Sandpiper

DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

Volume 30 Number 9 November 2026

EDITORIAL

CLEAR CHOICES

The campaign for two seats on City Council has highlighted significant differences among the four candidates. Our most critical challenges require support from other jurisdictions at the regional, state, and federal levels. This means we need leaders who know how to build trust and negotiate alliances.

Terry Gaasterland is an eight-year incumbent, so we have ample evidence of her approach to regional relationships. Two damning examples stand out:

- At SANDAG, instead of supporting the nominees who had majority support for election to Board leadership positions, she chose to participate in a showy, staged walkout in protest of the vote. And how was that received? The newly-elected Vice Chair said, "The idea that we're going to throw a fit and walk out of meetings if we think things aren't going to go our way is not how democracy is supposed to work."
- After Del Mar, Solana Beach, and the 22nd DAA signed a carefully crafted joint resolution with mutually agreed-upon goals and objectives related to SANDAG's rail realignment project, Gaasterland made statements to the media that the 22nd DAA Board saw as a clear violation of that joint resolution, causing them to pause housing negotiations with Del Mar. As one board member said about Gaasterland's conduct, "We had a deal, and Del Mar broke the deal. It's as simple as that."

It is clear that Gaasterland is not the candidate who can build trust and create effective alliances with those we need as our regional allies.

Candidate Jeff Sturgis does not offer a realistic plan as to how he would rebuild the regional relationships he calls "demonstrably ineffective" on his campaign website. Citing the Fair Board's decision to say "no" to an affordable housing site, he says on his website, "This is emblematic of the majority of residents that cite 'Del Mar hires consultants and studies everything to death, but never does anything.'" This is a garbled analysis, at best, and does not signal a candidate who has a workable plan for repairing our regional relationships.

The other two candidates, Meghan Spieker and Jas Grewal, offer better strategies, summed up as bridge-building and collaboration. It may sound appealing to declare that Del Mar alone should control its fate -- regional, state, and federal statutes be damned -- but that simplistic approach has already cost us.

Candidates Spieker and Grewal offer constructive engagement strategies to work with other jurisdictions to find solutions for mutual benefit. Spieker brings an impressive background in solving complex legal and business issues, as well as nonprofit leadership. Grewal's experience as a banking executive and extensive service on a variety of Del Mar advisory committees will allow her to hit the ground running. Both are members of the Planning Commission, which is an ideal training ground for Council service.

We have two candidates who seem ideally suited to repair Del Mar's reputation and guide us through intricate, consequential challenges. Electing Spieker and Grewal is our best way to move forward constructively and effectively. ▫

THE SANDPIPER ENDORSES...



Jas Grewal



Meghan Spieker

See Page 3 for our endorsements

FAIRGROUNDS FEVER DREAMS

by Betty Wheeler | Seaview Avenue

On October 13, a development group, Del Mar Dreams LLC, presented a proposal to the 22nd DAA Board (the Fair Board) for a mega-development on the Fairgrounds: a soccer stadium with 12,000 to 16,000 seats, a 300-room hotel, a 125,000 sq. ft. convention center replacing existing exhibit halls, a multi-level, 1,300-car parking garage, and a retail and restaurant district. Del Mar Dreams LLC includes the majority owners of San Diego Wave FC and founders of a global private equity firm, and a developer of mixed-use and industrial real estate. The conceptual graphic places the new structures primarily on the south side of the Fairgrounds property, adjacent to the ecologically sensitive San Dieguito Lagoon.

Notably, the conceptual graphic shows some existing facilities such as the racetrack, barns and backstretch, but does not appear to show the existing Del Mar Fire Station. Nor does it show a location for an affordable housing project to help Del Mar meet its State housing obligations, which are based in part on the 22nd DAA' s employment numbers – even as the presentation boasted of the creation of "year-round jobs in sports, hospitality, retail and operations," which would presumably increase Del Mar's future housing obligations imposed by the state. Nor does the graphic appear to have the 100-foot buffer required by State law to be established along the San Dieguito River no later than when the existing exhibit halls are replaced. A chart in the presentation lists "Plazas, open space and lagoon-edge walks" as part of the proposal, in contrast to "a 100-ft greenway along the San Dieguito River" shown on the chart as what was included in the 22nd DAA's 2008 master plan. That 100-ft greenway is what State law requires.

