



Merced City School District

GOVERNANCE TEAM HANDBOOK

Board Approved 08.27.24

OUR PROMISE AND OUR VISION

OUR VISION

Our students have the academic skills and personal characteristics to continue their learning journey, pursuing their passions and talents.

OUR MISSION

All students are ensured equitable access to high-quality instruction in environments that value and build from their unique talents. Guiding students toward mastery of academics, we build from our student talents to nurture their continuous academic achievement, critical-thinking skills, and develop the resiliency, perseverance and confidence necessary to excel in learning and life. Our District team provides positive, inclusive environments where all students feel safe, respected, and connected.

OUR PROMISE

All students are empowered and nurtured to build personal success and contribute to society.

OUR CORE VALUES

We are committed to:

- Providing safe, inclusive, and welcoming schools for all our students, staff, and families
- Approaching education from a student-centered lens, focusing on the learner's strengths, interests, and needs
- Offering our communities – staff, students, and families – the resources

necessary to ensure we are meeting each member with the instruction and support to meet their needs and help them achieve their potential

- Developing confidence, curiosity, perseverance, and resiliency to ensure everyone – students, staff, and families – can excel in their learning and life.

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

Our students: focusing on academic achievement

- Literacy - reading and comprehension proficiency
- Mathematics - strong mathematics skills that support success in higher-level math and all sciences

OUR PROMISE: STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

- Focus on strength - build from each student's strength
- Ensure equitable access to instruction and learning
- Provide support services to ensure our students are engaged in their learning

OUR TEAM: COLLABORATING IN SERVICE TO STUDENTS

- Evidence-based instruction and aligned assessments
- Strong, purposeful school-home communication and partnerships
- Providing safe and welcoming schools for all, students, staff, and families; All means all

OUR RESOURCES

- Aligning resources in support of our vision, mission, and goals
- Collaborate with our educational professionals to ensure they have supports to optimize their service to students

Board Values

The Merced City School District Board of Education is elected by the community to provide leadership and citizen oversight of the District. The Board shall ensure that the District is responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of the community. Board members shall hold themselves to the highest standards of governing excellence.

The District is governed by a Board, not by individual Trustees. While understanding our separate roles, the Board and Superintendent work together as a “governance team.” This team assumes collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture in order to govern effectively.

The Board will:

- Keep the District focused on learning and achievement for all students
- Communicate a common vision and shared values, reflective of the community’s values and priorities for our schools and students
- Ensure equitable access to high-quality education and engagement opportunities for all students and at all school sites
- Engage and honor the voice of all employees, especially when making decisions
- Operate openly, with trust and integrity
- Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect
- Govern within adopted policies and procedures
- Take collective responsibility for the performance
- Annually evaluate its own effectiveness
- Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform deliberations

We commit to:

- Hold ourselves to the highest professional standards of governance
- Follow the California Brown Act
- Follow Robert’s Rules or other Board by-laws regarding meeting protocols
- Maintain confidentiality of Closed Sessions
- Follow meeting norms and Board policies
- Attend and complete new member orientation and CSBA Training
- Complete annual Brown Act Training and Mandatory Ethics Training (AB 2158)
- Conduct a team self-evaluation annually
- Read the Weekly Organizational Briefing (WOB) and Board Agenda to prepare

Board Member Norms

- Everyone participates
- Respect the decisions of the Board
- Seek first to understand, then be understood
- Stay on topic
- Listen before responding
- Keep discussions moving forward
- Remain objective
- Assume good intentions
- Adhere to time
- One conversation at a time
- Maintain a collegial tone, where discussions are productive and respectful
- Consider the information provided when making decisions.
- Adhere to Confidentiality

Meeting Policies

Developing the Board Agenda

- Board Meeting agendas are reviewed and set in an Agenda planning Meeting attended by the Board President, Board Clerk, and the Superintendent on the Wednesday preceding the Regular Meetings of the Board of Education
- Trustees may request an item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board be placed on an agenda by:
- Calling or emailing the Superintendent and/or Board President with the request at least two weeks before the scheduled meeting date
- An exception to the 2-week notice period can be made for a time-sensitive issue
- Requests for items on the agenda will be reviewed in the agenda planning meeting
- If the Superintendent determines that the topic is best addressed first by providing information to the Board or by discussing it with staff or others, the Superintendent will notify the Board President and the Trustee who made the request

