

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District,
Board of Education
Governance Handbook

October 8, 2018

EVERY STUDENT. FUTURE READY. OUR PROMISE!

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I. GOVERNANCE AGREEMENT

The community entrusts the Board of Education for the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District to uphold the Constitutions of United States and California, to protect the public interest in district schools, and to ensure the district provides a high quality education to each student.

To effectively meet district challenges, the Board and Superintendent must function together as a governance leadership team with agreed upon behaviors (or norms) and operating procedures (or protocols) to support consistent behaviors and actions among team members.

The Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District Board of Education Governance Handbook helps to ensure a positive and productive working relationship among board members, the superintendent, district staff, students, and the community. Protocols developed for and by the members of the governance team may be modified over time as needed.

A. Mission Statement

The Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District, in collaboration with parents and community, shall develop in all students the knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes to empower them to become life-long learners and productive citizens in an ever-changing world. This will be accomplished in a climate that promotes high expectations, strives to meet individual needs, and values diversity.

B. Vision Statement

The Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District is leading our community into the future by developing students who are open and curious, skilled in critical thinking, working in teams, and using new and current technologies.

We personalize learning to meet the needs, motivations, and strengths of each student, ensuring every student graduates prepared to succeed in college, careers, and participate positively in our community's civic life.

C. Board of Education Goals

- Engaging and Responsive Climate and Culture
- College and Career Ready Graduates
- Exemplary Staff
- Parent and Community Engagement
- Access to Rigorous Instruction and Support
- Operational Excellence

II. GOVERNANCE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Board members serve as elected representatives of the Norwalk – La Mirada communities, to whom they are accountable. The primary relationship the Board of Education has is with the community, staff, students, and teachers.

Board leadership is best expressed by articulating what the district is to achieve for its community, staff, students and evaluating progress toward those ends — not by becoming immersed in the day-to-day operation of the district.

The Board speaks with one voice or none at all. Individual board members or board committees have no authority — only by acting as a body is Board authority expressed. Once a vote is taken, the Board has spoken, and decisions must be supported as decided.

A. The Board:

Articulates What the District is to achieve for its Community, Staff, and Students

- Provides ‘big-picture,’ visionary leadership; prescribes the ends for the district, but stays out of the means;
- Provides leadership on educational issues pertinent to the community and ensures that an appropriate inclusive process is used;
- Approves ‘setting direction’ documents (e.g., vision, mission, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators); and
- Fosters an environment within the district where excellence can be attained.

Establishes an Effective and Efficient Structure for the District

- Employs the superintendent;
- Works cooperatively with the superintendent to maintain a team effort in the prioritization of board goals;
- Delegates day-to-day management of the district to the superintendent;
- Adopts fair and responsible policies and procedures that guide district operations;
- Sets the direction for and adopts the curriculum;
- Establishes budget priorities, adopts the budget and oversees facilities issues; and
- Provides direction for and votes to accept collective bargaining agreements.

Ensures Accountability to the Public

- Evaluates the superintendent;
- Monitors student achievement and program effectiveness and requires program changes as needed by reviewing student outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of programs, actions, and services, including those provided to disadvantaged students;
- Monitors and adjusts district finances; and
- Serves as an appeals body.

Acts as Community Leaders

- Speaks with a common voice about district priorities, goals and issues;
- Engages and involves the community in district schools and activities;
- Communicates clear information about policies, programs and fiscal condition of the district;
- Educates the community and media about the issues facing the district and public education; and
- Advocates for children, district programs and public education to the general public, community leaders and local, state and national leaders.

The Board hires the superintendent to be the chief executive officer for the district, to manage day-to-day operations, and to implement board direction. The superintendent works with the Board to support effective governance and provides leadership on educational matters to the community and staff.

B. The Superintendent:

Implements the Board Vision and Decisions

- Provides tactical leadership to move ahead on issues and policies, with the support of the Board majority, and tries to get approval of all board members, with appropriate information;
- Delegates duties when appropriate to the leadership team for maximum performance in the superintendent's leadership role;
- Works cooperatively and effectively with board members; has open communication; maintains closed session, confidentiality; is honest about feelings and concerns; respects each board members' opinions; is loyal to the group; acts as a representative of the Board and not as an individual;
- Develops 'setting direction' documents (e.g., vision, mission, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators) for Board review and approval; ensures an appropriate inclusive process is used; and ensures these documents are the driving force for all district efforts;
- Creates and launches plans to meet the strategic charge; aligns all plans with Board's vision, community expectations and state and federal standards; and
- Develops a unified, positive perception of the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District.