The estimated completion date for the stadium is 2031, with other elements opening in 2033-34. Since the presentation was on the agenda as an "informational" item, the 22nd DAA took no action. Board member Sam Nejabat, chair of the Master Site Planning Committee, said that the committee had not sought proposals for development, but is meeting with groups that approach the 22nd DAA about potential

Continued on Page 7

Sandpiper
DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

The Sandpiper is published by the Del Mar Community Alliance, a 501(c)(4) non-profit. Its purpose is to advocate the Del Mar Community Plan, to foster informed public and government decision-making regarding issues affecting the community of the City of Del Mar, and to encourage a social and political climate favorable to the protection of the community character of the City of Del Mar and its environs.

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This publication depends upon the contributions of readers like you. Send contributions to: Sandpiper, 1155 Camino Del Mar #436, Del Mar, CA 92014. Make checks payable to Sandpiper, or pay online. Contributions are not tax-deductible.

The Sandpiper's Leadership Donors

Over the years, hundreds of Del Mar citizens have donated generously to the Del Mar Community Alliance (DMCA) in support of the Sandpiper. Since 2018, more than $296,000 has been contributed by Del Mar citizens, making it possible to bring the Sandpiper to every Del Mar family at no cost, via their mailboxes and online. The list below represents the community's cumulative leadership giving to DMCA between 2018 and February 13, 2026. Thank you!

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**In Memoriam*

THE SANDPIPER ENDORSES...

Del Mar voters will choose two of the four candidates on the ballot to serve on our City Council. Too often in the past, we've had uncontested elections, leaving voters with no choice. A contested election is good for democracy, giving us the best opportunity to collectively decide what leadership will best serve our city. And this year, there are real differences between the candidates. The Sandpiper editorial board endorses:



JAS GREWAL: The community has seen Jas Grewal work hard and effectively in service to our City for years: on the Finance Committee for eight years, and on the Planning Commission for the past three years. In 2020, she was appointed by Council to the Ad-Hoc Citizen's Housing Task Force, where she worked on the Housing Production and Preservation Subcommittee (along with Tracy Martinez, who now serves as our Mayor). That Task Force was a "baptism by fire" in the complexities of our affordable housing obligations. While there is room for disagreement on some of her positions, her service demonstrates her deep commitment to Del Mar as well as her leadership qualities. She can be counted on to be well prepared, to respect the views of others, and to make thoughtful decisions. Her long executive experience in banking should serve us well in continuing Del Mar's long record of prudent financial management.



MEGHAN SPIEKER appears to be a candidate tailor-made to meet the moment we find ourselves in. With consequential decisions just ahead of us that will shape Del Mar for decades to come, we need leaders with the deep experience and skills necessary to reach the best possible outcomes. Spieker's experiences in both nonprofit leadership and as an attorney handling complex business litigation means she can collaborate effectively to find the best solutions for Del Mar-- and can also fight hard and effectively for Del Mar when a hard fight is called for. At a time when our reputation regionally has been greatly diminished, for reasons noted in our Editorial, she has the skill set and commitment to repair our regional relationships, and restore Del Mar's reputation as a small City that punches above its weight. Her service on the Planning Commission will allow her to hit the ground running on Council.

Both of these candidates are endorsed by U.S. Congressmember Mike Levin, which means a strong federal connection is already assured. They both have strong relationships with other elected officials regionally. Their Sierra Club endorsements signal their alignment with Del Mar's strong environmental values. In a time of transition for our Fire Department, they both are endorsed by the Del Mar Firefighters. Del Mar can best position ourselves for the future by electing these candidates.

