. He informed that the Brisbane School District opposes the Oceanlight charter petition because it misrepresents North County schools, builds arguments on those misrepresentations, fails the legal test required for countywide authorization, and does not justify its proposed TK–8 structure.

Interim Superintendent Milliken argued that the petition inaccurately portrays Panorama School and mischaracterizes both district and charter school performance, for example comparing small individual schools to entire districts in misleading ways. Because of these inaccuracies, he believes the petition’s arguments should be discounted.

Interim Superintendent Milliken asserted that the targeted student population is not truly countywide, citing the geographic concentration of parent and teacher signatories and survey respondents. He noted that County Office staff agree that a single-district charter could serve the same population, which legally prohibits countywide approval.

Interim Superintendent Milliken challenged the petitioners’ claim that their TK–8 model is research-based, pointing out that none of the more than 130 cited studies actually address TK–8

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structures. He argued that the model's stated theory – personalized, continuous relationships – is inconsistent with Oceanlight's plan to operate one school across multiple sites. He compared this to the Brisbane School District's existing small, personalized middle school and questioned how Oceanlight's approach differs meaningfully.

Dr. Marla Silversmith, Superintendent, Burlingame School District, presented the District's response. She emphasized the Burlingame School District's strong opposition to the Oceanlight countywide charter petition and expressed full support for the County Office staff's recommendation to deny it. She emphasized that the petitioners failed to provide the Burlingame School District with the legally required 30-day advance notice before submitting the petition, an omission that prevented them from reviewing the proposal, evaluating potential facilities within its boundaries, or raising concerns before the first public hearing. She argued that this procedural failure should have halted the petition process entirely.

Superintendent Silversmith noted that County Office staff produced a thorough analysis identifying both procedural and substantive deficiencies, explicitly agreeing that the Burlingame School District did not receive proper notice, as required under Education Code. She asserted that the petition's submission and surrounding circumstances are flawed and the failure to meet this critical requirement alone warrants denial.

Superintendent Silversmith urged the County Board to stand with all San Mateo County districts that oppose the charter, arguing that approving it would undermine local control and hinder districts' ability to serve their students and communities effectively. She concluded by requesting that the County Board adopt the staff recommendation in full and deny the petition.

Board President Torres noted that the Jefferson Union High School District was not present at the meeting but had submitted a letter that was included in the board packet.

Dr. Carissa Bowman, Interim Superintendent, Pacifica School District, presented the District's response. She expressed shared commitment to providing excellent learning opportunities for all students while acknowledging the emotions and challenges surrounding school change. She affirmed the Pacifica School District's support for project-based, experiential, and environmental learning, values central to the Oceanlight petition, but emphasized their responsibility to address the legal and structural issues the petition raises.

Interim Superintendent Bowman argued that the petition does not meet the high legal threshold for a countywide charter under the Education Code, because it does not demonstrate a unique countywide need or benefit that cannot be provided by a single district. She stated that Oceanlight's focus is localized, not countywide, and the Pacifica School District offers the type of program the petition describes through Ocean Shore School and district initiatives. She also highlighted geographic issues in the petition, which cite limited options in North County despite countywide charters being required to serve the entire region from Daly City to Pescadero.

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Interim Superintendent Bowman next discussed financial and structural risks. She noted the petition anticipates drawing roughly 300 students from Pacifica, which would create a structural deficit because fixed costs—buildings, staffing, and mandated services—cannot be reduced proportionally. This would leave the remaining 2,600 students with fewer resources and supports.

Interim Superintendent Bowman acknowledged community concerns about the recent co-location of Sunset Ridge and Ocean Shore, recognizing that mixed classes and shared curriculum have not fully matched the previous Ocean Shore experience. However, she stressed that the Pacifica School District is committed to improving and expanding the program, not dividing the community. She called for partnership rather than separation, inviting Ocean Shore teachers and families to collaborate on strengthening project-based learning districtwide.

Interim Superintendent Bowman urged the County Board to deny the Oceanlight petition, emphasizing the Pacifica School District’s commitment to working together with empathy and shared purpose to ensure all students in Pacifica and across San Mateo County receive high-quality, equitable educational opportunities.

Board President Torres indicated that the San Bruno Park School District was not present at the meeting but had submitted a letter that was included in the board packet.

The South San Francisco Unified School District requested to speak on behalf of the District. Lisa Cho, Deputy County Attorney, informed that all affected districts had been invited to speak and were given a deadline to submit materials for inclusion in the board packet. She advised that the South San Francisco Unified School District could not make a formal presentation but could make public comment later in the meeting.

