



401 Nut Tree Road, Vacaville, CA 95687

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.

Board of Trustees

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Unity of Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities, Norms, Agreements

This handbook reflects the governance team’s work on creation of a framework for effective governance. This involves ongoing discussions about unity of purpose, roles, norms and coming to agreement 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 February 20 and 27, 2021, with the assistance of Walt L. Hanline, Ed.D., Executive Director of the National Center for Executive Leadership and School Board Development. This Governance Handbook was approved by the Board on March 18, 2021.

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?

We believe that by being an effective School Board we will:

- Guide the Vacaville School District to provide the best learning environment for **all** students.
- Build trust while moving the district forward.
- Understand our individual jobs and collective responsibilities.
- Be a team with a common focused direction, not a distraction to the District or community.
- Be partners with the staff in positive change.
- Oversee the putting together of a first-rate program and first-rate facilities.
- Perpetuate a legacy of positive culture as people come and go.

Roles and Responsibilities

Mutual agreement on the roles of the Board and Superintendent

The role of Trustees is to stay focused on the big picture while fulfilling five responsibilities.

These five responsibilities are:

1. Setting direction: make learning for all students a priority.
2. Establish structure: establish policies for district operations and allocate resources to support operations that align with the Board's priorities.
3. Provide support: create a culture of strong support and high expectations.
4. Ensure accountability: measure the performance of the Board, the Superintendent, and the District.
5. Engage the community: seek community input, share results of district performance, and engage the community to help improve student performance.

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

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

In addition to meeting the norms below in order to create a positive culture and atmosphere, we agree to act in ways that will help us meet the CSBA Professional Governance Standards.

WE AGREE TO –

- Keep from taking disagreements personally (individuality is embraced, respected).
- 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.
- Make a commitment 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 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 our students! This is what we do! And it is the touchstone that allows us to have our differences.

Board Governance Protocols

Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

The only authority to direct actions rests with the quorum of the Board sitting at the Board table. A majority vote sets such direction. 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.

As a Board, we recognize that no individual member of the Board, by virtue of holding office, shall exercise any administrative or investigatory responsibility with respect to the schools; nor as an individual, command the services of any employee. Board members are to channel their requests and/or concerns directly to the Superintendent (and, if necessary, through the Board President).

Board policies (Board Bylaws 9000, 9200 and 9300) of the District relate to the role and responsibility of the Board collectively and Board members individually.

When a complaint is made to a Board member, the member is encouraged to listen carefully, remembering that only one side of the story is being presented. The member will then direct the complainant to the staff member most appropriate and able to help them resolve their concern, making sure the person understands the appropriate order of whom to contact (teacher, then principal, then district staff) and is aware of any formal forms or policies that might assist them (e.g., written complaint form). When appropriate, communicate to the Superintendent.

When interacting with the public and constituents, Board Members will hold to the highest level of professional and ethical conduct, including emphasizing the positive aspects of the District.

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

When individually visiting schools or departments, as a Board Member and 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.

The Board’s Role and Relationship with the Staff and Community (continued)

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.

Management staff are directed to relay requests from Board Members to the Superintendent to ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Board Members.

This protocol does not imply a censoring of informal personal conversation.

Board Meetings and the Agenda

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.

Board meetings will be generally held on the First and Third Thursday of each month. Each Board meeting will begin with Closed Session at 5:30 pm. The Regular Public Meeting will begin at 6:30 pm. Study Sessions may be scheduled and shall be scheduled at the discretion of the Board.

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.

Critical to effective discussion and deliberation is clarification of the agenda placement process, appropriate placement of items on the Board agenda, and sufficient time for gathering information on the issue.

Any Board member or member of the public may request that a matter within the jurisdiction of the Board be placed on the board meeting agenda. Agenda items will reflect the District’s focus on student learning.

Board Meetings and the Agenda (continued)

The following steps outline the process for submitting an item for the Board Meeting agenda.

Step 1 - The request must be submitted in writing to the Superintendent with supporting documentation at least 10 days before the scheduled meeting date. Items submitted less than 10 days before the scheduled meeting date may be postponed to a later meeting in order to allow sufficient time for consideration and research of the issue.

Step 2 - The Board President and Superintendent shall decide whether a request is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board. Items not within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board may not be placed on the agenda.

