



San Mateo-Foster City School District

*(Draft)*  
*Governance*  
*Handbook*

*Our Vision*

*The San Mateo-Foster City School District  
educates and inspires students to live, lead,  
and learn with integrity and joy.*

May, 2018



**T**he most remarkable thing about our country is this: ordinary citizens control almost every major institution, public and private. No matter how many expert professionals are on payroll, they do not have the last word. Somewhere above them... is a group of civilians. They have the last word. Does this make sense? What it makes is a democracy. We, the people, govern ourselves. That is a particularly American idea. It may be the most American idea of all.”

*Henry N. Brickell & Regina H. Paul in Time for Curriculum*

In the spring of 2002, The San Mateo Foster City Board of Trustees and the Superintendent developed a governance handbook to strengthen their leadership skills, improve their organizational effectiveness, and keep all District efforts focused on student learning.

The Governance Handbook outlines practices and understandings that help build and sustain a positive Board-Superintendent relationship and define a culture of quality, equity, and respect.

The governance team annually reviews and evaluates their governance practices and updates the governance handbook; it was last updated on **May 31, 2018**. Acknowledgement and thanks are given to California School Boards Association Consultants for facilitating these meetings and guiding the process.

# *Governance Team*

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# *What We Are Most Proud of About this District...*

## **Our focus on equity:**

- **Students** - Our students reflect the diversity of our community.
- **Supporting Students** – The mental health supports, safety nets and early literacy initiatives we provide.
- **Staff** - Each school has a unique community and dedicated, committed, innovative teachers, who are working hard to support our students.
- **Leadership** - District leadership and staff are dedicated to the kids, families, community and equity.
- **Parental Choice** - The diversity of programs that we offer – the parents have options.
- **Community** - Our active, engaged community dedicated to supporting equity.

## *What Do We Want to Accomplish as a Governance Team?*

### **One Unified District focused on student achievement – Student Success for ALL; Therefore, we want to:**

- Focus on student achievement and meeting the needs of **all** students. We need to streamline in order to achieve this.
- Ensure that **all** students receive an incredible education.
- Build a unified districtwide team that will effectively raise the achievement level of **all** of our students.
- Ensure all financial decisions directly tie to enhanced student success.
- Focus on educational equity – make opportunities more accessible to all students and focus on family engagement – Make our diversity our greatest strength.

# *The Norms*

*Those Behaviors by which the Governance Team is characterized are as follows:*

*We keep the best interests of ALL the children as a priority.*

- We give respect and dignity to every interaction.
- We listen when people speak.
- We respond with respect in verbal and non-verbal communications.
- We come to meetings prepared.
- We deliberate at the table.
- We communicate a common vision and purpose.
- We respect and support the Board's decisions.
- We carefully consider the words we choose and what we say outside of the Boardroom.
- We understand that progress takes time, once a decision is made.
- We commit to representing the entire community, even if we change to Trustee Area elections,
- We recognize the purpose of an individual Trustee's public communication is to inform and educate. Information is objective and without intent to undermine.

*In support of our team norms, we have adopted the following meeting guidelines:*

## *Meeting Guidelines*

- We will keep our focus on the best interest of our students.
- We will be respectful of everyone's time **by being succinct and efficient.**
- We will all work to ensure **transparency and** that all issues and concerns **will** be dealt with openly by all members.
- **We will be direct and give honest feedback.**
- Each member will take responsibility for the work of the team. We will each be responsible for the success of the meeting, participate equally, address concerns and support majority decisions.
- We will stay focused on our goals and avoid getting sidetracked.
- We will listen actively to all ideas and respect differences.
- **We will build on the ideas of others and look for common ground.**
- **We** recognize the importance of participating in all meetings and strive to be fully prepared.
- **We will work toward the future – learning from the past.**

# *Discussion about Roles and Responsibilities:*

## **GAINING CLARITY ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **The Role of the Board and Superintendent - CSBA:**

School board “trustees” are the representatives of the people, elected to ensure the district schools educate the children in consideration of the interests of the local community. The role of the School Board is to govern the school district.

The superintendent is hired by the school board to provide the professional expertise in the day-to-day operations of the district. The role of the Superintendent is:

1. To work with the school board to develop an effective governance leadership team.
2. To serve as the chief administrative officer for the school district.

