



**SYLVAN UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Governance Handbook**

Revised October 10, 2017



# **SYLVAN UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## **Governance Handbook**

### **Board of Trustees**

Terriann Zeek, President  
Cyndi Lindsey, Vice President  
David Collins, Member  
Jennifer Miyakawa, Member  
George Rawe, Member

### **Superintendent**

Debra Hendricks

*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, commitment to norms and coming to agreement on protocols/formal structures that will enable the governance team to perform its responsibilities in a way that best benefits all children.*

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## **EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

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There are three dimensions to the effective governance of any organization: the actions of an individual, a group coming together to govern, and 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: 1) Maintain a unity of purpose, 2) Agree on and govern within appropriate roles, 3) Create and sustain a positive governance culture, and 4) 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.

### ***Governance – A Definition***

*School district governance is the act of transforming the needs, wishes and desires of the community into policies that direct the community's schools.*

# **SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

## **PROFESSIONAL GOVERNANCE STANDARDS**

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### **1. Keep the district focused on learning and achievement for all students.**

- Recognize that children come to school with diverse educational needs.
- Base decisions on the district's vision, student needs, research, empirical data and a balance of community expectations, legal constraints and resources.
- Ensure that the district has established academic standards and regularly measures growth in achievement for all students.
- Ensure that the district provides opportunities for all students to succeed.

### **2. Communicate a common vision.**

- Develop and adopt a written statement of the district vision and other direction-setting documents using collaborative processes that involve the staff and community.
- Ensure that procedures are in place to periodically review the district vision and other direction-setting documents.
- Demonstrate commitment to the vision and goals by regularly communicating them to staff and the community.
- Exhibit behaviors and make decisions that support achievement of the district vision.
- Keep current on trends and emerging needs in education in order to proactively participate in renewing or reviewing the district's direction and policies.
- Uphold board decisions.

### **3. Operate openly, with trust and integrity.**

- Conduct district business in a fair, respectful and responsible manner.
- Consider the concerns and interests of the staff and community.
- Encourage thorough debate, seek to engage in dialogue for clarification and keep an open mind until all perspectives are heard.
- Ensure that all members of the Board have the same information—no secrets or surprises among members of the governance team.
- Clearly communicate decisions to all those who are affected by them.
- Keep confidential information confidential.

## **SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROFESSIONAL GOVERNANCE STANDARDS (Cont'd)**

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### **4. Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect.**

- Treat the community, parents, students, staff and Superintendent with dignity and respect.
- Listen openly and respectfully to each other, to members of the community, parents, students, staff and the Superintendent.
- Welcome open discussion of different points of view.
- Demonstrate ability to disagree on issues and still maintain trust, respect and dignity.
- Work together to build consensus for decisions.

### **5. Govern within board-adopted policies and procedures.**

- Have a policy development, approval and update process in place that is understood and followed.
- Understand the distinctions between the role of the Board and that of the Superintendent and staff and do not become involved in the day-to-day operations of the district.
- Have agreed-upon norms and protocols to carry out Board responsibilities.

### **6. Take collective responsibility for the Board's performance.**

- Assume collective responsibility for Board conduct, behavior and conflict management.
- Function as a governance team with the Superintendent.
- Demonstrate a commitment to continually improving governance efforts.
- Take responsibility for the orientation of all new members.

### **7. Periodically evaluate the Board's own effectiveness.**

- Have procedures in place for regular, on-going self-evaluation.
- Ensure meeting agendas provide for a sound order of business and facilitate maximum focus on matters related to student achievement.
- Have norms and protocols in place to ensure that individual Board members do not get involved in the day-to-day management of the district.

### **8. Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform Board deliberations.**

- Ensure board policy enables parents, staff and the public to participate in district discussions, school programs and activities in meaningful ways.
- Consider the concerns and interests of all segments of the community in deliberations.

## SUSD MISSION STATEMENT

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The mission of the Sylvan Union School District is to provide a dynamic, broad-based education that prepares each child to be a contributing member of society.

## SUSD VISION

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To achieve this mission, we embrace the following instructional norms:

Our classroom environments...