Step 3 - The Board President and Superintendent shall determine if the item is a request for information or whether the issue is covered by an existing policy or administrative regulation before placing the item on the agenda.

The Board President and Superintendent shall decide whether an agenda item is appropriate for discussion in open or closed session, and whether the item should be an action item, informational item, or consent item.

The Superintendent, with the support of 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 agenda development shall follow the process below:

Step 1 – Board President and Superintendent meet to plan agenda on Monday

Step 2 – Draft agenda sent to all Board Members on Monday following agenda planning

Step 3 – Comments or changes to the agendas are communicated to the Superintendent within 24 hours

Step 4 – Agenda posted on Friday prior to meeting

Step 5 – Board meeting on the following Thursday

- When planning for Board agenda items, the Superintendent and the Board President should consider whether to schedule a study session prior to the action coming before the Board.
- Whenever appropriate, the Action item should come before the Board twice, first as a discussion item and second as an Action item.

Board Meetings and the Agenda (continued)

Board members will make every effort to submit to the Superintendent, prior to the meeting, questions they intend to ask so that the Superintendent and district staff have the opportunity to prepare to answer Board members' questions at Board meetings.

When an individual Board member request 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 that staff may not have the information on hand to answer the question.

The ability to make informed decisions is critical to Board effectiveness. Board Members should be informed and knowledgeable on agenda topics.

- Board Members have equal access to information.
- Communication is open and transparent. Surprises are minimized.
- Trustees will make every attempt to ask questions prior to the Board meeting, even if they intend to ask the question again at the public meeting. The Superintendent will distribute to all trustees answers to questions, if appropriate. Trustees will be mindful of time needed for preparation and ask questions as early as possible.

Individual Board Members will self-monitor to ensure one person's request for information does not divert an inappropriate amount of time from staff efforts to achieve district goals.

Individual Board Members are expected to self-monitor compliance to Public Meeting laws, including limiting Closed Session to the legally appropriate agenda item(s).

Board Members need equal access to information, and will operate within the boundaries established within the Public Meeting law. The use of email and social communication is subject to the Public Meeting law. The Superintendent shall forward questions and answers to all Board Members. Board Members, when responding, shall not "reply to all."

Board Members shall maintain the confidentiality of Closed Session and shall not release confidential information unless the release of said information is directed by the action of the Board.

Board Meetings and the Agenda (continued)

Board Members will read the information provided to them and commit to ongoing professional development and training.

Board Members will model professional behavior by being polite and respectful of the points of view held by their fellow Governance Team members.

Board Members want to hear public comment and want to ensure that the process of engagement is clearly stated and consistently managed.

- The Board President facilitates the Board meeting and ensures that all trustees have an opportunity to speak.
- When asking questions of staff, the Board member will press the speaker button and state, when called upon, “Mr. President, I would like to ask Superintendent ...” The Superintendent will invite staff to speak on an issue when appropriate.
- The Board President will remind the public that a topic/issue/concern may be addressed during the comments from the floor on items not on the agenda. The written Board agenda will include a statement that the board will listen and ask clarifying questions, but cannot engage in extended dialogue on non-agenda items.
- The Board President facilitates the public input and thanks the members of the public for their input/comment.
- The Board President, when appropriate, will remind the audience about no applause.

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 efficiently managed.

When addressing each agenda item the Board shall, normally, adhere to the following process:

- ❖ Input from the community
- ❖ Staff presentation/addressing questions from the Board:
When presenting items to the Board, when necessary, staff will provide back-up material for the Board to review prior to the Board meeting. Presentations are to be limited to not more than 10 minutes, unless prior approval of the Board President is received. Staff and Student Recognitions shall be limited to 3 minutes each.
- ❖ Superintendent shall clarify, if needed
- ❖ Board discussion and deliberation

Board Meetings and the Agenda (continued)

In most circumstances, the protocol to be used to elect the officers of the Board will follow a seniority rotation into the leadership roles of the Board.

Seniority is determined by the year in which an individual is elected or appointed. If multiple new members are elected in the same year, then lots shall be drawn to establish seniority. (Contact the Superintendent's Office for the chart on the details for process that will be followed).

Due to personal circumstance (e.g., medical reasons), a Board member who is next in line to serve as Clerk, Vice President or President may elect not to rotate into the leadership position at an organizational meeting. If this occurs, (due to medical reasons) the member would remain in the order of succession with future first right of refusal.

