



14713 Weedpatch Highway, Bakersfield, CA
Adopted: March 10, 2014

Governance Handbook

Effective governance teams discuss and agree upon the formal structures and processes, or protocols, used by both the Board of Trustees and the Superintendent in their functioning as a team. These structures and processes guide the operation of the governance team and determine how they do business. Protocols are the agreements that ensure that all members of the team are operating within their agreed upon roles.

Vineland Elementary School District Governance Team

Viviana Ramirez, President
Andy Stenderup, Clerk
Francisca Hernandez, Member
Freddy Medina, Member
Leticia Prado Member
Matthew W. Ross, Ed.D, Superintendent

Mission Statement

In a cooperative effort between students, staff, parents and community, Vineland School District will provide a caring, safe, and healthy environment where students may strive to reach their maximum potential in academic, intellectual, social, emotional, and physical skills. By integrating cultures through a common core of knowledge, students will have the opportunity to become positive, contributing members of society.

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SECTION I: PROFESSIONAL GOVERNANCE STANDARDS

The intent of these standards is to enhance the public’s understanding about the critical responsibilities of local boards and to support boards in their efforts to govern effectively.

THE INDIVIDUAL TRUSTEE

In California's public education system, a trustee is a person elected or appointed to serve on a school district or county board of education. Individual trustees bring unique skills, values and beliefs to their board. In order to govern effectively, individual trustees must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high quality education is provided to each student.

To be effective, an individual trustee:

- Understands that authority rests with the board as a whole and not with individual members.
- Understands the distinctions between board and staff roles, and refrains from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.
- Puts the educational and socio-emotional needs and interests of all children first.
- Values, supports and advocates for public education.
- Recognizes and respects differences of perspective and style on the board and among staff, students, parents and the community.
- Acts with dignity, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Keeps all oral and written confidential matters confidential. Confidentiality allows each member of the Board to be more open.
- Participates in professional development and commits the time and energy necessary to be an informed and effective leader.
- Asks questions
- Promotes their own issues and does not “carry the ball” for another person or organization.
- Contacts the Superintendent or Board President ahead of time to ensure there are no surprises.
- Refrains from harboring hidden agendas and openly deals with all issues and concerns.

THE BOARD

School districts and county offices of education are governed by boards, not by individual trustees. While understanding their separate roles, the board and superintendent work together as a "governance team." This team assumes collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture in order to govern effectively.

To operate effectively, the board must have a unity of purpose and:

- Put the educational and socio-emotional needs and interests of all the children first.
- Communicate a common vision.
- Operate openly, with trust and integrity (adhere to the Brown Act).
- Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect.
- Govern within board-adopted policies and procedures.
- Take collective responsibility for the board's performance.
- Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform board deliberations.
- Recognize the value of, and be fair with, the administrative staff.
- Emphasize planning, policy making, and communication, rather than becoming involved in the management of the schools.
- Work in a spirit of cooperation.
- Act as one body.
- Set clear goals for themselves, the Superintendent, and the District, as a whole.
- Utilize the Superintendent's input. The Superintendent should make recommendations, proposals, or suggestions on most matters that come before the Board.
- Practice efficient and effective decision-making.

THE BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary responsibilities of the board are to set a direction for the district, provide a structure by establishing policies, ensure accountability and provide community leadership on behalf of the district and public education. To fulfill these responsibilities, the board shall:

Effective Boards:

- Involve the community, parents, students and staff in developing a common vision for the district focused on learning and achievement and responsive to the needs of all students.
- Adopt, evaluate and update policies consistent with the law and the District's vision and goals.
- Maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress.
- Hire and support the Superintendent so that the vision, goals and policies of the District can be implemented.
- Conduct regular and timely evaluations of the Superintendent based on the vision, goals and performance of the District, and ensure that the superintendent holds district personnel accountable.
- Conducts periodic evaluation its own effectiveness.
- Adopt a fiscally responsible budget based on the District's vision and goals, and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the District.
- Ensure that a safe and appropriate educational environment is provided to all students.
- Establish a framework for the District's collective bargaining process and adopt responsible agreements.
- Provide community leadership on educational issues and advocate on behalf of students and public education at the local, state and federal levels.
- Do not publicly criticize staff, District Administration, or the Governance Leadership Team.
- Communicate with each other and the Superintendent.