D. Questions from the Board to SMCOE Staff, the Petitioners, and the Districts

Board Member O’Neill asked staff to clarify whether students from outside a district need an interdistrict transfer to attend a district-authorized charter school. Deputy County Attorney Cho confirmed that no interdistrict transfer is required. Board Member O’Neill questioned why Oceanlight argues that countywide authorization is necessary if district charters allow cross-district enrollment. Deputy County Attorney Cho discussed how the only limitation arises when applications exceed available seats. In that case, the school must run a public random lottery, giving priority to students from the authorizing district before offering remaining seats to students from elsewhere. Additional preferences must be explicitly approved by the authorizing district.

The petitioners clarified that their push for countywide authorization is fundamentally about equity. In a district-authorized charter, the school must give priority to students from the authorizing district. When a program is high-demand, those district-resident preferences typically fill all available seats, leaving little or no access for students from other parts of the county. They offered Bullis Charter School in Santa Clara County as an example. Although families across the county want to attend, the school is authorized by the Los Altos School District, so district students fill the

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seats first, limiting access for others. A countywide charter, by contrast, must give equal preference to students across the entire county.

Board Member O’Neill asked the petitioners why they object to being on a shared campus at Sunset Ridge, noting that Ocean Shore has historically shared sites for decades and any future location would also require sharing space. The petitioners explained that the current arrangement at Sunset Ridge is not a true co-location. Instead of two distinct schools sharing a campus, students from Ocean Shore and Sunset Ridge are placed together in mixed classrooms, with no guarantee that Ocean Shore students are taught by Ocean Shore teachers. This results in inconsistent experiences across grades and a loss of the distinct Ocean Shore program. A genuine co-location would involve two separate schools operating independently on the same campus, potentially in different wings or areas, not blended classrooms. They also clarified that they are not seeking co-location at Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Elementary School. If they were to consider co-location in the future, it would only be the traditional model of two separate schools sharing space, not the mixed-class model currently in place at Sunset Ridge.

Board Member O’Neill asked the petitioners to clarify their stated plan to locate the school within roughly 2.5 miles of Hickey Blvd. and Skyline Rd., an area where the South San Francisco Unified School District, Jefferson Elementary School District, and Pacifica School District meet. He questioned whether this meant that Oceanlight would be located on a campus in one of those three districts. The petitioners responded that the school could end up in one of those districts, but they are not limited to district-owned school campuses. Many charter schools operate in commercial or non-traditional buildings, and Oceanlight is open to a range of facility options. While a purpose-built school site would be ideal, they are considering multiple types of locations within the identified geographic area.

Board Member O’Neill asked whether the petitioners had contacted the Division of the State Architect (DSA) and asked staff whether a charter school using a commercial building would need DSA approval. Deputy County Attorney Cho noted that any authorized charter would have to meet all state facility requirements and the county would be responsible for ensuring compliance. The petitioners explained that charter schools are not required to use DSA-approved facilities. Instead, they can occupy buildings that meet the California Building Code and obtain an educational-use occupancy permit through the local city’s planning and building departments.

Board Member O’Neill pointed out that the petitioners would have to actually go through the planning process through a local jurisdiction or city to get a zoning change. The petitioners assured they would go through that process if it is required.

Board Member O’Neill explained that most commercial properties are not zoned for schools, even if they allow general “public use.” Because of that, a charter school choosing a commercial site could face significant hurdles including zoning applications, public notices, public hearings, and possibly a general plan amendment, which cities can only approve a few times per year. If the site isn’t zoned for school use, the charter may not even be eligible for such an amendment. The petitioners responded that charter schools can legally operate in commercial buildings as long as

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they meet the California Building Code and obtain the proper educational-use occupancy permit. The process varies by city but administrative approvals have been secured in many cases and are faster than full public hearings. They added that charter schools across California operate in commercial facilities, though the ease of approval depends on the local jurisdiction.

Board Member O'Neill noted that if the charter were approved now, they would have missed the deadline for a \$150,000 startup grant, creating a funding gap. The petitioners responded that the concern was based on incomplete information. While there was a December 5 deadline, they have been in direct contact with the California Department of Education (CDE), which administers the grant. CDE confirmed by email that a second application window will open in March, allowing Oceanlight to apply then. This is why they were comfortable submitting the petition on the current timeline, and County Board approval would allow them to move forward and apply during the spring grant cycle.

