

Newark Unified School District Governance Team Handbook



Newark Unified School District
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Adopted by the Board of Education on December 16, 2021

This handbook reflects the Governance Team’s creation of an effective framework for successful leadership and governance. This process involves an ongoing commitment to discussions focused on the development of a Unity of Purpose, Governance Team Goals, and a commitment to norms and protocols related to the formal structures that enable the Board of Education and Superintendent in the performance of their responsibilities in a manner that benefits all children.

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GOVERNANCE TEAM

The Governance Team is defined as the Newark Unified School District Board of Education working in concert with the Superintendent of schools.

GOVERNANCE TEAM MEMBERS

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ORGANIZATIONAL VISION

The Newark public schools, in partnership with the community, will be a model of world-class education that develops the unique abilities of every student.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Newark public schools inspire and educate all students to achieve their full potential and be responsible, respectful, and productive citizens.

ORGANIZATIONAL CORE BELIEFS

The Governance Team will always operate with the highest ethical standards and fairness in dealings with Board colleagues, students, district employees, parents, and community members.

The Governance Team believes:

- Our first responsibility is to provide all students with a quality education that challenges and enables them to achieve their full potential.
- Each student has the right to an environment that is emotionally nurturing, physically safe, and intellectually stimulating.
- Student success is the shared responsibility of district employees, parents, students, and the community, and we all must promote excellence in education.
- The Governance Team is responsible for setting goals, establishing expectations, measuring, and maximizing academic delivery to students.

- The District must be financially stable and must maintain adequate reserves for economic uncertainty.

The Governance Team believes public education offers the best assurance of the continuation of a viable democracy. When we honor these responsibilities and operate by these principles and beliefs, the children of Newark will be better served.

DISTRICT CORE VALUES

Newark Public Schools Value:

- Excellence: Strive and achieve quality performance
- Honesty & Integrity: Be truthful and worthy of trust
- Respect: Be considerate of others
- Accountability & Responsibility: Committed to attaining the established expectations
- Critical Thinking: Analyze information, synthesize it by breaking it down into its components, and evaluate the options which result in a plan of action
- Involvement & Teamwork: Willing to volunteer, effectively participate, and work as a team toward a common goal
- Creativity & Risk-taking: Use an imaginative method in problem-solving that encourages new and innovative approaches

OUR SHARED PURPOSE

- To provide a roadmap and support for the superintendent to reach the Board’s vision and goals using benchmarks and accountability
- To improve achievement for all students, and close the achievement gap
- To create an atmosphere of respect for students, employees, and the community
- To keep the District on a solid financial base
- To comprehensively communicate abstract and complex issues to the public
- To leave a legacy of positive community involvement and support
- To provide differentiated and quality programs

DISTRICT GOAL AREAS

The Board of Education will set specific measurable goals on an annual basis. They are documented, approved, and displayed on the District’s website. Goals are established and prioritized in the following areas:

1. Fiscal Vitality
2. Meaningful Community Engagement and Two-way Communication
3. Promote a Focus on Continual Improvement of Teaching and Learning
4. Exceptional Learning Environments

MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board sets the direction for the community's schools by:

- Focusing on student learning and achievement
- Regularly assessing the needs and baseline data
- Regularly reviewing or revising documents that provide direction for the District, e.g. Governance Team Handbook, beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators
- Ensuring that an appropriate and inclusive process is used in decision-making
- Ensuring that the direction-setting documents are the driving force for all District efforts

The Board established an effective and efficient structure for the school district by:

- Selecting, hiring, and supporting the superintendent, and setting policy for hiring other personnel
- Establishing academic priorities and adopting the District's curriculum
- Establishing budget priorities, adopting the budget, and overseeing facilities
- Providing direction and voting to ratify collective-bargaining agreements

The Board ensures accountability to the public by:

- Evaluating the superintendent
- Developing, monitoring, reviewing, and revising policies
- Serving as a judicial and appeals body
- Monitoring student achievement
- Monitoring program effectiveness and requiring program changes as indicated
- Monitoring and adjusting the District's finances
- Monitoring the collective bargaining process

The Board provides leadership by:

