



Newport-Mesa School District Board of Trustees Protocols

Updated Aug. 2025

Overview

Outstanding Boards are intentional about governance and invest in the practices that address changing situations. Protocols are tools that build and strengthen the capacity of the Governance Team to have constructive and positive relationships. The mutual understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Superintendent will provide transparency and stability for the District.

A. Principles of Governance

The Governance Team will operate on the following principles of good governance:

1. Keeping learning and student achievement for every student as the primary focus.
2. Following discussion/deliberation, the Board will articulate the “what and why” and allowing staff to outline the “how.”
 - “What” is the goal/desired outcome;
 - “Why” provides that rationale in support of the goal;
 - Additionally, the Board will specify strategies (“how”) that they would like staff to consider as they construct their recommendations for execution.
3. Recognizing that we represent the entire District, the Board shall ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views from across the communities the District serves to inform deliberations and decisions.
4. Operating openly with trust and integrity.
5. Governing in a dignified and professional manner verbally and nonverbally, treating everyone with civility, dignity, and respect, while honoring the right to disagree with each other.
6. Respecting the process of debate and decision making by honoring and upholding the democratic principle of debate, including a robust discussion before making a decision, and honoring the Board's decision following a vote, agreeing to never make a target of colleagues with differing opinions.
7. Valuing, supporting, and advocating for public education.

B. Governance Relationships and Productivity: Ongoing and Onboarding

1. The Board President and Vice President, or designees, shall meet with new Trustees to familiarize them with the rhythm of the Board's work, including and not exclusively covering:
 - a. The policy and legislative review process
 - b. Meeting protocols, including how to prepare for meetings, and processes for asking questions in advance of meetings, to ensure Board Meetings are efficient and productive

- c. Arranging meetings with key staff members to gain insights into reports, and how to review reports, such as budget
2. Recognize the cadence of onboarding by first meeting with new Trustee(s) to:
 - a. Hear why they ran and what they learned during the campaign;
 - b. Share information about Trustee trainings, including CSBA New Board Member training, and Masters in Governance training, and supporting them in building a training/orientation plan that will scaffold learning opportunities for optimal Trustee development.
3. The Superintendent will share information regarding the Brown Act, Public Records Requests, social media laws and best practices and other information to ensure new Trustees and the full Board are aware of, and adhering to, legal requirements.
4. Respecting the need to be honest if concerns arise between members of the Board, Trustees will speak directly with one another about concerns so that they may be addressed in a collegial manner, and with a commitment to keep the Governance Team optimally productive and focused on student achievement. If concerns persist, the Board President, or designee, will meet with the Trustees one-on-one.
5. The Trustees commit to engage in professional development, both individually and as a Board.
 - a. This may include attending the annual California School Boards Association Conference, participating in workshops, sharing resources that invest in strong leadership skills, and setting priorities for the Board of Education in support of the organization's goals.
6. The Board commits to conduct an annual self-evaluation, which may be included in the Superintendent's evaluation in order to align/assess the Board's work with the success of the District.

C. Monitoring Protocols

1. The Board agrees to meet annually to review its protocols and make adjustments as necessary to ensure strong, visionary leadership and optimal efficiency.
2. If protocols are not adhered to, Trustees agree to first work person-to-person, meaning they will try to work out the issue with one another.
 - a. If this does not produce satisfactory outcome, then the concerned Trustee shall speak with the Board President or designee to help facilitate a discussion/resolution, and if this does not address the concerns, an outside mediator may be engaged.

D. Communications

1. The Superintendent and Trustees commit to open dialogue with one another in order to avoid surprises to the Governance Team and staff.
2. The Superintendent will provide relevant, timely, and thorough information to Trustees through a weekly update, and may utilize the following communication channels to address concerns or questions in a timely manner:
 - a. Bi-weekly check-ins, texts, and phone calls
3. In order to ensure that all Trustees receive the same information prior to a meeting, and to keep the Superintendent informed of Trustees' questions and concerns, requests for information should be directed to the Superintendent's Office.
 - a. The Trustee will receive the information and it will also be provided to the other Trustees through a weekly update or other communication.
4. The Board understands the distinction between Board and staff roles and will refrain from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the Superintendent and staff.
5. The Superintendent's Office will provide the Board with a Governance Calendar.

6. The Superintendent will make an effort to meet at least every 2 weeks with individual Trustees to discuss items of mutual interest and concern.
7. The Board President will respond to email correspondence that is addressed to the full Board.

E. Maintaining Confidentiality

1. The Board, Superintendent, and cabinet members agree to maintain the confidentiality of all closed session and privileged communications as required by Education Code.
 - a. Such matters relate to personnel issues, litigation, real property negotiations, and labor negotiations.
2. Trustees should address concerns that may arise to the Superintendent and not to individual staff members.
3. Trustees will not personally advocate for an individual's hiring, promotion, demotion, or termination.
4. The Board will provide clear parameters to the District's negotiation team members, including the tone preferred for productive discussions at the table, and will not address, verbally or non-verbally, issues of negotiations with employee bargaining unit members.