Deputy County Attorney Cho followed up to clarify the earlier question about facility requirements. She explained that when a public school uses a commercial building for instruction, it must receive approval from the DSA. Any alterations or conversions must meet state standards for structural safety, accessibility, and fire codes before the building can be used as a school. Board Member O'Neill summarized that the charter school would need both DSA approval and local approvals such as zoning or general plan compliance. Deputy County Attorney Cho agreed, noting that the process is governed by state regulations.

Board Member O'Neill indicated that if the charter school was approved now, the petitioners would need to find a site, negotiate a lease, and secure all required approvals before opening in August 2026, which is the petitioners' stated goal. Deputy County Attorney Cho confirmed that was accurate.

The petitioners clarified that the earlier statement about needing DSA approval applies to district-owned public school facilities, but not necessarily to commercial buildings. Under Education Code, charter schools using non-district facilities may instead follow the California Building Code for any needed modification. They added that they are already working with an architect who is advising them on facility requirements, so they have professional support in navigating these issues.

Board Member Bonini asked whether any district had already evaluated the potential facility costs or incurred expenses in preparing for the possibility of hosting the charter school. Interim Superintendent Bowman said that the Pacifica School District has spent money preparing a possible site, including cleaning, security checks, and safety-plan work. If the charter school were approved, the district would need to relocate several existing tenants and programs to make space, resulting in a significant loss of rental income. They estimated the financial impact at roughly \$1.3 million, although the exact amount would depend on the charter's final grade span and facility needs.

Board Member Bonini asked whether the \$1.3 million dollars referred specifically to lost income. Interim Superintendent Bowman confirmed that it does. It represents the rental revenue the Pacifica

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School District would lose if they had to clear out the current tenants, businesses, and vendors who rent space in the building, in order to make room for a charter school.

Board Member Bonini asked whether the Pacifica School District could estimate the monetary cost of the work already done, or anticipated, in preparing for a possible charter school site. Interim Superintendent Bowman responded that the district has spent about \$237,000 on preparation costs.

Board Member O'Neill asked whether the Pacifica School District was referring to the Linda Mar site as the potential charter location. Interim Superintendent Bowman confirmed that the Linda Mar Educational Center is one of the sites the Pacifica School District has been preparing in case the charter is approved, although they have evaluated multiple campuses to ensure any placement would meet legal requirements for providing facilities equivalent to those offered to district students. But most of the preparation work and spending so far has focused on this site.

Board Member O'Neill asked whether reopening a school at the Linda Mar site would force the Pacifica Community Garden or the 4-H farm to relocate or close. Interim Superintendent Bowman explained that both were possible, depending on what facilities the district would be required to provide the charter under Proposition 39. Since all district schools have gardens for hands-on learning, the charter would need an equivalent space. That could mean giving the charter access to the existing community garden area or creating a new garden space elsewhere on the site. Regarding the 4-H farm, she said she would need to gather more information.

Board Member Gerard asked the Pacifica School District whether Ocean Shore, now located at Sunset Ridge, could operate separately on that campus rather than in mixed classrooms. Interim Superintendent Bowman explained that separation could be discussed, but the current mixed-class model exists because of staffing-to-enrollment realities. Classes are staffed for roughly 24 students. Neither Ocean Shore nor Sunset Ridge had enough students to fill full classes on their own, so combining students allowed the district to run full classes efficiently rather than paying for partially filled ones.

Board Member Gerard asked whether low enrollment was a reason Ocean Shore closed. Interim Superintendent Bowman clarified that Ocean Shore did not close. It was part of a broader restructuring prompted by a districtwide structural deficit. Several changes occurred including Ocean Shore's middle-grade students moving to Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School, Vallemar Elementary School's middle grades moving, and Cabrillo Elementary School continuing as a TK-8. The restructuring aimed to stabilize finances, support teacher compensation, and expand student programs. Co-location has allowed the district to open a computer lab, launch Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiatives, and use grants more effectively across five schools instead of six.

Board Member Bonini asked whether any other districts had already spent money or estimated the potential facility costs they might face if the charter school were located in their district. There were no additional responses.

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Board Member Bonini asked the petitioners to explain why they are seeking a countywide charter rather than a Pacifica School District-authorized district charter. She noted that the law’s threshold requirement asks whether the student population “cannot be served as well” by a charter operating in only one district. The petitioners had framed their request around equity and regional access, but even as a Pacifica School District charter, students from other districts could still apply and attend. Because of that, she could not see how the equity argument justified choosing a countywide model, and she asked for any additional evidence or reasoning that would clarify the distinction.