THE SUPERINTENDENT

The Superintendent will:

- Serve as the Board's Chief Executive Officer and Advisor.
- Serve as the school system's educational leader.
- Keep the Board informed about school operations and programs.
- Interpret the needs of the school system to the Board.
- Manage the District's day-to-day operations.
- Act as liaison between staff and Board.
- Ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations.
- Generate goals and objectives for the District.
- Act in public relations role with the community and the media.
- Delegate responsibility to the appropriate staff members.
- Ensure that evaluations of management personnel are completed.
- Implement Board policies and recommend policy changes.
- Be visible and have a presence at the school sites.

VISION OF THE GOVERNANCE TEAM

Our Governance Team will foster:

- A common dedication to keep learning and achievement for all students our primary focus.
- Cooperation, collaboration, and communication among students, families, the community, staff members, and the Governing Board to build the connection necessary for success. The partnership created will generate understanding through involvement.
- A fiscally responsible budget based on the District's vision and goals.
- Nurturing and maintaining safe learning environments that encourage and support quality teaching.
- A healthy working and educational environment.

GOALS OF THE GOVERNANCE TEAM

Our Governance Team will:

- Demonstrate open and honest communication amongst one another and between the Board and the Superintendent.
- Demonstrate integrity and dignity, and understand the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Build and maintain public confidence in school governance.
- Provide students and staff with quality educational programs & facilities.
- Create, sustain, and enhance positive/safe learning environments.
- Address current and future enrollment growth and the implications for our existing resources.
- Develop a fiscally responsible budget based on the District's vision and goals, and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the District.
- Promote and strengthen the communication between parents, teachers, staff, and the Governing Board.
- Recruit and retain quality teachers and staff.
- Provide continuous professional development and support for classified, confidential, certificated and management personnel.
- Be thoughtful, well-informed, independent, hard-working decision makers.
- Generate goals and objectives for the District.
- Uphold personnel practices regarding the selection and hiring of all employees.
- Conduct an Annual Board/Superintendent Governance Workshop.
- Efficiently reallocate resources to deliver a quality education while remaining fiscally solvent.
- Involve the community, parents, students, and staff in developing a common vision for the District focused on learning and achievement, and responsive to the needs of all students.
- Be open minded before final Board action and united once final action is taken.
- Conduct ourselves in such a way that brings honor to the Board and makes the community proud.

ROLE OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

Our Governing Board will:

- Set the vision for the District.
- Establish a structural framework to support the vision.
 - Organization Chart
 - Adequate Facilities
 - Ensure safety of students/faculty
 - Ensure accountability for the programs established to accomplish the vision
- Ensure support and accountability for the programs established to accomplish the vision.
 - Hire, support, and evaluate the Superintendent
- Advocate for children and the District programs to the general public, community leaders, and local and state governmental leaders.
- Act as a conduit between the public and the District/Administration, as allowed by law.
 - Promote openness
 - Partnership with the community
 - Accountability to the community
 - Promote sense of achievement with students, faculty, staff and administration

SECTION II: BOARD OF TRUSTEES GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES

BOARD MEETING PREPARATION

District Staff

- The Staff needs to provide full information for agenda items in advance of a meeting (even for study sessions) so it can be reviewed prior to the meeting, and shall include the following:
 - Background information.
 - Whole picture summary.
 - Succinct details (as appropriate).
 - Options/ramifications/implications.
 - Recommendation (as appropriate) or status.

Board President Responsibilities

- Anticipates potential Board questions about agenda items.
- Requests needed additional information in advance.
- Reviews agenda items with Superintendent, as needed.
- Receives, and shares with Superintendent, Board meeting recommendations coming from other Board members.

Superintendent Responsibilities

- Anticipates potential Board questions/needed information.
 - Provides estimated timing for agenda items with the understanding that they remain flexible to meet discussion needs.
 - When a recommendation is made, shares with the Board:
 - The process used to reach recommendation (explain the process and identify the people involved).
 - The necessary background information/data.
 - Options considered/ramifications (advantages/disadvantages).
 - The reasoning behind the final recommendation.
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- Contacts Board members individually to provide specific information if:
 - Particular confidential information needs to be shared.
 - The item under discussion was initiated by that Board member.
 - Arranges for proper information, presentations, and staff to be available at Board meetings.

Board Member Responsibilities

- Board members will come to the board meetings prepared and ready to do business. If an individual Board member believes he/she doesn't have enough information or has questions, either the Superintendent or Board president is to be called before the meeting.
- Board members will not surprise each other or the Superintendent at the Board meeting, but will instead contact the Superintendent or Board President ahead of time.
- Advance Notice: Board Meeting and Agenda Due Dates.

