



**AROMAS-SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Educate. Inspire. Succeed. Contribute.**

## **Board Governance Handbook**

### **Board of Trustees**

Casey Powers, President

Monica Martinez-Guaracha, Clerk

Briana Allan, Trustee

Anissa Dizon, Trustee

Dan Kerbs, Trustee

### **Superintendent**

Michele Huntoon

### **Unity of Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities, Norms, Agreements**

*This handbook reflects the governance team's work on the creation of a framework for effective governance. This involves ongoing discussions about the unity of purpose, roles, norms, and coming to an 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.*

# 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

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 will start and end meetings on time, as published in the agendas.*
- *We will prepare for meetings by researching topics and asking questions in advance.*
- *We will trust the expertise of District employees in implementing the mission and board policy.*
- *We will treat everyone in a respectful and fair manner and be open-minded to all points of view.*
- *We will create an environment where communication is accessible and audible for all.*
- *We will collectively support the authority of the Board as a whole, not as individuals.*
- *We will affirm the voices of the public while maintaining the structure under the Brown Act.*

### **WE AGREE TO –**

- Make a commitment to effective deliberation, each listening openly while everyone is allowed to express his or her point of view.
- 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 interests – 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 AND SUPERINTENDENT OPERATING PROCEDURES

### Purpose:

The Board of Trustees is the educational policymaking body for the District. To meet the District's challenges effectively, the Board and Superintendent must function together as a leadership team. To ensure unity among team members, effective operating procedures and protocols must be in place.

### The Board and Superintendent Will:

- Be dedicated to making all members of the team successful.
- Operate in an honorable and honest manner dedicated to the success of the students and staff of the District.
- Treat others and be treated with dignity and respect.

### Board Members Will:

- Work with other Board Members and the Superintendent to become a team devoted to students.
- Focus on policymaking, planning, and evaluation for student success.
- Recognize that the Board makes decisions as a whole only at properly scheduled meetings and that individual members have no authority to take individual action in policy or District/Site administrative matters.
- Respond to complaints by referring the complainant to the Superintendent.
- Support decisions of the majority after honoring the right of individual members to express opposing viewpoints and vote their convictions.
- Attend regularly scheduled Board meetings unless a situation occurs that makes attendance impossible.
- Cooperate in scheduling special meetings and/or work sessions for planning and training purposes.
- Participate in establishing annual expectations and goals for the Superintendent.
- Participate in self-assessment of the Board's performance.
- Communicate one-on-one with the Superintendent when an individual concern arises so as not to allow a matter to fester.
- Recognize the individual role of constituents and special interest groups while understanding the importance of using one's best judgment to represent all members of the community.

- Represent the District, when possible, by attending community functions.

Superintendent Will:

- Work toward creating a team with the Board dedicated to students.
- Respect and acknowledge the Board's role in setting policy and overseeing the performance of the Superintendent.
- Work with the Board to establish a clear vision for the District.
- Prepare preliminary goals annually for the Board's consideration.
- Provide data to the Board Members so that data-driven decisions can be made.
- Distribute information fully and equally to all Board Members.
- Communicate with Board Members promptly and effectively.
- Inform the Board prior to critical information becoming public.
- Share requests for information with all Board Members.
- Distribute the Board agenda in a timely fashion and with enough time for Board study, and clarify information prior to scheduled meetings.
- Respect the confidentiality requirement of Board meeting closed sessions; keep all conversations taking place in closed session strictly confidential.
- Publicly introduce Board Members at any events Board Members attend.
- Treat all Board Members professionally.
- Communicate privately with individual Board Members to determine if concerns exist prior to a possible problem developing.
- Conduct a self-assessment prior to the Board's evaluation of the Superintendent's job performance.
- Complete the Board's self-assessment instruments for the Board's consideration.
- Keep the Board informed regarding issues and/or situations that could possibly concern parents, students, staff, or community.
- Bring to the attention of the Board Members matters that affect relationships.
- Visit school sites regularly.
- Represent the District in the community.
- Endeavor to delegate duties to the appropriate persons.

