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To: Suezana Davis <Andrew Long < Rob Jones <

Cc: Chris Meyer

Subject: Public Comment - Proposed 2026–27 LCAP and Budget

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Good evening President Davis, and Members of the Governing Board,

This comment is submitted for consideration before the Board acts on the proposed 2026–27 Local Control and Accountability Plan and budget. Meridian operates under real constraints: very small enrollment, combination-grade classrooms, limited staffing, and a narrow revenue base. Those conditions make careful prioritization, clear assignment of responsibility, and reliable measurement especially important.

The proposed LCAP has meaningful strengths. It is candid about declining outcomes and acknowledges that the professional development, assessment, and intervention systems implemented to date have not yet produced improved academic results. It also proposes several sound components, including six-week data-review cycles, a daily intervention block, more frequent progress monitoring, teacher training, counseling support, and a distinct English Language Development (ELD) action. These elements should be retained.

The central concern is that the plan is stronger in diagnosis than in execution. It identifies a broad set of worthwhile activities but does not yet show that the District has the staffing, protected time, curriculum, or decision rules needed to carry them out well. The budget remains solvent in the near term, but it does not clearly demonstrate that scarce public resources are being directed to the uses most likely to improve student learning. The Board should not discard the plan's direction; it should require enough specificity and budget alignment to make that direction credible.

1. Academic need and adequacy of the response

The District is not facing a marginal performance problem. The LCAP reports that all students were 69.8 points below standard in English language arts and 104 points below standard in mathematics. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students were in the Very Low performance level in both subjects. From 2024 to 2025, the percentage of students

meeting or exceeding standards declined from 35.30% to 26.23% in ELA, from 30.19% to 18.03% in mathematics, and from 23.07% to 7.69% in science. Local winter results show 31.58% of students in grades 2–8 at grade level in ELA and 21.05% at grade level in mathematics (Meridian Elementary School District [MESD], 2026a, pp. 4–16).

The LCAP deserves credit for stating plainly that the current actions have not yet improved achievement. However, the response remains largely a description of systems—professional development, assessment calendars, intervention blocks, and walkthroughs—rather than a complete academic recovery plan. The Board should require priorities by grade group, trimester benchmarks, identified essential standards, and a clear explanation of what will change if results do not improve after two six-week cycles.

A plan of this importance should allow the Board to answer:

- Which students need which support?
- Who will provide it?
- How often will it be provided?
- What materials will be used?
- What evidence will trigger continuation, intensification, replacement, or discontinuation?

2. Tier I instruction and curriculum need greater specificity

The plan appropriately emphasizes stronger Tier I instruction, particularly in mathematics. Yet “strengthen Tier I” remains too broad. The LCAP should identify, by grade span, the adopted core materials, pacing expectations, essential standards, common formative assessments, supports for combination classes, and the coaching available to teachers as they implement those expectations.

The 2023 California Mathematics Framework emphasizes coherent learning progressions, reasoning and problem solving, equitable access, and alignment among curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional learning (California Department of Education [CDE], 2023). The Board should require the District to explain how its Tier I mathematics strategy addresses those elements from transitional kindergarten through eighth grade, particularly in combination-grade classrooms.

This is not a theoretical concern. Board minutes from September 2025 record a teacher reporting missing books, online access, and Spanish-language resources during a hearing on instructional-material sufficiency, while the LCAP and School Accountability Report Card (SARC) report full access to standards-aligned materials. Those statements may be

reconcilable, but the Board should not assume that a formal sufficiency finding means every teacher has the complete materials needed to teach multiple grade levels effectively (MESD, 2025a; Meridian Elementary School, 2026).

Meridian's 2023–24 LCAP, adopted before the current administration began, was weaker in measurement but more concrete about direct resources. It named science, physical education, mathematics, and intervention curricula; funded a bilingual paraprofessional; and included an additional paid teacher workday for standards alignment (MESD, 2023, pp. 5–13). The current plan should retain its stronger assessment structure while restoring that level of specificity about what teachers and students will actually receive.