Board Meeting Guidelines

Public Comments

- Members of the public may address the Board on an item of public interest, which is within the Board’s jurisdiction, as well as those items listed on the agenda. The law prohibits the Board from taking action on items not on the agenda. The Board will not respond to public comments or questions during the course of the meeting. If a member of the public desires a response from the District, they will be directed fill out the “Family and Community Comment/Question Form” and submit it to the District’s Administrative Secretary. All comments will be limited to three minutes, with a maximum of twenty minutes per topic/item.
 - General Comments
 - Comments on Open Session Agenda Items
 - Comments on Closed Session Agenda Items

Public Recognitions

- Give advance notice so persons being recognized can plan to attend.
- Where possible, streamline process by calling a series of names without applause in between.
- Announce award or reason for recognition before name(s).
- Where possible, avoid scheduling a large number of different recognitions in any single meeting.

Special Reports and Updates to the Board

- Written reports are sent with the agenda, or, at the latest, the Friday prior to the Board meeting and are not repeated orally.
- Oral reports, in a maximum 15 minute period, include:
 - Executive summary (concise).
 - Answers to questions posed in advance by Board or the staff.
 - (Note: reports involving demonstrations by students or staff may require more time.)

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- Question/answer/discussion periods with the Board should be limited to a maximum 15-minute period (extended upon Board consensus).
 - Response to new questions/requests for information is provided at a later date through Superintendent (update/staff memorandum/later report).

Consent and Action Agenda Items

- All items will be approved, adopted, or ratified.
- Items will be identified for consent vote only if they are routine items or issues which have been previously thoroughly addressed in a prior Board meeting.
- Each item will require a Motion, Discussion (if any), and a Call for the Question (vote).

Policy/Issue Board Member Discussions

- Time Limits
- The total elapsed time devoted to Board discussion of policies and issues will be limited to a maximum of 20 minutes per agenda item. Discussion may be extended beyond 20 minutes only by consensus or majority vote of the Board.
- Initial Discussion
- Recommended maximum 5-minute period for each Board member to state initial positions and reasoning; avoid repetition where possible.
- Summary Discussion
- Two 3-minute periods for each Board member to react to other opinions/restate positions/request needed new information.
- Action
 - Request needed information and next step, or
 - Vote on issue

Policy/Issue Public Hearing Discussions

- The total elapsed time devoted to public discussion of policies and issues will be limited to a maximum of 20 minutes per agenda item. Discussion may be extended beyond 20 minutes only by consensus or majority vote of the Board.
- The Board President requests public speakers to limit their comments to 3 minutes or less, and not to repeat prior remarks. They are also reminded that Public Hearing Comments become part of the official public record. Where appropriate, Brown Act limitations or confidentiality considerations shall be voiced for public knowledge.
- (Note: The Board President should remind the audience that Board Members may not discuss items that have not been agendized.)
- The Board is committed to respecting the needs of the audience to address the issue, as the demands of the agenda permit.
- The Board shall not enter into discussion/debate with the audience. Board meetings are held in public for information concerning district business. This is not a meeting of the public. Board members will not respond to public comments or questions during the course of the meeting.
- The Board President shall concisely summarize the input received and the plan of action.
- The Superintendent/staff will report at a later meeting the action and status, or resolution of the issue.
- When appropriate, a Board or staff member may provide immediate information.

Reports from the Superintendent or Board Members.

Reports from the Superintendent or the Board members are of general concerns which fall within scope of the Board, such as:

- Educational Issues
- Legislative Issues
- Community Issues
- Upcoming events

Closed Session

- The following are generally accepted closed session agenda items pursuant to the Brown Act:
 - License/permit determination
 - Conference with real property negotiators
 - Conference with legal counsel
 - Liability claims
 - Threat to public service or facilities
 - Public employee appointment
 - Public employment
 - Public employee performance evaluation
 - Public employee discipline/dismissal/release
 - Conference with labor negotiators
 - Case review/planning
 - Report involving trade secret
 - Hearings
 - Conference involving joint powers agency
 - Audit by California State Auditor's Office
- Once a closed session has been completed, the Board must convene in open session. If the Board took final action in the closed session, the Board may be required to make a report of the action taken and the vote thereon to the public in open session

