



Ventura Unified SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education
Governance Handbook

Board of Trustees

President, Sabrena Rodriguez
Vice President, Dr. Jerry Dannenberg
Trustee, Amy Callahan
Trustee, Calvin Peterson
Trustee, James Forsythe

Dr. Antonio Castro, Superintendent

February 22, 2023

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE
Unity of Purpose, Roles, Responsibilities,
Norms and Protocols

This document reflects the governance team's work on the creation of a framework for effective governance. This process involves ongoing discussions and agreements about unity of purpose, roles, responsibilities, norms, and protocols that enable the governance team to continue to perform its responsibilities in a way that best benefits all children.

On October 14, 2017, May 23, 2018, April 11, 2019, October 16, 2019, June 16, 2020, January 28, 2021, August 9 and 30, 2022 and February 22, 2023, the members of the Ventura Unified School District Governance Team participated in workshops on Effective Governance with the California School Boards Association. This document reflects the governance team's discussions about developing and sustaining a framework for effective governance. This Governance Handbook reflects highlights of their ongoing conversations about unity of purpose, roles, responsibilities, norms, and protocols that enable the governance team to continue to perform its responsibilities in a way that best serves all students.

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UNITY OF PURPOSE

Unity of Purpose:

Unity of purpose is the common focus, overarching goals, and the core values, beliefs and principles governing body members share in common about children, the district, and public education.

UNITY OF PURPOSE

We Believe that a Strong Governance Team...

- Trusts and inspires for the future of every student.
- Is focused on students and employees.
- Is essential to creating conditions for student achievement.
- Values feedback, different perspectives, and diversity of thought.
- Is our currency within our community.

CELEBRATING WHO WE ARE AND WHERE OUR STUDENTS ARE HEADING:

Our Promise:

When it comes to delivering an education that prepares students for a future in the world today, a one-size-fits-all approach no longer suffices. Students must be able to think critically, approach problem solving with agility and creativity, be open to exploration, and adapt to new ideas and pathways they will invariably encounter throughout their lives.

At Ventura Unified School District, we cultivate a wealth of diverse academic programs so every student in our community has the chance to explore and engage with a learning environment that not only challenges them academically, but also promotes their growth as people, scholars, and citizens of the world, in an open and positive environment.

Our passion is to help the children in our schools find their passion —academically and personally — believing that each and every student has a brilliant future ahead of them.

We Are Committed to Providing

- A safe, healthy, and positive learning environment in every school.
- Rigorous and relevant academics that challenge each student.
- Engaging settings that stimulate curiosity and empower students to have a voice in their learning.
- Real world experiences and connections in and out of the classroom to cultivate creativity, critical thinking, and an appreciation for the world in which we live.
- Consistent, enthusiastic, and unwavering encouragement of each and every child — so they can discover who they want to become academically, personally, and socially.
- Our young people are the future of our community and our world. It is incumbent on all of us to become deeply involved in their success, so each student has the freedom, support, and resources they need to find their future.

For the future of every student

**Ventura Unified School District
Board of Education - Priorities 2022-23**

1. **Build on VUSD Strengths** – The Board recognizes the many strengths of our District and wants to continue to build upon those strengths.
2. **Student Achievement** – The Board believes that the core function of a school district is to ensure high levels of achievement for all students. Efforts to address this priority should focus on ensuring equitable access to high-quality instruction and supports. Measuring success through data collection and analysis is key.
3. **Culture and Climate** – The Board respects the need of students and staff to attend and work in schools that are mutually respectful and positive environments. Taking time to recognize the excellence of our students and staff should be a focal point in creating this type of culture.
4. **Educational Options and Programs** – The Board understands that “one size does not fit all.” To ensure high levels of student achievement for all students, VUSD needs to offer a robust and compelling instructional program with a wide array of options for families. The Board encourages innovation in all its forms and seeks to become a leader in the state as it relates to Educational Options and programming.
5. **Facilities** – The Board understands the importance of the educational environment and is committed to modernizing, upgrading, and beautifying our campuses. VUSD is committed to creating the type of environment in which students can thrive.
6. **Declining Enrollment** – The Board understands that parents want options when it comes to the education of their children. Although not all parents will always choose VUSD, the Board wants to position the district to serve all school-aged students in the Ventura area and become the district of choice for as many students and families as possible.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Role of the Board and Superintendent – CSBA:

School Board “Trustees” are the representatives of the people, elected to ensure District Schools educate students in consideration of the interests of the local community. The role of the School Board is to govern the School District.

