MINUTES OF THE 2025-2026 ENCINAL PTO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING OF THE ENCINAL SCHOOL PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION

195 Encinal Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027

DATE: January 22, 2026

TIME: 8:45 am PST

PLACE: ENspire Lab, Encinal School

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Eleanor de Jong
Lindsey Sikes
Allison Jagtiani
Francesca Baraggioli
Emily Bhatia
Prachi Parvin
Stacey Shirer
Jessica Kohli
Ashley Ludlow
Chelsea Marinelli
Leah Wolf
Anand Gupta

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT:
Sharon Burns
Aanika Carroll
Jessica Hix
Kinga Fern
Pui-Yun Sha
Alyson Blume
Gina Watkins
Kendra Bartlow

1.	**Call To Order**	**Eleanor de Jong**

- The meeting was called to order at 8:46 am by Parliamentarian Eleanor de Jong.
- Emily Bhatia took notes as Recording Secretary.

2.	**VOTE:** Motion to approve prior minutes	**Eleanor de Jong**

- Eleanor de Jong moved that the December 11, 2025 minutes be approved. The motion was seconded by Prachi Parvin and approved unanimously.

3.	**President Welcome**	**Lindsey Sikes**

- **Welcome and Introductions:**
  A warm welcome and thank you to Debi Rice, Sherwin Chen, and Jackie Chen, our Chief Business Officer, for joining us today.
- **Math Assembly Appreciation:**
  Special thanks to Allison Jagtiani for organizing the Math Assembly—it was truly special. Photos from the assembly were shared. A heartfelt thank-you as well to the parents who dedicated their entire day to volunteering and helping make the event such a success.
- **Lion King Performance:**
  The Lion King production is in full swing! Students will perform tomorrow in front of the school. We encourage second grade families to visit Hillview this Saturday to attend the full performance and get excited about what's ahead next year.
- **Superintendent Update:**
  The Superintendent is attending a district-wide Safe Routes meeting, so Gina Watkins will not be able to stay for the full PTO meeting today.
- Upcoming Events:
  - 1/24: Third Grade Lion King Performances
  - 1/29: Staff Winter Birthdays Celebration
  - 1/29: TK & Kinder Orientations
  - 2/13-2/20: Outdoor Ed / 5th Grade Parents Coffee (Monday)
  - 2/24: Astronomy Night
  - 2/25: Planetarium Assembly

Encinal **PTO ByLaws** and **Standing Rules**

4.	**Hot Lunch Discussion**	**Debi Rice**

- Debi Rice, MPCSD's Lunch Program Specialist, shared appreciation for the invitation and expressed enthusiasm for discussing the district's Universal Food Program.

LunchMaster & Ordering Process

- Meals are ordered through LunchMaster and must be placed 10 days in advance.
- Ordering for the entire district requires daily coordination across all campus kitchens.

- While the system is not perfect and cannot meet every individual preference, the program is voluntary and aims to feed as many students as possible.
- Care is taken to include a variety of options, including vegan and vegetarian meals, as well as culturally diverse choices.
- Each campus has a distinct student palate, which is observed and learned over the course of the school year.

Meal Options & Nutrition

- Students typically have seven daily meal choices, including hot and cold options.
- Hot breakfast options are primarily available at Hillview, due to equipment needed to safely keep food warm.
- Daily breakfast options often include bagels and cereal.
- All meals are approved by CDE-certified dietitians and must meet National School Lunch Program requirements.
- Fruits and vegetables are offered daily; pre-cut produce is consumed more quickly.

Bulk Ordering vs. Parent Pre-Ordering

- The district previously used a parent pre-ordering system, which resulted in significant food waste. Additionally, if parents missed the pre-ordering window, kids may be hungry/without food on campus.
- The transition to bulk ordering was made to reduce waste and has been highly successful:
    - Food waste decreased
    - Students eat more
    - Students can select meals on demand
- While some families prefer parent pre-ordering, the district will maintain the bulk ordering system due to its success.
- A hybrid model is not permitted by the vendor—schools must choose either bulk ordering or pre-ordering district-wide.
- The district does not have the staff or funding required to label individual pre-ordered meals.

Student Choice & Availability

- If a student's first-choice meal runs out, they are encouraged to select a second or third option.
- Messaging to students emphasizes flexibility and resilience: *we don't always get our first choice*.
- While some parents report frustration when preferred items are unavailable, tracking unmet first-choice requests would be difficult to implement consistently.
  All campuses maintain a backup supply (bagels, fruit, milk) to ensure no student goes without food.

Concerns

- Concerns were raised about students—particularly shy or younger students—not eating lunch when preferred options are unavailable or when lunch stations are far away.
- Staff are asked to report students who do not eat, and parents may be contacted and encouraged to send lunch from home if needed.

- The school is willing to monitor identified students to ensure they are supported and not going hungry.

Campus Differences

- Food preferences vary by campus:
    - Lower Laurel (younger students) tends to prefer items like mac & cheese and nuggets.
    - Preferences diversify as students get older.
    - Encinal has a significantly larger ordering base than Oak Knoll.