- Exhibiting a professional demeanor that models the District's beliefs and vision
- Making decisions and providing resources that support mutually agreed-upon priorities and goals
- Upholding Board-approved District policies
- Promoting a positive personnel climate
- Being knowledgeable about the District's efforts, in order to explain them to the public
- Ensuring opportunities for the community to provide input to the Board
- Advocating for children, District programs, and public education to the public, as well as local and state community leaders

GOVERNANCE TEAM CULTURAL NORMS

The Board of Education believes each member brings unique skills, values, and beliefs to the Governance Team. To govern effectively, individual board members must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high-quality education is provided to all students. The Board believes that authority rests with the Board as a whole, and not with individual members of the Board. The board members understand and respect the separate roles of the Board and Superintendent, yet work together as a governance team with collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture where there is acceptance of honest mistakes.

The Board of Education will:

- Communicate openly and honestly
- Communicate with Governance Team members in a respectful and dignified manner.
- Let the Governance Team Members know the impact of their communication on themselves personally to allow for clarity and understanding of the actual intent.
- Listen openly and respectfully to what other team members have to say, recognizing that each individual's opinion is as important as our own.
- Be mindful of their body language, tone of voice, and words used. The Board will ensure that the body language and tone match the message intended to be transmitted.
- Take the time necessary, before board meetings, to become fully informed about issues coming before the Board.
- Communicate honestly and respectfully, even when they don't agree.
- Recognize that respecting and attempting to understand the other's points of view are essential to building trust. The Board will ask questions or paraphrase other team members' comments to clarify for understanding.
- Ask questions when they do not understand, be respectful when they disagree, and strive to build on each other's comments and ideas whenever possible during discussions.

GOVERNANCE TEAM PROTOCOLS

Orientation of New Members

New board members need to learn the basics of board governance as quickly as possible, to enable them to become fully contributing members of the Board. Immediately following the certification of a public election or appointment to the Board, new members will be seated following the oath of office. As soon as possible the Governance Team will schedule an orientation session with the newly constituted Board. This orientation session will include a review of:

- The governance handbook of protocols, and agreements
- Board agenda processes and procedures
- 9000 series of Board Policies
- The Brown Act, Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest (Form 700)
- CSBA Professional Governance Standards
- ACSA/CSBA Superintendent Standards and job descriptions for the Superintendent, contract provisions, and evaluation procedures
- Discussion of pending litigation and crucial decisions

- Past year's financial information
- The past year of board minutes

In addition, the superintendent will schedule an introductory meeting with critical District department heads to provide an understanding of the department's roles and responsibilities.

The Board recommends that newly elected members attend the CSBA Institute for New and First-Term Board Members, as well as the New Member Orientation at the CSBA Annual Conference.

Continuing Education

The Board is committed to continuing education opportunities for all staff and board members.

- All members of the Board are encouraged to attend the Masters in Governance Program sponsored by CSBA as well as other conferences and seminars.
- The Board commits itself to ongoing workshops to build personal and professional growth as part of a Governance Team.

Superintendent Evaluation

The Board recognizes the value and importance of a comprehensive and formal evaluation process for the Superintendent.

- The Board agrees to abide by all contract terms and to conduct a formal evaluation each year or as stipulated contractually.
- The evaluation shall consist of a self-evaluation presented by the Superintendent, and a board evaluation based upon formal goals and objectives.

Governance Team Self-Evaluation

The Board understands the value of periodically assessing their performance as part of a comprehensive approach to holding the entire District accountable to the public.

- The Board will schedule an annual workshop for a board self-evaluation and review the Governance Team agreements and processes each year by the end of February.
- The Superintendent is invited to provide candid assessments to build a more effective/efficient team.

Board Role in Public

Board members understand the importance and value of being visible and accessible in the community. They have been elected by the community to provide leadership and citizen oversight of the District. It is their responsibility to ensure that the District is responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of the community as a whole and educate the community as necessary.

- Board members will strive to educate the public about their role as public servants, entrusted with the education of all the children in the District.
- Board members will make visible their dedication and commitment to public education, actively engaging community members in discussions about critical public education matters of the District, State, and Federal Government.
- When speaking to community groups, the media, or other members of the public, individual board members recognize that their statements may be perceived as reflecting

the views and positions of the Board as a whole, and, as such, they have the responsibility to identify personal viewpoints as such and not as that of the Board.