The petitioners explained that their intention is to create a school with a countywide mission, serving students across district boundaries. If they are authorized only as a Pacifica School District charter, they would be required to give enrollment preference to Pacifica residents. If the school becomes popular, students from outside Pacifica would have little chance of getting in, even though they could apply. They discussed high-demand charters where students from nearby communities struggle to enroll because of district-based preferences and how they want to avoid recreating that dynamic. Their concern is that a district-authorized charter would inevitably prioritize local students and limit access for families elsewhere in the county. By seeking a countywide charter, they would not be required to give preference to any single district. This structure is the only way to ensure that students from any part of the county have a fair opportunity to attend. Their stated goal is to avoid excluding students who might benefit from a school like Oceanlight.

Board Member Bonini read aloud the section of the statute requiring charter schools to admit all students who wish to attend and use a random public lottery when demand exceeds capacity. She noted that the petitioners appear to have more interested families than available seats, which would trigger a lottery regardless of charter type. The petitioners responded that their enrollment policy runs lotteries only by grade level and only when a specific grade has more applicants than seats. Based on current interest, the only grade likely to require a lottery in the first year is TK–K, while other grades would probably not exceed capacity initially. They noted that their enrollment policy would ultimately need approval from the County Board, and could be adjusted.

Board Member Bonini emphasized that her question remained unanswered. She asked if the petitioners can run lotteries and set enrollment priorities under a district-authorized charter, why the same system cannot function within the Pacifica School District rather than requiring a countywide charter.

Board Member Bonini asked whether, had the petitioners applied to the Pacifica School District instead of seeking a countywide charter, they could have adjusted their enrollment preferences to reflect their regional mission. The petitioners responded that they could not. If they were authorized as a district charter, state law would require them to give enrollment preference to students who live within that district, and they cannot change or override that requirement. If Pacifica residents filled all available seats, the school would be obligated to enroll them first, leaving little or no room for students from elsewhere in the county. They emphasized that their goal is to serve a countywide population and a district-based charter would prevent them from offering broad regional access.

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Board Member Bonini indicated that based on the petitioners' own enrollment projections, most grades in the first year would already be filled primarily by Pacifica students, with only the lower grades potentially entering a lottery. Because of that, she still viewed the district-charter and countywide-charter scenarios as effectively the same in practice. The petitioners replied that their long-term plan is different. As initial TK–K classes move up each year, they would continue to backfill openings with students who reflect the broader countywide population they aim to serve. They acknowledged they are not yet at that demographic goal, but their outreach efforts are underway to expand interest and diversify enrollment over time.

The petitioners added that although their first-year target enrollment is roughly 238 students, they plan to staff based on actual enrollment and are open to using combined classes, similar to the Pacifica School District. This gives them flexibility to adjust class sizes and potentially admit more students than the target number. Their goal is to bring in as many students as possible in the first year, both to serve families and ensure the school is financially sustainable.

Board Member Alvaro questioned why the petitioners describe their proposal as countywide when their stated focus is on serving North County communities. She said “countywide” should include areas like La Honda–Pescadero and East Palo Alto, not just the northern end of San Mateo County. The petitioners responded that, like any startup school, they must begin where the need is most acute. They are not claiming that other parts of the county lack need, but that North County—Daly City, San Bruno, South San Francisco, Colma, and Brisbane—has a particularly limited set of options. Several districts in that region do not offer TK–8 programs, and only about 7% of students there have access to one, compared with far greater access in the southern part of the county.

Board Member Alvaro indicated that she understood their points about the need in North County but still could not see why the school should be countywide rather than a local district charter. A true countywide charter must serve the entire county, not just one region, and every other charter in San Mateo County operates as a district-authorized school. She asked what makes this proposal different from those local charters.

The petitioners responded that the issue is equitable access. District boundaries create barriers, even if students from other districts can technically apply. Their goal is to remove those barriers so students from anywhere in the county have an equal chance to enroll. They noted that families from outside Pacifica have already expressed interest, and a district-based charter would legally require giving preference to Pacifica residents, limiting access for others. They also explained that their long-term plan includes establishing additional satellite campuses across the county under one unified school structure, which they believe is more feasible under a countywide charter. The legal test is whether the target population could be served “as well” by a single-district charter and in their view, a district charter could operate, but it would not serve their intended countywide population as effectively because district boundaries would still shape who gets access.

Board Member Gerard asked the petitioners whether they had identified a specific facility for the school, noting that they were proposing to serve more than 200 students but had not named a location. The petitioners said they do not yet have a finalized site. They submitted a Proposition 39

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request to the Pacifica School District, which is one possible location. They are also in discussions with Skyline College and are exploring other sites in the North County area, including churches or other community spaces with available facilities. They emphasized that no lease has been signed, but multiple options are under consideration.