Feedback & Parent Surveys

- The possibility of a district-wide parent survey was discussed to gather feedback and assess how the program is working.
- Previous surveys have been conducted; a common concern at Encinal is lack of choice.
- Parents are encouraged to email Debi directly with questions or concerns.
- There was strong support for using survey data to better understand family perspectives.

Operational Constraints & Support

- Meal selection, leftovers, and waste are tracked, though student behavior varies week-to-week.
- Strict RFP requirements, budget limitations, and the absence of a central kitchen restrict flexibility.
- Additional staffing would be beneficial; PTO volunteer support could help supplement current resources.

Vendor Considerations

- The district may consider contracting with a different food vendor in the future.
- Any vendor must participate in the National School Lunch Program.
- Certain vendors (e.g., Fresh Choice, used by Las Lomitas) cannot be used due to legal restrictions.

Appreciation & Closing

- Sharon Burns thanked Debi for her daily presence and dedication to serving students breakfast.
- Jackie acknowledged the complexity of balancing nutrition, student preferences, budget, and regulatory requirements.
- While no system is perfect, the program's goals remain:
    - Reducing food waste
    - Feeding as many students as possible
    - Encouraging healthy habits and resilience

5.	**Treasurer Report**	**Chelsea Marinelli & Prachi Parvin**

- Checking account is $91,395.78 and savings account is $20,023.86 - total cash available: $111,419.64
- The most recent OCC donation exceeded budget expectations, with an unanticipated $24,000 received.

Expense/Income Highlights: December–January

- Benevity Disbursement
- District Disbursement
- A direct donation of $7,000 was received.
- C&S Target gift cards:
    - $11,500 spent, coming in just under the target donation goal.
- Basketball District Registration: $1,200
- Basketball TeamSnap fees: $700
- PTO Mini Grants
- Math Festival expenses
- Fall Musical ticket disbursement
- Fall Staff Birthday Celebration

Projected Expenses/Income: January–February

- PTO Mini Grants
- Basketball-related expenses
- Astronomy Night: February 24
- Staff Winter Birthday Celebration
- Fifth Grade Parent Breakfast with Hillview

6.	**Principal's Report**	**Sharon Burns**

- The Principal shared that it is hard to believe her career has spanned 30 years, and that ending her career working with the children at this school has been especially meaningful.
- She began her career as a teacher, teaching in three different countries, including Cairo, Egypt, and Canada, and initially envisioned becoming an international school director.
- She shared that she plans to remain in the Bay Area for the next few years while her son completes high school.
- Looking ahead, her long-term plan is to retire in Italy, noting that her husband recently obtained Italian citizenship.
- She expressed that it has been an honor and privilege to work with the students and families of the school.
- She will formally announce her retirement to students at tomorrow's "Awesome Me" Assembly.
- In a separate update, the Principal shared that she will be out on medical leave for three weeks beginning next Tuesday, and will return after February Break.
    - Gina Watkins will serve as Acting Principal during this time.
    - Jessica Lin will be onsite to provide additional support.

7.	**School Board Update**	**Sherwin Chen**

- Sherwin Chen, MPCSD's Board Liaison, expressed appreciation to Sharon Burns for her longstanding dedication, service, and commitment to the district. While transitions are always bittersweet, they also create opportunities for growth.
- The district has navigated multiple principal transitions successfully in the past and has consistently done an excellent job filling leadership roles.
- Leadership transitions offer an opportunity to ensure school site needs are met and to bring in a fresh perspective.

Principal Hiring Process

- The Board does not play a role in principal hiring; the decision rests entirely with the Superintendent.
- School Services will be involved in determining whether the candidate pool will be internal or external.
- At this time, Kristen Gracia's intentions are unknown.
- Historically, unless an assistant principal has been intentionally groomed for the role over several years, the district typically runs an open search process managed by School Services.
- Internal candidates are encouraged to apply.
- The district is considered a destination district, attracting high-quality candidates and often serving as a place where educators choose to retire.
- Regardless of the outcome, there is strong confidence in both internal leadership and the district's ability to attract top-tier external candidates.

Community Input on Leadership

- Sharon Burns shared that she met with HR the previous day.
- The Superintendent and Director of HR will host staff and parent input sessions on February 26 to gather feedback on desired leadership qualities.
- The Superintendent prioritizes engaging directly with the community to inform leadership decisions.
- Families and staff are encouraged to participate and provide feedback.
- Parent and PTO involvement is included as part of the hiring process.

Funding Priorities & Budget Overview

- The most recent Board meeting was well attended.
- A community survey was distributed as part of the budget process.
- The district is targeting just over $4 million in budget reductions over three years, representing approximately 2% of the overall budget.
- While relatively small in percentage, these reductions are financially significant.
- Core budget priorities remain:
    - Maintaining competitive teacher salaries
    - Keeping class sizes small
    - Preserving high-impact classroom programs
- Three key principles are guiding budget decisions:
    1. Protect classroom instruction: Over 50% of reductions will come from the district office, not schools.
    2. Preserve enrichment programs while ensuring strong alignment with core academic instruction and cost effectiveness.