General Board Meeting Rules

- Board meeting agenda shall be balanced in recognition, policy, report, and discussions items.
- Board members will refrain from playing to the audience or rallying others to attend a meeting for the sole purpose of supporting others' personal issue or promoting their own.
- Board members and staff follow agreed-upon guidelines.
- Board members do not expect immediate answers to new questions/requests for information and consider staff time required to meet requests.
- Staff members do not feel compelled to give immediate responses, but agree to gather answers/information for later date.
- When discussing problems, Board members and staff avoid public criticism of specific schools or personnel. Board members should be mindful that sometimes concerns expressed could appear to be critical in nature.
- Board members will avoid words and actions that create a negative impression on an individual, the Board, or the district. While debate and differing points of view, are encouraged, all discussions will be with care and respect to avoid an escalation of negative impressions or incidents.
- Board members are not compelled to speak to each issue; the Board President will ask for general reactions rather than call on each Board member individually unless specific consensus is being sought or issue positions are being clarified. The Board President will encourage the student representative to participate in issue discussions as appropriate.
- Board members and staff shall avoid:
 - Repeating own positions/opinions.
 - Repeating opinions/information already presented by other Board members/staff in order to preserve time for all Board members to speak.
- The Board President monitors meeting guidelines and provides respectful reminders to those who deviate.
- The Board President will remain alert to the needs of the attending audience and provide concise background or summary information as necessary, emphasizing previous Board discussions which preceded the final decision.

Critical/Sensitive Issue Decisions

- Board members will thoroughly inform themselves prior to votes on critical, sensitive issues.
 - Staff will provide substantial background information on all aspects of the issue.
 - Board members will request more information if needed.
- Board members voting "no" or abstaining are not required to state reasons for such votes during voting. When abstaining, a Board member may indicate briefly if it is for "conflict of interest reasons" or "missing prior discussions."
- When Board members request input or recommendations from committees, they should do so only when they are prone to accepting a range of possible, reasonable recommendations. The Board always retains the voting authority for the final decision.

New Issues for Board Meeting Discussion

- Board members may request the Board address a new concern by:
 - Contacting the Board President,
 - Contacting the Superintendent, or
 - Making the request at a Board meeting.
- If a new issue for future discussion is raised at a Board meeting, no discussion of the issue takes place at that time.
- The Board President refers the new issue to the Superintendent/staff who will recommend the appropriate process (Board agenda item, report, memorandum, etc.) and timeline to address the issue.
- The Superintendent/staff personally contacts a Board member who raises an issue and shares the information with other Board members.
- The Superintendent ensures follow-through.
- The Superintendent and Board remain alert and committed to involving key stakeholders in addressing issues and seeking solutions, and making clear to stakeholders the role they play, and where the ultimate decision lies.

Board Contacts with Staff/Schools

- Board members are encouraged to be visible, interested, positive forces in the schools and district sites. School visits provide the individual Board members with the opportunity to see the good things that are happening in the schools and to stay informed.
- Board member courtesies for school visits:
 - Make an advance appointment, where appropriate and possible.
 - Always check in at the main office to announce your arrival.
 - Confirm (and take caution to ensure) that your presence will not disrupt school activities and student learning.
 - Seek the positive in your observations; your visits are to support (not to critique) and to build (not tear down) our schools. Encourage the schools by telling them specifically what impresses you most.
 - If you observe concerns, or have critical questions, don't raise them during your visit. Instead, present them to the Superintendent for resolution and follow-through. The Superintendent will report results back to all Board members. This is not meant to preclude mutual discussion with the administrative staff about problems the site is addressing.
 - Acknowledge the time given to your visit. Send a note of thanks identifying your most positive observations.
 - Smile! The school staff may be nervous; your smile will help relieve concerns and assure staff that you are there in a role of support!
- Board members are encouraged to participate on school committees upon invitation and attend school activities; key rules for successful participation include:
 - Listen. Use the time to hear other points of view.
 - Speak seldom. Board members may not intend to, but Board comments may dominate because of the "Board Member" title. If sharing an idea, do it succinctly. Spend most of the time listening.
 - Be positive. In observations, suggestions, and outlook.

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- When Board members serve on various school committees their role shall be defined by the Board as a whole as either a silent observer or active participant.
 - Board members seeking answers to questions or resolutions to specific problems should follow these guidelines:
 - Present most questions, concerns, requests, or recommendations directly to the Superintendent; the Superintendent will follow through and then communicate the resolution to all Board members so all can be equally informed.
 - In some instances, it is appropriate to present questions or problems to specific District Office administrators. Unless clarification or routine, the administrator will share the issue and answer with all Board members.
 - Board members do not make personal requests for themselves or friends.
 - Board members avoid "micro managing" (i.e., giving specific direction or imposing solutions rather than giving policy direction).
 - Board members avoid making "snap judgments"; instead, they pose the question or concern to the Superintendent who will gather facts, pose solutions, and communicate the issue information to all Board members.
 - General Communication:
 - The Board:
 1. Shares questions, concerns, and problems with the Superintendent.
 2. Ensures that all Board members are kept informed.
 - The District Administrators:
 1. Respond in a timely manner to appropriate requests for information or questions from Board members.
 2. Provide adequate background information to support Board member decision-making.