Board Member Response to Community Complaints

The board members must be good listeners and consistent in their responses to each other, staff, and the community. Board members need to stay within their function and not attempt to personally “fix” the problem. Students and staff members have due process and confidentiality rights that cannot be violated. The Board may potentially be the “court of last resort” and members who have been “too involved” early in the situation may have to recuse themselves if they cannot be impartial.

- The Board will consider its judicial review responsibility, staff, and student confidentiality rights, and due process issues to assess whether the issue is appropriate for board members to hear.
- The Board will utilize the “6 R’s” to ensure that we have actively listened to the constituent:
 1. Receive: Listen to what the person has to say without preparing a response.
 2. Repeat: Paraphrase or ask a question to clarify for understanding. The Board will ask the person to identify those to whom they have spoken about the matter before contacting a board member.
 3. Request: Ask what the person would like the board member to do with the information and/or what they see as a solution to the problem.
 4. Review: Go over the *real* options available to the person to remedy the situation.
 5. Redirect: Put the person back into the system at the appropriate place, remembering lines of authority and chains of command. Remember, students and District personnel have legal and due process rights that must be honored. The Board will not divulge confidential information to community members or staff.
 6. Report: The Board will maintain open lines of communication between the Board and Superintendent, and will notify the Superintendent of the conversation as soon as possible so the Superintendent can verify or clarify the situation and follow through as necessary. This process will allow the Superintendent to know first-hand what the board member said to the community or staff member.

Visiting Schools

School visitations by board members are encouraged. They provide valuable insight into how board policy is implemented at the school level and help demonstrate Board support for the effort and accomplishments of District staff. However, board members’ visitations are to observe and learn, not to openly question operations and activities. Board members should not interrupt the classroom learning environment.

- Visits to schools are encouraged to support and acknowledge the learning community.
- Board members will inform the superintendent of their interest in visiting a specific school, the superintendent will schedule a visit, and the board members will recap with the superintendent their impressions following school site visits.

- Board members will follow all building protocols for sign-in and movement of visitors on school grounds.
- While members are free to choose which schools they will visit, considerations should be given to coordinating visitation schedules among all board members to help ensure maximum Board exposure to every school in the District.
- Questions or concerns about specific events observed during visitations should be shared with the superintendent, so as not to convey to staff a board member's role in the management of the District.

BOARD MEETING PROTOCOLS

Board Member Interaction With the Public at Board Meetings

Board meetings are meetings of the Board held in public. They are not “town hall meetings” where the elected officials and community members freely engage each other in an unstructured manner. Meetings are conducted in a civil, orderly, and respectful manner under the administration and discretion of the board president. Board members want to ensure that all and multiple voices are heard at the designated times during the meeting to inform Board deliberations.

- Time will be provided at all regular board meetings for public comment on agenda and non-agenda items.
- The Board will enforce its guidelines for public comment that balance efficient board meeting management and full participation of the public.
- A maximum of 30 minutes will be allotted per agenda item and for all non-agenda item comments. To ensure that all persons are treated fairly and equally, each speaker will be allowed to speak once at the podium on each agenda item and will be allotted a maximum of three minutes.
- The board president may, with the consent of the Board, exceed the 30-minute allotment or make other modifications of the public comment period and process.
- People speaking at board meetings will be listened to with respect.
- In regards to complaints and concerns of the public, the board president delegates the responsibility to the superintendent, and the matter will be responded to as quickly as possible.
- Where appropriate, a public-initiated item may be placed on a future board meeting agenda at the request of the board president, if the subject matter is within the Board's jurisdiction.
- If comments or concerns are specifically related to a past Board decision, the board president will reiterate that the Board stands by its decision.
- To avoid unintentionally agendizing a non-agenda item, board members and staff will limit their response to non-agenda public comments. The board president may respond on behalf of the Board. All responses will conform to the following guidelines:
 1. A brief statement to acknowledge the speaker may be made in appreciation and respect for the public comment, and reaffirm that the Board cannot act on a request during non-agenda items.
 2. A question may be asked for basic clarification as necessary to understand the

- public comment without engaging in a substantive discussion.
- 3. Do not “debate” with the public speaker.
- 4. As appropriate, refer the matter to a staff member or other resource for a factual reference, or a request may be made to agendaize the item at a future meeting.
- During board discussions and deliberations, board members will direct their comments to their fellow board members and not directly to the public.