# Board Governance Protocols

## 1. Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

- 1.1. Board members carry authority only as the Board, not as individuals. Individual Board members 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. The Board is to be focused on 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:

- Not obligate 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.
- 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. Responsibilities of Individual Board Members:

- Attend all **board and** assigned **committee** meetings.
- Be informed about the organization's mission, services, policies, and programs.
- Review agenda and supporting materials prior to board and committee meetings.
- Serve on committees or task forces and offer to take on special assignments.
- Advocate for and inform stakeholders about the district.
- Comply with conflict-of-interest and confidentiality policies and laws.
- Do not make special requests of the staff.
- Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, such as reviewing the annual budget and audit.

- 1.3. 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 Superintendent 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. The Superintendent will brief the Board member regarding the results of the interaction.

## 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, considering public input without re-engaging the public.
- 2.2. Board meetings are typically on the Second Wednesday of each month, beginning with the Closed Session at 6:30 pm. The Regular Public Meeting starts at 7:00 pm. Study Sessions may be scheduled and shall be 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. Community and Board Members may request an item be placed on a meeting agenda, with the Superintendent having discretion as to ~~when and what~~ **where the** items shall be included **on the agenda** while working closely with the President of the Board. Individual requests for reports, projects, etc. will be directed to the Superintendent.

- 2.5. Board members will review the information provided to them and be open to ongoing professional development and training.
- 2.6. 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.
- 2.7. Board members shall communicate directly with the Superintendent prior to Board meetings to address questions and/or concerns about agenda items. The inquiry is best accomplished through the submission of written questions/requests. All requests should be submitted at least 48 hours prior to the Board meeting. We will honor the "no-surprises" protocol.
- 2.8. 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.
- 2.9. Any request of the staff made to the Superintendent, **which the Superintendent determines** 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.
- 2.10. Individual Board members are expected to self-monitor compliance to Public Meeting laws, including limiting Closed Session to the legally appropriate agenda item(s).
- 2.11. **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 request 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.

2.12. 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, typically, adhere to the following process:

- 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.)*
- Input from the Community
- Board Discussion and Deliberation

2.13. The Governance Team will uphold the legal requirement for confidentiality on all matters, keeping all conversations taking place in closed session absolutely confidential. Respecting the confidentiality on matters coming before the Board maintains the Board’s judicial review role.

2.14. 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.”

2.15. 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.

2.16. 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, nor shall the member participate in the discussion.

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

2.18. Each Board member respects the right of other Board members 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 a vote.

2.19. 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, not to undermine the decision or directive.

2.20. Parliamentary procedures are to be utilized as a guide to ensure 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.

2.21. 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.

## 2.22. **Policy Approval Process**

Step 1 - District Receives Policy Update Packet from CSBA

Step 2 – Executive Assistant updates Policies with appropriate changes and prints updated Policies for Superintendent Review and Comments

Step 3 - Superintendent Reviews Updated Recommended Policy Changes and Superintendent provides to the Board at Board Meeting 1, 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 Action Items, 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 approved.

Step 6 – Board Meeting 1 - The polices 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 7 - Board Meeting 2 - 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 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.

3.2. As time permits, Board members will schedule school site visits and attend school functions.

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 the 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.

3.3. 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 the Superintendent 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 involved in the collective bargaining process only 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 through the Superintendent (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 working 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 the 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 shall objectively evaluate the Superintendent's performance and provide appropriate feedback. The Board commits to complete an annual evaluation of the Superintendent. The Board will set aside at least one special meeting in ~~November~~ **October** to complete 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~~ **November**. 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 the first Board meeting of the new Board member.

The orientation is intended to be a conversation and an overview of the things members need to know immediately. Questions will be answered, and the Board meeting structure, Superintendent contract, Superintendent objectives, Board policies, an 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 to review/updating the governance protocols of the Board.

Upon the request of two or more Board members, a special study session will be called to review/update the governance protocols of the Board.