



# Governance Handbook

## Board of Trustees

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**This handbook reflects the governance team’s work on creation of a framework for effective governance. This involves ongoing discussions about district’s vision, core beliefs, goals, and commitments; as well as the Board’s unity of purpose, roles and responsibilities, governance norms, code of ethics, and welcoming new Board members. This also involves coming to agreement on protocols for formal structures that enable the governance team to continue to perform its responsibilities in a way that best benefits all students.**

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# Section 1 - Vision, Goals, Core Beliefs and Commitments

## VISION

All NUSD students graduate as college and career ready, productive, responsible and engaged global citizens.

## CORE BELIEFS

- Every student can learn and succeed
- Disparity and disproportionality can and must be eliminated
- Our diversity is a strength
- Staff must be committed, collaborative, caring and exemplary

## DISTRICT GOALS

1. Increase student success in ELA, math, science, literacy and civics
2. Prepare students to be college and career ready
3. Engage parents and families to support student success in school
4. Create safe and welcoming learning environments where students attend and are connected to their schools
5. Recruit, hire, train, and retain high quality staff who are committed, collaborative, caring and exemplary

## COMMITMENTS

Every student can learn and succeed.

- We will ensure every student will learn and succeed.
- We will dedicate differentiated resources based on diverse and unique student and family needs.
- we will engage our families and community partners for student success.

Disparity and disproportionality can and must be eliminated

- We will eliminate the achievement gaps.
- We will utilize data to identify and eliminate disparity and disproportionality.
- We will increase access and raise expectations.

Our diversity is a strength

- We will recruit, hire, and retain diverse staff.
- We will champion options and choices for our students.
- We will differentiate instruction and programs to meet the needs and potential of each student.
- We will provide services that met the diverse needs of our parents and families.
- We will break down barriers and promote cultural understanding.

Staff must be committed, collaborative, caring, and exemplary

- We will commit to on-going professional development, support and accountability
- We will institute collaborative work practices.
- We will value and acknowledge exemplary performance.
- We will demonstrate caring through responsive and quality customer service.
- We will maintain a culture of accountability.

## **Section 2 - Building a Governance Team and Unity of Purpose**

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

In a school district, the Board and Superintendent work together as a governance team. For a governance team to work together effectively, members need to:

- Maintain a unity of purpose;
- Agree on and govern within appropriate role and responsibilities;
- Create and sustain a positive governance team culture and;
- Follow Board Governance protocols

### **Unity of Purpose**

Building an effective governance team involves:

- Supporting a shared vision and district goals.
- Building trust and moving the District forward.
- Working on being an effective team.
- Understanding our individual roles and collective responsibilities.
- Being a team with a common focused direction so we are not a distraction to the District or community but a catalyst for the focused efforts of employees, and the community can see evidence of this focused direction.
- Being partners with the staff in positive change.
- Overseeing the development of first-rate programs and facilities, making sure we continue to improve – never resting on our laurels.
- Creating a positive culture that is sustained regardless of transitions in Trustees, leadership and staff.
- Utilizing a systematic approach to equity based on the Board's Theory of Action (BP 0100)
- Striving to meet the needs of our diverse population.
- Creating a supportive structure for equity and effective governance.

## **Section 3 - Roles and Responsibilities**

The role of Trustees is to stay focused on the big picture while fulfilling five responsibilities:

1. Setting the direction.
2. Providing support.
3. Ensuring accountability.
4. Acting as community leaders.
5. Remaining focused on equity and eliminating disparity and disproportionality.

### **The Role of the Individual Trustee, the Board, and The Board's Job**

The CSBA recommends governance standards that: 1) defines the role of the individual Trustee, 2) defines the role of the Board, and 3) outlines the Board's job.

#### **The Individual Trustee**

In California's public education system, a trustee is a person elected or appointed to serve on a school district or county board of education. Individual trustees bring unique skills, values and beliefs to their board. In order to govern effectively, individual trustees must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high quality education is provided to each student.

