AGENDA
BOARD WORKSHOP
FEBRUARY 05, 2025
*12:00 P.M. (OPEN SESSION)

BOARD OF EDUCATION, REGULAR MEETING
2309 TULARE STREET, BOARD ROOM, SECOND FLOOR
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA 93721

BOARD MEMBERS WILL PARTICIPATE FROM THE TELECONFERENCE LOCATIONS AS FOLLOWS:

BOARD MEMBER ISLAS: 2409 MERCED STREET, SUITE 103, FRESNO, CA 93721
BOARD MEMBER JONASSON ROSAS: 4135 E. HUNTINGTON, BLVD., FRESNO, CA 93702
BOARD MEMBER LEVINE: 5200 BARTON AVENUE, 2ND FLR. RM. 2135, FRESNO, CA 93740

THE MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PURSUANT TO GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 54953(B)(2), ALL ACTION TAKEN DURING THIS TELECONFERENCE MEETING SHALL BE BY ROLL CALL VOTE

***DESIGNATED TIMES FOR CONFERENCE/DISCUSSION ITEMS ARE ESTIMATES.**

For the safety of all who attend Fresno Unified Board Meetings, everyone entering the Board of Education Room is subject to metal detector scanning. Board Policy 5145.12 allows for the use of metal detectors. The following items are prohibited: alcohol, illegal drugs, knives, or firearms.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, those requiring special assistance to access the Board meeting room, to access written documents being discussed at the Board meeting, or to otherwise participate at Board meetings, please contact the Board President or Board Office at 457-3727.

Notification at least 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the district to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to the Board meeting and to provide any required accommodations, auxiliary aids or services.

Any member of the public who wishes to address the Board shall submit a speaker card specifying the item(s) they wish to address. The card must be submitted before or during the Board's consideration of the item.

In accordance with Board Bylaw 9322, students and parents/guardians may request directory information or personal information (as defined in Education code 49061 and/or 49073.2) be excluded from the minutes by making a request in writing to the Superintendent or Board Clerk.

Public materials are available for public inspection at our website at: fresnounified.org/board.

TRANSLATION SERVICES: Available in Spanish and Hmong in the meeting room upon request.

***12:00 P.M.**

CALL meeting to order

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

1. **PRESENT and DISCUSS Student Outcomes Focused Governance - Budget Alignment**

2. **OPPORTUNITY for Public Comment on Item**

3. **UNSCHEDULED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS**

4. **ADJOURNMENT**
   NEXT SCHEDULED REGULAR BOARD MEETING
   WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2025

Effective Budget Alignment

School Systems, School Boards, & Superintendents

Communities have created school systems for only one reason: to improve student outcomes. This is the only reason for which school systems exist. But communities aren't monolithic, so determining what is acceptable **improvement**, which **students** (if any) warrant disproportionate system focus, and which **outcomes** the school system should focus on can all be topics of great contention. Said differently, communities needed a way to resolve the myriad differences of opinion regarding the community's vision what students should know and be able to do and the communities values that must be honored along the path to accomplishing the vision. To resolve this issue, communities select a group of individuals who ensure that their vision and values are honored. This group is called the school board.

The function of the school board is to represent the vision and values of the community. Representing the community's vision and values generally requires that the school board 1) listens to the community to gain an understanding about the shared vision and values, 2) reaches consensus about how best to write the vision and values (we refer to the written form of the community's vision and values as, "policy"), and then 3) monitors the work of the school system to ensure that the vision is being accomplished while the values are being adhered to. But the board doesn't do the accomplishing or adhering itself — too many cooks in the kitchen. Instead, it hires someone to do this work at its behest. This person is called the superintendent.

The function of the superintendent is to implement the vision and values of the community, as described to them by the school board. To facilitate this, the school board delegates to the superintendent the responsibility for managing the day-to-day affairs of the school system. For minor operational expenditures — where "minor" is generally articulated via a host of policies that moderate the delegation of authority from the school board to the superintendent — the superintendent is generally empowered to make the decisions unilaterally without board interaction. Major expenditures — again, generally defined in policy by the board — tend to involve the superintendent making a recommendation based on their expertise, and then the school board voting to approve or disapprove. A key tool used to clarify this delegation is the school system's annual budget.

Superintendents & the Budget

Each year, the school board relies on the superintendent to draft an annual budget for the school system and present it for consideration to the school board. In practice, this often involves identifying large buckets of operational areas and indicating how much of projected revenue will be designated for expenditure in that area. In developing the budget — this list of operational buckets and projected expenditure amounts — the superintendent must make the case to the school board that adoption of the proposed allocations will create the conditions in which the school system will accomplish the vision for what the community wants students to know and be able to do, while honoring the values of the community.

