Santa Fe Public Schools Board of Education
February 19, 2026
4:30 p.m. Executive Session
5:30 p.m. Study Session Finance Subcommittee
Minutes
YOUTUBE LINK TO BOARD MEETING

I. Opening Activities

A. Call to Order

1. President Noble called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.
2. Attending:
   - Board President Kate I. Noble
   - Vice President Sarah Boses
   - Secretary Dr. Carmen Gonzales
   - Board Member Juan Blea
   - Board Member Roman "Tiger" Abeyta
   - Superintendent Dr. Christine E. Griffin

   SFPS Leadership Attendance:
   - Deputy Superintendent Vanessa Romero
   - Assistant Superintendent Michael Hagele
   - Assistant Superintendent Jaime Holladay
   - Beata Thorstensen, Chief of Assessment and Accountability
   - Joshua R. Granata, General Counsel
   - Richard Halford, Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

B. Pledge of Allegiance and Salute to the New Mexico Flag

C. Acknowledgment of Tribal Land

D. Approval of Agenda

Moved by: Secretary Dr. Gonzales,
Seconded by: Board Member Abeyta

Aye	President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales, Board Member Abeyta and Board Member Blea

Carried 5-0

II. Executive Session

A. Threatened or Pending Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); *Amanda Chavez v. SFPS and Hilario Chavez*, D-101-CV-2025-01983.

B. Threatened or Pending Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); *Hilario Chavez v. SFPS BOE et al.*, 1:25-cv-00729-SCY-LF.

C. Threatened Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); Threatened litigation that the district is considering initiating.

Moved by: Secretary Dr. Gonzales
Seconded by: Vice President Boses

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales, Board Member Abeyta and Board Member Blea

Carried 5-0

Entered: 4:36 p.m.
Returned: 6:22 p.m.

Moved by: Secretary Dr. Gonzales
Seconded by: Vice President Boses

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales, Board Member Abeyta and Board Member Blea

Carried 5-0

III. Action

A. Threatened or Pending Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); *Amanda Chavez v. SFPS and Hilario Chavez*, D-101-CV-2025-01983. Authorize the legal counsel to proceed as discussed in the Executive Session regarding litigation.

Moved by: President Noble
Seconded by: Board Member Abeyta

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales and Board Member Abeyta

Abstain Board Member Blea

Carried 4-0-1 (Abstention)

B. Threatened or Pending Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); *Hilario Chavez v. SFPS BOE et al.*, 1:25-cv-00729-SCY-LF. Authorize the legal counsel to proceed as discussed in the Executive Session regarding litigation.

Moved by: President Noble
Seconded by: Secretary Dr. Gonzales

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales and Board Member Abeyta

Abstain Board Member Blea

Carried 4-0-1 (Abstention)

C. Threatened Litigation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1H(7); Threatened litigation that the district is considering initiating. Authorize the legal counsel to proceed as discussed in the Executive Session regarding threatened

litigation.

Moved by: President Noble
Seconded by: Vice President Boses

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales, Board Member Abeyta and Board Member Blea

Carried 4-0-1 (Abstention)

D. Consent
   1. Contracts Over $60,000
   2. Minutes January 21, 2026 Joint Study Session & CRC Meeting, January 22, 2026 Standalone Executive Session, and January 29, 2026 Study Session

Moved by: Vice President Boses
Seconded by: Secretary Dr. Gonzales

Aye President Noble, Vice President Boses, Secretary Dr. Gonzales, Board Member Abeyta and Board Member Blea

Carried 5-0

IV. Finance Subcommittee Presentation & Discussion

A. Overview and Review of FY26 Budget and Preview and Timeline for FY27 Budget

Chief Financial Officer Mr. Halford presented an overview of key budget terms and explained the process from state appropriation to final approval by the Public Education Department. He reviewed the current and projected budget in light of declining enrollment, highlighted emerging considerations, and outlined the timeline for the upcoming budget cycle.