- Are physically safe, clean, and well-organized
- Demonstrate a student-centered focus
- Feature outstanding classroom management
- Are constantly monitored by teachers who demonstrate professional attentiveness
- Are positive, risk-taking environments for students and teachers
- Feature a growth mindset and an innovative spirit
- Feature healthy, respectful relationships contributing to a powerful sense of a Learning Community
- Feature compassionate understanding of all students in all circumstances

Our instruction consists of...

- Well-constructed and delivered standards-based learning goals
- Purposeful academic vocabulary, language and discourse
- Deliberate and rigorous instructional design
- Continuous, varied on-going assessment
- Active, engaged participation by both teacher and students
- Intentional collaborative work with flexible student grouping
- Appropriate pacing, differentiating, and scaffolding to meet the needs of all students
- Research based strategies delivered by teachers who are experts in their content
- Purposeful integration of educational technology
- Evaluation of student achievement based on multiple measures
- Comprehensive content coupled with 21st Century skills

## SUSD VALUES

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These values support our work:

**COLLABORATION:** At all levels • **EXCELLENCE:** In instruction • **INTEGRITY:** We are open and honest in all of our interactions • **REFLECTION:** We constantly monitor, evaluate, and refine our mutual work • **COMMUNICATION:** We all have a voice, give and receive • **FLEXIBILITY:** We have many avenues to accomplish our goals • **INNOVATION:** We are a 21st Century organization, open and responsive to new ideas • **RESPONSIBILITY:** We accept responsibility for the achievement of our students • **PROFESSIONALISM:** We proudly represent our profession in our behavior and the manner in which we present ourselves • **CITIZENSHIP:** We understand that our work is vital to the development of the future generations who will become leaders in our community, state, nation, and world • **COMMUNITY:** We work in the context of the larger community, supporting and being supported by parents and organizations

# Governance Team Beliefs

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## **We believe that...**

1. Our primary purpose is to provide a quality education for the children of our District;
2. What is best for children informs all of our decisions;
3. Our focus is the needs of our students, staff and community, not just governmental requirements;
4. We provide a safe and healthy environment for students;
5. We encourage innovation;
6. We need to ask the tough questions in order to be wise stewards of the public's money;
7. Public education is fundamental to democracy;
8. Collaboration and cooperation are at the heart of our leadership;
9. All ideas are deserving of discussion and deliberation, and we value input from all stakeholders;
10. We need to seek to understand before being understood;
11. As role models for the children, staff and community, we demonstrate respect for others, even when we disagree;
12. We hold our governance team to high expectations, just as we do students and staff;  
and
13. We help parents instill virtues in their children.

## **GOVERNANCE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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Citizen oversight of local government is the cornerstone of democracy in the United States. The role of the 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: setting direction; establishing an effective and efficient structure; providing support; ensuring accountability; and providing community leadership as advocates for children, the school district and public schools.

These five responsibilities represent core functions that are so fundamental to a school system's accountability to the public that they can only be performed by an elected governing body. Authority is granted to the Board as a whole, not each member individually. Therefore, Board members fulfill these responsibilities by working together as a governance team with the Superintendent to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community.

The Board carries out these responsibilities in each of the following job areas:

### **Setting the District's Direction**

- Establish, uphold, and embody the beliefs, vision, priorities, and strategic goals of the district
- Ensure that an inclusive process is used in the development of the district's direction
- Speak with a unified voice about the district's priorities, goals, and values

### **Student Learning and Achievement**

- Focus on student learning as the foremost priority in the district
- Monitor student achievement and program effectiveness
- Set direction for and adopt the curriculum

### **Finance**

- Establish budget priorities
- Approve the budget
- Oversee budget implementation

### **Facilities**

- Identify facilities needs
- Approve facilities master plan
- Oversee construction projects and facilities maintenance

### **Human Resources**

- Employ the superintendent and set policy for the hiring of other personnel
- Oversee the implementation of personnel-related policies
- Evaluate the superintendent

### **Policy**

- Monitor, review, and revise board policies and administrative regulations
- Oversee the development of and adoption of new board policies and administrative regulations
- Uphold board policies in decision-making

### **Judicial Review**

- Serve as a judicial and appeals body when required

### **Collective Bargaining**

- Provide direction for collective bargaining negotiations
- Approve collective bargaining agreements

### **Community Relations and Advocacy**

- Advocate for children, district programs, and public education to the general public, community leaders, and local, state, and national leaders
- Engage and involve the community in district schools and activities

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. The following page provides more detail on how the Board performs its governance responsibilities in each job area. It is important to remember that Boards who inadvertently get involved in staff functions undercut their ability to hold the Superintendent accountable for the results of those efforts.