The Sandpiper also endorses:

- Mike Levin, U.S. Congress (CA-49)
- Xavier Becerra, Governor
- Catherine Blakespear, State Senate
- Tasha Boerner, State Assembly
- Helen Doyle, SDUHS Trustee

The Sandpiper Recommends a "NO" Vote on Prop. 39 (Voter ID)

Out-of-state billionaires and Carl DeMaio's fundraising machine are plowing millions into Prop. 39, described by the League of Women Voters as "a partisan power grab to further President Trump's voter suppression efforts" that is "intended to make it harder to vote and easier for politicians to decide which voters count." Mega-donors funding Prop. 39 include Illinois billionaire Richard Uihlein ($17 million) and Airbnb co-founder and Trump DOGE appointee Joe Gebbia ($8 million). Carl DeMaio's "Reform California With Carl De Maio Ballot Measure Committee" kicked in $3.1 million. California already has robust laws to protect voter integrity, including an ID requirement for voter registration. Voters should say "no" to this Trump wolf in sheep's clothing.

SURF CUP RUN AMOK

by Jeff Barnouw | Amphitheatre Drive

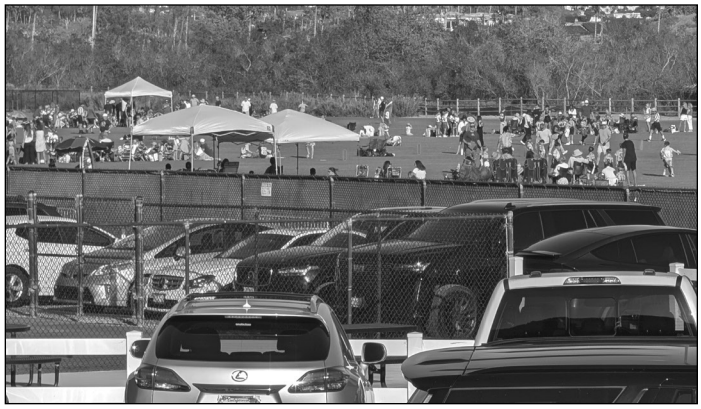
On September 28, the Coalition to Preserve the Polo Fields Neighborhood held a meeting at La Valle Coastal Club, in furtherance of their goal is to stop and reverse the commercial development of Surf Cup Sports, on the open land known as the "Polo Fields" located in the San Dieguito River Valley, east of Del Mar.

Over 100 people attended to hear Coast Law Group attorney David Peck's update of the Coalition's lawsuit against Surf Cup and the City of San Diego for violating and failing to enforce the grant deed restrictions on the 114-acre property that was granted to the City in 1983 under a deed restricting its use to rural, public open space, passive recreation and a strict limit of 25 event days per year.

Surf Cup Sports, acquiring the lease in 2016, has continued to extend the scope and nature of its activities. The record of alleged violations of the restrictions is overwhelming, yet the City of San Diego looks the other way, intent on the revenue from the Surf Club. The value of open space is trumped by the compulsion to monetize the property.

In April 2023 Fairbanks Polo Club Homes, successors to the grant deed, filed a suit against the City for failure to enforce the grant deed restrictions. To undermine the standing of the litigants and void the suit, the San Diego City Council voted in October 2025 to terminate portions of the grant deed protections and amend the Surf Cup lease to exempt its commercial activities from the California Environmental Quality Act. This sparked an expansion of the suit as well as a parallel suit by the Sierra Club. Recently the City, Surf, and former owner Ocean Industries asked a judge to throw out the lawsuit without a trial, On September 9 the judge, Victor Torres of San Diego Superior Court, refused, adding that Ocean's actions in helping the city end the 1983 deed protections "do not appear to be in good faith."

As an example of the City's acquiescence to the violations, the City Council raised the annual event limit from 25 to 40 days. While Surf claimed 25 events, many stretching over several days, and their public 2026 calendar shows 29 events across more than 80 days. The traffic jams that disrupt the neighborhood are more serious than mere inconvenience. since Surf and the

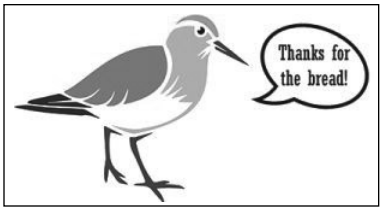


Surf Sports Park on Fri., Oct. 16, 2026, with lots of activity throughout the Park, though nothing for this date was listed on the Park's Calendar of Events. Photo: Betty Wheeler.

