



Small School Districts' Association
Virtual Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
February 2, 2026 | 3:30 PM – 5:30 PM

Board Members Present: Nicole Newman, Ed.D., Amy Alzina, Ed.D., Melanie Matta, Catherine Reimer, Ed.D., Eric Bonnicksen, Mike Martin, Elizabeth Brenner, Don Brann, Ed.D., José González, Ben Howell, Ed.D., Ramiro Rubalcaba, Ed.D., Roberta Zarea, Jeremy Powell, Ed.D., Keila Rodriguez, *Katie Kohler & Roberta Zarea (arrived late)*

SSDA Staff Present: Dr. George Sziraki, Karen Mix, Gwen Bell, & Laissa Caraveo

SSDA Staff Not Present: Amy Roehl and Barbara Mitchell

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 3:31 PM by SSDA President, Dr. Nicole Newman.

1. Welcome, SSDA President Dr. Newman
 - Dr. Newman greets everyone for the meeting and then makes a motion to approve the agenda and proceed with the meeting.

Motion to approve the agenda and proceed with the meeting.

 - a. *Motion: Dr. Amy Alzina*
 - b. *Seconded By: Dr. Jeremy Powell*
 - c. *Vote: All in favor*

2. Appointment of new board member William A. Brown, Superintendent, Lone Pine Unified School District (Region 10 – Riverside, San Bernardino, Inyo & Mono Counties) (please see [By Laws](#) section 4.5 Vacancies) – “*Action Item*”
 - Dr. George Sziraki brought forward the appointment of William A. Brown. He reviewed the Board By-Laws and confirmed the proper process is being followed. Use the link above to see section 4.5 Vacancies in the By Laws to view the process for appointments to the board.
 - Two individuals initially applied, but the second dropped out for unknown reasons, leaving only one candidate.
 - Once candidates have been nominated in their region, the subsequent membership vote serves as an advisory vote.



- Dr. Sziraki conducted reference checks on William Brown and received glowing reviews, describing him as a person of high integrity, and he recommended William to fulfill the position.

Discussion among the Board before proceeding to a motion:

- A recommendation was made that even if only one candidate is nominated, a resume and video should be provided for the Board to review in future appointments.
- The Board invited William Brown to introduce himself during the call, and he briefly shared his background and prior experience.

Motion to appoint William A. Brown to the SSDA Board of Directors as the region 10 representative.

- a. Motion: Eric Bonniksen*
 - b. Seconded By: Mike Martin*
 - c. Vote: Dr. Amy Alzina - Yes, Melanie Matta - Yes, Dr. Catherine Reimer - Yes, Eric Bonniksen - Yes, Elizabeth Brenner – Yes, José González – Yes, Dr. Ben Howell – Yes, Mike Martin – Yes, Chris Rafanelli – Yes, Keila Rodriguez – Yes, Dr. Ramiro Rubalcaba – Yes, Roberta Zarea – Yes, Dr. Don Brann – No & Dr. Jeremy Powell - No*
- Motion passes.***

Katie Kohler joins the meeting at 3:49 PM.

3. Legislative Update and SSDA Direction - Capitol Advisors Barrett Snider and Nick Romley. SSDA Board Priorities “*Action Item*”
 - a. Process for Taking Legislative Positions*
 - b. 2026 Legislative Priorities*
 - c. Prop 98 \$5.6B Manipulation Letter*
 - d. SSDA Suggested Areas for Focus*Meeting*

Discussion:

- Dr. Newman introduces Dr. Alzina, Vice President on the SSDA Board of Directors, and SSDA’s Legislation and Advocacy Committee Chair.
- Dr. Alzina gave a brief update that SSDA’s Legislation and Advocacy Committee had their first meeting in January 2026 with Capitol Advisors. Dr. Alzina then introduced Barrett Snider and Nick Romley of Capitol Advisors to the meeting to review the links provided above.