Board Deliberations

The Board has a strong interest in ensuring efficiency and fair consideration of all items on the Board’s agenda, and that the deliberation process is open, inclusive, and respectful. The Board agrees to promote a consensus-driven decision-making process that encourages each Trustee to freely state their perspective, feel heard, and understood by all board colleagues before decision-making.

- Trustees may speak to only one other Trustee in advance of deciding on a potential issue to refrain from setting a previously determined outcome.
- Trustees will be recognized by the board president to ask questions about agenda items. Questions of staff and other Trustees will be done professionally and respectfully.
- The board president will manage public comments in a fashion that ensures an open and inclusive forum conducted within accepted meeting decorum standards.
- The board president will consider deviations from normal public comment practice where the interest of having open and inclusive public participation warrants exceptions. The board president will take into consideration the interests of other Trustees in instituting exceptions to the normal public comment practices.
- The board president will announce the item to be discussed and acknowledge the superintendent to introduce the staff member providing information on the agenda item.
- After the information on the topic has been provided, an opportunity will be made available for the public to comment if requested.
- Following any public comment, the Board will deliberate on the item for the allotted time.
- Following Board deliberations, a motion and a second will be made, and a vote will be taken. The majority position will prevail, and all board members agree to abide by the prevailing vote.

Bringing New Ideas Forward

The Board will be open to having “brainstorming” discussions, or study sessions, around any idea that a Trustee may feel merits exploratory consideration. “New Ideas” are defined as any proposal brought forward by a Trustee, at their initiative, or at the request of a constituent, which was previously discussed during a board meeting.

- Trustees will first notify the board president and Superintendent of their interest in bringing forward a new idea at a board meeting.

- When initially agendized, the preliminary discussion of a new idea will not require staff research time. Initially, staff will be expected to respond to new ideas based on current knowledge.
- Only a majority of the Board may direct the Superintendent to conduct research regarding the exploration of a new idea. The Superintendent will decide on the delegation of assignments to District staff.
- The new idea may be agendized for discussion only. The Board majority will decide if the new idea should be further developed and studied by staff. The Board majority will decide if staff time should be invested in the “fleshing out” of new ideas.
- Individual Trustees, in the course of interactions with constituents, will be careful not to make or imply the commitment of the full Board to explore or proceed with implementing new ideas.

Closed Session Practices

The Brown Act establishes conditions for discussing certain District business during closed and confidential sessions. The Brown Act strongly supports the “public's right to know,” but recognizes that some highly sensitive matters are best discussed in a confidential setting, in part to protect the legal rights of other parties. The public’s trust, and the trust among Trustees, is breached if confidential information is shared in a public manner.

- Anyone who attends Closed Session will maintain confidentiality regarding all matters as prescribed by the Brown Act, including matters about employee labor contract negotiations, district litigation, personnel matters, the substance of a superintendent evaluation, and other matters permitted or required by the Brown Act.
- Anyone who attends Closed Session will maintain the public’s and each other’s trust by not breaching confidentiality.
- If any person attending Closed Session inadvertently or accidentally violates a confidential issue, the board president and Superintendent will take immediate action to rectify the matter.

BOARD MEETING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Authority is Collective, Not Individual:

- The only authority to direct action rests with the Board as a whole when seated at a regular or special board meeting. Outside of this meeting, there is no authority.
- A majority Board vote provides direction to the Superintendent. Board members will not undermine the ability of staff to carry out Board direction.

Board Meetings are Where the Board Conducts Its Work in Public:

- Reports to the Board will focus primarily on accountability for student learning.
- The Superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer for the District and should

recommend/propose/suggest on most matters before the Board.