Following the presentation, the following topics were discussed:

- Clarification was requested regarding insurance premiums listed separately from salaries and benefits. Administration clarified that the listed premiums reflect property and liability insurance, while employee health and dental coverage are included within benefits. A future breakdown of benefit categories was requested.
- A breakdown comparing district-level staffing costs and school-site staffing costs was requested to support transparency and responsible resource allocation.
- Discussion included the recently approved 1% raises for public employees and whether potential 80/20 reimbursement funds could support employee compensation. Board members emphasized addressing hard-to-fill positions and wages that may no longer reflect a living wage locally.
- A possible State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) adjustment was discussed; administration explained adjustments may include unit value changes and National Board certification counts. No confirmed SEG adjustment was available at this time.
- It was noted that early budget projections often appeared severe at this stage but may improve as additional information becomes available. Insurance cost increases were discussed; a projected 17% increase was noted as significant but consistent with broader insurance trends.
- Budget Adjustment Requests (BARs) were explained as adjustments to grant allocations or funding finalized after budget adoption, and identified funding sources when changes were made.

- A projected enrollment decline of approximately 509 students was noted. Board members requested analysis of how many students left the district versus demographic decline, where students enrolled after leaving, comparisons to state and national trends, and the geographic distribution of enrollment loss.
- Administration explained current figures compare year-over-year 40th and 80th day counts and are consistent. Transfers to other public districts or charter schools could be tracked, while transfers to private schools or out-of-state schools were more difficult to verify. Withdrawal comments could provide partial insight into reasons for departure.
- Board members emphasized the importance of understanding whether dissatisfaction is contributing to student departures, including concerns about responsiveness and communication with families. Possible contributing factors discussed included housing affordability, cost of living, demographic changes, and relocation trends.
- It was noted that some students attend district elementary schools before transitioning to private schools, while others return to district high schools for specialized programs and diverse course offerings.
- Enrollment losses distributed across many classrooms were noted as more difficult to address than losses concentrated at specific schools. Discussion included aligning staffing levels, facilities, and operational resources with declining enrollment. Aging facilities and infrastructure needs were acknowledged.
- Board members emphasized the district's strengths and educational offerings and the importance of communicating these positives. Rising legal liability costs were noted as a concern that may affect public perception. Concern was expressed that funds are going to legal cases instead of students.
- A board member referenced the priorities on page 11 and suggested clearly identifying objectives and actions within the budget to meet those priorities. It was acknowledged that much of the budget is fixed with limited flexibility; however, priorities should support student retention and promote district strengths. A member stated they did not accept that enrollment loss must be inevitable.
- A question was raised regarding how the board should develop priorities during the budget process. It was clarified that the board acts as a governing body and adopts the budget collectively, requiring majority agreement. Board leadership emphasized identifying priorities early and submitting information requests to avoid last-minute requests.
- Social-emotional wellness and staffing challenges were cited as examples of priorities that could guide budget alignment. It was noted that priorities must remain financially realistic and require collaboration with administration to determine feasibility.
- Social-emotional wellness needs and economic insecurity were discussed. A board member questioned the current status of community schools and their role in supporting students and families.
- Administration explained the distinction between community schools and Communities In Schools. Community schools provide wraparound services and resources for students and families, while Communities In Schools focuses on case-managed support. The district previously received grant funding to support community school models at seven schools and continues operating the model at those sites.
- Board members noted that community schools strengthen family engagement and provide resources such as food pantries, clothing, weekend food support, and connections to community services. It was suggested that these services are a significant strength of the district and may not be widely known. A request was made for an update on community schools, potential expansion, and possible budget impact.
- Increased community requests to use district facilities were discussed. Board members noted facilities may be used more than the public has realized and requested a report on facility usage. Consideration was suggested for reviewing fee structures and potential revenue generation while prioritizing student use.