- Barrett then discussed the process for taking legislative positions – ***bullet point a***
 - Dr. Sziraki clarifies how appointments were made for SSDA members serving on the Legislation and Advocacy Committee. Each SSDA Board member appointed an individual from their respective region to serve. ***Missing appointments for region 9 and region 10.***
- Barrett then discussed ***bullet point D***, outlining the seven areas of focus that Capitol Advisors will focus on for SSDA, as these will make up the majority of their work on behalf of members.
- Barrett then reviewed SSDA’s legislative platform. Linked as ***Legislative Update and SSDA Direction*** above. Barrett mentioned that the items highlighted in yellow were brought forward by the Legislation and Advocacy Committee during their first meeting in January 2026, and were added to the document.
- Nick Romley shared that Capitol Advisors and Dr. Alzina have established a regular meeting schedule with the SSDA Legislation and Advocacy Committee, and calendar invites have been sent out.
- Barrett also mentions that Capitol Advisors drafted a Prop 98 letter, ***bullet point C above***, in response to the Governor’s proposal, and encouraged SSDA to join other districts in signing on.

Board Questions & Discussion for Barrett and Nick at Capitol Advisors:

- Dr. Ramiro Rubalcaba asked how the Board should share suggestions or recommended edits on the letters.
 - Barrett advised sending suggestions to Barrett, Nick, and Dr. Alzina, while also copying Dr. Newman, Dr. Sziraki, and the regional appointee.
 - Elizabeth Brenner asked what the process will be for sending letters out to our members.
 - Barrett responded that the Legislation and Advocacy Committee should oversee the process, and that the letters need to move quickly with timely feedback, giving Capitol Advisors the green light to send them out. Barrett also added that if a letter falls outside of the approved legislative platform, it should be discussed with the legislation and advocacy committee to make sure everything is aligned.

Amended by Dr. Amy Alzina: Motion to approve SSDA’s legislative priorities and have the legislative committee use this platform moving forward.

Amended a 2nd time by Dr. Amy Alzina: Motion to approve the 2026 legislative priorities, the 2026 areas of focus (items 1-7), and the 2026 legislative platform.

a. Motion: Dr. Amy Alzina



- b. Seconded By: Elizabeth Brenner*
- c. Vote: All in favor*

Barrett and Nick left the meeting at 4:16 PM.

4. [Executive Director Search Process](#) - Dr. Nicole Newman

Discussion:

- Dr. Sziraki and Dr. Newman asked any individuals who had applied or intended to apply for the position to leave the meeting for this portion of the discussion.
- Dr. Sziraki then reviewed the interview process.
- A question asked by Dr. Sziraki about who should do the paper screening for candidates?
 - The final panel to review the paper documents are Dr. Nicole Newman, Dr. George Sziraki, Dr. Amy Alzina, José González, Dr. Ramiro Rubalcaba, and Dr. Don Brann. The group will meet on Monday, February 9th to review the candidates documents.
 - José recommended narrowing the applicant pool to three to five candidates for interviews. He mentioned that the SSDA Board will be aware of all applicants and can discuss whether any candidates should move forward based on Board input.
- Dr. Sziraki then reviewed the interview process of the candidates with the board. Interviews will be held on February 27th. Background checks and reference checks will happen.

5. [Membership](#) – Karen Mix

- a. Discussion on charter growth

Discussion:

- Karen provided an update on SSDA membership, reviewed the membership spreadsheets (see link above) with the Board, and highlighted the new associate members.
- Dr. Sziraki added to the discussion on charter growth. Around 1,000 charter schools under 2,500 ADA that could be eligible for SSDA membership.
- The board agreed to bring charter membership to the charter roundtable on February 4th for further discussion.

