



# **Governance Handbook**

**BUENA PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**February 14, 2023**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Rhodia Shead, President

Tharwa Ahmad, Clerk

Jason Chong, Trustee

Brenda Estrada, Trustee

Jerry Frutos, Trustee

**Superintendent**

Dr. Ramon Miramontes

## **PREAMBLE**

Representative government requires that public officeholders be competent, independent, impartial, and accountable. Therefore, the Board of Trustees of the Buena Park School District (BPSD) adopts this Governance Handbook, which is a companion to our Board Bylaws, to promote and maintain best practices and the highest standards of professional conduct. Its norms and protocols emphasize adherence to Board Bylaws and collective agreement between the Board. This resource formalizes the guidelines to be used by this governance team in the conduct of its day-to-day business.

This handbook is particularly valuable as it sets forth a series of norms and protocols to ensure that all board members are ready to confidently undertake the work of the district.

This Governance Handbook is a collaboration between the Buena Park School District Board of Trustees and Superintendent, under the guidance of CSBA.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

BUENA PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT HERITAGE .....	1
UNITY OF PURPOSE .....	2
OUR GOVERNANCE TEAMS UNITY OF PURPOSE.....	2
MISSION .....	2
VISION .....	2
CORE ETHICAL VALUES .....	2
RESPONSIBLE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE .....	2
GOVERNANCE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	2
LIMITS OF TRUSTEES AUTHORITY.....	3
OUR NORMS.....	3
Accountability.....	3
Competence and Judiciousness .....	3
Ethics and Integrity.....	4
Solidarity.....	5
How the Board Communicates .....	5
Support, Respect, and Consideration.....	5
During Board Meetings .....	6
OUR PROTOCOLS.....	7
Gatherings and Communications.....	7
Agenda Preparation and Distribution .....	7
Board Meeting Preparation and Attendance .....	8
Planning Special Board Meetings .....	8
The Role of the Board President .....	8
Requests for Information .....	8
New Ideas.....	8
Visiting Schools.....	9
Handling Concerns or Complaints from the Public and Staff.....	9
Media Relations.....	10
Official Board Correspondence .....	10
Vacancies on the Board of Trustees.....	10
Orientation for School Board Candidates .....	11
Welcoming New Members to the Board.....	11
OUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	12

## **BUENA PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT HERITAGE**

The Buena Park School District, founded in 1890, is firmly committed to providing the highest quality educational experience for all students. The Buena Park Governing Board is proud to inspire and ignite all students to pursue high achievement, empowering all to follow their passions. We proudly educate approximately 4,200 students at five Elementary Schools and two Middle Schools. Our Buena Park Schools have won numerous national and state academic awards, as well as safety and student support awards. Buena Park class sizes are small with an average of twenty-four students per teacher at the primary grades.

Rigorous and relevant Standards Based Instruction occurs daily in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environments. Most recently, local bond Measure B provided modernization and technology at all of our campuses. Modernization included painting, carpeting, wall replacement, new furniture, and upgrading technology infrastructure. Every student in our District has a dedicated laptop or iPad at Kindergarten through eighth grade. Enrichments and GATE Classes are offered at every campus, and every school provides an after school program through ASES, and the Extended Learning Opportunity programs which includes homework help, recreation, and enrichment. In addition, Pre-School and Transitional Kindergarten programs are offered to our younger 3-4 year old students.

Every BPSD School has a unique focus, which include: STEM; Science-Technology-Engineering- Math, Visual and Performing Arts, Gifted and Talented Education, College and Career Bound, Physical Education & Wellness, and Honors Academy. Our two Buena Park Middle Schools proudly offer Academic Honors classes, Gifted and Talented Enrichment, Engineering, Arts, Leadership, Debate, a variety of Technology classes and clubs. There is something for everyone in the Buena Park School District. In addition to our Alternative TK-8 Academy of Accelerated Learning, students may also engage virtually and enroll into college credit courses.