City have ignored or dodged the requirement of an evacuation plan. Surf regularly has approx. 3000 cars parked ($20 a day) with only a single, complicated exit route. On October 3-4, Surf hosted the Del Mar Wine and Food Festival (owned by Surf's owner), and October 22-25, the USA Ultimate Frisbee Tournament.

Judge Torres's ruling is limited to his rejection of the defendants' motion for "judgement on the pleadings." Future proceedings are likely to address the substantive merits of the lawsuit. At this point, chalk one up for those trying to enforce the deed restrictions intended to limit the property's use to rural, public open space, with a limit of 25 event days per year. □

SANDPIPER SUPPORT



For almost three decades, the Sandpiper's volunteer writers and editors have covered our people, our community organizations, our natural and human environment, our cultural and recreational activities, and very importantly our governmental processes, with reliable information and reasoned opinion. This publication depends on the contribution of readers like you. Our December issue will include our annual request for your support. If you would like to donate now, use the "Donate" button here: delmarsandpiper.org/about. Or mail your check, payable to 'Sandpiper," to Del Mar Sandpiper, 1155 Camino Del Mar #436, Del Mar, CA 92014. Donations are not tax deductible.

Del Mar FOUNDATION

WITH GRATITUDE

by Linda Bachrach | DMF Board Member

I have had the honor of serving on the Del Mar Foundation's Board of Directors for the past three years. It is with gratitude that I have agreed to serve another three-year term on the Board. Why is DMF important to me and so many others?

DMF provided the community with over twenty-five cultural events this year including First Thursday concerts, Summer Twilight concerts, the Fourth of July Parade, the Community Picnic, and Easter and Halloween events for our children and our dogs.

DMF also provided essential grants to local non-profits this year. Some of the grants in 2026 supported the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy, the Torrey Pines Conservancy, Del Mar International Composer's Symposium (DMICS), Don Diego's Plant*Grow*Eat Program, the Library's 30th Anniversary Celebration, Del Mar Community Connections' programs, and the Surf Del Mar Festival.

This year the Foundation engaged in a remarkably successful partnership with the Salk Institute. DMF offered a challenge grant which was met. Salk offered three webinars we co-sponsored which emphasized why Science Can't Wait. Funding is imperative for science to advance.

DMF is grateful for the volunteers and donors who make Del Mar the special community it is. As we approach the holiday season, let us think of the things for which we are thankful.



Fun in the bubbles at the Del Mar Community Picnic.

DEL MAR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
www.dmcc.cc (858) 792-7565

by Ashley Simpkins | Executive Director

Focus on Family Caregivers

According to research done by AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving, 92% of the 7 million family caregivers in California care for an adult, and most often for a parent. 37% of family caregivers are themselves age 65+. It can reasonably be assumed that these numbers are even greater in Del Mar, where the population share of older adults is almost double that of the state as a whole.

At DMCC, we support family caregivers in Del Mar whose work is often under-resourced or underappreciated. November is National Family Caregivers Appreciation Month, so while our work happens year-round, let's take the opportunity to spotlight it:

- On Nov. 9, the Caregiver Coalition of San Diego is hosting a free resource fair and appreciation party in Clairemont – and we're providing a shuttle for those who want to attend! In order to learn more and reserve your seat on the shuttle, call (858) 792-7565.
- On Nov. 12, family caregivers might want to attend our educational program "We Hired Homecare… Now What?" in Del Mar Town Hall at 1:30pm.
- Twice a month, DMCC partners with the Alzheimer's Association to provide a Del Mar support group for dementia caregivers.
- Through the Aging Resources Advocate service pilot, funded in partnership with the Del Mar Foundation, caregivers may receive free short-term resource navigation counseling from an expert in aging services.