School Boards & the Budget

The school board should review the proposed budget from the superintendent with the initial assumption that it does NOT accomplish the community's vision while honoring the community's values. The school board should not simply extend the benefit of the doubt; the superintendent must convince the school board that this is the case. Only upon being convinced should the school board then vote to adopt the annual budget. If the school board is not initially convinced, it is the job of the superintendent to either be more effective in their description of how the budget will accomplish the vision/honor the values OR make adjustments to the proposed budget that are sufficiently convincing. For this reason — the potential for back and forth as part of the deliberative

process — it is wise to begin the budget adoption process at least four to six months prior to any statutory deadlines for adoption.

Budget Adoption Part 1: Board and Superintendent Plan For Budgeting
The school board's role in planning for the budget is simple: adopt goals and guardrails that will guide the superintendent's design of the budget. If goals and guardrails haven't been adopted, the school board should focus on doing so.

A major part of the superintendent's role before budget development starts is the creation of a set of assumptions concerning projected revenue and projected expenditures. Revenue assumptions and their timeline will vary by school system due to major variances nationwide surrounding school system funding. In light of so many revenue-related variables that are out of the superintendent's control, we encourage a conservative approach to projecting revenue. Developing whimsical, hopeful projections, spending the funds, receiving vastly less than projected, and then laying off staff later is unacceptable behavior.

At a minimum, the superintendent should be prepared to share their assumptions about projected expenses and revenue, what their projects are based on the assumptions (with enrollment/revenue projections ideally reaching out 3-5 years), and how those projections compare with prior years. It is also helpful for the superintendent to share a summary of any process they used for getting input from families and staff, and the role that input played in the development of any assumptions. All of this generally takes place at least three to five months prior to budget adoption.

Budget Adoption Part 2: Superintendent Drafts Budget
This sounds like it would be simple, but many school boards fail this part. Time and time again school board members will either a) modify/amend/rewrite the budget themselves at the board meeting or b) show up with a completely different budget they recommend for adoption. Both of these behaviors demonstrate a triumph of adult needs (ego, catering to adult-focused constituencies, etc) over the potential of aligning around student outcomes. No matter what stories board members invent to justify this behavior, the end result is the same: adults benefit at the expense of children.

If the board doesn't like the superintendent's draft, discuss why you think it doesn't align to the goals and guardrails and don't approve it. But for the board to write the budget itself now using either of the aforementioned tactics destroys any ability the board has to hold the superintendent accountable for student outcomes later. Questions board members could be asking of the budget to understand its alignment include:

- Does accomplishing the goals appear to be the focus?
    - Are the goals clearly the framework around which the budget has been crafted?
    - Where and how does the budget prioritize improving the quality of instruction in the areas of our goals?
    - Where and how does the budget prioritize improving the quantity of quality instruction in the areas of our goals?
    - Is there a logic model flow from outcomes to outputs to inputs?
    - What evidence is the superintendent relying on to suggest that there is alignment between the goals and the budget? Or if there isn't evidence -- if it's a judgment call -- why isn't there evidence, and when will evidence be available?
    - Is the budget presented in a goal-aligned manner or just the typical functional category manner?
    - Does the budget demonstrate ROI measures using cost-per-student or something similar?

- Is there evidence that the guardrails are being honored?
- Is there strategic clarity about:
    - which new strategies are being added
    - which strategies are being continued
    - which strategies are being increased
    - which strategies are being decreased
    - which strategies are being abandoned (it's a red flag if there are no items identified for strategic abandonment)
- Is there financial clarity about:
    - what were previous dollar investments in accomplishing each goal
    - what are proposed dollar investments in accomplishing each goal
    - what's the change between these investments

Budget Adoption Part 3: Superintendent Convinces Board
Once the superintendent has drafted the budget, they now are responsible for persuading the board that the first priority or resource allocation is accomplishment of the goals AND that the budget accomplishes this while honoring the guardrails. To be clear: it is the superintendent's job to convince the board, it is not the board's job to be easily convinced.

The most common strategies for superintendents to convince the board involve presentations to the board demonstrating the alignment of expenditures in a way that will increase the likelihood of accomplishing the goals. Where there is strong trust between the board and superintendent, this is a straightforward process. Where that is not the case, the superintendent's job of convincing the board is harder. But that's the job; do it or find another job.

Because the budget must be a direct reflection of the community's vision and values, as revealed by the board-adopted goals and guardrails, the budget must make accomplishment of the goals the **first** priority for resource allocation while honoring the guardrails. In general, a status quo approach to budgeting is unlikely to accomplish this. After the board has scheduled a new set of goals and guardrails, a subsequent budget would benefit from a zero/near-zero-based budgeting approach to ensure maximum alignment. After the recalibration year budget to initiate the goals, a normal budgetary process is reasonable. Board members should be suspicious of budgeting processes that haven't taken a zero/near-zero-based budgeting approach in decades; alignment is highly unlikely in this scenario.