F. Trustee Role in Public and All Forms of Media

1. Trustees visiting a school will inform the Superintendent and principal in advance.
 - a. Trustees should avoid making evaluative comments about an employee's performance when visiting school sites, in public, and/or in the media.
2. As a courtesy, Trustees will inform their fellow Trustee if they visit a school site/s in that Trustee's area.
3. If an invitation is issued to all Trustees, the Trustees shall notify the executive assistant who will place the event on the calendar; staff will create/maintain and RSVP process to help clarify who will be in attendance.
4. Trustees agree to follow all safety protocols when visiting school sites.
5. Trustees will be introduced at all school and District events unless they are attending as a parent or spectator.
6. Trustees will contact the Superintendent should the media contact them.
7. Individual Trustees represent the District in an official capacity only when appointed by the Board in that capacity.
 - a. Trustees will inform the Board and Superintendent when asked to represent the District in their capacity as a Trustee.
8. In high profile situations, the Superintendent or Board President will be the spokespersons for the District to communicate a unified message.
9. In using social media to communicate District business, Trustees should:
 - a. Clarify that any statement made reflects their personal views and not necessarily their official position as a Member of the Board
 - b. Refrain from the deliberation of School District business before the vote
 - c. Direct all concerns from community members to the appropriate District administrator.
 - d. Freely consider posting or reposting content that the District has already approved.

G. Board Committees

The Governing Board may establish Board committees as necessary. Unless specifically authorized by the Board to act on its behalf, Board committees shall act in an advisory capacity. Any committee not required by law may be dissolved when its duties or term has been completed or whenever the Board deems necessary.

1. Purpose: Upon establishing a committee, the Board shall clearly define the committee's purpose, a timeline for completion of the assigned responsibilities, and stakeholder groups or individuals to be represented on the committee, length of time that the committee members are expected to serve, and expectations for reporting to the Board and/or the Superintendent or designee.
2. Unless exempted by law, Board-created committees shall provide public notice of their meetings and conduct meetings in accordance with the Brown Act.

H. Staff Relationships

1. Trustees may request information:
 - a. Directly from the Superintendent
 - b. From members of executive cabinet, with a copy to the Superintendent as a courtesy to keep them informed.
2. If a Trustee contacts a member of executive cabinet by phone, the staff member shall keep the Superintendent informed.
3. Trustees will share any concerns about staff to the Superintendent and will refrain from disparaging staff members in public.
4. Official visits to school sites are encouraged and should be arranged through the Superintendent's office.
 - a. This does not include attendance at campus events such as athletic contests, performances, etc.
5. Trustees recognize that they are not to do staff work.
6. Trustees will treat all staff with respect.

I. Handling Concerns

The Board and Superintendent are committed to having parent and/or staff concerns handled at the level closest to the point of interest/concern e.g., the school site, the department, etc. where those involved in the issue can resolve the matter.

1. Trustees should not solicit information from staff regarding other staff members.
2. Trustees will listen to and relay any concern to the Superintendent, and will not remain directly involved in the complaint process.
3. Trustees will refer parent or staff concerns to the Superintendent.
 - a. The Superintendent will investigate the concern in a timely manner, respond, and communicate back to the complainant and the Trustee.
4. A Trustee forwarding a complaint will not be perceived as endorsing the complaint.
5. If a Trustee is a parent in the District and has concerns regarding their child/ren, they may consult with the Superintendent on the best course of action to ensure the matter/s are properly and promptly attended to without causing concerns due to the Trustee's official role.
6. When communicating with staff as a parent, Trustees will use their personal email accounts.
 - a. If staff reach out or respond to the Trustee's District email account, the Trustee shall politely remind them to use their personal email when communicating about personal matters.

J. Prior to Board Meetings

1. Trustees will thoroughly read materials before the Board Meeting and contact the Superintendent with any questions they have on the agenda no later than 10 a.m. on the Monday before the meeting.
 - a. The purpose of asking questions in advance of the meeting is to ensure that staff is prepared to make the Board's meetings as efficient and effective as possible.
2. Trustees' questions will be answered and provided to all Trustees prior to the meeting.
3. To avoid Brown Act violations, Trustees will not communicate with more than two other Trustees regarding items that the Board will be acting on.
4. Trustees will notify the Superintendent and Board President, in advance, of their intent to remove an item from the Consent Agenda for separate consideration so that the appropriate staff member may be included in the Board Meeting to provide further information on the item if needed.
5. Trustees may request that an issue be agendized by making a request to the Superintendent or Board President.
 - a. The item will be placed on the agenda according to the bylaws and after giving staff time to prepare for the item.
6. When a high-profile item is being considered by the Board, any disagreements or concerns should be discussed with the Superintendent before the meeting.

K. Board Meetings

1. Individual Trustees will be acknowledged by the Board President prior to making a comment.
2. Each Trustee will respect the right of other Trustees to hold an opposing point of view and, following a Board vote, will support the decision made by the Board.
3. Trustees will not engage with audience members unless they are speaking from the podium with an agendized address to the Board.
4. Trustees will be mindful of their commitment to honor diverse thinking and their obligation to hear all points of view, treating all speakers, including staff, with respect and modeling civility.
5. Trustees agree that it is a courtesy to each other and to the full Board to share the reason for a dissenting vote during deliberation.
6. All team members will be respectful of each other and recognize the impact of comments made in public toward one another.
7. The Superintendent or a Trustee should not bring a matter to a public meeting that is a surprise to the Governance Team.
8. Study sessions will be developed throughout the year on issues that require extensive discussion.
9. Board and management team members will be fully engaged at all meetings and avoid electronic or other distractions not related to the meeting.
10. Trustees will attend all regularly scheduled Board Meetings and study sessions unless there are extenuating circumstances.
11. The Superintendent and Board will review protocols related to recessing Board Meetings, clearing the Board Room, and continuance of meetings.

Board Adoption: 5-19-26