## **PERFORMING GOVERNANCE RESPONSIBILITIES**

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We agree with the responsibilities of school Boards as described below by the California School Boards Association:

### **Set the direction for the community's schools**

- Focus on student learning
- Assess needs/obtain baseline data
- Generate, review or revise setting direction documents (beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators)
- Ensure an appropriate inclusive process is used
- Ensure these documents are the driving force for all district efforts

### **Establish an effective and efficient structure for the school district**

- Employ and work with the Superintendent in support of an effective Governance team
- Establish a human resources framework that includes policies for hiring and evaluating other personnel
- Oversee the development of and adopt policies
- Set a direction for and adopt the curriculum and require data-producing assessment systems
- Establish budget priorities, adopt the budget and oversee facilities issues
- Provide direction for and vote to accept collective bargaining agreements

### **Provide support through our behavior and actions**

- Act with professional demeanor that models the district's beliefs and vision
- Make decisions and provide resources that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals
- Uphold Board-approved district policies and support staff implementation of Board direction
- Ensure a positive working climate exists for the governance team
- Be knowledgeable enough about district efforts to explain them to the public

### **Ensure accountability to the public**

- Evaluate the Superintendent
- Monitor, review and revise policies
- Serve as a judicial and appeals body
- Monitor student achievement and program effectiveness and require program changes as indicated
- Monitor and adjust district finances and periodically review facilities issues
- Monitor the collective bargaining process

### **Act as community leaders**

- Communicate clear information about district priorities, goals, policies, programs and fiscal condition of the district
- Engage and involve the community in district schools and activities
- Educate the community and the media about the issues facing students, the district and public education
- Advocate for children, district programs, and public education to the general public, key community members, and local, state, and national leaders

## **POSITIVE GOVERNANCE TEAM CULTURE**

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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.

Because the community elects school Board members to set and monitor the direction of the school district, and the district Superintendent translates all efforts into action, it is vital that the Board and Superintendent have a respectful and productive working relationship based on trust and open communications.

## **SUSD GOVERNANCE NORMS**

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As we work together...

- We acknowledge that each of us brings differing personal strengths and focus to issues;
- We respect our beginning and ending times;
- We are well prepared for meetings and attempt to clarify questions with staff in advance;
- We focus our efforts on the present and future needs of the District;
- We make joy and humor a part of all our interactions;
- We demonstrate concern for the personal well-being of our team members;
- We govern with passion;
- We are respectful and nonjudgmental of one another;
- We support a decision once it is made, even if we do not agree with it. The only exception to this norm would be when a board member cannot conscientiously agree with a decision.
- We focus our decision-making on student success;
- We actively listen to each other and encourage full participation in discussions and decisions;
- We stay on task.

## STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

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Effective governance teams discuss and agree on the formal structures and processes used by the trustees and the Superintendent in their functioning as a team (e.g., processes or structures for agenda setting, set-up of Board room and table, agenda structure, handling complaints or concerns from the community, bringing up a new idea); how governance teams operate, and how they do business. These agreements about how groups will operate are often called protocols.

### SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROTOCOLS

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The following protocols were developed to support and promote the effectiveness of our governance team.