The Superintendent is hired by the School Board to provide the professional expertise in the day-to-day operations of the district.

The role of the Superintendent is:

1. To work with the School Board to develop an effective governance leadership team.
2. To serve as the chief executive officer (CEO) for the School District.

Performing Board Responsibilities – CSBA:

We Set the Direction for the Community’s Schools by:

- Focusing on student learning.
- Assessing needs/obtaining baseline data.
- Generating, reviewing, or revising Direction Setting documents (beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators).
- Ensuring an appropriate, inclusive process is used to develop these documents.
- Ensuring that these documents are the driving force for all District efforts.

We Establish an Effective and Efficient Structure for the School District by:

- Employing the Superintendent.
- Setting policies for hiring of other personnel.
- Overseeing the development and adoption of policies.
- Setting direction for and adopting curriculum.
- Establishing budget priorities and adopting the budget.
- Providing parameters for and voting to accept collective bargaining agreements.

We Provide Support through our behavior and actions by:

- Acting with 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.
- Ensuring a positive personnel climate exists.

- Being knowledgeable about District efforts and able to explain them to the public.

We Ensure Accountability to the Public by:

- Evaluating the Superintendent.
- Monitoring, reviewing, and revising policies.
- Serving as a judicial and appeals body.
- Monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness.
- Monitoring and adjusting District finances.
- Monitoring the collective bargaining process.

We Act as Community Leaders by:

- Speaking with a common voice about District priorities, goals, and issues.
- Engaging and involving the community in District schools and activities.
- Communicating clear information about policies, programs, and fiscal conditions of the district.
- Educating the community and the media about issues facing the district and public education.
- Advocating for students, District programs and public education to the general public, community, local, state, and national leaders.

Enhancing Team Communication by Understanding:

What the Board needs from the Superintendent:

Superintendent supports the Board in fulfilling their responsibilities by providing:

- Trust
- Information
- Clear communication
- Expertise in knowledge of laws that govern schools
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Unity – being a steady force
- Results

What the Superintendent needs from the Board:

The trustees can support the Superintendent in fulfilling his responsibilities by providing:

- Trust
- Clear communication – clearly defined goals – scope of work
- Letting him figure out the “HOW”
- Benefit of the doubt
- Encouragement
- Back-up

What Governance Team Members Need from each other:

The trustees can support each other by:

- Maintaining trust
- Clear communication
- Honest, straight talk
- Mutual respect
- Each staying within their Governance role
- Confidentiality

Ventura Unified School District Positive Governance Team Culture

Norms and Protocols:

The Board of Education for the Ventura Unified School District is entrusted by the community to uphold the Constitutions of California and the United States, to protect the public's interest in the schools, and to ensure that a high-quality education is provided to each student. To effectively meet District challenges, the Board and Superintendent must function together as a governance leadership team. Agreed upon behaviors or norms, and operating procedures or protocols, support consistent behavior and actions among team members. The purpose of the Ventura USD governance team agreements is to ensure that a positive and productive working relationship exists among Board Members, the Superintendent, District staff, students, and the community. Norms and protocols are developed for and by the members of the governance team and may be modified over time as needed.