…And that's just this month! To register or learn more about these activities or services, visit our activity calendar at dmcc.cc/calendar or call (858) 792-7565.

Thanks For an Incredibly Successful Fall Benefit

Thank you to the Sustaining Members, Fall Benefit Sponsors, ticket buyers, and volunteers that made this year's Fall Benefit an amazing success! We had a huge party on the Del Mar Civic Center Plaza featuring dueling pianos with good food, good wine, and good company. The heat that day was record-breaking, but so were the donations! Particular thanks to Chana Mannen, Special Events Chair, as well as the crack team she assembled to plan such a great event: Katie Militello, Susan Halenza, Susan Harrington, Tema Halpern, Denine Henry, Linda Otchis, Claire McGreal, and Carly Michaels.

Volunteer of the Month – October

DMCC's Volunteer of the Month for October 2026 was Kim Weinstein, the instructor of Kalm with Kim, our relaxing chair yoga class that is held on the 2nd Monday of each month at 3pm. DMCC Programs Chair Carol German commented that "Our participants love her classes. She is helping our older clients stay as healthy as possible and contributing to their peace of mind."

ROVING TEEN REPORTER: SOCIAL MEDIA TIME OUT

by Viktoria Kiss | Torrey Pines High School Junior

In a new survey, almost 95% of youth aged 13-17 reported they were using a social media platform. Today it feels as if almost every child has immediate access to the piercing lights of digital screens.

Though companies have been attempting to limit the imposition of age restrictions on their platforms, Meta reached a $17 billion settlement with 51 U.S. states and territories to protect young users of Instagram and Facebook by implementing stricter safety rules for users under age 18. The agreement states that in the next 10 years the company will use these funds to fund youth mental health and safety.

Alex Wiklund, social media manager for Peer Assistant Learners, and Claire Zhou, editor in chief of the Falconer, support restrictions: "Super early social media usage can be really bad for people's digital footprint," Wiklund said. "When people are so young they could post things that they don't know are offensive or maybe even cringy...they can also come across things that are inappropriate for their age group."

Zhou finds that a restriction on children under 13 years old would be effective. "Before then, it is important for children to learn to interact with the world ouside of the screen and develop critical skills such as maintaining eye contact and striking up conversations with new people," Zhou ssaid. "Overuse of social media in the period before and during middle school, where students are beginning to grapple with identity, hinders their ability to organically find confidence, in my opinion."

Although there are dangers, Wiklund still admires the positive aspects. "Social media can be really beneficial if it's used in the correct way by children," Wiklund said. "It can help you grow interests, hobbies and sparks, and it can really help kids make friends and grow a community." □

THUNDER BEASTS

by Julie Maxey-Allison | 10th Street

In the midst of major infrastructure work last September up the road in Oceanside, paleontologist Dr. Joseph El Adli at the site to monitor the process, spotted bones 12' down below ground level. Work was halted. El Adli and his team excavated. Over the next few days they dug out a total of 12 limb bones, ribs, and fragments lodged beneath several tons of hardened mudstone and sandstone in Member C of the Santiago Formation. (Complying with California state environmental laws, paleontological and cultural resource monitors are on site throughout construction. The city is keeping the exact spot private.)

The fossilized bones, carefully wrapped, were whisked off to a laboratory for initial analysis. Turns out they had been in place for quite a while— 40-45 million years or so—the dating estimate determined by the age of adjacent rocks and organisms.

Dr. El Adli believes the bones likely belonged to a "large hoofed mammal" from one of two extinct "odd-toed hoofed mammal" families within the order Perissodactyla (of the the Eocene Epoch) that once roamed North America during the Uintan North American Land Mammal Age all those years ago.

The possibilities: of the rhino like land dwelling large animals, herbivores, a member of the Brontotheriidae group known as titanotheres or "thunder beasts", or maybe an Amynodon, some of whom may have been semi-aquatic.