NOTE: At no point are children served by school boards amending school system budgets on the fly at board meetings. This is a guaranteed strategy for perpetuating inequity district-wide. If the school board is not convinced that the proposed budget's first priority for resource allocation is accomplishment of the board's adopted goals, don't approve it. Instead send it back to the superintendent so that they can either 1) make the appropriate adjustments to demonstrate alignment with the goals, or 2) do a better job of presenting the alignment. The school board budgeting by amendment at the end of a budgeting process will harm students regardless of how well intentioned individual board members are.

Budget Adoption Part 4: Board Approves Budget
Once the board is fully convinced that the superintendent's draft budget prioritizes accomplishment of the goals while remaining within the boundaries created by the guardrails, the board is ready to proceed. Then -- and only then -- should the board vote to adopt the budget.

Nowhere in this process should the board be considering whether or not they like the budget or not. Nowhere in the process should the board be considering if the right people get jobs or the right vendors get contracts. Nowhere in the process should the board be considering if they agree with the strategies proposed by the superintendent. If the board has done its job of listening for the vision and values of the community, and identifying them as goals and guardrails for the administration to implement, then those vision/goals and values/guardrails should be the only tool the board uses to evaluate whether or not to approve the budget.

The board chair knows when it's time to pursue adoption of the budget when the majority of board members voice in the negative on the following questions:

- Are there any board members who have evidence that the budget does not address accomplishment of goal #1? #2? #3?
- Are there any board members who have evidence that the budget violates guardrail #1? #2? #3?

When the majority of board members answer, "no" to each of these questions, the board can proceed with budget adoption. Budget adoption should hinge on alignment to vision and values, not on whether board members like the budget, agree with the budget, or have items in the budget that they want. In addition, budget adoption should be all or nothing; board members should not try to line item edit/veto the budget.

After Budget Adoption

When the school board adopts the budget, it is explicitly delegating to the superintendent the authority to take managerial action that is consistent with the construction of the budget. Said differently, so long as the superintendent only engages in expenditure amounts that do not exceed the buckets as adopted, the superintendent is operating within their delegated authority. What this also means is that if the superintendent believes that adjustments must be made such that funds originally allocated to one bucket need to be re-allocated to a different bucket, that is a decision which must go back to the school board. Within the confines of the adopted budget, the superintendent has freedom to operate; beyond the limitation of the amount assigned to each bucket, action of the school board is required.

Sample Policy Language

Here are two examples of how this balance of authorities might show up in policy about delegation of authority to the superintendent:

- The superintendent shall draft the proposed annual budget based on the board's adopted goals and guardrails, and the school board shall adopt the annual budget. Once the budget is adopted, the superintendent may implement any financial decisions that 1) help accomplish the goals, 2) while honoring the guardrails, and 3) that are consistent with policy, law, and the budget. Financial decisions that are inconsistent with the goals, guardrails, and/or the budget must be made by the school board.

- The superintendent shall draft the proposed annual budget based on the board's adopted goals and guardrails that includes the amounts to be spent in each functional area. The school board shall adopt the annual budget. Once adopted, the superintendent may implement any financial decisions that are consistent with the goals, guardrails, and budget and that do not involve movement of finances between functional areas.

Special Notes on School Boards & Budgets

Budgets are not a governance document. Budgets are clearly an operational means to an end, not the end itself. As such, in a purely governance framework, boards would not be involved in budget creation or adoption.

Instead, they would worry themselves with either values-related ends (ie: “did we have a balanced budget?”) or vision-related ends (ie: “did we accomplish the organizational goals?”) as measures of whether the organization was fiduciarily sound.

But there are state legislatures. And in the unerring wisdom of state legislative bodies, most have explicitly adopted laws extending legislative obligations to school boards. While not inherently destructive in itself — the idea of having school boards involved in adopting a budget — the practice often metastasizes into the school board’s belief that its work is a super-layer of management. It creates confusion, causing school boards to see themselves as being one level above management rather than their more accurate orientation: one level below community.

Budgeting Case Study

Sometimes it's helpful for a school board to think through a real-world scenario together as a way of bringing an issue to life. The case study below and the questions that follow are intended to be used in this manner.