6. [Program Update](#) – Gwen Bell, Program update link prepared by Amy Roehl

- a. Total registered for the state conference: 409
 - School Districts: 314
 - Associate Members: 95

- b. [Conference schedule](#)



Discussion:

- Gwen provided an update on SSDA programs prepared by Amy Roehl, Director of Programs. The discussion also included potential locations for the 2028 conferences.
- A possible plan was discussed to hold the 2028 Annual Conference in Southern California and move the Summer Conference to Northern California, due to the 2028 Summer Olympics making hotel bookings more difficult in the south.

The SSDA staff will work together on locations and bring options to the SSDA Board.

7. Grants

- a. CS4NorCal- Closeout by March 31, 2026 “Federal Compliance Audit”
 - b. [CTE – SWP CTE Digital Sciences Pathway](#)
- Dr. Newman provided a summary of updates to the CTE–SWP Digital Sciences Pathway.

8. [Communications Report](#)- Gwen Bell

Discussion:

- Gwen shared her communications report and the items being highlighted for SSDA members.
- Gwen asked if we should move the newsletters, rather than being every month to quarterly.
 - Dr. Rubalcaba and Dr. Brann thought it was a good idea.
 - Dr. Sziraki mentioned that while the work being developed is valuable, SSDA has limited staff capacity, and Gwen’s time may also need to focus on membership, events, and other priorities. He also shared that Board meetings will be held quarterly, with monthly Executive Committee meetings, so the newsletter schedule should better align with the Board meeting cadence.

9. Board Policies – Laissa Caraveo and Karen Mix

- a. [Webpage](#)

Discussion:

- Karen and Laissa discussed SSDA’s Board Policy Program and the progress so far.
- Laissa then reviewed the Trona Joint Unified School District’s board policy webpage with the Board to showcase how it looks.



- Dr. Newman mentions that Kingsley Bogard has been assisting SSDA in reviewing the board policies before they are sent to school districts.
 - Dr. Newman suggested that Karen reach out to everyone on the list to let them know SSDA is actively working on the program and will be in touch soon.

10. Board of Directors Reports-

- a. Retiree Recognition
- b. [Board of Directors Dashboard](#)

Discussion:

- SSDA Board members discuss any items with the rest of the board or things they have going on.
- The Board discussed recognizing retirees at the 2026 Annual State Conference
- Gwen will send a communication to conference registrants to identify retirees and gather years of service
- José asked whether a Board meeting has been scheduled with the interim Executive Director and the SSDA Board to review protocols. The group is working on scheduling this meeting to go over processes for the incoming Executive Director.
- Dr. Sziraki reviewed the Board of Directors dashboard, which will serve both members and Board members.
- SSDA staff will capture notes from the superintendent roundtables and share them with the members.

11. Executive Director Report – Dr. George Sziraki

- a. Associate Member New Structure
 - [Current Structure](#)
- b. [Board of Director Job Description](#)
 - i. Roundtables
 - ii. E3 Forums
 - iii. Membership – [Membership Benefits](#)
- c. Executive Committee Meeting during Annual Conference
- d. [Staffing](#)

Discussion:

- Dr. Sziraki discussed the current structure of SSDA associate members.
 - July through September 1, 2026 may be the final period to select the \$2,500 membership level. An associate member meeting will be held to gather their input.



- Dr. Sziraki reviewed the Board of Directors job description (linked above)
 - SSDA staff to create individual SSDA email addresses for Board members (e.g., nicole@ssda.org) to be used for official communications from the Board.
 - Dr. Sziraki shared some system challenges with WildApricot integrating with QuickBooks and ADP for payroll. SSDA staff is working to clean up the process and improve communication between WildApricot and QuickBooks.

Jeremy Powell, Ed.D. exited the meeting at 5:06 PM.

- Dr. Sziraki discussed calling an Executive Committee meeting during the State Conference in March, to be held at Capitol Advisors' office.
- Dr. Sziraki reviewed the staffing and consulting model and will provide salary figures for each person/company to the Board.

Board of Directors meeting adjourned at 5:19 PM. Then moved into closed session. Karen Mix, Gwen Bell, and Laissa Caraveo exited the meeting.

12. Closed Session