Many resources are available for our BPSD students and families including but not limited to social emotional learning and wellness services. Parents are actively involved in our schools through PTA, School Site Council, English Learner Advisory, Gifted Advisory, and other school and district committees. Parent volunteers also provide support at every school. Safe and secure campuses are a high priority in our school district. Relevant educational and job specific training is conducted for all staff. We are proud of our community partnerships with city and county agencies. We are very pleased that, through a successful grant, every student in the Buena Park School District receives free breakfast and lunch. Supportive resources are provided to maximize educational opportunities for all children.

We pride ourselves in working collaboratively to effectively meet the needs of our students and the Buena Park community. Throughout the year, the Buena Park School District evolves to support and serve our students and families. Please take time to give us a call or tour one of our schools.

## **UNITY OF PURPOSE**

Unity of purpose is a commitment to transcend individual differences to focus upon the greater good. It means being unified, even when not uniform.

## **OUR GOVERNANCE TEAMS UNITY OF PURPOSE**

Our unity of purpose is fostering respect and appreciation of all voices while communicating a common vision in the best interest of our students.

## **MISSION**

Buena Park School District inspires and ignites all students to pursue high achievement; empowering them to follow their passions.

## **VISION**

We ignite passion for learning by:

- Ensuring we have highly-trained, talented and dedicated educators/staff
- Providing ambitious and innovative curriculum and instruction
- Establishing cutting-edge technology and facilities
- Cultivating nurturing and safe environments
- Valuing the strength of our cultural diversity
- Partnering with our families and community
- Guiding students to lead and impact the world

## **CORE ETHICAL VALUES**

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Cooperation
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Perseverance
- Civic Duty
- Honesty

## **RESPONSIBLE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

The BPSD Board is entrusted with much. It has a solemn duty to uphold the constitutions of California and the United States, protect the public interest in schools, and provide high quality education to all students.

## **GOVERNANCE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Board carries out these responsibilities in each of the following domains:

- Student Learning and Achievement
- Finance
- Facilities
- Human Resources
- Policy
- Judicial Review

- Collective Bargaining
- Community Relations and Advocacy

### **LIMITS OF TRUSTEES AUTHORITY**

Board members are state officers who act under the auspices of state law when conducting official business. The exercise of the board's authority is predicated upon the delegation of authority from the legislature and must be justified under standards of reasonableness to avoid a judicial presumption of arbitrary or capricious action.

According to Board Bylaw 9200, the Board of Trustees has broad but clearly limited powers with respect to its operations. Please see the appendix for the full text.

- The board is the unit of authority over the district.
- The exercise of the board's authority is restricted by law and may only take place in a legally constituted meeting.
- Board members have no individual authority.
- Individually, board members may not commit the district to any policy, act, or expenditure.
- Board members hold the education of students above any partisan principle, group interest, or personal interest.
- Board members who visit schools have no more authority than any other citizen.
- Unless agreed to by the board, individual members do not exercise any administrative responsibility with respect to the schools or command the services of any school employee.
- A board member whose child is attending a district school is aware of his/her role as a board member when interacting with district employees about his/her child. Because his/her position as a board member may inhibit the performance of school personnel, the board member informs the superintendent or designee before volunteering in his/her child's classroom
- The superintendent, or designee, provides a copy of the state's open meeting laws (Ralph M. Brown Act) to each board member and to anyone who is elected or appointed to the board but has not yet assumed office.
- Board members and persons elected to the board, who have not yet assumed office, are responsible for complying with the requirements of the Brown Act

### **OUR NORMS**

#### ***Accountability***

- We take collective responsibility for the success of our governance team.

#### ***Competence and Judiciousness***

- We are honest stewards of students' education and focus on what is best for them.
- We set clear direction for the district.
- We recognize each member is integral to the governance team.
- We operate within our respective roles and responsibilities.