### **Performing Board Responsibilities - CSBA:**

#### **We Set the Direction for the Community’s Schools by:**

- Focusing on student learning.
- Assessing district needs.
- Generating, reviewing and revising setting direction documents: (beliefs, vision, mission, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators).
- Ensuring an appropriate inclusive process is used to develop these documents.
- Ensuring that these documents are the driving force for all district efforts.

#### **We Establish an Effective and Efficient Structure for the School District by:**

- Employing the superintendent.
- Setting policy for hiring of other personnel.
- Setting policies.
- Setting direction for and adopting the curriculum.
- Establishing budget priorities and adopting the budget.
- Overseeing facilities issues.
- Providing direction for and voting to accept collective bargaining agreements.

### **We Provide Support through Our Behavior and Actions by:**

- Acting with a professional demeanor that models the district's beliefs and vision.
- Making decisions and providing resources that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals.
- Upholding board approved district policies.
- Ensuring a positive personnel climate exists.
- Being knowledgeable about district efforts and able to explain them to the public.
- Recognizing that the Board takes action as a team; not as individuals.

### **We Ensure Accountability to the Public by:**

- Evaluating the superintendent.
- Monitoring, reviewing and revising policies.
- Serving as a judicial and appeals body.
- Monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness and requiring program changes as indicated.
- Monitoring and adjusting district finances.
- Reviewing facilities issues.
- Monitoring the collective bargaining process.
- Evaluating our progress as a Board.

### **We Act as Community Leaders by:**

- Speaking with a common voice about district priorities, goals and issues.
- Engaging and involving the community in district schools and activities.
- Communicating clear information about policies, programs and fiscal conditions of the district.
- Educating the community and the media about issues facing the district and public education.
- Advocating for children, district programs and public education to the general public, community, and local, state and national leaders.

## AN EFFECTIVE TRUSTEE

During our session, we determined that an effective trustee is...

- **Mindful:**

- Of the amount of time and space that we take.
- Has self-awareness
- Being in tune with other Board Members feelings/frustrations/hesitations
- Being respectful of the community and their concerns.
- Seeking to understand intentions and whether they are centered on what is best for students.
- Being ok with taking time to think.
- Of our role

- **Focused on: Students:**

- Bringing tangential conversations back to the task at hand.
- Having thoughtful deliberations so that students succeed
- Keeping initiatives moving in the same direction
- Bringing the community together.

- **Prepared:**

- Reading and analyzing materials
- Asking questions before Board Meetings
- Hearing from constituents
- Looking at all side of issues
- Being flexible
- Asking clarifying questions

- **Committed to:**

- Students - **all** kids
- Supporting staff
- The work of the Board and the district
- The public – representing and working with the public

- **Committed to Maintaining Confidentiality:**

- Respecting privacy
- Not discussing closed session matters with anyone:
  - ✓ Personnel issues
  - ✓ Student or staff discipline
  - ✓ Negotiations
  - ✓ Or any other issues that might be jeopardized, if information is released.

- **One that has a good Manner:**

- Is respectful of other Board Members and staff
- Has honest communication
- Professionalism
- Is fully present and engaged
- Provides constructive and direct feedback

*What does the Board need from the Superintendent in order to fulfill its responsibilities?*

***The Board needs:***

- Accurate information – as fully detailed as possible about any topic presented.
- The Superintendent to bring alternatives, options, and the reasoning behind those options. The Board appreciates hearing the Superintendent’s recommendations and reasons as the Board respects the Superintendent’s expertise and experience.
- To receive presentations and reports 48 hour prior to Board meetings so that good decisions can be made and appropriate questions can be asked in order to be prepared for the meetings.
- To receive copies of appropriate emails, letters, and especially press releases. In this way, the Board will be informed and current when asked questions by community members.
- To hear from the Superintendent directly if something is at the crisis level in order to eliminate any confusion or miscommunication.
- To share information with the Superintendent and the Superintendent can then inform the other Board Members in the Weekly Letter when a Board Member has important information to convey to the entire Board. The Trustees are knowledgeable about and operate within the Brown Act guidelines.

- To know that once a trustee has referred a complaint to the Superintendent, it will be addressed and follow-up information will be provided to the Board member. If it is an issue of which the entire Board needs to be aware, the Superintendent will provide that information to the Board.
- The Superintendent to mentor staff regarding staff reports, ensuring that the reports are concise and focused.