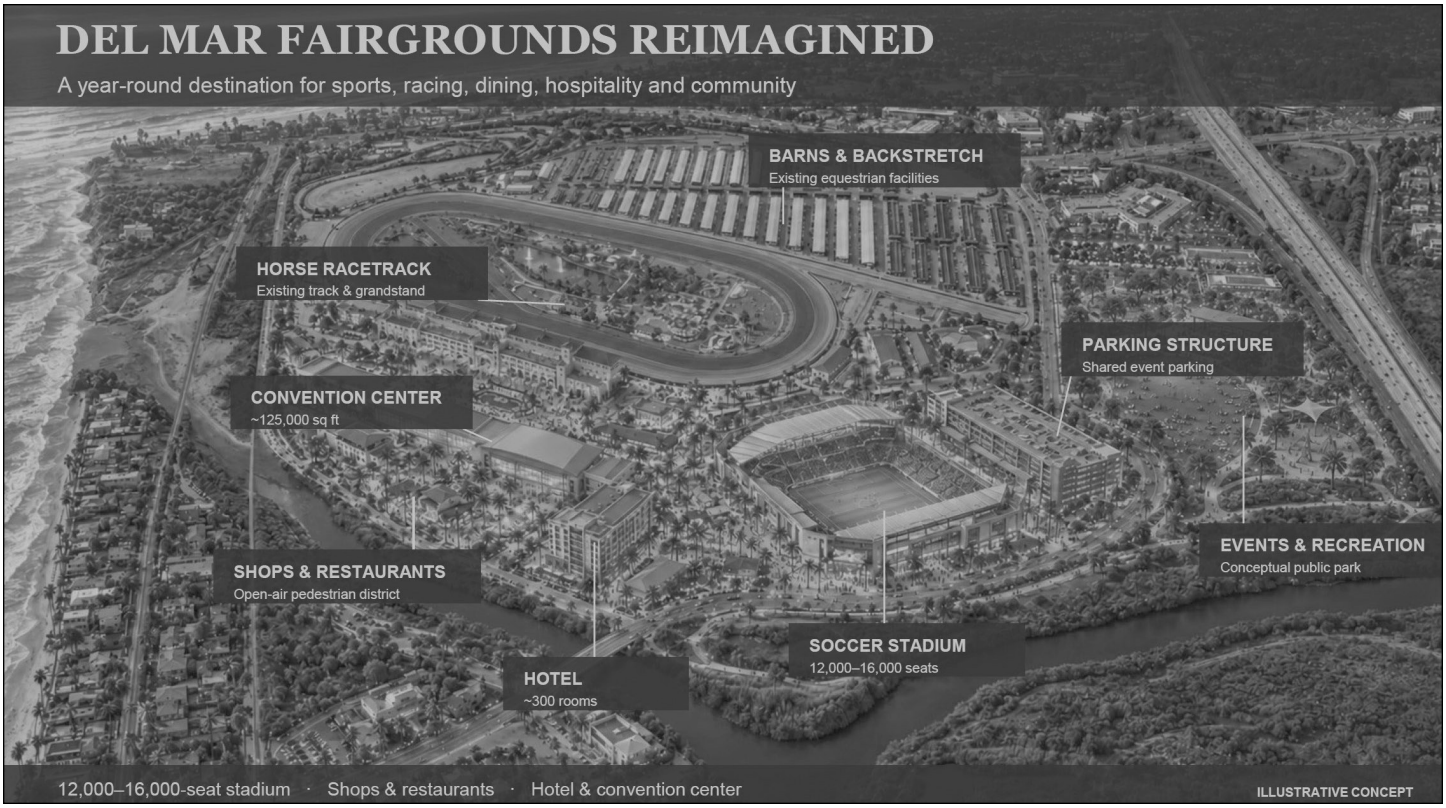
Next steps: the ancient remains will be stabilized for long term preservation and further examination. Once their identity is clarified, the Oceanside fossils will go to a museum collection where they will be available for further research and eventual public viewing.