Board Member Arias noted that the petitioners' "wish list" survey emphasized academics but did not include mental wellness, belonging, or social-emotional supports. She underscored that these issues are essential in North County and without addressing those needs first, even the strongest academic program will fall short.

Board Member Arias referenced the staff analysis, which describes the petition's goal of serving a student population reflective of North County demographics. She cited county data showing high proportions of students who are English learners, students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and a large Latino/Hispanic population. She pointed out that this diversity is not reflected in the petitioners' Board, supporters, or public comments. If the petitioners are claiming to address equity and serve areas of greatest need, she would expect to see stronger engagement from Latino families, who make up a significant portion of the region and face substantial educational challenges. Board Member Arias asked the petitioners whether the parents and grandparents supporting the charter effort reflect the demographic makeup of northern San Mateo County she had just outlined, particularly its large Latino/Hispanic population and other historically underserved groups.

The petitioners responded that their founding team includes members of several racial and ethnic backgrounds and they intentionally left open seats on their Board to add members who better reflect the communities they hope to serve. They emphasized that their outreach plan includes targeted efforts to reach specific ethnic groups and they created a Diversity Leadership Group to help build cultural and linguistic bridges with different communities.

In terms of whether the Board or supporters reflect the socioeconomic makeup of the region, the petitioners said they do not collect demographic or socioeconomic data from intent-to-enroll families or board members, and therefore cannot answer that directly. However, they are partnering with organizations such as the Pacifica Resource Center and are conducting multilingual outreach through translated materials, flyers, community events, and information sessions. They acknowledged the concerns and said they are committed to expanding representation and engagement as they continue outreach.

Board Member Arias asked whether the petitioners are prepared right now, not in the future, to serve the roughly 14% of North County students who have disabilities and require Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans. She emphasized that any student who enrolls on day one must immediately receive all services required in their plan, and she questioned whether relying on contracted support would be adequate.

The petitioners responded that they fully agree they must be ready on day one. They have been working with a retired Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) executive director and a retired

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PETITION (continued)**

special education director to develop a detailed scope of work outlining everything that must be in place before opening. They have identified three potential candidates to hire as a special education consultant to complete the pre-opening setup, including procedures, forms, student information systems, and staff training. This consultant would be credentialed and experienced as a special education administrator. Once the school opens, they plan to hire a Director of Student Services/Special Education, replacing their original idea of a wellness coordinator. This director would be a fully credentialed employee responsible for special education administration and would report directly to the head of school.

Board Member Arias asked whether the person handling special education would be a consultant or a fully credentialed specialist with real experience in the field. The petitioners explained that the pre-opening work would be done by a contracted special education consultant who must have administrative experience in special education and the proper credentials. Once the school opens, they plan to hire a full-time employee to run the special education program, and that person would also be required to hold the appropriate administrative and special education credentials.

Board Member Arias asked whether the proposed wellness coordinator position was being eliminated and replaced. The petitioners confirmed that they plan to replace it with a Director of Student Services/Special Education, who would take on broader responsibilities beyond special education, similar to models used in small districts.

Board Member Arias expressed concern that the workload for serving TK–8 students with IEPs is substantial and requires daily, individualized support. She noted that the petitioners seem less prepared in this area than in others and questioned why the plan was not more fully developed. The petitioners clarified that they have concrete elements in place. A Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher is budgeted for year one, based on expected caseload ratios, and they plan to contract for services such as occupational therapy and speech. These services would be coordinated by the Director of Student Services/Special Education, possibly with support from the head of school. They emphasized that special education is a core value for their organization, not a compliance checkbox, and they are committed to serving all students.

Board Member Arias raised concerns about mental wellness supports and whether the school is prepared to meet urgent, individualized needs, such as depression, anxiety, and other conditions covered under 504 plans, immediately and consistently. She emphasized that students with IEPs require daily, ongoing services to ensure they can learn alongside their peers, and she questioned whether the petitioners' current plan is robust enough.

The petitioners responded that the Director of Student Services/Special Education would also serve as the 504 plan administrator. They plan to contract with a counselor who would coordinate with that director, and although they cannot afford a full-time counselor in the first years, they hope to add one later through fundraising.

Board Member Arias noted that the petition emphasizes environmental education, STEAM, project-based learning, and family-school partnerships as ways to address opportunity gaps. She

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PETITION (continued)**

asked whether the petitioners and supporters come from communities experiencing those gaps, since many of the public comments referenced private school choices or other forms of educational privilege. One petitioner shared his own background, explaining that he is a former foster youth and issues of access and opportunity are personally meaningful to him.