*What does the Superintendent need from the Board in order to fulfill her/his responsibilities?*

***The Superintendent needs:***

- The Board Members to call the Superintendent with any questions or issues. All phone calls are welcome and will serve to help communicate and clarify.
- The Board to contact the Superintendent with all requests for information. In this way, the Superintendent can be aware of all requests and ensure that if one Board Member receives information, the entire Board can receive the same information. This arrangement also ensures that the Superintendent can be aware of a Board Member's need for further information on a particular topic or agenda item. This enables a system that provides all Board Members with pertinent information.
- Board Members to acknowledge emails/community communications and then forward them to the Superintendent so that she/he may address the issue as appropriate.
- Board Members to send all questions and concerns to the Superintendent who may respond or forward them to the appropriate staff person. The Superintendent will send the response to the Board.
- Each Trustee to call or email the Superintendent with any questions or concerns early so the lines of communication are open and frequent.

## Protocols and Procedures to Facilitate Governance Leadership

Both the history and culture of the District have provided for a great deal of exchange between the public and the Board. The following procedures are not designed to limit input, but rather to assist in considering everyone’s ideas and facilitating effective decision-making.

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<p><b>Board Meetings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board Members recognize the importance of participating in all meetings and strive to be fully prepared and present for all meetings.</li> <li>• The beginning of each meeting is a time for staff to provide quick updates and for the public to comment on items not on the agenda. This is not a time for the Board to engage in dialogue. The Board cannot address issues that have not been placed on the agenda for discussion.</li> <li>• Updates, which may require questions or discussions, are agendaized as reports.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Role of the Board President</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board President is the facilitator of the Board meeting process and must be allowed the license to change the procedure under special circumstances by announcing the changes in process and the reason for the changes.</li> <li>• The Board President will regularly remind the Board and the public of the Board norms, and will clarify the deliberation process for the Board and the public at the beginning of an agenda item discussion.</li> <li>• The Board President will strive to ensure that Board Members do not interrupt one another during deliberations.</li> <li>• If a Board Member does not follow the agreed upon process, the Board President can remind the Board Member by saying something as simple as “I would like to remind the Board...”</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<b>Role of the Trustees in Board Deliberation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the Board will assist the Board President by not directing requests to members of the community or staff, but by asking the Board President, thereby giving him/her the control of the meeting process.</li> <li>• If the Board President misses a step, a Trustee can respectfully remind the Board President that a step needs to be re-considered.</li> </ul>
<b>Board Deliberation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board President introduces the item, explains how/when the public may comment, and how the Board will deliberate. The agenda reflects when and how the audience may speak to any given item.</li> <li>• The staff offers information and responds to questions from the Board.</li> <li>• The Board President acknowledges any member of the public who wishes to speak.</li> <li>• After hearing public comments, the Board deliberates.</li> <li>• The public may be invited to comment a final time on the Board’s discussion before a vote is taken, at the discretion of the Board President.</li> <li>• The Board then makes the decision.</li> </ul>
<b>Time limits (BB 9323)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If necessary, the Board may establish a time limit at the beginning of the meeting for people addressing them in order to facilitate input and manage time effectively.</li> <li>• When a time limit is used, a timing device will manage it and initial public comments will be limited to three minutes. The Board president will ask that the public limit their comments to new information. If the public is invited to comment after Board deliberation, the time limit may be reduced.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<b>Input from the Public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board President may remind the public that all business is conducted in a respectful manner. As individuals address the Board, members listen with respect in both verbal and non-verbal language.</li> <li>• Questions from the public will be directed to the Board President. The Board President will facilitate responses.</li> </ul>
<b>Study Sessions/Workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board will periodically schedule special meetings/study sessions to hear information from staff and study particular topics in greater depth.</li> </ul>
<b>Closed Sessions of the Board Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All closed sessions operate according to the Brown Act. All Board members commit to strict confidence.</li> </ul>
<b>Board/Superintendent Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board and the Superintendent will try, as much as possible, to inform each other early on of any important situations. This “heads up” will provide information so that timely decisions can be made. The Board would like to hear any sensitive information directly from the Superintendent to avoid any miscommunications.</li> <li>• It is helpful for the Board to receive copies of appropriate emails, letters from schools, or press releases. The Board wants to be informed and aware of what is positive in the District and any issues of concern. <b>The Superintendent will note the importance of each item on the subject line and mark urgent matters with an exclamation point (!).</b></li> <li>• The Superintendent should receive copies of all communications between Board Members and the public.  If a Trustee forgets one of these procedures, the Superintendent may call her/him individually to review the steps of the procedure.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<b>Board/Board Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trustees are knowledgeable about and operate within Brown Act guidelines.</li> <li>• Good communication is critical to effective governance.