The Role of the Board President

The President shall preside at all 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 the Board's policies relating to the conduct of meetings and help ensure compliance with applicable requirements of the Brown Act
- 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 issues of parliamentary procedure
- Put motions to a vote, and state clearly the results of the vote
- Be responsible for the orderly conduct of all Board meetings

The President shall perform other duties in accordance with law and Board policy, including, but not limited to:

- Signing all instruments, acts, and orders necessary to carry out state requirements and the will of the Board
- Consulting with the Superintendent or designee on the preparation of the Board's agendas
- Working with the Superintendent to ensure that Board members have the necessary materials and information
- Subject to Board approval, appointing and dissolving all committees
- Calling such meetings of the Board as they may deem necessary, giving notice as prescribed by law
- Representing the district as governance spokesperson, in conjunction with the Superintendent

The President shall have the same rights as other members of the Board, including the right to move, second, discuss, and vote on all questions before the Board.

- When the President resigns or is absent or disabled, the clerk shall perform the president's duties
- When both the President and Clerk are absent or disabled, the facilitation of the

Board meeting shall default to the Superintendent

- Representing the District as governance spokesperson, in conjunction with the Superintendent

Role of the Board Clerk

The duties of the Clerk shall be to:

- Participate in the agenda-planning meetings
- Certify or attest to actions taken by the Board when required
- Maintain such other records or reports as required by law
- Sign documents on behalf of the district as directed by the Board
- Serve as presiding officer in the absence of the president
- Notify Board members and members-elect of the date and time for the annual organizational meeting
- Perform any other duties assigned by the Board
- Shall state the time when a Board Trustee enters or exits a meeting

Board Meeting Agenda Management

The Board President shall state the starting and ending times of all meetings, the break beginning and end times.

A. Motions and Deliberations Process:

B. On action items, the order is as follows:

- a. Staff Presentation
- b. Public Comments (if any)
- c. Trustee discussion and deliberation; further clarification from staff when needed and/or as directed by the President
- d. During discussion, Trustees will be called on only when they indicate they have something to say (vs “going down the line”)
- e. Motion; Second
- f. Vote
- g. Voting No or Abstaining- Each Trustee respects the right of other Trustees to vote “no” or to abstain on an issue. Trustees may, out of courtesy, explain to the team the reasons for their votes, including a “no” vote during deliberation
 - i. No Board Member, District employee, or other person in a designated position shall participate in the making of any decision for the District when a prohibited conflict of interest exists, consistent with Board Bylaw 9270

- ii. Even if an actual conflict of interest does not exist, a Board Member shall abstain from voting on personnel matters that uniquely affect their relatives, with exceptions noted in Board Policy 9270.
- iii. When abstaining, the reason must be stated for the minutes.
Reasons for abstentions to include:
 1. Conflict of interest
 2. Lack of sufficient information

Public Comments Guidelines

- The Board President and/or Superintendent will strive to provide clarity when summarizing the direction or decision set forth by the Board to ensure the organization has clear direction
- The public may address the Board prior to Closed Session on items to be discussed in Closed Session.
- The President opens public comments, and reminds the community of the guidelines for public comment:
- Non agendized items are addressed at the front of the meeting
- Agendized items may be addressed at the front end of the meeting or during the item; speakers will not be afforded the opportunity to address the item twice (front and during the item) in an effort to be fair to all speakers
- Three (3) minute time limit per person per topic. The President may, in consultation with the Board, adjust the time to accommodate large groups. Total speaker time per topic, including non-agendized items is 20 minutes
- The Board President may ask the Board if they would like to modify speaker time in order to accommodate a high number of speakers. This individual time can be adjusted to fewer than 3 minutes or to extend the total/group time up from 20 minutes. This will happen in public, from the dais, with attention to thoughtfully explaining the process and Board decision to the public
- Members of the public may only yield their time to people in attendance at the Board Meeting
- The President will acknowledge each speaker
- Comments should be directed to the full Board
- The President closes public comment
- Any Board Member or the Superintendent may ask for clarification
- Board Members should not respond directly to staff or community concerns at a school board meeting and may only offer a brief response consistent with the Brown Act and Board Policy