- We collaborate constructively for the success of the team.
- We do not micromanage the district.
- We demonstrate through our conduct the differences between good intentions and good government.
- We do not supervise individual board members; we are publicly elected or appointed officials, not employees.
- We participate in professional development and commit the time and energy necessary to be informed and effective leaders.
- We model dignified behavior for our students, staff, and community.
- We maintain poise and decorum in the face of controversy, difficulty, or complexity.
- We are conversant in district matters and with trends in education.
- We are mindful that every word spoken and every action taken contribute to the district's reputation, either for good or for bad.
- We devote our time and energy to important business issues, not to politics, pettiness, or ungraciousness.
- Board members, either individually or corporately, never suggest or recommend any employee or member of the public for a position in the district. Board members can encourage members of the public to apply for a position.
- Absent board direction, we do not observe or participate in the interviews of prospective employees.
- We ensure that all information is shared with all Board members in a timely manner.
- We wear official badges when at the district office, when visiting schools, and when attending school or district functions.

### ***Ethics and Integrity***

- We advance the effectiveness of our governance team through the individual and collective demonstration of integrity, consistency, responsibility, accountability, fairness, and transparency.
- Board members do not unilaterally assign work to employees except as provided for in the executive assistant to the superintendent's job description.
- We do not solicit or accept offers of help from district employees, except as allowed by law, for political campaigns, personal business interests, or other personal purposes.
- We do not use our position on the board to further our personal business ventures, nor do we publicize them at any district or school function or on any district properties. We do not distribute non-district business cards or other promotional materials to employees, nor do we exploit interactions with the public to promote personal business interests.
- We do not solicit or consider information from anonymous sources.
- We adhere to the "no surprise" rule when it comes to our fellow governance team members.
- We do not disclose confidential information acquired during a closed session.
- We are willing to admit mistakes readily and do not seek to evade responsibility.

- We reserve judgment on every matter until all known facts are communicated to the full board.
- We do not participate in gossip or hearsay.
- We do not form alliances within the team to carry out divergent goals or secret agendas.
- We do not speak ill of current or former governance team members.
- The superintendent is required to report to the board president egregious violations by board members of board bylaws, policies, or the agreements made herein. If the board president is the offending party, the superintendent is required to make his report to the board clerk. The board president or clerk, as the case may be, then reviews with the offending party the established practices to be observed and offers guidance and support.
- We use our titles only when conducting official district business, for informational purposes, or as an indication of background and expertise. We are careful not to exceed or appear to exceed our authority or use our position to influence others unduly.

### ***Solidarity***

- When working together, we look beyond our own individual contributions to the governance team and appreciate our collective achievements
- If necessary, we discuss with an individual team member, privately and respectfully, any personal concern or issue we have with him or her for the good of the team. We do not burden the team with such matters.
- We are neither arbitrary nor capricious in our conduct, decision-making, or deliberations.
- We do not engage in or permit any personal attacks against fellow board members or the superintendent.

### ***How the Board Communicates***

- We develop and maintain open, honest communication with each other.
- We do not criticize the reasoning, motives, or philosophies of fellow team members, whether in public or private settings.
- When we disagree, we do so in a reasonable and respectful manner and do not take differences of opinion personally.
- We speak with one voice in order to maintain the trust of our community.
- We make no unilateral, extemporaneous remarks regarding the job performance of the superintendent or any other employee, recognizing that employee performance reviews are conducted solely in accordance with established policy.

### ***Support, Respect, and Consideration***

- We support each other and operate from positions of goodwill, good faith, and good motivations.
- We consistently treat fellow team members with respect, courtesy, and consideration.
- We demonstrate sensitivity and caring for fellow team members.



- We give one another the benefit of the doubt.
- We look to the strengths of our colleagues and do not participate in frivolous fault-finding missions.
- We are considerate of one another's schedules.

