p

Stanislaus Union School District

GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

The Board of Trustees 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

Gilbert Jackson, President

Susan Elliott, Clerk

Nate Howard, Member

Norm Lee, Member

Jeff McKay, Member

Superintendent

Dr. Britta Skavdahl

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.

Stanislaus Union School District

Mission Statement

The mission of Stanislaus Union School District, as the premier district of choice in partnership with the community, is to ensure the ultimate educational experience for all children.

Building An Effective 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.

There are three dimensions to the effective governance of any organization. They are (1) The actions of an individual; (2) a group coming together to govern; and (3) the performance of governance responsibilities by the group.

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.

Effective governance tenets encompass the basic characteristics and behaviors that enable governance team members to effectively create a climate for excellence in a school district and maintain the focus on improved student learning and achievement. (CSBA)

What do we, as a governance team, want to accomplish?
What do we stand for?

Unity of Purpose is a common focus, overarching goals, and the values and beliefs governance team members share about children, the district and public education that help them transcend their individual differences to fulfill a greater purpose. (CSBA)

- 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 who sit on locally elected school boards is to ensure school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of their communities Boards fulfill this role by performing five major responsibilities. These five responsibilities are:

1. Setting a direction for the district
2. Establishing an effective and efficient organizational structure for the district
3. Providing support for the Superintendent and staff
4. Ensuring accountability to the public for the performance of the district's schools
5. Providing community leadership and advocacy on behalf of the district and public education

Trustees 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. **(See Board Bylaw 9000)**

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

is vital that the board and superintendent have a respectful and productive working relationship based on trust and open communications.

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 –

1. Keep the district focused on learning and achievement for all students.
2. Communicate a common vision.
3. Operate openly, with trust and dignity.
4. Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect.
5. Govern within Board adopted policies and procedures.
6. Take collective responsibility for the Board's performance.

8. Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform Board deliberation.

(Board Bylaw 9005)

The Board's effectiveness is enhanced through the establishment of structure and protocols that define how board members and the superintendent will operate within the team. Protocols explicitly define governance principals, mutually agreed upon expectations, and specific processes under which the team will operate and assist its effectiveness. There are general protocols and those that are specific for the Board and the Superintendent.

Supportive Structures and Processes
Developing Protocols

Effective teams discuss and agree on the formal structures and processes used by the superintendent and the board in their functioning as a team – how the board will operate, how members agree they will do business in order to govern effectively.

~CSBA

Process for establishing protocols ...
There is a three-step process recommended for creating protocols for the board:

First: Identify the Issue:

Simply naming the issue is sufficient in most cases. For example: Staff/Board communication – process for board member site visits – bringing up new ideas – obtaining additional information – handling concerns or complaints from staff or community – agenda structure and planning – how to handle complex community issues, using e-mail to communicate, etc.

Second: Clarify the Issue:

Here it is important to agree on the problem the protocol is intended to solve, or in a more positive manner, to agree on what the protocol is intended to do and why it is important. At this point it is often helpful to define the parameters for the protocol: any rules or regulations that must be followed, beliefs or values that must be honored, pitfalls that should be avoided, etc.

Third: Write the Protocol:

Writing the specific language of a protocol in a way that the board can agree to is extremely important. Protocols ought not be adopted with majority/minority votes (3-2) since the entire board is expected to operate within the protocol scope.

Monitor, Evaluate and Review:

After agreeing on a set of protocols, governance teams should determine when and how protocols will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed. (For example, the governance team may agree to review all protocols annually at a governance workshop, or whenever a new member joins the team.)

Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

The only authority to direct actions rests with the full Board sitting at the Board table. A majority vote sets such direction. Individuals can request action by bringing up a new idea and will explain their interest in a particular course of action. 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, not the methods used to achieve those results.

Board Policies of the District relate to the role and responsibility of the Board collectively and Board members individually. “No individual member of the Board, by virtue of holding office, shall exercise any administrative 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.

Trustees will direct all requests to the superintendent. The superintendent will inform the Board regarding the implications of the request for staff capacity and work load.

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

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.

The Board will consistently abide by its formal processes so that all persons are treated fairly and equally. The Board will review its policies, bylaws and protocols relating to Board meeting management, revising or reaffirming them as appropriate.

Each trustee respects the right of other trustees to vote “no” on an issue; however, the trustees agree, as a courtesy to the team, to explain the reason for the “no” vote either during deliberation or before casting the vote.

When there is no conflict of interest that requires abstention, Board members have a duty to vote on all issues.

When a Board member abstains, his/her abstention shall be considered to concur with the action taken by the majority of those who vote, whether affirmatively or negatively.

When an individual Board member requests information, that information will be provided to all Board members. An individual Board member will, insofar as possible, work to let the Superintendent and staff know ahead of time when a request for information will be made in public so the staff can be prepared to provide an answer. 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.