Meridian's 2024–25 LCAP shifted toward three broader systems—professional development, data and assessment, and intervention—and assigned the superintendent/principal as coordinator for the latter two (MESD, 2024, pp. 24–25). The 2026–27 plan adds stronger monitoring and a more candid diagnosis, but the best next step is to combine that structure with the 2023–24 plan's clearer identification of direct resources, staffing, and materials.

3. Science requires a distinct response

Science is the clearest content-area omission in the proposed LCAP. Among students tested in science, the percentage meeting or exceeding the standard declined from 23.07% in 2024 to 7.69% in 2025, yet the plan contains no science-specific improvement target, interim measure, protected instructional-time expectation, or professional-learning commitment. The SARC identifies science materials, but access to materials does not establish consistent implementation, sufficient instructional time, or adequate support for teaching science across combination-grade classrooms (MESD, 2026a, pp. 4–5; Meridian Elementary School, 2026).

The California Department of Education's Science Framework emphasizes coherent grade-span progressions, three-dimensional learning, hands-on investigation, assessment, equitable access, and sustained educator learning (CDE, 2016). The Board should require a concise transitional-kindergarten-through-eighth-grade science plan identifying weekly instructional time, adopted materials and investigation resources, teacher training, interim evidence of learning, and a measurable target for reversing the decline.

4. The intervention investment should be transparent and measurable

Action 1.3 budgets \$176,306 for intervention, approximately 57.5% of all LCAP action expenditures. The proposed daily intervention block, flexible grouping, tutoring, bilingual early-literacy support, and progress monitoring are reasonable. The action is nevertheless too aggregated to evaluate either academic adequacy or value for money.

Before approval, the Board should receive a concise intervention schedule identifying:

- the number of students expected to receive Tier II and Tier III support by grade and subject;
- the staff, contractors, paraprofessionals, tutors, and volunteers who will provide it, including their time and qualifications;
- minutes per session, sessions per week, group-size limits, and whether the service occurs during or after the school day;
- the named reading and mathematics intervention materials;
- entry, progress-monitoring, intensification, exit, and referral criteria; and
- the cost per student, expected growth, and percentage of students successfully exiting intervention.

Research supports well-designed tutoring, especially when delivered by teachers or paraprofessionals, in small groups, and during the school day. The label “intervention,” however, is not evidence of effectiveness. Dosage, provider, group size, curriculum, and quality of delivery matter (Nickow, Oreopoulos, & Quan, 2020).

Meridian’s six-week review cycle is a sound starting point. It should be paired with written rules for when a service will be continued, intensified, changed, or discontinued. An intervention should not remain in place simply because it was funded or implemented.

5. Teacher capacity and working conditions are a central academic issue

The LCAP asks teachers to strengthen Tier I instruction, participate in weekly professional learning, analyze data, deliver Tier II and Tier III intervention, implement integrated ELD, support Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices, and maintain family communication. Each responsibility is reasonable in isolation. The plan does not show that the combined workload is reasonable in a small district with combination classes and limited specialist support.

The District’s own measures report that only 75% of teachers were appropriately assigned in both October 2024 and October 2025, with a 25% misassignment rate. The percentage of surveyed staff reporting that the school was safe declined from 100% to 50%. Public minutes also document staff concerns, resignations, and substantial replacement hiring. These records do not establish why employees left, but they do establish a workforce disruption that should be addressed directly in the LCAP rather than treated as separate from student achievement (MESD, 2026a, pp. 11, 23; MESD, 2026b).

California workforce research supports treating these conditions as an academic issue. A 2026 Learning Policy Institute analysis associates teacher turnover with factors including heavier workloads, inadequate preparation, principal turnover, lower salaries, and lower per-pupil spending, and notes that high-need schools bear disproportionate organizational, fiscal, and educational costs (Leung-Gagné et al., 2026).

The Board should require a staffing and workload map that identifies:

- classroom grade configurations;
- individual preparation time;
- collaborative planning time;
- intervention and ELD duties;
- substitute or release coverage; and
- noninstructional assignments.

Weekly minimum days should not be treated as an unlimited source of time for new initiatives. Teachers need protected time for multi-grade lesson design, assessment, family communication, and collaboration.