Manages the Instructional and Non-instructional Operations of the District

- Hires, supports and manages a competent, highly qualified staff;
- Upholds Board approved policies and rules; and
- Ensures a positive personnel climate exists;

III. GOVERNANCE NORMS

As members of the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District Board of Education, we accept the high honor and trust placed in us to ensure that the students of the district receive the best education available anywhere in the United States of America. In accepting this role, we hold the pursuit of that goal as our sacred duty. To that end, we hereby commit to the following in the conduct of our business.

We will:

- Place the interests of students above all others in every decision that we make;
- Uphold all applicable federal and state laws and regulations;
- Abide by the policies of the Board, and work with fellow governance team members to change those policies as needed to improve student learning;
- Maintain Board focus on the achievement of all students regardless of race, class, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, gender identity or gender expression;
- Not use our positions for personal or partisan gain;
- Model continuous learning in our roles as members of the governance team;
- Collaborate with the superintendent so that the vision, goals, and policies of the district can be implemented;
- Maintain accountability for student learning in schools and programs within the district;
- Base our decisions upon available facts, vote our convictions, avoid bias, and uphold and support the decisions of the majority of the Board once a decision is made;
- Work to build trust between and among board members and the superintendent by treating everyone with dignity and respect, even in times of disagreement;
- Maintain the confidentiality of privileged information including that shared in closed sessions of the Board;
- Recognize that authority rests only with majority decisions of the Board and will make no independent commitments or take any independent actions that may compromise the Board as a whole;
- Refer constituent complaints and concerns to the superintendent; and
- Respect the leadership roles of the board president and the superintendent.

We will maintain fidelity to these commitments and will be held accountable by our fellow board members should any one of us fail to live up to these commitments.

Positive Governance Team Culture

Establishment and adherence to team norms helps build team discipline, creates trust between team members and supports a safe environment. Ineffective relationships and interactions sabotage the team's work. Norms provide a series of boundaries within which members of the team agree to work to be productive.

IV. PROTOCOLS FOR COMMUNICATION

We recognize that the superintendent is the one who reports to seven bosses, and who works with numerous board members; therefore, communication protocols are not only necessary, but must be established in order to maintain effective communications between the superintendent, Board, and all constituent groups of the system.

NOTE: As a board member, your conversations and actions must comply with the Brown Act. Further, as a board member, your electronic communications are public information.

A. Superintendent Communications to the Board

The superintendent will keep the Board as fully informed as needed to allow members to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. The superintendent provides communication through:

- Board meetings and study sessions;
- Meeting agendas and back-up information;
- Governance team retreats;
- Superintendent/Board member one-on-one meetings;
- Weekly written updates;
- Periodic phone check-ins;
- Periodic one-on-one, face-to-face meetings as necessary;
- Calls or emails to alert board members to events they are likely to hear about through the media or from the community to apprise the Board of good, bad, urgent and other information as needed;
- Provide equal communications to all board members on a regular basis; information or materials provided to one board member will be provided to all board members; responses to requests for information will identify the member seeking the information;
- If the superintendent has a concern about something a board member has done or has not done, the superintendent will communicate the concern to that member only;
- Media advisories and press releases; and
- Planning meetings with the board president.

The superintendent will determine the best way to provide information or materials.