- The Board will consider research, best practices, and public input in its decision-making process.
- The Board agrees to speak to the issue on the agenda and be attentive to their fellow Trustees.
- Board discussion should be concise and pertinent to the issues.

The Board Will Follow the Practice of “No Surprises” Toward Trustees and District Staff:

- When a Trustee needs more information or has questions on an agenda item, the Superintendent will be contacted before the meeting.
- Trustees will follow the protocol for “bringing up new ideas” when adding items to a board agenda. New ideas should not be brought up unexpectedly at a board meeting.
- The Board will respect each Trustee’s right to request that Board action be deferred in instances where there is concern about the adequacy of information on which to make an “informed decision.”

Before the Board Meeting, Trustees Should:

- Receive the agenda packets as early as possible, but no later than 72 hours prior to a regularly scheduled board meeting.
- Review the agenda and supporting documents (exhibits).
- Contact the Superintendent, or designated staff, with clarifying questions and requests for information as early as possible.
- At board meetings, the Superintendent will provide information and counsel to the Trustees.

During Board Meetings, Trustees have a responsibility to:

- Elect a president and other officers.
- Review, agree, and take action on creating an annual calendar.
- Establish and periodically review the bylaws by which the Board governs its internal operations.
- Determine the scope of committees.
- Decide on the role and authority of student board members.
- Review conflict of interest laws.
- Become knowledgeable about the state’s open meeting laws.
- Submit agenda items.
- Read materials.
- Come prepared.
- Act professionally, abiding by the team’s norms and protocols.

- Deliberate insightfully, keeping the focus on the District’s vision and priorities.
- Vote on items.
- Follow the agreed-upon meetings process.
- Help the board president move the meeting ahead when help is needed.
- Ensure Board action is communicated appropriately.
- Allow the direction set by the majority of the Board to be implemented effectively.

Additional Board Meeting Agreements:

- The Board will not communicate with members of the community during board meetings.
- Meetings will start on time.
- Trustees will provide the Superintendent with announcements topics they believe should be made during a meeting before the start of that meeting.
- In the interest of time and to avoid repetition, the board president will greet the audience at the beginning of the meeting and thank those addressing the Board on behalf of the entire Board.
- Reports from Trustees will be given at the end of the meeting.
- Trustees will address each other, staff, and audience by title and the person’s last name.
- The Board will annually appoint a keeper of the time. If a technical issue results when a member of the public begins to speak, then the timekeeping will revert to the board president.
- All Board motions will receive a second to allow for discussion. A second will not be interpreted as agreement, and the maker of a second can clarify and qualify the reason for a second.
- Once a vote has been called and a decision made, the Board will support the decisions of the majority to implement the Board’s direction.

Officers of the Board

At the annual organizational meeting, the Board shall elect from among its members a President and Vice President/Clerk of the Board. The term length of the officers shall be for one year. The Board shall designate the Superintendent as Secretary of the Board.

DUTIES OF BOARD OFFICERS

The President of the Board of Education (BB 9121)

At the annual organizational meeting, the Governing Board shall appoint a president from its membership. The president shall preside at all Governing Board Meetings. They shall:

- Call the meeting to order at the appointed time.
- Announce the business to come before the Board in its proper order.

- Enforce and maintain the Board's policies related to the order of business and conduct the meetings.
- Recognize persons who desire to speak, and protect the speaker who has the floor from disturbance or interference.
- Explain what the effect of a motion would be if it is not clear to every member.
- Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the Board.
- Rule on parliamentary procedure.
- Put motions to a vote, and state the results of the vote.

The President shall have the same rights as any member of the Board, including the right to move, second, discuss, and vote on all questions before the Board, allowing other members priority to speak and make motions as a point of courtesy.

The board president, or in their absence the Vice-President, shall also perform other duties as directed by law, State Department of Education regulations, and the Board, including the duty to:

- Meet with the Superintendent before meetings to review the agenda and meeting details.
- Represent the District at events when invited or appropriate.
- Sign instruments, acts, and orders necessary to carry out state requirements or the will of the Board.
- Consult with the Superintendent on appropriate Board issues or crucial matters which may occur between board meetings.
- Appoint and disband all committees, subject to Board approval.
- Call for meetings of the Board as they shall deem necessary, giving notices as prescribed by law.
- Be responsible for the orderly conduct of all board meetings.
- Share informational mail with other board members.