The plan also places substantial instructional responsibility with the superintendent/principal, who is identified as data and assessment coordinator, intervention coordinator, walkthrough observer, coach, and system monitor while also serving as evaluator and operational executive. That concentration creates both a time problem and a trust problem.

Teacher coaching is most effective when it is sustained, content-specific, and developmental. Research finds positive effects on instruction and achievement but also warns that quality declines when coaching programs are spread too thin (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Meridian should secure protected support from Sutter County staff, a part-time curriculum and English learner coordinator, or another qualified coach who is not solely responsible for employee evaluation.

Nearby small districts show that this is feasible even with limited enrollment:

- Pleasant Grove funds eight classroom teachers, a 60% Student Services Coordinator, mentoring by retired educators, paid training, and recurring data meetings.
- Winship-Robbins uses a part-time Director of Curriculum and Instruction, added certificated staffing to reduce combination-class burden, and clearly assigned coaching and data responsibilities.

- Browns maintains collaboration time, additional certificated capacity, intervention support, and outside assistance with data systems.

These districts are not identical to Meridian, but they demonstrate that small enrollment does not require every instructional and administrative responsibility to rest with one person (Browns Elementary School District, 2025; Pleasant Grove Joint Union School District, 2025; Winship-Robbins Elementary School District, 2025).

6. English learner program

The LCAP reports three consecutive years of 0% reclassification, only 14% of English learners making progress on the 2026 English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) measure, and 0% of English learners at grade level on the local ELA assessment. Against that record, adding Action 1.4 is appropriate and overdue. The commitment to daily designated and integrated ELD is a strength (MESD, 2026a, pp. 12–19).

The action is only one paragraph and budgets \$11,000. It does not:

- name the online platform or designated ELD curriculum;
- specify daily minutes by grade or proficiency level;
- identify the credentialed staff responsible;
- explain how students will be grouped;
- describe newcomer support; or
- establish a six-week language-growth and reclassification-monitoring process.

“Daily ELD” is a commitment, not yet a program design.

The Board should also ask why Action 1.4 is marked as noncontributing even though it is expressly directed to English learners, and confirm that the funding classification accurately reflects the service being proposed.

The Board should require an ELD implementation appendix identifying:

- the designated ELD curriculum and the role of any online platform;
- daily minutes, schedule placement, and what core instruction students will not miss;
- proficiency-based grouping and a newcomer protocol;
- the staff responsible for designated and integrated ELD;

- coaching and planning supports for classroom teachers; and
- measures of ELPAC domain growth, local language objectives, curriculum progress, and reclassification readiness.

The California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework treats designated and integrated ELD as coordinated parts of a coherent instructional program supported by appropriate materials, professional learning, and leadership (CDE, 2015).

Winship-Robbins provides a useful small-district example: a schoolwide 30-minute designated ELD block, grouping by ELPAC level, named ELD materials, staff training, and a Director of Curriculum/English Learner Coordinator. Brittan Elementary, while larger than Meridian, identifies English language arts and mathematics specialists who provide daily ELD, share English learner data with teachers, support integrated ELD, and provide monthly teacher training on integrated ELD. Colusa Unified, also larger, identifies ELD specialists, ELPAC goal-setting and data discussions, and districtwide professional learning for multilingual learners (Winship-Robbins Elementary School District, 2025, pp. 16–20; Brittan Elementary School District, 2025, pp. 5, 17–18; Colusa Unified School District, 2026, pp. 4–10).

7. Fiscal stewardship and alignment with educational priorities

The budget begins with substantial reserves, which is a genuine strength. It also projects recurring operating deficits:

- \$126,242 in 2026–27;
- \$126,302 in 2027–28; and
- \$142,898 in 2028–29.

The projected fund balance declines by approximately \$395,000 over three years. Reserves provide time to adjust; they do not make a recurring imbalance sustainable (MESD, 2026c, General Fund Form 01 and Multiyear Projections).

