



SAN MATEO-FOSTER CITY  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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San Mateo-Foster City School District

# *Governance Handbook*

## *Our Vision*

*The San Mateo – Foster City School District  
educates, inspires and empowers  
every student in every school every day to  
live, lead and learn with integrity and joy.*

March 2021

# *Our Mission Statement*

The San Mateo – Foster City School District provides a rigorous, high quality and equitable education while partnering with our families and community to support all students to achieve their full academic, social and emotional potential.

## *Equity Definition*

(adapted from the National Equity Project)

Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop their full academic or social-emotional potential as measured through multiple data metrics. Working towards equity involves:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, cultural or racial factor
- Interrupting inequitable policies and practices while examining and eliminating biases to create inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children
- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests that every human possesses.

# *Governance Team*

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(Until June 30, 2021)

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# *What We Value as a Governance Team*

**Equity and Inclusion:** We value our students and are committed to equitable practices that are inclusive of every student.

**Our Students and Families:** We prioritize educating the whole child which includes empowering and collaborating with families.

**Our Teachers and Staff:** We are dedicated to supporting our innovative staff, teachers, and administrators who work hard to support our students.

**Our Community:** We are committed to engaging with our entire community, recognizing that it is essential to the success of our students.

**Our Diversity:** We resolve to ensure that the many perspectives and cultures in our schools are valued as a source of strength and pride in our community.

**Our Moral Imperative:** We commit to interrupting racism and all forms of oppression in order to support the development of full academic and social potential of all students

# *The Norms*

*The behaviors by which the Governance Team is characterized are as follows:*

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

- **Be respectful:** We give respect and dignity to every interaction.
- **Be prepared:** We come to meetings prepared and ready to deliberate.
- **Be transparent:** We communicate openly and honestly with one another and the community.
- **Be inclusive:** We commit to representing and empowering the entire community.
- **Be collaborative:** We work collaboratively towards a common vision and purpose.
- **Be unified:** We respect and support the Board's decisions.
- **Be bold:** We make data driven decisions focused on equity and policy to improve student achievement.

*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.

*In support of our Meeting Guidelines, we have adopted the following discussion norms:*

## *Discussion Norms*

- Keep the focus on the best interest of students
- Assume positive intentions
- Be willing to push each other's thinking
- Look at every issue from multiple perspectives
- Invite and welcome the contributions of every member and listen to each other
- Listen to understand
- Agree to disagree
- Be solutions oriented
- Support team's decisions



# *Discussion of 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.
- Collaborating with other agencies on behalf of our students, teachers and staff.
- 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 of Trustees in order to fulfill her/his responsibilities?*

***The Superintendent needs:***

- The Board of Trustees 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.
- The Board to acknowledge emails/community communications and then forward them to the Superintendent so that she/he may address the issue as appropriate.
- The Board 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 in a timely manner 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
<b>Board Meetings</b>	<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 announcements, committee updates and public comments. 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>• The end of each meeting is a time for staff and Trustees to provide updates. 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><li>• The Agenda includes an item for three labor unit reports (classified, certificated, administration).</li><li>• Board member desired agenda items are aligned with board priorities.</li><li>• 1-2 Regular Board Meetings are held monthly from August through June and every effort will be made to hold Board Meetings to three hours.</li><li>• Study Sessions and School Visitations are scheduled as desired by the Board.</li><li>• On items of interest, the Board can direct staff to hold community listening sessions.</li></ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<b>Role of the Board President</b>	<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 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> </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 will open and close public comment and acknowledge 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>• If the Board President misses a step, a Trustee can respectfully remind the Board President that a step needs to be re-considered</li> <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>• The Board then makes the decision.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual speakers may be allowed three minutes to address the Board on each agenda or non-agenda item. The Board shall limit the total time for public input on each item to 20 minutes.</li> <li>• With Board consent, the Board president may increase or decrease the time allowed for public presentation, depending on the topic and the number of persons wishing to be heard. The president may take a poll of speakers for or against a particular issue and may ask that additional persons speak only if they have something new to add.</li> <li>• In order to ensure that non-English speakers receive the same opportunity to directly address the Board, any member of the public who utilizes a translator may be provided at least twice the allotted time to address the Board, unless simultaneous translation equipment is used to allow the Board to hear the translated public testimony simultaneously.</li> </ul> <p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board President may remind the public that all business is conducted in a respectful manner.</li> <li>• As individuals address the Board, members listen respectfully.</li> <li>• Questions from the public will be directed to the Board President. The Board President will facilitate responses.</li> <li>• Board members may be contacted through email prior to the Board meeting on agenda items of interest.</li> <li>• Community listening sessions may be considered for topics of interest.</li> </ul>



ISSUE	AGREEMENT
<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. The Superintendent will note the importance of each item on the subject line and mark urgent matters with an exclamation point (!).</li> <li>The Superintendent should receive copies of all communications between Board Members and the public.</li> </ul> <p>If a Trustee forgets one of these procedures, the Superintendent may call her/him individually to review the steps of the procedure.</p>

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>• The Trustees will operate under the norms set forth in the Governance Handbook.</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 community concerns and the Superintendent will share that information with the other Board Members and appropriate staff.</li> <li>• Community listening sessions may be considered for topics of interest.</li> <li>• Board Meeting minutes will reflect the main point of the discussion and any actions taken with a timestamp of where to find the item on the zoom recording.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We want to see classrooms and experience students learning.</li> <li>• Attendance on campuses helps us build relationships.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Protocol:</u></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 once a month.</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>• Breakfast or 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> <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>

ISSUE	AGREEMENT
	<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, the Board President will respond to the individual and inform them that he/she is sending the email to the Superintendent so that she can deal with the issue appropriately. Other Board Members may respond as appropriate.</li> <li>• The Board member(s) 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 updates from the committees quarterly.</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> <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>
<p><b>Revisions to Governance Protocols and Procedures</b></p>	<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 March 25, 2021.

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Kenneth Chin, President

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Noelia Corzo, Trustee

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Alison Proctor, Vice President

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Lisa Warren , Trustee

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Shara Watkins, Clerk

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Dr. Joan Rosas, Superintendent

(Until June 30, 2021)

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.