- Board leadership noted that budget flexibility primarily exists within the operational fund, as special revenue funds and grants are restricted.
- Staffing accounts for more than 80% of operational expenditures, limiting flexibility. Past efforts to generate revenue, including property sales, were discussed as one-time funding sources.
- Board members requested that budget information be presented in ways that clearly show how priorities appear within expenditures. Program codes and reporting tools could present financial information in multiple formats. Previous practices, such as color-coding priorities,s were noted as helpful for transparency and tracking.
- A board member asked whether the board can request implementation details ("the how") behind the priorities listed on page 11. Administration confirmed the board may request implementation details, including staffing ratios, teacher qualifications, and early literacy supports through programs, coordinators, and grant funding.
- It was suggested that future discussions include reviewing budget information in a format closer to the final adoption version to better understand how priorities connect to budget allocations.
- A board member referenced the phrase "the budget is where strategy becomes action" and asked whether a strategic planning session would occur alongside the budget process. Board leadership stated the strategic plan needs updating, but emphasized the immediate priority is adopting next year's operating budget and that strategic planning is a broader, multi-year process requiring community engagement.
- Concern was expressed about the perceived lack of cohesion and the need to build a stronger foundation rather than reacting year to year. Leadership emphasized maintaining realistic expectations and supporting staff capacity.
- It was noted that community schools were embedded as a philosophy rather than solely a grant-funded program and that perceptions of disconnection may reflect limited awareness of ongoing work.
- Board leadership encouraged bringing forward specific proposals and working collaboratively on strategic planning within realistic time and resource constraints.
- Board leadership summarized key information requests and areas for further review, including staffing cost breakdowns and hard-to-fill positions; evaluations of school buildings and facility use; analyses of enrollment decline and student movement; leveraging community schools; and aligning priorities with budget decisions.
- Reimagining was noted as a foundation for strategic planning, though not a specific budget priority. Board members were invited to share additional ideas and information requests with the superintendent. It was suggested that, similar to the E.J. Martinez and Chaparral process, board members submit specific requests so staff can compile data to support decision-making. Board members were encouraged to share requests sooner rather than later so the superintendent and team can begin preparing information.

V. Advance Planning

1. The following topics were discussed:
   - The Board discussed scheduling the superintendent evaluation, noting it will begin in executive session at the next meeting and continue on March 12.
   - Executive sessions are anticipated for both meetings to complete the evaluation process.
   - The Board confirmed Santa Fe Public Schools will host the New Mexico School Boards Association Region II meeting at Santa Fe High School.
   - An update was provided that the Housing Task Force will meet for the first time next week.

1. 02/24/2026 12:00 p.m. Partners In Education Meeting
2. 02/26/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
3. 03/04/2026 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
4. 03/12/2026 12:00 p.m. Audit Committee Meeting
5. 03/12/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
6. **03/16/2026 5:30 p.m. Hosting New Mexico School Board Association Spring 2026 Region II Meeting - Can be removed**
7. 03/18/2026 Tentative 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
8. 03/24/2026 12:00 p.m. Partners In Education Meeting
9. 03/26/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
10. **Spring Break March 30 - April 3, 2026**
11. 04/08/2026 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
12. 04/16/2026 12:00 p.m. Audit Committee Meeting
13. 04/16/2026 5:00 p.m. Tentative Study Session/Finance Subcommittee
14. 04/21/2026 12:00 p.m. Partners In Education Meeting
15. 04/23/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
16. 04/29/2026 Tentative 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
17. 05/06/2026 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
18. 05/12/2026 12:00 p.m. Partners In Education Meeting
19. 05/14/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
20. 05/20/2026 Tentative 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
21. 05/28/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
22. 06/03/2026 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
23. 06/11/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting
24. 06/17/2026 Tentative 6:00 p.m. Community Review Committee Meeting
25. 06/23/2026 12:00 p.m. Partners In Education Meeting
26. 06/25/2026 4:30 p.m. Tentative Executive Session 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting

IX. Adjournment

President Noble adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

SANTA FE PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION **Minutes approved on: 2/26/2026**

Kate I Noble

President Kate I. Noble, President

Carmen Gonzales

Attested by: Dr. Carmen L. Gonzales, Secretary