OUR AGREEMENTS TO FACILITATE GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP

Meeting Guidelines:

- We will stay focused on our priorities, for the future of every student.
- We will respect differences of opinion and address process, not personalities.
- We will come to all meetings prepared.
- We will be thoughtful about the use of electronic devices during meetings.
- We will strive to be constructive and supportive and ask questions in advance, for all meetings.
- We will keep our remarks brief and to the point so that all opinions can be expressed.
- We will be a unified team and communicate openly and honestly with positive intent.
- We will keep confidential information confidential.
- We will work to build consensus and support majority decisions once they are made.
- When an issue does not receive a unanimous vote, we will respect the process and the decision of the majority.
- Agenda items will be limited to those items requiring Board input and/or action.

SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

Protocols:

Effective governance teams discuss and agree upon the formal structures and processes, or protocols, used by the Board and Superintendent in their functioning as a team. These structures and processes guide the operations of the governance team and determine how they do business. Protocols are the agreements that ensure that all members of the team are operating within their agreed upon roles.

The following protocols were developed at our Governance Workshops:

TOPIC:	PROTOCOL:
Responding to Staff or Community Concerns or Complaints	<p><u>Rationale:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We care about our constituents concerns and want to hear them, but we recognize that “the Board is the unit of authority over the district and... Individual Board Members do not have the authority to resolve complaints,” as stated in BB 9200, <i>Limits on Board Member Authority</i>. • Therefore, we want to assist the complainant in getting to someone who really can address his/her issue. <p>Therefore, when a Board Member is approached by a community or staff member with an issue or concern, he/she will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Receive</u> – Listen without interruption and without preparing a response to the person’s issues or concerns, unless it is an issue that may come before us in our judicial role (personnel issues and student discipline) - that information will be shared with the entire Board at the appropriate place and time - during the hearing. • <u>Repeat</u> – If it is appropriate for us to listen to the concern, we will paraphrase or ask a clarifying question to ensure understanding of what has been said. • <u>Request</u> – Ask what the person sees as the solution to the problem or concern. Ask what they would have us do with the information they have given us. • <u>Review</u> – The conversation (and next steps, if any). • <u>Redirect</u> – Put the person back into the system at the appropriate place. • <u>Report</u> - Notify the Superintendent of the conversation so that he has the full picture and can follow through as appropriate and/or necessary. <p><u>Emails</u> – When receiving complaints via email, Board Members wishing to address the issue with the sender will request the sender’s phone number to facilitate that conversation.</p>

TOPIC:	PROTOCOL:
Coming to Board Meetings Prepared	<p><u>Rationale:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe in the norm of, “no surprises” and do not want to blind-side anyone. • We wish to show <u>respect for the staff</u>. Staff puts a great deal of time and effort into creating the materials that we need in order for us to have a thorough discussion of each item. Not being prepared undermines the staff’s trust in the Board. • <u>Efficiency of Meetings</u>: We do not want to spend meeting time answering questions when the answers are already contained in our materials. • We have respect for one another’s views and the use of our time. • Public perception is important. • As trustees, we have a responsibility to come to meetings prepared to deliberate and vote on the issues/items before us. <p>Therefore, we agree that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff has a responsibility to provide Trustees with the data/information that the Board needs, in a timely fashion. • Board Members will read and consider all of the information provided to them before meetings. • After studying Board material, Board Members will ask their questions in advance so that staff is prepared to answer them. Questions will be sent to the Superintendent or appropriate staff members. The Superintendent will be copied on any questions addressed to other staff members, in order to keep him informed. • We will be on time to all meetings and be prepared to address the issues before us.

TOPIC:	PROTOCOL:
Adopting Board Policies	<p><u>Rationale:</u> We wish to have an efficient process for adopting Board Policies to avoid delays and confusion.</p> <p>Therefore, we agree that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When appropriate, staff may recommend and the Board may approve waiving a second reading on non-controversial, routine policies, allowing the Board to approve the policy on the first reading in accordance with the law and BB 9310, <i>Board Policies</i>. • If during a first or second reading of a policy, controversy occurs regarding language in the policy, Board Members may follow one of two procedural options: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A Board Member may move to table the item. The Board then has two options. The Board may agree to table the item so that it can be studied and discussed in more depth at a future date or vote to approve the policy despite the concerns expressed. b. During the meeting, the Board Member(s) with concerns may suggest alternative language and request that staff bring the policy back with two or more possible wording options, much as CSBA does in its sample policies. • In most cases, The Board will make every attempt to adopt the policy at the first or second reading.