The Challenge

A school district was operationally dysfunctional. Hardly a day could pass without someone calling the board chair about yet another organizational failure. When the school year started, it was buses that never showed up to collect children in the morning. This was so frequent and persistent that parents started jokingly referring to ad hoc carpool situations—one parent cramming all the kids from an unserved bus stop into their car and driving them all to school themselves—as the district's "underground railroad." Throughout the year it was vendors calling to ask why they hadn't been paid in ninety days. It got to be so bad that a local bank started marketing "district loans" to small businesses doing business with the district that needed thirty days of cash to hold them over until the district got through its inevitable procurement system delays. The lack of order was everywhere—boxes of unopened and unused textbooks discovered years out of date, job applicants who couldn't get an update on the status of the process after the interview, and the list went on and on. And for the board chair, so did the phone calls from frustrated community and staff members about the unending issues.

The Reaction

After being pressured by the board for months to hire an effective chief operating officer, the superintendent finally did so. The new COO had a reputation for addressing systems issues and had served as a lauded chief of operations in two similar districts prior to being hired. As soon as the COO was installed, they reached out to a national organization to have a comprehensive set of operational audits conducted. Over the following two months, dozens of individuals with deep expertise in school district systems arrived. They conducted hundreds of interviews with staff, parents, community members, vendors, and board members; pored over mountains of documents; and attended several school board meetings. The blistering report that came back as a result confirmed everything the school district had known for months. Here it was in black and white: the operations of the district were in complete disorder.

The Result

The COO immediately went to work forming teams to implement the pages of recommendations that were included in the final report. Slowly the number of calls decreased as the implementation teams addressed item after item. Among the recommendations was discontinuing a large number of initiatives that could not be validated as being effective in advancing the district's strategic plan. Many of the initiatives had operations components—specialized furniture and equipment, extra facility and operations staff usage, extra food service or transportation usage, and so on. The COO, seeing an opportunity to streamline inefficiencies to free up resources for the academic side of the house, cut operational support for the identified initiatives out of the subsequent year's budget recommendation, thereby ending the partner contracts.

The Issue

Not surprisingly, many of the programs had students, parents, and staff who were strong supporters. Once the budgetary shift recommendation was communicated to the students, parents, and staff, the board chair's phone began ringing incessantly once again. After corresponding with a group of district staff about the harm their program's removal would create for students, the board chair contacted the superintendent and asked for the programs to be spared or, at minimum, for the highly effective long-term staff to be retained and provided with assignments that maintained the relationships with and benefits for the students being served. The board chair pointed out that many of the targeted programs benefited marginalized communities and that their removal would contribute to a significantly less equitable set of offerings for the district's most vulnerable populations. The superintendent declined, saying that the board chair was out of line to even make the request and that the changes would continue to be reflected in the budget recommendation. After hearing that the superintendent would not modify the budget recommendation, a group of parents attended the board meeting during which the budget was considered. Their request was simple: board members should either make a motion to restore the items in the budget or reject the budget outright on ethical grounds.

Case Study Questions

- As a board member, what would you do?
- How should the school board respond to the parent concerns about the discontinued programs?
- Which aspects of the budgeting process is it clear that this board did well?
- Which aspects of the budgeting process could the board enhance?
- What are applicable lessons for your school board based on this case study?
- Imagine you are the board chair. How would you want your colleagues at the board meeting to react after hearing the parents' request?
- What is the most important aspect of this case study?

All-Star Unified has 10 schools with 400 students per school and has $1,000,000 to put toward an investment. Fill in the shaded cells on a set of proposed investments (each $1M). Discuss: which makes more/less sense from a cost/value perspective?

	Investment	Major cost factors	Estimated # Students Served	Cost per participating student	Desired Outcomes — Estimated Effectiveness (High/Med/Low)	Risks	
A	Tutoring 1-to-1 student-teacher ratio 3x/week, 36 weeks	Tutors = $30/hour	308 students (Highest-needs students?)	$1,000,000/308 = **$3,240**	Math and reading scores increase? Grades increase? — Promising?	Some student may not attend; no peer interaction; difficulty hiring tutors	
B	Tutoring 4-to-1 student-teacher ratio 3x/week, 36 weeks	Tutors = $30/hour	1,232 max				
C	Adding specialists staff to schools	$100,000 per FTE = 1 per school	4,000	**$250**			
D	High school recovery courses	Summer provider costs $875/ student		**$875**			
E	Lengthen the school day 20 minutes/day	$3,600 stipend for all certificated staff	4,000	**$250**			
F	PD & planning time Teachers paid extra for SEL – one week before school starts plus 10 half-days	$3,600 stipend for all certificated staff	4,000	**$250**			
G	Other (you choose)						

Use this template for your own planning.

	Investment	Major cost factors	Estimated # Students Served	Cost per participating student	Desired Outcomes – Estimated Effectiveness (High/Med/Low)	Risks	Once implemented is it working? (Check data)
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							