</li> <li>• A Trustee may contact the Superintendent with questions/concerns and the Superintendent will respond to the Board Member and/or the entire Board in the Weekly Letter or through email, as appropriate and needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Requests for Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the Superintendent receives a request for information, he/she may respond or forward the message to the appropriate person. The Superintendent will then send the response to all Board Members.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication with the Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board Members agree to reserve speculation on Board deliberation and outcome. Board Members agree to say when asked, “We do not know and we will discuss this issue in public at the Board Meeting.”</li> <li>• Board Members will promote a calm professional demeanor and strive to assure the community that they are accessible, open to listening and share hope about the future.</li> <li>• Board Members will communicate to the community that decisions are always made with the focus on what is best for all children, and will strive to be fair in all decisions.</li> <li>• The Board will inform the Superintendent about electronic communications and groups at the various sites.</li> <li>• The Superintendent will share that information with the principals and other Board Members.</li> <li>• The principals will also monitor electronic communications at their sites and inform the Superintendent who will inform the Board.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals will work with PTA’s to keep the community informed about official sites and accurate information.</li> <li>• Principals may post factual information about their schools and the district on electronic sites, such as, “Next Store,” in an effort to keep the community informed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Visiting Schools and Attending School Events</b></p>	<p><b>Rationale: We believe that Site Visits and Attendance at School Events Are Important, Because:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We want to see our programs implemented and teachers using technology.</li> <li>• We want to see classrooms and experience students learning.</li> <li>• Attendance on campuses helps us build relationships.</li> </ul> <p><b>Protocol:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School site visits will be arranged by the Superintendent with input from the Board regarding scheduling.</li> <li>• More targeted visits will be scheduled.</li> <li>• School Site visits will be noticed as Board Meetings if necessary under the requirements of the Brown Act.</li> <li>• Board Members will notify the Superintendent if they plan to attend a school event.</li> <li>• Lunch with staff will be scheduled into some visits.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Handling Community Complaints</b></p>	<p><b>When approached by an individual or group with concerns and complaints, it is best practice to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen openly, being careful not to imply agreement, since only one perspective is being expressed,</li> <li>• Unless the complaint involves an issue that may come before the Board in its judiciary role.</li> <li>• In that case, Board Members will end the conversation by explaining to the constituent that listening further will require the Board Member to recuse him/herself when the issue comes before the Board.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In all other cases, Board Members will direct people to the policies or processes (e.g., complaint process) or person in the District (e.g. teacher, principal, superintendent) who can most directly help them with their concern.</li> <li>• Inform the Superintendent of concerns or complaints so she/he can ensure follow up.</li> <li>• If the comments/concerns are specific to a past board decision, the trustee will confirm that the board stands by its decisions until and unless the board majority expresses a need to change the decision.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues received via email:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Superintendent will respond to emails addressed to her and inform the board about the correspondence.</li> <li>• When Board Members receive an email either individually or as a group, each Board Member will respond by thanking the individual for their message and inform them that he/she is sending the email to the Superintendent so that she can deal with the issue appropriately.</li> <li>• The Board Member will then send the message to the Superintendent.</li> <li>• The Superintendent will circle back to Board Members to keep them informed as to how the matter was dealt with.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Districtwide Committees</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee work enables the board to make more informed decisions, incorporating the multiple voices of the community and staff.</li> <li>• The board will be involved in discussing the framework for Districtwide committees.</li> <li>• Board Members will receive committee reports and information as much in advance as possible.</li> <li>• Reporting from Districtwide committees will include an interim progress report and the final report with recommendations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Board Member Committee Assignments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the annual reorganization meeting, various committee assignments are made by the Board President. In order to ensure effective governance, the responsibilities and expectations of these committee assignments shall be made clear at the annual organization meeting.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board President will send a letter to the appropriate organization identifying the trustee who will represent the board on the committee.</li> </ul>
<b>Revisions to Governance Protocols and Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All changes in written governance team protocols and/or procedures will be reviewed during the annually scheduled effective governance workshop.</li> </ul>

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 San Mateo-Foster City School District Board of Education, Superintendent, staff, students and the community. We shall renew this agreement annually.

Affirmed on this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2018

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Audrey Ng, President

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Shara Watkins, Vice President

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Noelia Corzo, Clerk

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Kenneth Chin, Trustee

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Rebecca Hitchcock, Trustee

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Dr. Joan Rosas, Superintendent