Several spending shifts warrant explanation before adoption:

- budgeted certificated teacher salaries decline by 7.0%, while budgeted certificated administrator salaries increase by 4.7%;
- approved textbooks and core curriculum materials decline from \$34,346 to \$3,237;
- books and supplies decline by 25.7%;
- capital outlay declines by 55.8%; and

- Professional/Consulting Services and Operating Expenditures are budgeted at \$228,878.

The Board should require those explanations in public because they bear directly on whether the LCAP can be implemented.

A contract schedule should identify each material vendor, purpose, amount, funding source, students served, and measure of success. The Board should also compare the likely educational value of current contracts and programs with the likely value of added certificated capacity, curriculum, protected planning time, ELD support, and facilities repair.

The assigned fund balance also deserves a clear drawdown plan:

- \$494,628 for two years of charter oversight;
- \$150,000 for special education; and
- \$100,000 for roof repair.

Large assignments may be prudent, but the public should understand the assumptions behind them, the expected annual use, and the effect on the District's ability to fund urgent classroom and safety needs.

8. Facilities planning should respond to documented conditions

Public minutes record playground and safety concerns beginning in September 2025: a broken slide, limited usable equipment, wasps, rusty nails, and deteriorated wooden borders. The 2024–25 SARC reports a September 2025 Facilities Inspection Tool rating of “Good” for the external/playground category.

The exact inspection date and underlying findings should be reviewed so the Board can understand whether conditions changed after inspection or whether the rating did not capture the reported defects (MESD, 2025b; Meridian Elementary School, 2026, facilities section).

The LCAP's facilities response is limited to a future target of “Good.” A rating is not a repair plan. The budget includes a \$100,000 roof assignment and \$35,000 for buildings and improvements, but it does not identify a playground project, scope, cost, funding source, or completion date.

The Board should require a current facilities list showing:

- each identified condition;

- any temporary safety measure;
- the permanent remedy;
- estimated cost;
- responsible person; and
- target completion date.

If current inspections show unfunded safety work, the budget should be amended accordingly.

9. Recommended Board action

The proposed LCAP contains worthwhile work and provides a solid foundation to build on. Before adoption, or through a written addendum adopted with it, the Board should require:

- 1.
- 2.
3. A one-page table for every action
4. showing the responsible staff, staff time or position percentage, students served, schedule, materials, funding source, measure of success, and the action to be taken after each six-week review.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
8. A curriculum and materials assurance
9. review for each grade span, including combination-class supports, complete teacher and student access, alignment of the Tier I mathematics plan with the California Mathematics Framework, and a science implementation plan addressing instructional time, materials,
10. professional learning, and interim measures.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.

14. A transparent intervention schedule
15. and cost model.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
19. An ELD implementation appendix with
20. curriculum, minutes, staff responsibilities, grouping, newcomer support, and progress measures.
- 21.
- 22.
- 23.
24. A staffing and workload plan that
25. protects preparation and collaboration time and responds to retention and climate concerns.
- 26.
- 27.
- 28.
29. A contract and consulting-services
30. schedule tied to student need and measurable results.
- 31.
- 32.
- 33.
34. A three-year plan to eliminate recurring
35. operating deficits without weakening core instruction or safety.
- 36.
- 37.
- 38.

39. A facilities corrective-action schedule
40. and any necessary budget amendment.
- 41.
- 42.
- 43.
44. A short public report after each
45. six-week cycle showing student growth, intervention changes, ELD progress, science implementation, implementation problems, and fiscal variances, while protecting student privacy.
- 46.

The question before the Board is whether the proposed plans show that the people, time, materials, and funding are sufficient to carry them out and whether the Board will receive enough evidence to stop or revise actions that do not work. At present, the plan does not fully meet that standard.

Meridian's size is a constraint, but it can also be an advantage. A district serving approximately 70 students can know each student's needs, adjust quickly, and use data with unusual precision. Realizing that advantage requires a plan that is equally precise about adult capacity, curriculum, mathematics and science, intervention, ELD, facilities, and spending.

The Board should ask for those revisions before concluding that the proposed LCAP and budget represent the best educational use of the District's limited resources.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenna Marlow

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