



"Together, We Can Make a Difference"

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

President, Michael Brennan

Clerk, Cindy Rhorer

Member, Kurt Bayers

Member, Rachel Bell

Member, Casey Kerns

Superintendent

Ben Howell

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 February 28, 2020, 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 initially approved on March 10, 2020. This living document was last revised on March 9, 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?

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.

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 order 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, 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.

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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.
- 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.
- Behave at all times in a manner that reflects positively on the District.

- 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
- *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.
- *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.

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 be on the Second Tuesday's of each month. Each Board meeting will begin with Closed Session at 5:45 pm. The Regular Public Meeting will begin at 6:15 pm. 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. Board members will review the information provided to them and be open to ongoing professional development and training.
- 2.5. 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.

- 2.6. Board members will make every effort to submit, prior to the meeting, questions they intend to ask so that the Superintendent and district staff has 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.

- 2.7. Any request of the staff, 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.
- 2.8. Individual Board members are expected to self-monitor compliance to Public Meeting laws, including limiting Closed Session to the legally appropriate agenda item(s).
- 2.9. **Public Participation:** Since the Public Meeting Law (Brown Act) expressly prohibits discussion leading to action from being conducted unless agendaized, 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.

- 2.10. 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:
- Staff Presentation/addressing questions from the Board
 - Input from the Community
 - Board Discussion and Deliberation
- 2.11. 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.
- 2.12. 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."
- 2.13. 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.
- 2.14. 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/her abstention shall not be counted for purposes of determining whether a majority of the membership of the Board has taken action

- 2.15. Board members will model professional behavior by being polite and respectful of the points of view held by their fellow Governance Team members.
- 2.16. Each Board member respects the right of other Board member to vote in the minority position. If 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.
- 2.17. 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 of the Board 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.

- 2.18. 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.
- 2.19. Whenever Board members are appointed or elected to serve on the Board, the Superintendent shall administer the Oath Office at a meeting of the Board.

2.20. Chart of Policy Revision Process

Step 1 - District Receives Policy Update Packet from CSBA

Step 2 - Superintendent or designee prints Policies for Superintendent Review and Comments

Step 3 - Superintendent Reviews Updated Recommended Policy Changes. 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 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.

Step 6 – (Board Meeting 2) 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

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 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.

- 3.2. 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.

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 and a staff member.
 - 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. Any complaints against the superintendent and a member of the school staff or the public will be handled through the district's universal complaint process. A complaint that is filed will be handled by the board president who will conduct any investigations and receive information from the complainant. The board president and one other member will handle the complaint in accordance with the district's adopted universal complaint procedure. The board will meet in closed session to confirm

regarding the complaint. Any complaint against the superintendent will be handled in Closed Session, with the Superintendent being in attendance, when appropriate and necessary.

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

6. The Ongoing Implementation of Board Approved Protocols

6.1. New Board Members (Elected or Appointed)

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 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.

- 6.3 The Board will annually schedule a special meeting to review this living document to reviewing and updating of the governance protocols of the Board.

We, the Governing Board of the Summerville Elementary School District agree to this *framework for effective governance created through our collaborative efforts as a governance team. The creations of this handbook and future revisions involved 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.*

Date Approved: Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Signed:

Board President

Board Clerk

Board Member

Board Member

Board Member

Attest:

Dated: _____

Superintendent
Summerville Elementary School District

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