Board Focus & Collaboration

- Board Focus
- Board member focus discussions, inquiries, and decisions on the needs of students and schools, avoiding personal interests and narrow concerns. Board members will not only address immediate needs, but also be visionary, future-oriented, and proactive.
- Board Collaboration
 - The Board maintains positive, productive relations with staff and employee associations by demonstrating interest and support through participation in joint activities, training, and school activities.
 - The Board supports and encourages staff, parent, and student involvement in key decisions which affect their schools. Board members avoid trying to be "experts" or "heroes" who "provide all the answers" themselves.
- The Board supports and encourages communication and collaboration with representative stakeholders in developing District visions, goals, policies, and priorities.
- Board members support and model interest-based problem-solving by:
 - Respecting the interests and opinions of others.
 - Keeping their minds open to alternative solutions.

Board Member Teamwork & Professionalism

- The Board works together as a governance team:
 - Respecting each other's opinions.
 - Avoiding attempts to "show each other up".
 - Supporting final Board decisions, even after an opposition vote.
 - Keeping communication open, courteous, and properly focused on student needs.
- Board members remain professionally prepared for their vital responsibility:
 - Reading Board reports prior to decisions.
 - Continuing training in District, education, and Board matters (CSBA workshops, student sessions, etc.).
 - Remaining knowledgeable about school programs and accomplishments.
 - Focusing on student learning, curriculum and instruction.
 - Avoiding any compromising situations, particularly those that jeopardize confidentiality.

School and Community Involvement

- Board members attend as many official annual school visitations as possible.
- Board members regularly attend school, classroom, PTA events, as well as other key school events (graduations, award ceremonies, performing arts events, etc.).
- Board members are encouraged to participate in City, Chamber, and other community events.
- Where appropriate, Board members should take the opportunity to share positive school news and accomplishments to groups and to individuals.

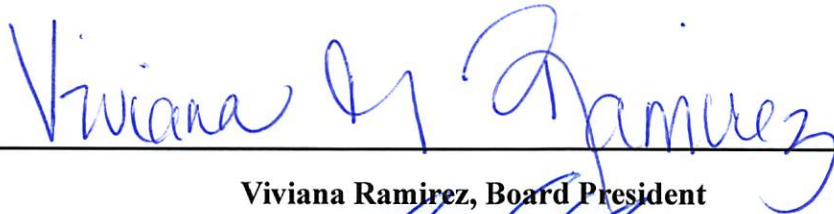
Complaints/Requests from the Public

- Board members who receive contact from the public or staff regarding concerns or complaints should follow the chain of command. The last stop, not the first, will be the Board of Trustees. While the board is eager to listen to its constituents and staff, each inquiry is to be referred to the Superintendent, who can properly and expeditiously address all the issues. When approached with a complaint:
 - Listen to the speaker, carefully noting concerns;
 - Recognize their feelings about the situation;
 - Acknowledge that the person has concerns and needs a response;
 - Ask, where appropriate, what steps they have taken or for clarification of details;
 - Explain that Board members do not solve specific problems, but will help in getting them referred to the right people;
 - Refer the person to the appropriate staff member or inform them that you will refer the problem to the Superintendent;
 - Call the Superintendent so he/she can follow through and inform all Board members about the issue, the plan to address it, and the ultimate resolution.

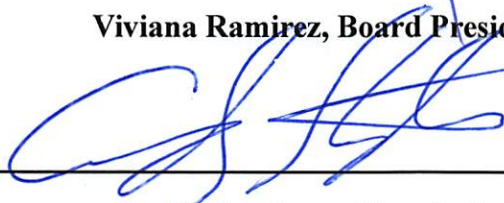
Legal Communication (Brown Act)

Any private individual or group interaction/discussion among Board members and/or staff to reach a consensus (or determine positions) is illegal and in violation of the Brown Act.

Adoption: March 10, 2014



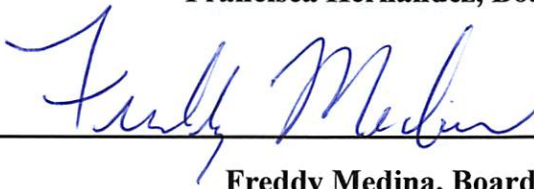
Viviana Ramirez, Board President



Andy Stenderup, Board Clerk



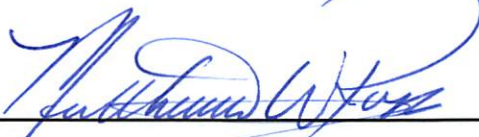
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Dr. Matthew W. Ross, Superintendent