### ***During Board Meetings***

- Board meetings are held in public to conduct the business of the district in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act; they are not to be regarded as town hall meetings.
- Board meetings are for gathering information, making decisions, and taking action.
- We are on time and prepared for meetings.
- We will remain attentive and engaged throughout the meeting.
- We behave and dress in a manner worthy of a professional business meeting.
- We endeavor to ensure that all members of the team have the same information.
- We do not bring hidden agendas to board meetings.
- We do not use the privacy afforded in closed-session meetings as a cloak for unprofessional conduct or wrongdoing.
- Board members remain behind the dais or the board table, except for personal or medical necessity, and are attentive throughout board meetings in order to govern effectively and participate fully.
- We work cooperatively with the board chair to promote common courtesy and decorum. We do not text while in closed session.
- We observe the philosophy in Rosenberg's Rules of Order, Revised 2011, "Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not" and uphold the practice, "The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude."
- We speak only after first having been recognized by the chair and do not interrupt others.
- Board discussion shall be addressed to fellow board members, the superintendent, members of the executive cabinet, or scheduled speakers, and not to the audience.
- Board members accept the contributions and full participation of fellow board members and do not monopolize discussions.
- We do not use coarse or profane language.
- We have no side conversations.
- Use of the Internet—except to view the Board of Trustees' online meeting agenda, board policies, and agenzized presentations—, e-mail, texting, and other electronic messaging on any device or computer is prohibited by board members during board meetings. This includes reading, sending, or receiving data and messages unless it's an emergency.
- We do not make or answer personal telephone calls when on the dais or in closed session. Personal cellular telephones are to be silenced before meetings are called to order.

- We use wisely the time set aside in board meetings for board members' reports and announcements. We do not grandstand, evaluate employees, advocate action be taken on behalf of employees, or reargue a failed motion or position.

## **OUR PROTOCOLS**

### ***Gatherings and Communications***

- We comply with the Brown Act and do not form unlawful meetings, regardless of the circumstances.
- A board meeting exists whenever a majority of board members gather at the same time and place to hear, discuss, or deliberate upon any item within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board or district (Government Code 54952.2).
- A majority of the board does not, outside of an authorized meeting, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board. However, an employee or district official may engage in separate conversations with board members in order to answer questions or provide information regarding an item within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board, as long as that employee or district official does not communicate the comments or position of any board members to other board members (Government Code 54952.2).
- Attendance by a majority of board members at events delineated below is not subject to the Brown Act provided that a majority of the board members do not discuss specific district business among themselves other than as part of the scheduled program (Government Code 54952.2).
  - A conference or similar public gathering open to the public that involves a discussion of issues of general interest to the public or to school board members
  - An open, publicized meeting organized by a person or organization other than the district to address a topic of local community concern
  - An open and noticed meeting of another body of the district
  - An open and noticed meeting of a legislative body of another local agency
  - A purely social or ceremonial occasion
  - An open and noticed meeting of a standing committee of the board, provided that the board members who are not members of the standing committee attend only as observers

### ***Agenda Preparation and Distribution***

- Agendas are to be set only with the approval of the board president, or clerk in the president's absence, and the superintendent.
- Agendas and all supporting materials for regular board meetings are made available online to the board in draft form prior to the board meeting. Board members may request hard copies of the online information.
- Time set aside for the board president and the superintendent to plan meeting agendas is restricted to relevant matters and is not used to circumvent the normal procedure for the board to give direction to the superintendent.

- To request an item be placed on the Board agenda, an email should be sent to the Superintendent and Board President no less than 10 days prior to a calendared board meeting.

### ***Board Meeting Preparation and Attendance***

- Consistent, punctual attendance at board meetings is expected. If a board member is unable to attend or will be late, the superintendent office is to be notified as soon as possible.
- Board members direct all questions regarding agenda items to the superintendent.
- Board members may improve through independent learning their knowledge about general matters related to public education.
- Board members do not undertake independent inquiries or investigations that could create conflicts of interest or compromise the integrity of the board or district.
- Inquiries from board members shall be directed to the superintendent.