Board Member Bonini asked the petitioners to explain how they are addressing transportation, especially given their equity claims and the reality that many families in North County cannot manage long commutes. She noted that a previous comment from the petitioners suggested attendance would depend on whether parents could withstand the commute, which she felt did not align with the needs of the region. She asked whether transportation planning was included in the petition, whether it had been reconsidered since submission, and whether it factored into their budgeting or future planning.

The petitioners responded that transportation is one of the reasons they propose a model with one school and multiple small TK–8 campuses. Each satellite campus would offer the full TK–8 program, allowing them to place campuses directly in neighborhoods where transportation barriers are greatest. This structure would let them be local and linked, expanding access across the county while maintaining a unified program. They asserted that a countywide charter is necessary to open satellite campuses without having to petition each district individually. Additionally, they will provide transportation for students who are homeless and students in special education as required by law.

Board Member Bonini asked what the petitioners would do if a TK applicant from the farthest part of the region wins the lottery but has no way to get to school. The petitioners said the response would depend on how many such students there are, but emphasized that they would look for community-based solutions, especially carpooling, which is common in small, community-oriented schools. Building strong family relationships is central to their model, and a supportive community culture would help families coordinate transportation creatively and cost-effectively.

Board Member Love revisited the concern that by seeking a countywide charter, the petitioners were effectively bypassing local district approval processes and avoiding giving elected school boards an opportunity to evaluate whether the school should operate in their communities. She questioned why the petitioners believe it is important to bring a school to communities rather than first going through their elected representatives, especially when the petitioners repeatedly describe those communities as having significant needs.

The petitioners responded that they do not view their approach as circumventing any processes. When opening future satellite campuses, they would conduct community outreach, hold public hearings, and gather input from affected districts. The difference is that the authorization would come from the county rather than each individual district. Districts are often financially disincentivized to approve charters, even when they may see programmatic value, which is why they believe the countywide route is more practical. Additionally, they emphasized that the current process is fully public and their goal is to accelerate access to the program for families who want it.

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PETITION (continued)**

Board Member Love discussed how quickly the Pacifica School District merger occurred and how rapidly this petition followed. She pointed out how the petitioners want to open in the fall, yet staff identified serious academic concerns, especially around multilingual learners, special education, and early literacy, which should not be taken lightly. She asked if the petitioners would have more breathing room if they had another year.

Board Member Love also noted that she had heard that many former Ocean Shore families are not actively supporting or volunteering at their current Pacifica school after the merger. She said she wasn't sure whether those reports were accurate but noted that this is the kind of mixed input the Board receives.

A petitioner responded to concerns about family involvement by explaining that she still volunteers weekly in her child's current classroom, just as she did at Ocean Shore. She said she can do so because her child's current teacher is a former Ocean Shore teacher who welcomes parent participation. Other parents want to volunteer but don't always have the opportunity, since volunteering depends heavily on each teacher's openness to it.

The petitioners confirmed that many petition team members remain involved in different ways. Families genuinely want the current school to succeed and are working hard to make the merged school a positive experience for their children. Seeking a charter does not mean they have abandoned efforts to support the existing school.

The petitioners acknowledged that nine months is fast, but asserted that the team's ability to organize so quickly comes from an existing community of practice—teachers and families who already know the Ocean Shore model and have systems and experience they can carry forward. Waiting another year would risk losing that collective capacity.

The petitioners explained that the merged school can no longer offer many of the programs Ocean Shore had. The loss of grades 6–8 to a different campus and significant student attrition have reduced numbers and made cross-grade collaboration, central to the old model, harder to sustain.

Board Member O'Neill reminded the petitioners that in an earlier conversation, before the petition was even filed, they had said the main reason for seeking a countywide charter was funding, not equity. He asked whether the petitioners were pursuing county authorization because the Pacifica School District's funding level is low, and whether they expected to receive more money as a countywide charter. The petitioners responded that the intention was not to secure more funding. Charter funding follows each student's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) rate, based on the district the student comes from. Because most nearby districts have similar funding levels to the Pacifica School District, the difference would not be significant unless they drew students from a very high-funded district like the Hillsborough City School District.

**PUBLIC HEARING: OCEANLIGHT SCHOOL COUNTYWIDE BENEFIT CHARTER
PETITION (continued)**

The petitioners discussed that one reason they chose a countywide petition was to avoid creating a concentrated financial impact on any single district. If they located within one district, especially a basic-aid district, pulling students from that district could have a larger negative budget effect and potentially result in a lower funding rate for the charter. By going countywide, they could spread the impact across multiple districts more equitably.

