



PASADENA
Unified School District

2025 PUSD Governance Handbook

October 23, 2025

Version 1.0

Board of Education

Jennifer Hall Lee, Board President

Tina Fredericks, Board Vice President

Dr. Yarma Velázquez, Board Clerk

Kimberly Kenne, Board Member

Michelle Richardson Bailey, Board Member

Scott Harden, Board Member

Patrice Marshall McKenzie, Board Member

Superintendent

Dr. Elizabeth J. Blanco

Introduction

What is Governance?

“...a governance mindset is much more than just understanding. It is about having an internal moral compass geared to a well-defined moral purpose. A high performing trustee knows that excellence in governance requires purposeful action.” - The Governance Core, School Boards, Superintendents, and Schools Working Together. Davis Campbell, Michael Fullan

Governance is defined as the act of governing or overseeing the control and direction of something, such as a county or an organization; government.

The Pasadena Unified School District (“PUSD”) Board of Education (the “Board”) is the Governing Board for the School District, and it includes the Board Trustees and the Superintendent. The board works as a governance team with the superintendent.

What is a Governance Handbook?

This PUSD Governance Handbook documents how the Board and Superintendent agree to provide high quality, effective governance leadership in support of educational excellence as defined by the mission and vision, values and goals of the district.

The Board will review and revise this handbook annually.

Mission

Pasadena Unified School District prepares students for success in an ever-evolving world. We are committed to cultural responsiveness and academic excellence.

Vision

We will transform education to empower students to succeed.

Values

Our students come first. Our decisions are driven by what is best for them. Our policies, programs, and behaviors are based on:

1. Cultural Competency – Our behaviors, policies, and programs affirm the worth and personal dignity of all students, employees and community members. We foster a climate of civility, collegiality, tolerance and reasoned debate, embracing our diversity as a strength that adds vibrancy and creativity to our perspectives, deliberations and decisions.
2. Equity – We believe that every child is equally entitled to high quality education, and that different needs require different levels of resources to enable all children to achieve their full potential.
3. Accountability – We take responsibility for our actions, decisions and outcomes. We are committed to continuous improvement and use evidence-based approaches to identify improvements that support student success. We make information accessible and our decisions openly.
4. Collaboration – We value the participation of parents, students and the community in all aspects of PUSD. We actively seek mutually-beneficial partnerships with people and organizations. We encourage diverse input and differing opinions.
5. Fiscal Responsibility – We maintain the public trust by providing high quality services and by using our resources prudently, efficiently and equitably. Preserving the longer term financial viability of the district is always a key factor in our decisions.

Governance Team

Who We Are

We are elected Board Trustees working collaboratively with the Superintendent. Together, the eight of us (seven Trustees and one Superintendent) form the governance team for the Pasadena Unified School District.

Purpose of the Team

We have the responsibility to do the best job we can for our students within the state and federal requirements, with the goal that every student graduates from our schools and is college and career ready and prepared to become a responsible citizen and community member.

We Are Responsible To...

...Our Children

To provide the best possible education in a safe, engaging, challenging, compassionate, learning environment

...District Staff

To provide necessary resources and a safe, supportive, challenging work environment

...Families / Caregivers

To provide an education for their children in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for the children and their families, and to provide avenues for their engagement in their children's education

...Voters and Taxpayers

To provide a high-quality education in our schools, so that the community is a great place to live, and to use public funds efficiently and effectively

...Our Entire Community

To keep them informed and promote an understanding of the benefits of our educational system, whether or not they have children in our schools

...State and Federal Governments

To obey the law, to be informed and to keep other elected officials informed about the effect of legislation on our district, and to advocate on behalf of our children and our schools

...The Other Members of Our Team

To come to meetings prepared, to be interested and informed, to be committed to our work, and to be respectful and honest in our interactions

Effective Governance Team

School district governance is the act of transforming the needs, wishes, and desires of the community into policies and decisions that direct the community's schools.

Utilizing effective governance techniques, private citizens, once elected to school Boards, work with the Superintendent to keep all district efforts focused on student learning. School board trustees are the only elected positions that solely represent children. Effective governance tenets encompass the basic characteristics and behaviors that enable governance team members to effectively create a climate for excellence in a School District.

The role of the school Board is to see that the schools are well run, not to run the schools. The community elects school Board members to set and monitor the direction of the School District. The district Superintendent will translate all efforts into action. It is therefore vital that the Board and Superintendent have a respectful and productive working relationship based on trust and open communication. Direction is given to the Superintendent by a Board majority, which only exists at a properly noticed meeting of the Board. Individual Board members do not have the authority to direct the Superintendent.

Working as a group, Board members and the Superintendent leverage the efforts of the professional staff by setting a direction for the district reflective of the community's wishes for its children, by creating a supportive framework for action in the district, by holding the system accountable through mutually agreed upon mechanisms, by providing support to students and staff through behaviors and actions, and by demonstrating community leadership on behalf of children, district schools and public education, thereby creating a climate for excellence in which all students thrive.