3. Address concerns around screen time and technology, which was a recurring theme in parent feedback.

Program-Specific Feedback & Decisions

- **5th Grade Instrumental Music**
  - Approximately two-thirds of 5th graders participate.
  - Community feedback strongly emphasized the value of early instrument exposure and its importance as a pipeline to the Hillview instrumental program.
  - Due to its impact and difficulty to replicate, this program has been removed from consideration for cuts.
- **Math & Reading Intervention**
  - This program was introduced using COVID-related funding and did not exist prior to the pandemic.
  - The district is exploring an integrated intervention model to improve efficiency and align support based on site needs.
  - The Board has requested additional detail on how this program would be restructured.
  - By this time next year, the district expects to be prepared to provide meaningful feedback and recommendations.
- **Library Programs**
  - Library services vary by grade level and campus.
  - Several district librarians and programs are deeply valued, particularly at Hillview.
  - Libraries are relatively cost-intensive, and usage varies throughout the day.
  - Priorities include:
    - Maintaining high-value programs (e.g., Kindergarten read-alouds, Hillview research skills in preparation for high school)
    - Keeping libraries open as a safe and supportive space during recess and lunch when possible
  - A potential restructuring could include fewer librarian positions, while preserving the most impactful services.
  - Kristen Gracia will present a revised multi-year library program plan to the board.

Staffing & Layoff Considerations

- Questions were raised about retaining highly valued staff during staffing reductions.
- By law, tenured teachers retain their positions; others may be offered alternate roles within the district.
- For non-tenured staff, the district makes every effort to retain strong employees whenever possible.
- Year 2 layoff decisions will be made next year, with Year 3 decisions the following year.
- There remains a possibility of additional funding before cuts are finalized, including potential increases from property tax reassessments.
- The district aims to be as least disruptive as possible throughout the process.

Revenue Context & Long-Term Planning

- Parcel taxes fund operating costs; bond funds are designated for construction.
- Recent parcel tax changes have affected the budget, requiring right-sizing rather than drastic reductions.

- Property tax revenue has declined from 8-9% to 5.42%.
- The goal of restructuring is to use resources more effectively and strengthen program quality.
- While the TK program has created challenges, the district is faring better than many others statewide facing severe cuts or school closures.
- State Budget Context: Although the California state budget reflects a significant increase in education funding, the district expects to receive only a modest share.
    - The district is not primarily state-funded, and increased funding tends to flow toward districts serving more vulnerable student populations

Enrollment & Future Capacity

- Approximately 5,000-6,000 new housing units are planned within district boundaries, which could increase property tax revenue.
- Long-term enrollment (10–15 years out) remains the district's biggest uncertainty.
- District enrollment has declined from approximately 3,000 to 2,700 students.
- If new developments generate 300 additional students, capacity can likely be managed; 500-600 additional students would exceed current capacity.
- Statewide enrollment declines have created some buffer; otherwise, the district would need to explore acquiring additional land or school sites.
- At this time, leadership does not anticipate an immediate capacity crisis.

8.	**OCC MOU Update**	**Francesca Baraggioli**

- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlines the process by which the district and schools agree on OCC contributions for the upcoming year.
- The district is contemplating an increased OCC funding request for the next school year.
- Meetings take place weekly. A meeting date for a formal vote on proposed changes has not yet been scheduled.

Proposed Changes to OCC Contributions

- The current OCC ask is $2,000 per child.
- A potential increase is under consideration.
- If the OCC ask increases, discussion included whether the PTO portion should also increase as well.
- The incremental revenue from a PTO increase could potentially cover most or all of the C&S budget for Encinal.
- While OCC donations help fund district-wide expenses, funds are ultimately allocated to the school the child attends.

Participation & Comparisons

- Approximately 60% of families contribute to OCC, with donations varying by family.
- Compared to neighboring districts, the district's OCC ask is on the lower end.

Concerns & Discussion Points

- A concern was raised about a disconnect between parent messaging around what OCC funds and district budget cuts, including items previously perceived as supported by MPAEF.
- Encinal's OCC contributions have declined over time.

PTO Budget & Equity Considerations

- The group discussed areas where the PTO budget may be overextended and opportunities to right-size expenses to reduce annual asks from families.
- Demographic differences between Encinal and other district schools were noted, raising ongoing equity concerns across PTOs.
- The idea of pooling PTO funds district-wide was discussed but noted as challenging, as families generally prefer donating directly to their own school.
- The concept of creating a district-wide C&S fund was raised; however, legal constraints were cited as a barrier.
- A proposal was discussed to allow Encinal families to sponsor another family's OCC contribution, which could increase PTO funding for the school.
- The group explored whether there is an effective way to communicate that donations could be used to support students with the greatest need across the district.
- It was noted that similar messaging has not been well received in the past.

9.	**Adjourn**	**Eleanor de Jong**

- The meeting adjourned at 10:44 am
- The next scheduled meeting of the Encinal Executive Board is scheduled for February 26, 2026 at 8:45 am in the ENspire Lab at Encinal School.
- No attachments to these minutes.

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Emily Bhatia
Recording Secretary of the Meeting