Aromas-San Juan USD

Educate · Inspire · Succeed · Contribute

Board Governance Handbook

The Board of Education is entrusted by the community to uphold the Constitutions of California and the United States, to protect the public interest in schools, and to ensure that a high-quality education is provided to each student.

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Superintendent

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Unity of Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities, Norms, Agreements

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

This Governance Handbook was updated in a Board Governance workshop conducted on March 1, 2025 with the assistance of Fred Van Vleck, Ed.D., Advisor for the National Center for Executive Leadership and School Board Development. The Governance Handbook was approved on April 8, 2026.

Building a Governance Team
Unity of Purpose

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

In a school district, the Board and Superintendent work together as a governance team. For a governance team to work together effectively, members need to: Maintain a unity of purpose; agree on and govern within appropriate roles; create and sustain a positive governance culture, and; create a supportive structure for effective governance.

What do we as a governance team want to accomplish?

What do we stand for?

- Our shared purpose is to have the best learning environment for all students.
- We want to build trust and move the district forward.
- We want to be an effective team.
- We want to understand our individual jobs and collective responsibilities.
- We want to be a team with a common focused direction so we are not a distraction to the district or community but a catalyst for the focused efforts of employees, and the community can see evidence of this focused direction.
- We want to be partners with the staff in positive change.
- We want to oversee the putting together of a first-rate program and first-rate facilities, making sure we continue to improve – never resting on our laurels.
- We want to perpetuate a legacy of positive culture as people come and go.

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Roles and Responsibilities

The role of Trustees is to stay focused on the big picture while fulfilling five responsibilities in a series of job areas. These five responsibilities are:

- We set the direction.
- We establish the structure.
- We provide support.
- We ensure accountability.
- We act as community leaders.

We carry out these responsibilities in each of the following job areas:

- Setting the District's Direction
- Student Learning and Achievement
- Finance
- Facilities
- Human Resources
- Policy
- Judicial Review
- Collective Bargaining
- Community Relations and Advocacy

The Superintendent assists the Board in carrying out its responsibilities in each of the job areas and leads the staff toward the accomplishment of the agreed-upon District vision and goals.

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Creating and Sustaining a Positive Governance Team Culture

Culture is the positive or negative atmosphere created by the way people in an organization treat each other. Teams have unwritten (implicit) or written (explicit) agreements about how they will behave with each other and others. These behavioral ground rules, often called norms, enable teams to build and maintain a positive culture or shift a negative one.

Governance Norms

To make meetings positive and productive experiences for all, we make the following collective commitments to each other.

WE AGREE TO –

- Keep from taking disagreements personally (individuality is embraced, and respected).
- To show respect (never dismiss/devalue others).
- Make a commitment to effective deliberation, each listening openly while everyone is allowed to express his or her point of view.
- Commit to open communication, honesty, no surprises.
- Commit the time necessary to govern effectively. This means being there, being knowledgeable, participating, understanding the full scope of being a Board Member, and being willing to take on all the responsibilities involved.
- Be collaborative (this is the way we operate)!
- Maintain confidentiality (builds trust).
- Look upon history as lessons learned; focus on the present and the future.

AND – ABOVE ALL –

- Focus on students' best interests – on what's best for the students! This is what we do! And it is the touchstone that allows us to have our differences.

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Board Governance Protocols

1. Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

1.1 Board members carry authority only as a Board, not as individuals. Individuals can request action by bringing up a new idea, explaining their interest in a particular course of action, and working to get a Board majority to support moving in that direction. When a majority of the Board, sitting in a formal meeting, requests action, that request should be made in the context of the intended results (what is to be accomplished), not the methods used to achieve those results.

1.2 To be effective representatives of the Board and district, members will:

1. Always behave in a manner that reflects positively on the district.

2. Refrain from obligating the Board and/or administration by actual speech or implication, unless authorized to do so by the Board.

3. Represent the Board at various school events.

4. Refer any concerns, questions, or comments to the superintendent as specified in the protocol for Responding to Concerns.