When the president resigns, is absent, or is disabled, the Vice President shall perform the President's duties. When both the President and Vice President are absent or disabled, the Board shall choose a President Pro Tempore to perform the President's duties.

The Vice President of the Board of Education (BB 9123)

At the annual organizational meeting, the Governing Board shall appoint or elect a Vice President from its membership. The duties of the Vice President shall be:

- Serve as the presiding officer in the absence of the President.
- Certify and attest to actions taken by the Board when required.
- Sign the minutes of the board meetings following their approval.
- Sign documents as directed by the Board on behalf of the District, and sign all other items which require the signature of the clerk.
- Perform any other duties as assigned by the Board.

The Secretary to the Board of Education (BB 9122)

The Superintendent serves as the official secretary to the Board of Education. The secretary to the Board shall be responsible for maintaining an accurate and complete record of all board proceedings and shall:

- Prepare, distribute, and maintain the board agenda.
- Record, distribute, and maintain the board minutes.
- Maintain board records and documents.
- Conduct official correspondence for the Board.
- As directed by the Board, sign and execute official papers.
- Perform other duties as assigned by the Board.

Responsibilities of the Superintendent

- Promotes the success of all students and supports the efforts of the Board of Education to keep the District focused on learning and achievement.
- Values, advocates, and supports public education and all stakeholders.
- Recognizes and respects the differences of perspective and style on the Board and among staff, students, parents, and the community.
- Ensures that the diverse range of views informs board decisions.
- Acts with dignity and treats everyone with civility, respect, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Serves as a model for the value of lifelong learning and supports the Board's continuous professional development.
- Works with the Board as a "Governance Team" and assures collective responsibility for building a unity of purpose, communicating a common vision, and creating a positive organizational culture.
- Recognizes that the Board and Superintendent governance relationship is supported by the management team.
- Understands the distinctions between Board and staff roles, and respects the role of the Board as the representative of the community.
- Understands that authority rests with the Board as a whole.
- Guides the Board to assist in decision-making and provides leadership based on the direction of the Board as a whole.
- Communicates openly with trust and integrity, including providing all members of the Board with equal access to information, and recognizing the importance of both responsive and anticipatory communications.
- Accepts leadership responsibility and accountability for implementing the vision, goals, and policies of the District.

Discussion of Roles

The Superintendent assists the Board in carrying out its responsibilities in each job area by providing adequate information, following through promptly, and by leading the staff toward the accomplishment of the agreed-upon District vision and goals.

The Board needs:

- Accurate information—as fully detailed as possible about any topic presented.
- The Superintendent to bring alternatives, options, and the reasoning behind those options. The Board appreciates hearing the Superintendent’s recommendations and reasons as the Board respects the Superintendent’s expertise and experience.
- To receive information promptly so that good decisions can be made and appropriate questions can be asked to be prepared for meetings.
- To receive copies of emails, letters, and especially press releases. In this way, the Board will be informed and current when asked questions by community members.
- To hear from the Superintendent directly by phone if something is at the crisis level to eliminate any confusion or miscommunication.
- To share information with the Superintendent when a Trustee has important information to convey to the entire Board, so the Superintendent can inform the other Trustees in the Wednesday Update.
- To know that once a Trustee has referred a complaint to the Superintendent, it will be addressed. Follow-up information will be provided to the Trustee by the Superintendent. If it is an issue of which the entire Board needs to be aware, the Superintendent will provide that information to the Board.

The Superintendent needs:

- Board members to call him/her with any questions, issues, or concerns promptly, which is why the lines of communication are open and frequent. All phone calls are welcome and will serve to help communicate and clarify concerns or questions.
- Board members to contact him/her for all requests for District information. This will allow the Superintendent to be aware of all requests and ensure that if one Trustee receives information, the entire Board can receive the same information. This arrangement also ensures that the Superintendent can be aware of a Trustee's need for further information on a particular topic or agenda item. This enables a system that provides all board members with pertinent information.
- Trustees to copy him on emails or community communications which relate to District matters.