Del Mar is not that far from Oceanside where those thunder beasts roamed millions of years ago Wonder what is lurking right here underfoot? □

Fairgrounds Fever Dreams
Continued from Page 2

development. Del Mar Dreams LLC asked for a two-year exclusive negotiating agreement with the 22nd DAA, to justify the millions it would spend producing detailed site plans.

Just as the 2008 master plan was challenged in court by the cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach and the San Dieguito River Park JPA, with a separate challenge filed by the Sierra Club, a mega-development like this, on such an environmentally important and sensitive location, would likely face heightened scrutiny by those same stakeholders, along with the California Coastal Commission. □



Concept illustration from Del Mar Dreams LLC's October 13, 2026 presentation to the 22nd DAA Board of Directors.



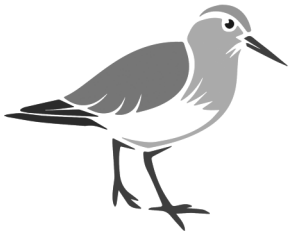
Exposed: remains of early "natatorium" from the 1800s along sand stripped shore. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison.



High low tide against the cliffs: here today, here tomorrow? Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison.

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SHRINKING SCHOOLS

by Neelum Arya | Zuni Drive

California recorded its ninth consecutive annual decline in public K–12 enrollment in 2025–26. Public Policy Institute of California's January 2026 analysis found that about 70% of California school districts had experienced enrollment declines over the preceding decade, and coastal districts have some of the largest losses. Between 2015-16 and 2025-26, Del Mar Heights and Hills schools have experienced a 33% drop in enrollment. Several forces are likely responsible for the decline: lower birth rates; an aging population; families leaving California for other states, changes to immigration policy, and the geographic redistribution of where children live within California; as well as increases in private-school enrollment and homeschooling.

For most California school districts, declining enrollment means declining revenue because state funding is closely tied to student attendance. As a basic aid district, DMUSD receives most of its general-purpose funding from local property taxes, making it less directly exposed to enrollment-related reductions in state aid. Although DMUSD is not likely to experience a drop in funding, the substantial decline in our enrollment raises difficult questions about how to best allocate our resources. Choices about staffing, class sizes, possible grade-combination classes, and the future of specialized programs such as STEAM+, will shape students' educational experience. While school closures seem to always be top of mind, a recent Stanford study of California school districts found that school closures did not provide a significant improvement to a district's oveall s financial position.

The magnitude of the decline remains uncertain. DMUSD annually contracts with MGT to prepare a multi-year demographic study, "Student Population Forecast by Residence." Below is a table consolidating the forecasts for our area – children residing West of I-5 zoned for Del Mar Heights/ Del Mar Hills Academy. For the year 2030, total enrollment for Heights and Hills is expected to be lower than the enrollment of children attending Heights in 2015/16. The latest forecast projects approximately 48 kindergarten students in 2030, down from the 62 kindergarten students currently enrolled at both schools in 2025–26. □

Comparison of Forecasted Resident Students in 2030 by Grade

	Official Enrollment by School				Combined Heights/Hills Data			
Grade	Heights 2015-16	Heights 2025-26	Hills 2015-16	Hills 2025-26	HTS + Hills 2025-26	2024 Forecast for YR 2030	2025 Forecast for YR 2030	2026 Forecast for YR 2030
Kindergarten	63	38	44	24	62	40.4	49.6	48
Grade 1	49	43	42	35	78	44.5	51.6	49.4
Grade 2	71	22	44	29	51	52	58.9	52.9
Grade 3	69	48	46	33	81	52	65.1	62
Grade 4	86	48	52	46	94	58.1	71.1	71.2
Grade 5	67	45	43	34	79	55.6	67.3	68.7
Grade 6	54	50	51	28	78	56.9	62.6	68.5
Total Enr.	459	294	322	229	523	359.5	427.2	420.7
				Expected Drop from 2025/26		-31%	-18%	-20%

Table prepared by Neelum Arya. Sources: MGT forecasts dated May 21, 2026; June 26, 2025; and August 6, 2024. Enrollment data obtained from DataQuest California Department of Education, www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/