



SONORA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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.

Board of Trustees

Nancy Scott, President

David Wheeler, Clerk

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Superintendent

Ed Pelfrey

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 developed in a Board Governance workshop conducted on September 30, 2019, with the assistance of Walt L. Hanline, Ed.D., Executive Director of the National Center for Executive Leadership and School Board Development. **The Governance Handbook was approved on January 24, 2023.**

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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.

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 in a series of job areas. These five responsibilities are:

1. We set the direction.
2. We establish the structure.
3. We provide support.
4. We ensure accountability.
5. 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.

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

Board Governance Protocols

1. Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

- 1.1. Board members carry authority only as 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.

In order to be effective representatives of the Board and District, members will:

- Behave at all times in a manner that reflects positively on the District.
- Refrain from obligating the Board and/or administration by actual speech or implication, unless authorized to do so by the Board.
- Represent the Board at various school events, particularly those held at specific sites assigned annually on a rotating basis.
- Refer any concerns, questions, or comments to the Superintendent as specified in the protocol on Responding to Concerns.
- Reinforce with the community the key messages agreed upon by the Board.

- 1.2. In responding to concerns regarding the work of the District, Board members will:

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

- *Repeat* the information – paraphrase to ensure understanding
 - *Share* the appropriate line of command and process to follow to address their concern.
 - *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.
 - *Report* – In a timely manner, inform the Superintendent, with the Superintendent appropriately responding to the individual and/or Board member.
- 1.3. 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.

2. The Board’s Role and Relationship with the Staff and Community

- 2.1. When individually visiting schools or departments, 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.

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.

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.

- 2.2. 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.

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 any private and informal conversations.

3. Board Meetings and the Agenda

- 3.1. 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.
- 3.2. Regular Board meetings are approved in December as part of the annual Board meeting calendar. 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.
- 3.3. 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 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.
- 3.4. 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
 - Superintendent provides to the Board at Board Meeting, with 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 Reports and Information, and is considered as 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 place under the Action Section of the Board Agenda (Second Reading and Approval).

3.5. Board members will make every effort to submit, 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 requests information, that information will be provided to all Board members. If unforeseen questions arrive 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.

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

3.7. Board members need equal access to information, and to 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, may not “reply to all.”

- 3.8. The Board wishes to maintain a culture of professionalism, stay focused, and respect the need of trustees to be available to their families:
 - Electronic devices will be set for ‘silent’ or vibrate.
 - Trustees will be discreet in checking electronic devices.
- 3.9. 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.
- 3.10. Board members will review the information provided to them and be open to ongoing professional development and training.
- 3.11. Each Board member respects the right of other Board members to vote in the minority position. As a courtesy to the team, Board members are encouraged, but not required, to explain the reason for their minority vote, either during deliberation or after casting the vote.
- 3.12. 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 three of five members voting for an item. Once the decision has been made, it becomes the decision of “the Board.”

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.

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.

3.13. 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:

- Input from the Community
- Staff Presentation/addressing questions from the Board

(Staff members, when presenting items to the Board, are to provide appropriate back-up material for the Board to review prior to the Board meeting. If it is 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.)

- Board Discussion and Deliberation

3.14. 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.

3.15. Upon the request of an individual Board member, a roll call vote will be provided.

The protocol for recording the votes of the individual Board members shall follow the rotation established by the Board; with the first vote recorded being that of the Past President and the last vote would be that of the current President of the Board.

3.16. Since the Public Meeting Law (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.

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.

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.

If a Governance Team 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 clarifying or correcting. Any further discussion should be agendaized.

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

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

Where an actual legal conflict of interest exists, the member must publicly declare the conflict and recuse him or herself from voting at all.

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

- 3.18. 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 information items published by the District and about the District, including District approved organizations such as Parent Teacher Associations/Boosters, etc.

- 3.19. Whenever Board members are appointed or elected to serve on the Board, the Superintendent shall administer the Oath of Office at a meeting of the Board.

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:

- 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.

5. The Board's Relationship with the Superintendent

5.1. 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.

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. 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 media contacts the Superintendent.

- 5.4. 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.).

- 5.5. The Board commits to complete an annual evaluation of the Superintendent. The Board will set aside at least one special meeting in October 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 January. 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.

6. The Ongoing Implementation of Board Approved Protocols

- 6.1. 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.

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

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

- 6.2. 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.

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.