5. Reinforce with the community the key messages agreed upon by the Board.

1.3 Responsibilities of Individual Board Members:

1. Attend Board and committee meetings and functions, such as special Board events.

2. Be informed about the organization's mission, services, policies, and programs.

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3. Review agenda and supporting materials before Board meetings.

4. Serve on task forces and offer to take on special assignments.

5. Inform others about the district.

6. Follow conflict-of-interest and confidentiality policies.

7. Refrain from making special requests of the staff.

8. Assist the Board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, such as reviewing the annual budget and audit.

9. All district committees will be attended by staff and community members only, with the exception of the facilities, curriculum, technology, and budget committee. On these four committees, the meetings will be open to the entire Board. If three or more Board members wish to attend, the meeting will be scheduled as a special meeting of the Board. Note, Board members who are not members of the committee will need to notify the superintendent of their plan to attend the meeting at least three workdays prior to the meeting to allow time to properly agendize the meeting.

1.4 In responding to concerns regarding the work of the district, Board members will:

1. Receive the information, remembering that only one side of the story is being presented (listening).

2. Repeat the information, paraphrase to ensure understanding.

3. Remind the individual that a Board member has no authority as an individual and share the appropriate line of command and process to follow to address their concern.

4. Re-Direct, thank them for sharing their thoughts and refer them to the appropriate staff member and, if necessary, encourage them to initiate the formal complaint process.

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5. Report. Promptly inform the superintendent, with the superintendent appropriately responding to the individual and/or Board member.

2. Board Meetings and the Agenda

2.1 Meetings of the Board are held in public but are not open-forum town hall meetings. Meetings will be conducted in such a way as to allow the public to provide input in the time allotted to ensure that multiple voices of the community inform Board deliberations; however, when the Board deliberates, it will be a time for the trustees to listen and learn from each other, taking public input into consideration without re-engaging the public.

2.2 Board meetings will generally be on the second Wednesday of each month. Each Board meeting will begin with closed session (with dinner provided to the Board) at 6:00p.m. The regular public meeting will begin at 7:00pm. Study sessions may be scheduled and shall be scheduled at the discretion of the Board.

2.3 The design of the Board agenda will follow the historical structure utilized by the Board. The design of the agenda may only be altered with the approval of the Board.

2.4 The Board values community involvement and desires that the community is informed about information discussed, deliberated on and when action is taken during regular Board meetings. As such, all regular (not special, study sessions or emergency) Board meetings will be live streamed, recorded and archived for live and future viewing. Public comment will be taken from in person attendees only. In addition, public comments that are submitted in written form, at least 7 hours before a regular Board meeting, will be copied and made available to Board members and the public at the meeting.

2.5 Board members will review the information provided to them and be open to ongoing professional development and training.

2.6 The superintendent, with the support of the staff, will create each Board agenda. In advance of the preparation of the Board agenda, Board members may request items to be placed on the agenda. The Board president and the superintendent will discuss the contents of the agenda and the process that will be followed at the meeting, in advance of the Board meeting.

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2.7 The superintendent and Board believe that the need for information and/or clarification on agenda items is best accomplished by the submission of written questions/requests ahead of meetings. This will allow for in-depth consideration of items without unduly lengthening the meeting time.

2.8 Board members will make every effort to submit, before the meeting, questions they intend to ask so that the superintendent and district staff can prepare to answer Board members' questions at Board meetings.

2.9 When an individual Board member requests information, that information will be provided to all Board members. If unforeseen questions arise during the meeting, trustees will acknowledge their question or comment as spontaneous and that they understand staff may not have the information on hand to answer the question.

2.10 Any request of the staff by an individual Board member, which will take more than 30 minutes to fulfill, must be made by the majority of the Board so as not to detract staff from focused efforts that are meant to move the district toward achieving the year's goals.

2.11 Individual Board members are expected to self-monitor compliance to the Brown Act, including limiting closed session to the legally appropriate agenda item(s).

