

OJAI UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Tuesday, May 29, 2018  
Minutes of the Special Open Session  
of the Board of Education  
414 E. Ojai Avenue

---

Persons requesting interpreter services or with disabilities requiring special accommodations to attend this meeting should contact the Superintendent's office, 640-4300, ext. 1011, at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

1. 6:00 p.m. Meeting called to order, Pledge to the Flag.

Attendance: Kevin Ruf, President  
Michael Shanahan, Vice President  
Shelly Griffen, Clerk  
Thayne Whipple, Member  
Jane Weil, Member

Administrators: Andrew Cantwell, Superintendent  
Sherrill Knox, Assistant Superintendent

Minutes Secretary: Kathy Smith  
Spanish Interpreter: Phil Morales

2. Approval of the Agenda

- 2.1 Emergency Additions/Modifications to Agenda

There were no emergency additions or modifications to the agenda.

- 2.2 Approval of Agenda - Action

Member Weil moved to approve the agenda as presented. Member Griffen seconded the motion which carried with a vote of 5:0.

3. Special Presentation

- 3.1 Discussion on Summit Elementary School's 2018-19 Enrollment – Information

- 1) Recent Enrollment History and 2018-19 Projection
    - 2) Impact on Funding (Loss of Necessary Small School Allowance)
    - 3) Staffing Impact as a Result of Loss of Revenues
    - 4) Implications on Student Experience Resulting from Reduced Student Enrollment
    - 5) Other Considerations as Noted by Community Members or other Stakeholders

Member Ruf thanked members of the community for attending the meeting tonight. As you know, he said, we are reviewing information regarding enrollment at Summit Elementary School; he indicated that there will be neither action nor vote taken tonight on this topic. Board members will be receiving information and as many people as wish to speak to the Board will have the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Cantwell presented foundational information and he noted that he has already met with most of the people attending tonight however, he said, it is important to provide a brief recap of the information shared at previous meetings.

Mr. Cantwell directed everyone's attention to the memo found in the agenda and he reviewed enrollment trends dating back to the 2013-2014 school year when 62 students were enrolled. He indicated that while the Thomas Fire had some impact on enrollment, as recent as March 23, 2018 next year's enrollment was projected to be over 30 students. The crisis was identified only recently when 19 students were projected to attend in the 2018-2019 school year. Only recently did the District find that the enrollment changes had actually made a greater impact on staffing and finances for the upcoming school year.

Mr. Cantwell explained the Necessary Small School Allowance (NSS) which provides funds to small and geographically-isolated schools with a minimum of 15 students residing more than five miles from the nearest other public elementary school. Summit School will not meet that requirement in the coming school year. Several staffing issues also affect the school's needs.

Dr. Knox discussed the state of the school's educational environment with 20% of the student population meeting state standards, a reduction in special education students and therefore reduction in special education staffing. She also discussed the reduction of Title I funding with fewer intervention services, based on projected enrollment figures.

Dr. Knox indicated that with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, it has become very difficult for a teacher to teach to numerous standards when teaching multiple grade levels. She added that it is almost impossible for a teacher to familiarize himself/herself with the various components in each grade level. Dr. Knox believes that needed collaboration doesn't exist for students when only one or two children make up a single grade-level cohort. Students are negatively impacted because the size of the environment limits the type of rich discussion that occurs in a typical classroom.

Summit principal Marilyn Smith reviewed the various attendance survey scenarios shared with parents as options for the 2018-2019 school year. Mrs. Smith indicated that she has received information as late as May 10, 2018, 18 students are currently planning to attend in the coming school year, nine of which are interdistrict students. Mrs. Smith provided historical information regarding the number of students and teachers at Summit dating back to the 1970s. She was asked elaborate on Summit's current chronic absenteeism at 18% with the overall District rate of 11%.

Mr. Cantwell indicated that Summit teacher Sheri Usher was not able to attend the meeting tonight but she provided the following statement that Mr. Cantwell read into the record, "Good evening, my name is Sheri Usher, and I am one of two teachers from Summit Elementary School. I have very much enjoyed my three years as the upper grade teacher

working with grades 3-6. This year, my third year at Summit, with 3 support staff for 24 students, I felt I had a good handle on the program and learning was happening. With one classified and two part-time credentialed teachers this configuration allowed for small group instruction and the ability to structure the curriculum so that all students received information from all subject areas. It is my belief that the program ran as well as it did due to the number of students per grade and the support staff that I had. It is my professional opinion that with too few students per grade, and the projected reduced support staff, it would be difficult to continue to provide a quality program.”

Kim Eck, Summit primary grade teacher. She has been involved at Summit school for 20-years as a parent and teacher. She has filled various positions over the years. Basically she thought that all of these various programs could be done to help enrollment. She is a member of the upper Ojai community and feels the school is at a crossroads. She indicated that she is dedicated to these students and whichever way the board decides, she wants them to know that she will always do her best to teach these students no matter how many or how few.

Mrs. Eck feels that having a robust public school with at least 3 teachers and 75 or so students and maybe a special emphasis would be the best use of Summit School. Without substantial assistance from the District and the community, she fears that is not an option. She added that she would like to see the school become a true community center with a satellite public library, a yoga center, an elder daycare program and she'd like to see solar electricity options installed. She added that it used as a makerspace, gardens, farm, location for forest education and 4-H programs. Summit could be a place where other organizations rent the space for potlucks and fundraisers to provide for the Upper Ojai Community and she would like to know how Ojai Unified could help support with such programs. Mrs. Eck added that she has had great success with classroom aides but sometimes volunteers are just not able to attend and assist in the same way as a paid staff member would.