### ***Planning Special Board Meetings***

- Special meetings of the board may be called at any time by the presiding officer or by a majority of the board members. However, a special meeting shall not be called regarding the salary, salary schedule, or other compensation of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, or other management employee as described in Government Code 3511.1.
- In the interest of full attendance at special board meetings, priority is given to the fourth Monday of each month.

### ***The Role of the Board President***

- The board president provides leadership and administrative responsibilities but does not have greater power than other board members.
- The board president leads the business of the board and carries out the duties prescribed in Board Bylaw 9121.

### ***Requests for Information***

- Questions and requests by board members for information related to district matters or programs or to matters that may come before the board are directed to the superintendent only. Staff members who receive such inquiries from board members may only redirect them to the superintendent.
- Board members do not undertake independent inquiries or investigations that could create conflicts of interest or compromise the integrity of the board or district.

### ***New Ideas***

- It is recommended that a board member wishing to present a new idea to the Board of Trustees first consult with the superintendent, who is the subject matter expert.

- In accordance with Board Bylaw 9322, should the board member decide to pursue the idea, then he or she may prepare an agenda item or request that one be prepared for placement on a future agenda.
- A board member may bring up a new idea during the Board Members' Reports and Announcements section of a board meeting. The board member uses this brief opportunity to mention the idea and state a benefit or two about it. The board member may not argue at length the merits of the idea or grandstand. No action will be taken.

### ***Visiting Schools***

- It is desirable for board members to visit schools with the superintendent during his/her regularly scheduled visits if time permits.
- Should board members wish to visit schools at other times they are encouraged to contact the school principal and the superintendent ahead of time, but not required.
- As a professional courtesy, board members notify the superintendent of school visits.
- Board members are careful not to encroach on the learning environment. As such, the superintendent instructs principals and teachers not to interrupt lessons when a board member is visiting.
- It is recommended, but not required, for the superintendent, or school principal, or both accompany board members during school visits.
- Board members are encouraged to attend celebratory events on campus. They do not sit in on IEP meetings, employee discipline, or parent teacher conferences, except as related to their own children, even if invited. Board members do not sit in on collective bargaining meetings, even if invited.
- If a concern is seen or heard during a school visit, the board member will not address the staff member at the site. The board member will let the superintendent know to address concerns.

### ***Handling Concerns or Complaints from the Public and Staff***

- We respond to concerns or complaints in accordance with uniform procedures to ensure not only that matters are handled expeditiously but also that everyone is treated fairly and without bias.
- We protect the confidentiality and due process rights of students and staff members.
- When listening to a concern or complaint, we are neutral in our position and fully aware that we are hearing only one side of the story.
- We are consistent in our responses and function within our roles, conveying that individual board members have no authority to resolve matters.
- We use the California School Boards Association's 6 R's to ensure we listen actively to members of the public and staff and that we abide by uniform procedures.
  - Receive - listen to what the person has to say without preparing a response.

- Repeat - paraphrase or ask a question to clarify for understanding. We ask the person to identify those to whom s/he has spoken about the matter prior to contacting a board member.
- Request - ask what the person would like the board member to do with the information and/or what is seen as a solution to the problem.
- Review - go over the real options available to the person to remedy the situation.
- Redirect - put the person back into the system at the appropriate place—respecting district lines of authority and chains of command.
- Report - maintain open lines of communication between the board and superintendent and notify the superintendent of the conversation as soon as possible:
  - so the superintendent can verify or clarify the situation and follow-through as necessary and/or appropriate'
  - so that the superintendent knows first-hand what the board member said to the community or staff member
- We invite the public or staff member to follow up with us about the issue.
- Board members exercise the same level of care when responding to emails from staff and members of the community as is described for personal interactions.