2.12 During the portion of the meeting reserved for Board member reports/communications, Board members shall only provide information (i.e. activities or professional development they have attended as a Board member). They may request items to be placed on future agendas, but due to the Brown Act, they shall not make statements affecting pupils, employees, or services provided by the district. It is important that this time in the agenda not be used to engage in discussion items not on the agenda or for partisan political statements.

2.13 Under the reports section of the regular Board meeting agenda, excepting the Superintendent's Report, each report shall be limited to a maximum of five minutes per person. The Superintendent will not have a time limit on their report.

2.14 The use of social media by Board members will be limited to personal topics not related to the school district, except in the case

where the Board member is reposting informational items published by the district and about the district, including district approved organizations such as parent teacher associations/boosters, etc.

2.15 The governance team will strive for brevity in deliberations, keeping remarks brief and to the point so that all opinions can be expressed, and meetings can be efficient. Addressing each agenda item, the Board shall, normally, adhere to the following process:

1. Staff members, when presenting items to the Board, are to provide appropriate back-up material for the Board to review before the Board meeting. If necessary to provide a presentation to the Board, presentations are to be limited to not more than 10 minutes unless prior approval of the president is received.

2. The Input from the community.

3. Board discussion and deliberation including clarifying questions to staff presenting the topic.

2.16 Board members individually and collectively demonstrate confidentiality as appropriate and as outlined through the mandates of the California Education Code, the Brown Act, and other compliance criteria established by law or legislation. Respecting the confidentiality of information maintains the Board's judicial review role

2.17 The use of email and social communication is subject to the Brown Act. The superintendent shall forward questions and answers to all Board members. Board members, when responding, may not "reply to all."

2.18 The Board wishes to maintain a culture of professionalism, stay focused, and respect the need of trustees to be available to their families:

1. Electronic devices will be set for 'silent' or vibrate.

2. Trustees will be discreet in checking cell phones if necessary.

3. When meeting virtually, whenever possible, Trustee's cameras will be on during the meeting.

2.19 Any non-routine expense in excess of $75,000, shall be pre-approved by the Board prior to the superintendent committing the district to the expense.

2.20 Abstentions are most appropriate in cases where there is a personal relationship between a litigant and a Board member (perception of bias), a decision that financially impacts the Board member or their immediate family (legal conflict), or a personal connection to the Board member that may bias a decision on discipline.

1. When abstaining because there may be a perception of bias, the Board member is encouraged to state the bias.

2. When an actual legal conflict of interest exists, the Board member must publicly declare the conflict and recuse themselves from voting at all.

3. When a Board member abstains, their abstention shall not be counted for purposes of determining whether a majority of membership of the Board has taken action.

Board members will model professional behavior by being polite and respectful of the points of view held by their fellow governance team members. The governance team will address one another by their first name.

Each Board member respects the right of other Board members to vote in the minority position. In so doing, each Board member agrees, as a courtesy to the team, to explain the reason for their minority vote, either during deliberation or after casting the vote.

Parliamentary procedures are to be utilized as a guide to ensure for the most effective and efficient Board meeting possible. Accordingly, the Board utilizes Rosenberg's parliamentary procedures as its guide to managing the agenda of each Board meeting.

Upon the request of an individual Board member, a roll call vote will be taken. The protocol for recording the votes of the individual Board members shall follow the rotation established by the Board.

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Decisions of the Board

1. Governance team members are reminded that policy and decisions reserved to the Board must be made as a Board. Except where otherwise indicated in the Education or Government Codes, a majority consists of 3 of 5 members of the Board voting for an item. Once the decision has been made, it becomes the decision of "the Board."

2. Under the concept of majority rule, each member is compelled to support the successful implementation of a policy decision, program, or procedure even when he or she does not agree with the decision.

3. If a member of the governance team cannot support the decision of the Board because it offends a moral/personal code, the member is expected, at a minimum, to refrain from undermining the decision or directive.