Issue	Protocol
Self-monitoring of governance team effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will schedule a workshop every Fall, as a part of our retreat, to review governance team agreements and processes by reviewing the Governance Handbook.</li> </ul>

Issue	Protocol
Voting no	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each trustee respects the right of other trustees to vote “no” on an issue.</li> <li>• Everyone agrees it is a courtesy to the team to explain the reasons for the “no” vote during deliberation.</li> </ul>

Issue	Protocol
Visiting schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits are encouraged.</li> <li>• As a professional courtesy, trustees will call the principal ahead of time to arrange the visit.</li> <li>• Trustees will also be cautious about encroaching on the learning environment. To assist in this matter, the Superintendent will ensure principals and teachers know that a teacher does not need to interrupt his/her lesson when a Board member visits a classroom.</li> <li>• Three formal visitations will take place each year to three different schools. The visiting team will consist of all Board members and the Superintendent.</li> </ul>

## SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROTOCOLS (Con't)

Issue	Protocol
<p>Handling concerns from the public and staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When someone brings a concern to the Board, we will listen carefully, remembering we are only hearing one side of the story, and then we will direct that person to the individual in the district most appropriate and able to help them resolve their concern.</li> <li>• We will make sure they understand the appropriate order of whom to contact (i.e., teacher, then principal, then district staff) and are aware of any formal forms or policies that might assist them (e.g., written complaint form).</li> <li>• This will ensure everyone is treated fairly, equally and expeditiously and that the processes and procedures of the district are upheld.</li> <li>• It will also clarify that one Board member has no individual authority to fix a problem.</li> <li>• As a representative of the public, it is important the Board member invite the person with the complaint to ultimately get back to him/her if there was a failure in the process.</li> </ul>

Issue	Protocol
<p>Individual Board member requests for information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When an individual Board member requests information pertaining to an agenda item, it may be provided to all Board members.</li> <li>• 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 a thorough answer.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

Issue	Protocol
<p>Individual Board member requests for action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The only authority to direct action rests with the full Board sitting at the Board table.</li> <li>• A majority vote sets such direction.</li> <li>• Individuals may request an item for a future agenda.</li> <li>• When a majority of the Board, sitting in a formal meeting, requests action, it should be done in the context of the intended results. It is the duty of SUSD staff to determine the methods used to achieve those results.</li> </ul>

## SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROTOCOLS (Con't)

Issue	Protocol
Board meeting management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We understand that Board meetings are meetings of the Board held in public, not open forum town hall meetings.</li> <li>• We will keep this in mind as we conduct our meetings, allowing the public to provide input at the time allotted to ensure the multiple voices of the community inform Board deliberations.</li> <li>• However, when the Board deliberates, it will be a time for the Board to listen and learn from each other, taking the public input into consideration, not a time to re-engage with the public.</li> <li>• We will consistently abide by our formal processes relating to this issue so that all persons are treated fairly and equally.</li> <li>• We will review our policies, bylaws and protocols relating to Board meeting management (e.g., time limits on input from members of the public), revising or reaffirming them as appropriate.</li> </ul>

Issue	Protocol
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will use email carefully to insure that we do not violate the Brown Act which prohibits Board members from exchanging facts to               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop collective concurrence</li> <li>○ Advance or clarify an issue</li> <li>○ Facilitate agreement or compromise</li> <li>○ Advance ultimate resolution</li> <li>○ Creates a public record</li> </ul> </li> <li>• We recognize that by using Reply All               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Easily makes email part of the deliberative process</li> <li>○ Inhibits opportunity for any other two Board members to have a conversation on a topic</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Board members will be aware of and follow District policy as it pertains to electronic communication</li> <li>• Board members will recognize that in response to a public records request, the Superintendent will provide, including, but not limited to, any electronic communication substantively related to the records, such as email, text messages, instant messages, and other electronic communications, regardless of whether they are transmitted through a district-provided device or account or through an employee's or Board member's personal device or account.</li> </ul>

## SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROTOCOLS (Con't)

Issue	Protocol
<p>Role and Responsibilities of the Board President</p>	<p><b>Our Beliefs:</b>  <i>We have an obligation to set an example of good government in action for our community. We will model dignified problem solving for our community and our children. The Board President works with the Superintendent to ensure Board meeting effectiveness. We intend that our Board meetings proceed professionally, efficiently and effectively and that district staff will have the opportunity to provide necessary background materials and information to the Board in a respectful environment. Each Board member must have the opportunity to express his or her viewpoint during Board deliberation. Everyone in attendance at Board meetings will be treated with dignity and respect. The Board president has a facilitation role relative to Board meetings, and acts as spokesperson for the Board. S/he has no more authority than any other Board member outside of Board meetings.</i></p> <p><b>Our Agreement:</b>                      The role of the Board president is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chair meetings,</li> <li>• work with the Superintendent as necessary to help ensure Board members have the necessary information and materials to make wise decisions,</li> <li>• make sure that pending agenda items are addressed appropriately,</li> <li>• confer with the Superintendent before meetings to prepare, as necessary for the upcoming meeting,</li> <li>• model the tone and behavior the Board wishes to convey to the community.</li> </ul> <p>As meeting chair, the Board president will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• open and preside over meetings,</li> <li>• introduce agenda items, providing some background information as appropriate, different from background information that is provided by staff (e.g., <i>"This is an item we have had on our agendas four times in the last three months. We have given it a great deal of consideration and appreciate all of the input we have received from the public and the information staff has provided on the issue. Tonight we will receive additional public input, deliberate further and hope to make a final decision."</i>),</li> <li>• call on speakers,</li> <li>• not make a motion him or herself, but ensure that there is one made at an appropriate time during deliberation,</li> <li>• make sure all Board members have a chance to share in deliberation,</li> <li>• work to facilitate effective deliberation,</li> <li>• interpret and clarify for understanding to ensure that all Board members have an accurate understanding as the deliberation proceeds,</li> <li>• wait until all other Board members who wish to speak on an issue have done so before adding his or her own comments,</li> <li>• call for a vote restating the motion,</li> <li>• clarify and authenticate all action, order and procedures of the Board,</li> <li>• adjourn meetings,</li> <li>• remind the governance team and audience members of any meeting guidelines and Professional Governance Standards the Board has adopted, as necessary,</li> <li>• work with the Superintendent to make sure there is appropriate follow-up and clarification of possible options for the Board following the Board meeting,</li> <li>• serve as the spokesperson for the Board – always bearing in mind the direction and commitment of the Board given during Board meetings.</li> </ul>

## SUSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROTOCOLS (Con't)

Issue	Protocol
Designated Spokesperson(s)	<p><b>Our Beliefs:</b>  <i>It is essential that important information be communicated to members of the Board, the staff and the community in as timely a fashion as possible. Board Members and the Superintendent have an obligation to communicate clearly about district issues to the staff and community. We recognize that some situations have legal or other considerations that may place restrictions on what may be told to the media or public. Confidential issues must remain confidential. It is important that the Board speak with clarity and consistency regarding Board actions in order to maintain the trust of our community.</i></p> <p><b>Our Agreement:</b></p> <p>The primary spokesperson will be the Superintendent. In the event the Superintendent is unable to be the designated spokesperson, the Board president will be the designated spokesperson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a Board member is invited to speak to a community group or organization, s/he will make sure other Board members know about the invitation and will ask for any updated district information as appropriate.</li> </ul>

# SYLVAN UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE TEAM

## AGREEMENTS TO FACILITATE GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP

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*A major difference between groups and teams is that teams have clear agreements (norms that identify expectations for behavior, and protocols that describe how the team will operate) set by the team's members. Once developed, these norms and protocols shape how team members behave with each other and how they perform their responsibilities.*

*Group expectations help a group work together to not only address difficult issues in an objective and consistent way, but also to confirm what each member will do in the normal course of business to help the team succeed.*

**- CSBA**

### **SUSD Governance Team Norms and Protocols**

*The Board of Education for the Sylvan Union School District 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.*

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

*The purpose of the SUSD governance team agreements is to ensure a positive and productive working relationship among Board members, the Superintendent, district staff, students, parents and the community. The protocols were developed for and by the members of the governance team and may be modified over time as needed.*

We have reviewed and agree to follow the aforementioned governance team norms and protocols in order to support a positive and productive working relationship among the Sylvan Union School District Board of Trustees, staff, students and the community. We shall renew this agreement at the Annual Governance Workshop/Retreat of the SUSD Board of Education held in November.

**Affirmed on this 10<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2017.**

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**Terriann Zeek, Board President**

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**Cyndi Lindsey, Vice President**

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**David Collins, Member**

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**Jennifer Miyakawa, Member**

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**George Rawe, Member**

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**Debra Hendricks, Superintendent**