The petitioners explained that the team initially analyzed whether to pursue district or county authorization. The conclusion was that a countywide charter would distribute enrollment and financial effects more evenly, while still receiving the same per-student LCFF funding. The shift toward a countywide model was part of the petition's evolution—not about increasing revenue, but about minimizing harm to any single district.

Board Member Bonini questioned a previous statement suggesting that school districts are disincentivized to approve charter schools. She pointed out that nearly all charters in the county were approved by districts, except one that came on appeal. The petitioners explained that the landscape changed about five years ago with the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 1505, which gave districts new authority to deny charter petitions based on fiscal impact, an option they did not previously have. Districts now have a clearer and more straightforward path to denial, and this shift influenced the decision to apply for a countywide charter. While districts are not required to deny petitions, many have used this new basis even when approval might better serve the community.

Board Member Arias asked for clarification about comments from the petitioners that opening a charter school would create a burden on all districts rather than just one. The petitioners shared that when a student enrolls in a charter school, state funding follows that student, which reduces revenue for the district they leave. This creates a fiscal impact, since districts still carry certain fixed costs. However, the priority should be students' educational needs. A countywide charter spreads enrollment across many districts, which reduces the financial impact on any single district. For example, the Pacifica School District would not bear the full burden because the charter's enrollment plan draws students broadly from across the county.

Board Member Arias asked whether, given that 42% of San Mateo County's public school students are Hispanic, 25% are English learners, and 42% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, the students who remain in district schools would bear the fiscal burden when others leave for a countywide charter. The petitioners stressed that no district is entitled to maintain a particular size. Districts across California vary widely in enrollment and must adjust as populations shift. The state constitution guarantees every student a public education, and districts are responsible for providing it regardless of enrollment changes. The financial impact of enrollment loss is phased gradually, giving districts time to right-size and continue serving students effectively.

Board President Torres noted that he had already submitted his questions in advance and any remaining questions were addressed by others.

E. Public Comment (1 minute maximum per speaker)

**PUBLIC HEARING: OCEANLIGHT SCHOOL COUNTYWIDE BENEFIT CHARTER
PETITION (continued)**

Deputy Superintendent Chávez reported that 33 comments had been submitted prior to the meeting related to Item 3, as of roughly 6:30 p.m. There were 31 emails in opposition to the charter petition and 2 in favor.

The following speakers provided live public comment related to Item 3:

- Sue Digre, teacher, spoke in favor of the petition
- Stacy Lein, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Megan McKenna, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Jennifer Hsu, Oceanlight board member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Tarra Knotts, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Anna Yeung, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Stephanie B., community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Wilma Lee, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Brenda Hammond, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Cher Stella, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Marie V., parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Danielle Lee, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Spencer Ayres, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Deborah Sherwin, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Alex Sobieski, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Stephanie Sugawara, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Rebecca Stella, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Faye Jose, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Xana Cook, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Conor Fagan, student, spoke in favor of the petition
- Parker Lindow, student, spoke in favor of the petition
- Christine Fagan, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Jewel Marie, student, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Kathleen Beebe, California Teachers Association (CTA), spoke in opposition to the petition
- Stephanie Trelogon, teacher, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Sandy Mills, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Sheila Gamble-Dorn, retired teacher, spoke in favor of the petition
- Grace Sobieski, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Beccy Howorth, educator, spoke in favor of the petition
- Christine Lee, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Jennifer Mitchell, teacher, spoke in favor of the petition
- Karen Kee, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Jennifer Ly, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Tressa Navalta, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Joan Weideman, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Virginia Szczepaniak, teacher, spoke in favor of the petition
- Valerie Davidson, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Faith Holle, community member, spoke in favor of the petition

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PETITION (continued)**

- Tanya Guido spoke on behalf of Terry Voorhees, parent, in favor of the petition
- Crissie McBride, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Sarah Cusenza, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Leo Cusenza, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Zachary Pang, student, spoke in favor of the petition
- Alexandra Bril, teacher, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Eric Chávez, Oceanlight founding member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Chelsea Jodsaas-Biondini, parent, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Tiffany Hanna, community member, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Annemarie Cruz, parent, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Monica Howell, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Sebastian DiPirro, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Jonathan Markham, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Joal Truong-Vargas, parent, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Aubrey Duffy, principal, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Amy Truong-Vargas, teacher, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Dr. Marcos Garcia, South San Francisco Unified School District, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Ted O, South San Francisco Unified School District, spoke in opposition to the petition
- J. Marwan Hannon, South San Francisco Unified School District, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Anthony Rinehart, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Meg Lamont, parent, spoke in favor of the petition
- Ric Cruz, community member, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Kendra Vara, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Cailey Horan, teacher, spoke in opposition to the petition
- Kim Barrett, community member, spoke in favor of the petition
- Mike Sugawara, grandparent, spoke in favor of the petition

At 10:26 p.m., after a motion by Board Member O’Neill and a second by Board Member Gerard, the Board unanimously (Alvaro, Arias, Bonini, Gerard, Love, O’Neill, and Torres) approved a five-minute recess, by roll call vote.