Whenever Board members are appointed or elected to serve on the Board, the Board president shall administer the oath of office at a meeting of the Board.

Public Participation

1. Since the Brown Act expressly prohibits discussion leading to action from being conducted unless agendized, governance team members are strongly encouraged to refrain from engaging members of the public in dialogue about issues not on the agenda.

2. In general, citizens and residents wishing to "dialogue" with members should be encouraged to contact individual members and discuss issues of importance with them or the superintendent as appropriate.

3. As a result of a comment under public communication, a member may ask the superintendent to briefly comment for clarity or correction. The member may also ask that a matter be investigated, with or without a follow-up report to the Board.

4. If a Board member feels compelled to speak to the issue, the member must first be recognized by the Board president. The

comments must be brief and only to clarify or correct. Any further discussion should be agendized.

Public Comment

1. Time limits, generally 3 minutes per speaker and 20 minutes per subject will be imposed by the Board president.

2. The Board president may rule on the appropriateness of a topic. If the topic would be more suitably addressed later, the president may indicate the time and place when it should be presented.

Chart of Policy Revision Process

Step 1:

- District receives policy update packet from CSBA.

Step 2:

- Administrative assistant prints policies for superintendent review and comments.

Step 3

- Superintendent reviews updated recommended policy changes. The superintendent provides to the Board at Board meeting 1, appropriate comments and edits.

Step 4 – Board Meeting 1:

- The original packet of updated policies, with comments from the superintendent, is placed on the Board agenda (Board meeting 1), under information and discussion, and is considered as the first reading by the Board.

Step 5 - Board Meeting 1:

- If a Board member or community member would like to discuss one or more of the policies provided, they will request specific said policies be pulled for discussion at the next Board meeting (Board meeting 2) and placed under the action section of the agenda.

- The policies presented to the Board, on which they have no concerns or questions, will be placed under the consent agenda (second reading and for approval) at the next Board meeting (Board meeting 2) for action.

Step 6 – Board Meeting 2:

- The policies requested by individual Board members to be discussed shall be placed under the action section of the Board agenda (second reading and approval). Discussion will take place prior to a motion to approve said policies.

3. The Board's Role and Relationship with the Staff and Community

3.1 When interacting with the public and their constituents, Board members will hold to the highest level of professional and ethical conduct, including emphasizing the positive aspects of the district.

3.2 When individually visiting schools or departments in your capacity as a Board member, as a professional courtesy, Board members are encouraged to notify the superintendent that they will be visiting a school or department and may provide input to the superintendent on issues or concerns that may arise from such a visit.

1. At no time, while visiting schools shall a member make promises, either overt or implied, interfere with administration, or involve him or herself in personnel issues, student records, or union activities.

2. To assist in this matter, the superintendent will ensure that principals and teachers know that a teacher does not need to interrupt his/her lesson when a visitor is in his/her classroom.

3.3 Board members shall not request any information from staff beyond that which would be provided to any regular community member. Staff members are directed to relay requests from Board members to their supervisor to ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Board members.

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3.4 Management staff are directed to relay requests from Board members to the superintendent to ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Board members.

1. This protocol does not imply a censoring of any private and informal conversations.

4. **The Board's Role in Collective Bargaining**

4.1 Board members will be actively involved in the collective bargaining process to ensure that the district is represented well by those selected to negotiate on behalf of the Board and the community. The involvement of the Board will be to:

1. Ensure the ethical, fiscal, and educational goals of the community are represented in the actions taken throughout the collective bargaining process.

2. Participate by providing direction and guidance to those selected to represent the Board (District Negotiation Team). Board members do not attend at-the-table negotiations.

3. The Board believes that the collective bargaining process shall be as transparent as possible. Accordingly, the Board recommends the district, and the associations agree to broadcast negotiations, via virtual technology, for both the Board and the association members.