### ***Media Relations***

- To maintain message consistency and discipline, board members and the superintendent are obligated to speak with a common voice about district issues to the staff and community.
- Some situations have legal or other considerations that may place restrictions on what may be told to the media or public.
- The superintendent or his/her designee and the board president prepare and distribute press releases.
- The superintendent or his/her designee, as soon as possible, will notify the board president and board members before contacting the media on behalf of the district.
- Media inquiries are directed to the board president and superintendent.
- With prior board approval, any board member may speak on behalf of the district or board of trustees.

### ***Official Board Correspondence***

- The superintendent conducts official correspondence for the board (Board Bylaw 9122).
- Official correspondence from the board is signed by the board president.

### ***Vacancies on the Board of Trustees***

- Vacancies on the Board of Trustees must be filled in accordance with state law.
- If a vacancy is to be filled by appointment, then barring official correspondence from the board president, all contact with prospective board members is restricted to the formal interview process in a public meeting.

### ***Orientation for School Board Candidates***

- The Board of Trustees desires to provide board candidates with information that will enable them to understand the responsibilities and expectations of board membership.
- Anyone whose name has been published on the Orange County Registrar of Voters' official website as a qualified candidate may request to attend the candidate orientation meeting with the superintendent to receive general information about school programs, district operations, and board responsibilities. The superintendent or designee must provide the same information to all candidates who make the request (Board Bylaw 9230).
- Before Election Day, the superintendent is to advertise the date and time of the candidate orientation meeting on the BPSD website with at least two weeks advance notice.

### ***Welcoming New Members to the Board***


- The board convenes an open orientation meeting to provide information to incoming board members to assist them in understanding the board's functions, policies, procedures, protocols, and agreed-upon standards of conduct.
- Incoming board members receive the district's policy manual, governance handbook, and other materials related to the district and board member responsibilities.
- Upon their election, incoming board members are provided with a copy of the Brown Act and are informed that, pursuant to Government Code 54952.1, they must conform to the Act's requirements as if they had already assumed office.
- The superintendent provides incoming board members with additional background and information regarding the district's vision and goals, operations, and current challenges in areas that include, but are not limited to, student achievement, curriculum, finance, facilities, policy, human resources, and collective bargaining.
- Incoming members are encouraged to attend board meetings and review agenda materials available to the public in order to become familiar with current issues facing the district. Incoming members also may, at district expense and with approval of the board, attend workshops and conferences relevant to their individual needs or to the needs of the board as a whole or the district.
- Each new board member receives a new board member orientation packet that includes informational handouts about the district and governance team operations. Please see the appendix.
- Board members may attend district paid conferences only after the election results have been certified.

**OUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

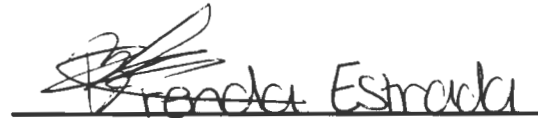
We have reviewed and agreed to the aforementioned governance team norms and protocols in order to support a positive and productive working relationship among the Buena Park School District Board of Trustees, staff, students and the community. We shall renew these agreements at our annual governance workshop.

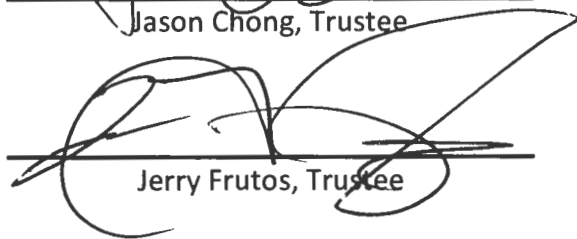
Affirmed on this 14 day of February, 2023

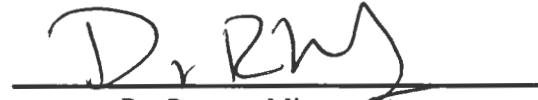
  
Rhodia Shead, Board President

  
Tharwa Ahmad, Board Clerk

  
Jason Chong, Trustee

  
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Dr. Ramon Miramontes,  
Superintendent