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

- Cell phones will be set for 'silent' or vibrate.
- Trustees will be discreet in checking cell phones, if necessary.
- During a Board meeting, Board Members shall not electronically communicate on issues regarding the district.
- When meeting virtually, whenever possible, Trustee cameras will be on during the meeting.

The Board believes that when no legal conflict of interest requires abstention, its members have a duty to vote on issues before them. When a member abstains, his/her abstention shall not be counted for purposes of determining whether a majority of the membership of the Board has taken action.

New Board Member Training (Elected or Appointed):

In addition to the administrative orientation by the Superintendent and senior staff, new members will be given an "orientation to the Board," in a Study Session.

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.

The meeting is intended to be a conversation and overview of the things members need to know immediately. Questions will be answered, and the Board meeting structure,

Board Meetings and the Agenda (continued)

the Superintendent contract, superintendent objectives, Board policies, overview of the services and programs, and the major challenges being faced, will be outlined and discussed.

Each session may be slightly different depending upon the needs and interests of the incoming members and the major issues before the Board.

The Board's Role with Expulsions

The Board's role is to review the due process aspects of an administrative advisory panel's decision/action and to determine that the recommendation is appropriate and consistent with the policies and philosophy of the Board.

The Board's role in the expulsion process is detailed in Board Policy Exhibit 5144. As stated in Exhibit 5144, the Board considers expulsions in closed session with no staff members present. During the closed session deliberations, the Superintendent or designee will be available if the Board needs clarification on the findings and recommendations. The clarification shall not include questions regarding additional evidence that could have or should have been presented at the expulsion hearing.

Closed Session Process – Parents NOT in Attendance

Board President – Relates to the staff and the Board, *“We will deliberate, in private, and report out our decision in the public meeting. We will also inform the Superintendent of our decision and the specifics of our decision. We will direct the Superintendent or designee to inform the parents of our decision, at the earliest possible date. Thank you staff for your work and please leave the room to allow the Board to deliberate on the expulsion recommendations presented to the Board.”*

Closed Session Process – Parents in Attendance

Superintendent – Introduces the Board President by name and the trustees as individuals, and then asks the parents to be seated.

Board President – *“It is not the intention of the Board to rehear the case that was presented to the Administrative Panel. We wish to hear what you have to say and perhaps ask questions prior to our making a decision regarding this expulsion. What would you like us to know?”*

The Board's Role with Expulsions (continued)

At the conclusion of the session – *“We will deliberate, in private, and we will be report out our decision in the public meeting. We will also inform the Superintendent of our decision and the specifics of our decision. The Superintendent or designee will inform you (the parents) of our decision at the earliest possible date.”*

The Board's Role in Collective Bargaining

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:

- Ensure that the ethical, fiscal and educational goals of the Community are represented in the actions taken throughout the collective bargaining process;
- 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;
- Establish the bargaining approach to be utilized by its negotiation team;
- Set the District's collective bargaining parameters for its negotiation team;
- 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
- The Superintendent is the Collective Bargaining Spokesperson for the Board.

The Board's Relationship with the Superintendent

The Board will commit to work through and with the Superintendent on issues regarding the running of the District. The Superintendent will inform the Board as soon as possible of:

- ✓ serious safety concerns
- ✓ serious disciplinary action
- ✓ serious/unexpected personnel changes or disciplinary issues
- ✓ serious illness or death of a student, a staff member, or members of the staff member's immediate family
- ✓ legal or liability concerns
- ✓ notable achievements

In all matters, the Board and Superintendent are expected to protect confidential information.

The Board's Relationship with the Superintendent (continued)

It is the Superintendent's responsibility to organize the staff in the manner that best serves the needs of the District. In advance of the assignment/reassignment of significant staff positions, the Superintendent shall consult with the Board.

As the norm, the Superintendent speaks on behalf of the Board. The Board President is authorized to speak on behalf of the Board, when directed by the majority of the Board. Individual Board members reserve the right to express their individual point of view. The Superintendent will inform the Board when media contacts the Superintendent.

All conflicts between the Superintendent and the Board will be handled in Closed Session, with the Superintendent being in attendance, except 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 September. 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.

The Ongoing Implementation of Board Approved Protocols

As soon as practical following 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.

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