#### 4. Public Hearing

##### 4.1 Public Hearing of the Issue of Whether to Operate Summit Elementary School for the 2018-19 School Year – Public Hearing / Information

Member Weil moved to open the public hearing on whether to maintain open Summit Elementary School for the 2018-19 school year or to temporarily combine the instructional program to San Antonio Elementary School pending increased enrollment in 2019-20.. Member Griffen seconded the motion which carried with a vote of 5:0.

Upper Ojai resident Bonnie Brown her students went to Summit school and she asked the District could reach out to other local districts to enhance enrollment at Summit school. She also wondered if the Summit property could be donated to the community and if such a document providing for the same ever existed.

Mr. Cantwell indicated that during his time on the 7-11 committee that he did review the deeds to District property and there were no recorded encumbrances attached to any deeds. We can review board documents to determine if there was discussion. He addressed the issue of communicating with other districts regarding enrollment. He spoke to the Mupu Superintendent just today with regard the desire to increase enrollment. In years past extensive work has been done by the parent body. He doesn't believe that 60 students could be enrolled within the next two months.

Thea Wilcox, Summit parent asked the Board to bring the focus back from historically declining enrollment to what is currently happening at Summit and the potential enrollment for the coming school year. She added that this has been no ordinary school year. Residents having survived the worst fire in California history desire a year with the same resources as this year. She asked the Board to provide one transitional school year in light of the recent community trauma due to the Thomas Fire.

Member Ruf expressed his hope that everyone knows that the Board understands the suffering and sacrifice that has occurred in the Upper Ojai after the fire. He expressed the importance of this conversation, that the Board is required to have because of student enrollment projections. He added that the Board and District administration strongly believe that transparent decision making is critical. We are going to continue hearing from stakeholders and discuss the issues before us.

Angie Genasci, teacher, community member and Ojai Federation of Teacher president indicated that she has witnessed the amazing interactions within the community of Upper Ojai. The post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that community members are dealing with from the Thomas Fire has affected so many. She said yet, we all have to march forward. As a teacher she knows that multi-age teaching isn't perfect but it is doable. She has concerns for her colleagues in a multiple grade-level teaching environment without additional Title I or NSS funding. As a kindergarten teacher she has concerns about the limited grade-level cohort sizes and limited playgroups which affect student social skills not to mention the curriculum challenges. She said it's difficult to feel good about this situation.

Ms. Genasci indicated that while the Upper Ojai community deserves additional support it may not be the responsibility of the District. She said the Board has the responsibility to address the needs of all eight District schools and putting one school above all others would not be the right thing to do.

Danielle Bautista, Summit volunteer shared her commitment to the Art Trek program as well as the Condor after school program. She feels that parents have worked over the years to keep the school open and raise funds to support programming. She said that when the third classroom teacher was removed from the school that it caused a downward spiral and that that directly caused the decline in enrollment. She said that because of the unsure future of the school she and others have moved their students from Summit because they fear uncertainty.

Jim Bailey, former OUSD teacher and Upper Ojai resident shared his personal experiences now a teaching at an enrichment center he founded with his wife. They serve public home-school students enrolled in a charter school. He suggested additional uses of Summit next year as a resource center for the 87 students he expects to attend his center next year.

Barbara Weiser, Summit parent and Santa Paula high school teacher spoke to her experiences. She also suggested that families from future Santa Paula housing developments, totaling over 1600 homes, as well as receiving students from Mupu and Briggs wait-lists could potentially bring additional students to Summit. She also suggested the additional students would enroll in Summit should a third teacher return to the school.

Marianne Ratcliff, Upper Ojai community member spoke to her extraordinary experience as a Summit parent. She indicated that Jim Bailey's program is proof to her, that continued school opportunities exist in the Upper Ojai. She reiterated that three teachers at Summit was the secret of the school's success. She shared her belief that money raised at Summit school benefited the entire district and that Summit deserves consideration. She also presented information regarding Necessary Small School Funding statistics.

Ms. Ratcliff asked the Board to consider providing a bridge year by keeping Summit open and affording parents the time to work on long-term solutions.

Chris Danch, former 7-11 community member spoke as an individual and the deliberations that he participated in with regard to potential school closures. It is his belief that enrollment has decreased at such a rate that it is not viable to keep Summit.

Kass and Heather Voyson also asked questions regarding declining enrollment and their feeling that keeping the school open would encourage additional students to enroll next year.

Member Ruf indicated that as a school board member, his job is to be a fiduciary for the whole school district and to say that all schools could remain open regardless of the number of enrolled students is not an acceptable method of operation.

Member Ruf moved to close the public hearing and reminded everyone that no action will be taken tonight. Member Shanahan seconded the motion which carried with a vote of 5:0.

Board members asked questions of administrators and discussed a multitude of topics, including: the use of volunteers in addition to classroom teachers; necessary changes due to low enrollment; potentially changing District boundaries; interdistrict options and the status of Santa Paula School District's closed boundary practices; loss of Title I and NSS funds; the consideration of no cost before school childcare at Summit if students attend San Antonio, and other possible considerations due to the transition.

Board members asked for additional information from Mr. Cantwell and Dr. Knox before continuing the matter to June 6, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. for a final decision on whether to maintain open Summit Elementary School for the 2018-2019 school year or to temporarily combine the instructional program to San Antonio elementary School pending increased enrollment in 2019-2020.

5. The meeting adjourned.