The Board and Superintendent commit to providing all the information at their disposal that relates to the running of the District. When Board members have questions regarding the Board Packet, the individual Board member will channel said questions to the Superintendent, at least 24 hours prior to a Board meeting.

Board members will hold to the highest level of conduct, including emphasizing the positive when in public places or situations. Whenever appropriate, when responding to phone calls, emails, or visits from staff or community members, each Board member will channel concerns or complaints from such individuals to the Superintendent or appropriate staff member for action.

Board members will keep confidential information confidential at all times.

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 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 Board and Superintendent are expected to protect confidential information. The Superintendent will inform the Board as soon as possible of:

1. serious safety concerns
2. serious disciplinary action
3. serious / unexpected personnel changes
4. legal or liability concerns

5 ▪ notable achievements

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.

All conflicts between the Superintendent and the Board will be handled in Closed Session, before the Board, with the Board and Superintendent always being in attendance. Individual conflicts will be addressed privately between those who hold the conflict and will not involve the Board as a whole or part.

The board designates the superintendent as the official spokesperson for the district. The superintendent will inform the board, as appropriate, regarding media coverage for certain events and issues.

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

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

The Board assumes that the Management Team members who present to the Board are speaking as representatives of the Superintendent, and, as such, the Superintendent is responsible for all presentations to the Board. Additionally, the Superintendent has the right and the responsibility to interrupt, if necessary, the presentation of a staff member to clarify any issues that he/she believes appropriate.

Staff members are directed to channel any requests made by individual Board members directly to the Superintendent. Such a direction does not imply, to either the staff or to individual Board members, a censoring of any private and informal conversations. The imperative is that a staff member is not placed in a position, by a Board member, to provide any information (beyond the information that would be provided to any regular community member) and/or complete any duty as requested. Staff members are directed to relay requests from Board member to the Superintendent to ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Board members.

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.

When a complaint is made to the Board, the members are encouraged to listen carefully, remembering that only one side of the story is being presented. Trustees will then direct the complainant to the staff most appropriate and able to help them resolve their concern, making sure the person understands the appropriate order of who 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).

In responding to concerns or 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;

Direct the complainant to the staff most appropriate and able to help them resolve the concern;

Make 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 (i.e. written complaint form);

As soon as possible, inform the superintendent.

Board Meetings and the Agenda

Meetings of the Board are held in public, but are not open-forum town hall meetings.

The Board/Superintendent Team is symbolically recognized, in the Public Board Meeting, with the Board and Superintendent working together on the Dias. The Superintendent will serve as a direct resource to the Board President by sitting next to the President. The Superintendent will determine the best placement of staff reporting to 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 approval of the Board.

The superintendent, with the support of staff, will create each Board Agenda. Board members may request items to be placed on the agenda. Any item may be placed on the Board agenda by a Board member. Board members requesting to place an item on the agenda must follow Board policy and submit a written request 9 days prior to the scheduled Board meeting.

The Board President will meet with the Superintendent to discuss the contents of the agenda and the process that will be followed at the meeting, in advance of the Board Meeting.

Board meetings will be on the third Thursday of each month, unless otherwise noted in the Board calendar. Each Board meeting will begin with Closed Session at 5:45 pm. The Regular Public Meeting will begin at 7 pm. Study Sessions may be scheduled and shall be scheduled at the discretion of the Board. Special meetings may be called by the Board President or a majority of the Board (GC 54956).

When Board members have questions regarding the Board Packet, the individual Board member will channel said questions to the Superintendent, at least 24 hours prior to the Board meeting.

When an individual Board member requests information, that information will be provided to all Board members. An individual Board member will, insofar as possible, work to let the Superintendent and staff know ahead of time when a request for information will be made in public so the staff can be prepared to provide an answer. 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.

Each trustee has the obligation, in serving the community, to vote on each item presented to the Board. Abstention from voting must only take place when required by law, due to a potential conflict of interest and shall be proclaimed by the Board member. Board members have a duty to vote on all issues.

Each trustee respects the right of other trustees to vote "no" on an issue; however, the trustees agree, as a courtesy to the team, to explain the reason for the "no" vote either during deliberation or before casting the vote.

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.

The Ongoing Implementation of Board Approved Protocols

A Board workshop on the Board governance protocols and the Board Governance Handbook will be will be scheduled in January after each Board election to review governance team agreements and processes.

Evaluation of the Superintendent

The Board will annually complete a written evaluation of the Superintendent according to the timeline and requirements in the superintendent's contract.

The evaluation instrument should be designed to bring about the collective view of the Board, as a whole. Thus, minimally the evaluation should reflect the majority view of the Board as a whole.

The Governance Handbook was developed in a Board Governance Workshop conducted on October 2, 2013, with the assistance of Wendell Chun, Ed.D., Executive Director of Education Leadership Services. The Governance Handbook was approved by the Board of Trustees on . 2013