TOPIC:	PROTOCOL:
Bringing Up New Ideas/Agenda Items	<p><u>Rationale:</u> We wish to have an efficient process for bringing up new ideas/agenda items to avoid confusion and to ensure that there is Board consensus on the desire to address the issue.</p> <p>Therefore, we agree that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Members may suggest topics for future agenda items during that item on the agenda. • When bringing-up ideas, Board Members will consider the topic's relationship to current goals and availability of staff and financial resources necessary to address the issue. • During the initial phase of this process, a Board consensus through a simple "thumbs up/thumbs down" procedure without discussion is required in order to move the matter forward. • If there is consensus to further explore this subject, the Superintendent will bring preliminary information to the next meeting describing what this issue would entail/cost. • At that meeting, the topic will actually be listed on the agenda under, "Future Agenda Items," in order to afford the Superintendent the opportunity to provide the Board with the information he has gathered and enable the Board to discuss it. • The Board will then decide whether or not to add the item to a future agenda. • The urgency of some items may require that they be moved forward after only one meeting. • The Board President and Superintendent shall determine the appropriate placement and timing of the agenda item.

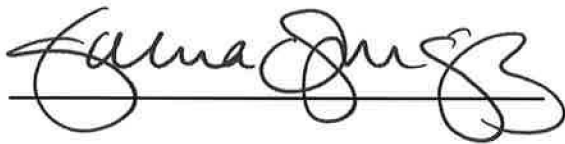
TOPIC:	PROTOCOL:
<p>Site Visits</p>	<p><u>Rationale:</u> We believe it is important to have a protocol on this issue because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We wish to facilitate communication with principals so that they and their staff have a clear understanding of expectations for site visits. We do not want to disrupt the functioning of the school or classroom instruction. • So that there is a consistent procedure that we all know and can follow. <p>Therefore, we agree that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Superintendent will develop a visitation schedule and invite Trustees to accompany him on his visits. • Board Members wishing to visit schools on other occasions will notify the Superintendent and principal and copy the Executive Assistant. • Board Members planning to attend school events will notify the principal and copy the Executive Assistant. • Principals and teachers are encouraged to invite Board Members to attend school/classroom events and activities.

GOVERNANCE AGREEMENTS SIGNATURE PAGE

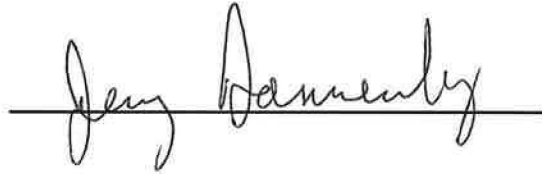
We have reviewed and agree to follow the aforementioned Governance Team norms and protocols in order to support a positive and productive working relationship among the Ventura Unified School District Board of Trustees, Superintendent, staff, students, and the community. We shall renew this agreement annually.

Affirmed on this 14th day of March 2023.

Ms. Sabrena Rodriguez, President

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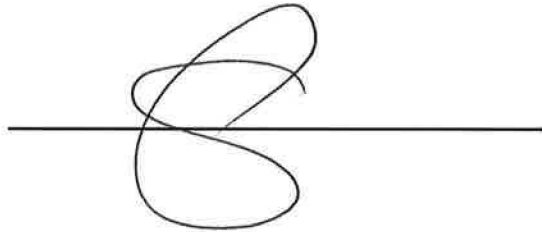
Dr. Jerry Dannenberg, Vice President

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jerry Dannenberg', written over a horizontal line.

Ms. Amy Callahan, Trustee

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Mr. Calvin Peterson, Trustee

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Mr. James Forsythe, Trustee

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Dr. Antonio Castro, Superintendent

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