B. Board Communications to the Superintendent

Board members will support the superintendent by adhering to the following:

- Be a good listener to constituent concerns;
- Inform the superintendent of pertinent conversations with community members so the superintendent is aware of the issue and the board member's response;

- Refer employee concerns to the superintendent so that he or she can ensure issues are handled properly;
- Refer constituent concerns or complaints to the point of the problem, and, through the appropriate chain of command, and to the superintendent's office if necessary;
- If a concern raised by a constituent is of a potentially serious nature or may require a Board policy change, inform the superintendent immediately;
- Call or email to alert the superintendent to events he or she is likely to hear about from the community or through the media to apprise the superintendent of good, bad, urgent news, rumors and other information as they hear about it from the community;
- The board president will be the only member to provide direction to the superintendent based on a vote or the consensus of the Board.
- Board members with questions or who need additional information will call the superintendent's office; members will wait until the next Board meeting to make a request to receive a report.
- Questions about the Friday Report or the board meeting agenda should be raised in a timely manner to allow the superintendent and staff ample notice and time to adequately address the situation.
- Board members will self-monitor requests for information to ensure such requests do not divert an inappropriate amount of time from staff efforts to achieve district goals.
- Respect the instructional priority time of the superintendent and make appointments to discuss personal concerns or issues.
- If a board member has a concern about something the superintendent has done or has not done, bring the concern to the attention of the superintendent and will make every effort to initiate face-to-face informal meetings with the superintendent as needed, to ensure adequate lines of communication.

C. Board Member to Board Member

As a leadership team, we are accountable for building and sustaining strong working relationships by:

- Being honest, having integrity, showing trust by affirming each other's strengths and differences, listening empathetically to others, and being accepting of all.
- Making a commitment to begin resolution of conflicts in a timely manner with the appropriate person, while consistently maintaining professional relationships.
- Reminding ourselves and each other that our purpose is supporting the instructional efforts of schools and students. We will coordinate our actions to ensure the greatest positive impact and support for schools under our jurisdiction.

We recognize the value of ongoing communication. We commit to actively participate in meetings which exemplify:

- Mutual respect: Each member brings to the meeting a unique and valued skill set which is essential to the success of the team.
- Shared understanding: We will actively listen and inquire, provide complete information, and fully participate in discussion in order to learn from each other and to arrive at the best possible decisions.
- Quality decision-making: We will consider all perspectives and encourage constructive dissent during discussion. When a decision is not unanimous, all members will, at a minimum, agree to not block or undermine the final decision.
- Personal responsibility: Each member is responsible for being prepared and actively involved, and meeting the commitments of the team.
- Effective group process: We will work with an agenda that includes the meeting's purpose, start and end meetings on time, each participate fully without anyone dominating the conversation, and address issues rather than personalize problems.

In order to operate within our roles and responsibilities and to maintain the confidentiality required by the Brown Act, board members will work cooperatively and diligently to maintain closed session confidentiality.

D. Board Members to Community and Staff

- Maintain fidelity to fellow board members, board policies, and governance team standards when communicating with the community, staff or media.
- Communicate with district staff in a professional, respectful, efficient, and responsive manner.
- Allow the board president and superintendent to be the official spokespersons for the district in all matters including contacts with all governmental agencies; this does not preclude a member from speaking with news media or others as long as they make it clear they are speaking as one, individual board member.
- Not act as spokespersons for the board unless specifically authorized to do so by the board
- Be mindful of the sensitive nature of concerns and issues from the community, and uphold confidentiality when appropriate, and demonstrate tact when handling such matters.

V. VISITING SCHOOLS

In order to be respectful of the teaching and learning environment and of staff's time we agree:

- Board members respect the instructional priority time of the staff and make appointments for site visits.
- Board members planning to visit schools shall notify the superintendent's office prior to the date of the visitation.
- The superintendent's office will work with board members to facilitate school visits.

XI. SERVICE ON COMMITTEES

If the Board determines that board member representation is necessary on a given committee, or if the Board is invited to have representation on a committee, the board president shall appoint committee members.

Dependent on the type of committee, the board president shall determine the role of the board member on said committee. The role shall either be that of an observer or participant.

XII. ACTING AS A PARENT

A board member with a student in the district has the unique perspective of first-hand knowledge of how district policy is implemented. A board member must also understand the role of the Board in relation to district staff and the schools.

When a situation arises with a board member's child that requires parental attention, the board member will use his/her best judgment on a case-by-case basis to determine how to work through the situation with staff. Board members will start at the most appropriate level in attempting to find a solution, and will honor district lines of authority and chains of command. In some situations, the board member may decide to confer with the superintendent to determine the best or most sensitive way to approach the situation.

Whenever a board member has had an exchange with a district staff member about a situation with his/her own child, the board member will inform the superintendent.