The meeting resumed at 10:33 p.m.

F. Discuss/Act on Oceanlight School Countywide Benefit Charter Petition

Board Member O’Neill reflected on his 14 years on the Pacifica School Board, noting his long familiarity with Ocean Shore School. He described Ocean Shore School as an excellent program valued for fostering critical thinking and acknowledged the many respected individuals involved in the petition. He expressed how difficult the decision feels, given the Pacifica School District’s declining enrollment and the broader funding challenges facing many San Mateo County districts, which receive far less per-student funding than the state average despite the region’s high cost of living.

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Board Member O’Neill recounted past discussions about school sustainability, including the need for 550–600 students for a school to financially support itself, compared with Ocean Shore School’s enrollment of 367 last year and a decade-high of 432. He emphasized that declining enrollment is affecting every district in the county and recognized that each school represents a unique and meaningful community. He acknowledged and expressed appreciation to all those involved in the petition.

After a motion by Board Member Alvaro and a second by Board Member Gerard, the Oceanlight School Countywide Benefit Charter petition was unanimously (Alvaro, Arias, Bonini, Gerard, Love, O’Neill, and Torres) denied, by roll call vote.

4. OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

A. Superintendent’s Comments

Deputy Superintendent Chávez extended his gratitude to everyone involved in the charter petition process, especially Executive Director Dardenelle and Mefula Fairley, Coordinator, District Improvement and Support, Educational Services Division, who led the work.

5. BOARD MEMBERS

A. Board Member Comments

Board Member Alvaro

Board Member Alvaro thanked everyone involved in the charter petition process, including the petitioners, supporters, and those who submitted emails. She also thanked staff, especially Executive Director Dardenelle and Coordinator Fairley, for their excellent work.

Board Member Love

Board Member Love echoed earlier expressions of gratitude and praised everyone involved for their professionalism. She noted that she learned a great deal through this process and encouraged school districts to keep open hearts and minds, emphasizing that there is valuable work happening in the community that others, both within Pacifica and beyond, can learn from.

Board Member O’Neill

Board Member O’Neill explained that he cast his vote because he believed it served the greater good for everyone. He also acknowledged that the concerns and statements shared by Oceanlight parents and supporters align with his own experiences and are valid.

Board Member Arias

BOARD MEMBERS (continued)

Board Member Arias expressed appreciation for the large turnout, regardless of viewpoint. She noted that Oceanlight has worked hard and presented the kind of educational opportunities she hopes to see across all districts in San Mateo County.

Board Member Bonini

Board Member Bonini thanked staff for their professionalism and thorough work throughout a demanding process, along with Deputy County Attorney Cho. She also thanked the community members for their input, emphasizing that the process exists to ensure everyone has a voice. She explained that although she did not reply to the hundreds of emails received, she read all of them and found the perspectives balanced.

Board Member Bonini underscored that she feels strongly about supporting local school districts during difficult times. She discussed the need to heal the community, expressed sadness about the divisions, stressed the importance of supporting one another, and encouraged volunteering and community involvement.

Board Member Gerard

Board Member Gerard acknowledged the disappointment felt by many in the room and emphasized that the Board's decision was extremely difficult and made only after weeks of reviewing materials, studying information, and reading many emails. She thanked staff for their extensive work and for providing the information needed to make an informed choice. She noted that she read all public input, even if she couldn't respond to every message.

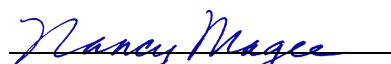
Board Member Gerard reaffirmed that her top priority has always been students, and she felt that commitment reflected in the discussion during the meeting. She hopes that the community can work together to move forward in a positive direction.

Board President Torres

Board President Torres noted that regardless of which side people were on, there was genuine passion from everyone. If both sides can bring that passion together, something stronger and better will emerge. He emphasized that this will require collective effort and affirmed that the Board is committed to supporting that work however they can.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 p.m. Board President Torres announced the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.


Nancy Magee, Secretary
jlp