Characteristics of an Effective Team

- Are honest, caring, and supportive
- Create a safe environment for each other, never intentionally hurt one another
- Respectfully receive ideas from one another
- Value diversity of views as an opportunity to build a consensus or common ground
- Are present and attentive, and put in the time needed to reach decisions
- Keep their sense of humor
- Show gratitude for great work
- Well informed regarding education issues
- Asks thoughtful questions
- Considers all the facts when making decisions

How We Operate

Role of Board

School Board Trustees are the representatives of the people, elected to ensure the district schools educate the children in consideration of the interests of the local community. The role of the school Board is to govern the School District.

Board Responsibilities

Setting the direction for the community's schools by:

- Focusing on student learning
- Assessing district needs
- Generating, reviewing, and revising guiding beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, board goals and success indicators, following an inclusive process
- Ensuring that the District embodies these directions

Establishing an effective and efficient structure for the School District by:

- Employing the Superintendent
- Setting policy for hiring of other personnel
- Setting policies
- Setting direction and targets for student achievement
- Establishing budget priorities and adopting the budget
- Providing direction for and voting to accept collective bargaining agreements

Providing support through 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
- Being knowledgeable about district efforts and able to explain them to the public

Ensuring accountability to the public by:

- Evaluating the Superintendent
- Monitoring, reviewing, evaluating effectiveness and revising policies
- Serving as a judicial and appeals body
- Monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness and requiring program changes, as indicated
- Oversight and approval of District budget
- Reviewing facilities program implementation
- Monitoring the collective bargaining process

Acting 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 the district's policies, programs, and fiscal conditions
- Educating the community and the media about issues facing the district and public education
- Advocating for children, district programs, and public education to the general public, community, and local, state, and national leaders

What Board needs from Superintendent

- Demonstrate effective listening
- Demonstrate good judgement, leadership and creativity
- Demonstrate effective crisis management skills
- Be fiscally responsible and prudent with district funds
- Understands that the entire Board is apprised of information and not just one individual
- Communicate timely, accurate and complete information to assist the board in making decisions

Role of the Superintendent

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

- Works with the School Board to develop an effective governance leadership team
- Serves as the chief administrative officer for the School District

What Superintendent Needs From The Board

- Demonstrate effective listening
- Demonstrate good judgement, leadership and creativity
- Understand how our budget is funded
- Understand that the Board speaks with one voice and individual Trustees do not hold power nor can they direct the Superintendent as individuals

Types of Meetings

Regular

Regular meetings are convened for the discharge of the Board's legal responsibilities and include, but are not limited to, discussions of policy, School District business, planning, educational programs, and matters of community interest. Regular meetings are held once a month on a Thursday.

Special

Special meetings may be called when a vote on a specific issue is needed before a regular meeting is scheduled. Special meetings may be called by the Board President or by a majority of the Board. No business will be transacted except that for which the special meeting was convened. Special meeting agendas are posted 24 hours in advance as required by law.

The following meetings are specific types of special meetings:

Study Sessions

These sessions may be scheduled from time to time to provide Board Members with opportunities for planning and discussion without formal action. Topics for discussion will be announced publicly and sessions will be conducted in accordance with state law.

Retreats

A Board retreat is a dedicated, extended meeting where Board members step away from regular business to focus on strategic planning, relationship building, and organizational development. These sessions typically occur outside the normal meeting environment and allow Board members to engage in deeper discussions about vision, mission, goals, and governance practices without the constraints of routine agendas. Board retreats often include team-building activities, evaluation of the organization's direction, and opportunities to strengthen working relationships among Board members and with District leadership.

Committees

School Board committees serve as specialized working groups that allow the Board to distribute its governance responsibilities across multiple teams rather than requiring the full Board's involvement on every issue. While committees develop informed recommendations for action, the entire Board maintains ultimate decision-making authority. This structure enhances governance efficiency, provides opportunities for Board members to develop leadership skills in specific areas, and creates a more thorough approach to complex issues—all while respecting the Superintendent's management role. Effective committees produce recommendations that are generally accepted by the full Board without excessive revision.

Public Hearings

Public hearings may be conducted from time to time to assure adequate time for the public to express its views regarding a specific issue.

Norms

Board members agree to come together as individuals to form a Governance Team and pledge to adhere to the CSBA Professional Governance Standards and these norms:

- Focus on the best interests of students
- Maintain confidentiality

- Listen openly, show respect and civility, and be open to ideas
- Share in the responsibility for successful meetings
- Support decisions of the majority
- Provide opportunities for all members to be heard
- Provide accurate and timely information to the public
- Pay attention to process and stay on task
- Participate in professional development for the board
- Use data whenever possible to drive decision-making
- Do a board self-evaluation regularly
- Provide opportunities for community input into decisions

Appendix

Board Protocols

CSBA Professional Governance Standards (11/2021)