4. Establish the bargaining approach to be utilized by its negotiation team.

5. Set the District's collective bargaining parameters for its negotiation team.

6. Expect, as the representative of the Board, that the superintendent will ensure that the Board, collectively and individually, is informed on the issues and strategies implemented within the collective bargaining process.

7. The superintendent is the collective bargaining spokesperson for the Board.

5. **The Board's Relationship with the Superintendent**

5.1 The Board will commit to working through and with the superintendent on issues regarding the running of the district. The superintendent will inform the Board as soon as possible of:

1. Serious safety concerns.
2. Serious disciplinary action.
3. Serious/unexpected personnel changes or disciplinary issues.
4. Serious illness or death of a student, a staff member, or members of the staff member's immediate family.
5. Legal or liability concerns.
6. Notable achievements.
7. In all matters, the Board and superintendent are expected to protect confidential information.

5.2 It is the superintendent's responsibility to organize the staff in the manner that best serves the needs of the district. As a professional courtesy, the superintendent shall provide appropriate notice to the Board in advance of action being taken.

5.3 It is the superintendent's responsibility to work with and be the primary contact for the district's attorney. Board members will work with the superintendent with any legal questions.

5.4 Individual Board members will only contact the district's attorney with the authority of the majority of the Board. In the case of a serious or legal concern about the superintendent's actions, the Board president may contact the district's attorney.

5.5 The Board recognizes the success of the superintendent is critical to the success of students and the district. As such, the Board is committed to providing an opportunity for the superintendent to have a professional coach/advisor who is not affiliated with the district.

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As the norm, the superintendent speaks on behalf of the Board. The Board president is authorized to speak on behalf of the Board, when necessary.

The superintendent will inform the Board when the media contacts the superintendent. The Board president will inform the superintendent when media contacts the Board president.

All conflicts between the superintendent and the Board will be handled in closed session, with the superintendent being in attendance, when appropriate and necessary.

Conflicts between individual Board members and/or the superintendent will be addressed privately between those who hold the conflict and will not involve other members of the Board or the public (community, staff, media, etc.).

The Board commits to complete an annual evaluation of the superintendent. The Board will set aside at least one special meeting in May for the purpose of completing the annual evaluation of the superintendent. In consultation with the superintendent, the evaluation process and associated documents will be developed and approved by the Board, not later than the first Board meeting in June.

The evaluation process and instrument is designed to bring about the collective view of the Board. Thus, the evaluation will reflect the majority view of the Board, as a whole. To better attain this majority view, the Board will work with a professional from outside the district to facilitate the evaluation process and the composing of the superintendent's evaluation.

6. The Ongoing Implementation of Board-Approved Protocols

6.1. New Board Members (Elected or Appointed)

1. An administrative orientation by the superintendent and senior staff will be provided to new members of the Board. Training may be provided by county and state organizations, consultants, or led by staff. The training shall, whenever possible, take place prior to the first Board meeting of the new Board member.

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2. The orientation is intended to be a conversation and overview of the thing's members need to know immediately. Questions will be answered, and the Board meeting structure, superintendent contract, superintendent objectives, Board policies, overview of the services and programs, and the major challenges being faced will be outlined and discussed.

3. Each orientation may be slightly different depending on the needs and interests of the incoming members and the major issues before the Board.

4. Within 90 days of the election/appointment of a new Board member or appointment of a new superintendent, a study session of the whole Board will be held for the purpose of reviewing/updating the governance protocols of the Board.

5. Upon the request of two or more Board members, a special study session will be called for the purpose of reviewing/updating the governance protocols of the Board.

7. What do we do when someone violates one of the protocols?

7.1 Principles/Assumptions

1. We should expect that we will make mistakes.
2. Self-monitoring our own behavior can be very difficult.
3. Behavior in conflict with agreements erodes trust.
4. Behavior that is not challenged is condoned.
5. Confronting another team member can:
    a. Be difficult. If done poorly, it can be damaging.
    b. If done correctly, it demonstrates that the Board is a highly functional team!

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