Addressing colleagues during board meetings

- Trustees will address one another formally in all Board meetings. i.e., Trustee (surname)
- Titles and surnames will be used when addressing staff

Obtaining Information about board meeting agenda items

- The Trustees should, as much as possible, contact the Superintendent with any questions about the agenda items prior to the Board Meeting. Board member requested information will be provided to all Board Members without mention of the trustee who made the request

Asking Questions at a Board Meeting

- Board Members should ask questions of staff that are aligned to agenda items in accordance with Robert's Rules

Confidential Matters

- A Board Member shall not disclose confidential information acquired during a closed session to a person not entitled to receive such information unless a majority of the Board has authorized its disclosure

Other Communication at the Dais

- Communications during Board Meetings, including those by electronic means, are subject to requests from the public under the Public Records Act
- Trustees will refrain from sending/receiving electronic communication during Board Meetings on matters that are being heard, considered, or deliberated, including text messages
- Trustees will refrain from engaging in private conversations during Board Meetings

General Communication Policies

Communicating between and among board members

- Emails, messages, and text messages are subject to PRA (Public Records Act), and communications between Board Members are governed by the Brown Act

- Electronic communications regarding any District-related business shall be transmitted through a District-provided device or account, and/or personal device. When any such communication is transmitted through a Board Member's personal device or account, they shall copy the communication to a District electronic storage device for easy retrieval
- Per the Brown Act, a majority of the Board shall not use a series of electronic 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

Contact with Attorneys

- Board Bylaw 9124 states as follows: At their discretion, the Board President or Superintendent may confer with District legal counsel subject to any limits or parameters established by the Board
- The Superintendent or Board President may contact District legal counsel to provide the Board with legal information or advice when so directed by a majority of the Board
- Individual Board Members other than the Board President may not seek advice from District legal counsel on matters of District business unless so authorized by a majority of the Board

Using Social Media

- Board Members shall exercise caution to ensure that social media is not used as a means for the Board to deliberate outside of an agendaized board meeting
- Board Members shall not "like", comment, or interact in any way with any discussions or posts on which other Board Members have already commented, "liked," shared, or interacted, if the topic is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the District
- Board Members shall not respond directly or indirectly to any communication from another Board Member on a social media platform, including using digital icons, on District matters
- Board Members may share released/published information on social media regarding the District
- Trustees Individual Board Members should not make any statements on social media that may be misconstrued as the voice of the school board
- Any complaint or request for information should be forwarded to the Superintendent

- All department complaints or concerns will be directed to the Superintendent, who will route them to the appropriate department for follow-up

Responding to Media Inquiries

- The Board President will be the official spokesperson for the board for all media inquiries, including those on social media
- Communication received from the press shall be forwarded to the Board President
- The Superintendent or designee will respond to inquiries regarding day-to-day operations

Community Engagement Policies

Handling Complaints and Concerns

- Individual Board Members have no authority to fix problems
- Each complaint or issue is to be forwarded to the Superintendent for proper routing and resolution
- A Board Member may respond, as appropriate, to an electronic communication received from a member of the community and should make clear that their response does not necessarily reflect the views of the Board as a whole
- The Superintendent shall inform all Trustees of the issue and resolution

School Visits

- Trustees shall advise the Superintendent when they plan to make site visits or have visited a school or school event
- Trustees shall report to the school office and sign in
- If attending as a parent, you cannot conduct Board business

School Events

- School Board Members are encouraged to attend events. No prior notice is needed.

School Volunteering

- Because Trustees are often parents of students in the District and/or close-knit members of our school community, they may have regular volunteer commitments
- Trustees should make the Superintendent aware of ongoing commitments