TO BE EFFECTIVE, AN INDIVIDUAL TRUSTEE:

- Keeps learning and achievement for all students as the primary focus.
- Values, supports and advocates for public education.
- Recognizes and respects differences of perspective and style on the Board and among staff, students, parents and the community.
- Acts with dignity, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Keeps confidential matters confidential.
- Participates in professional development and commits the time and energy necessary to be an informed and effective leader.
- Understands the distinctions between board and staff roles, and refrains from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.
- Understands that authority rests with the board as a whole and not with individuals.

#### **The Board**

School districts and county offices of education are governed by boards, not by individual trustees. While understanding their separate roles, the board and superintendent work together as a "governance team." This team assumes collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture in order to govern effectively.

## TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY, THE BOARD MUST HAVE A UNITY OF PURPOSE AND:

- Keep the district focused on learning and achievement for all students.
- Communicate a common vision.
- Operate openly, with trust and integrity.
- Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect.
- Govern within board-adopted policies and procedures.
- Take collective responsibility for the board's performance.
- Periodically evaluate its own effectiveness.
- Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform board deliberations

### **The Board's Job**

The primary responsibilities of the board are to set a direction for the district, provide a structure by establishing policies, ensure accountability and provide community leadership on behalf of the district and public education. To fulfill these responsibilities, there are a number of specific jobs that effective boards must carry out.

### EFFECTIVE BOARDS:

- Involve the community, parents, students and staff in developing a common vision for the district focused on learning and achievement and responsive to the needs of all students. Adopt, evaluate and update policies consistent with the law and the district's vision and goals.
- Maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress.
- Hire and support the superintendent so that the vision, goals and policies of the district can be implemented.
- Conduct regular and timely evaluations of the superintendent based on the vision, goals and performance of the district, and ensure that the superintendent holds district personnel accountable.
- Adopt a fiscally responsible budget based on the district's vision and goals, and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district.
- Ensure that a safe and appropriate educational environment is provided to all students.
- Establish a framework for the district's collective bargaining process and adopt responsible agreements.
- Provide community leadership on educational issues and advocate on behalf of students and public education at the local, state and federal levels.
- Oversee the development and adoption of policies and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies.
- In accordance with law, Board Policies, and negotiated agreements, serve as a judicial (hearing) and appeals body.

## **The Roles of the Superintendent**

The Board of Trustees desires to establish a productive working relationship with the Superintendent and to ensure that the work of the Superintendent is focused on student learning and achievement and the attainment of the district's vision and goals. The Board also desires to provide a fair basis for holding the Superintendent accountable.

The Superintendent's role as outlined in Board Policy 2110 states:

- The responsibilities of the Superintendent are detailed in law, in the Superintendent's contract, and throughout Board policies and administrative regulations.
- The Board shall clarify expectations and goals for the Superintendent at the beginning of every evaluation year.
- As the chief executive officer of the district, the Superintendent shall implement all Board decisions and manage the instructional and non-instructional operations of the schools.
- The Superintendent also serves as a member of the district's governance team and has responsibilities to support Board operations and decision making.

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.

## **Section 4 - Creating and Sustaining a Positive Governance Team Culture**

**Culture is the positive or negative atmosphere created by the way people in an organization treat each other. Teams have unwritten (implicit) or written (explicit) agreements about how they will behave with each other and others. These behavioral ground rules, often called norms, enable teams to build and maintain a positive culture or shift a negative one.**

In order to create and sustain a positive culture and atmosphere among the governance team, we agree to follow Governance Norms and a Code of Ethics:

### **Governance Norms**

- Maintain a focus on students' best interest. This is also a touchstone that allows the Trustees to have differences on what is best for students.
- Keep from taking disagreements personally and embrace and respect individuality.
- Show respect to each other and do not dismiss/devalue others.
- Commit to effective deliberation, listening openly while everyone is allowed to express his or her point of view.
- Commit to open communication, honesty, and no surprises.
- Commit the time necessary to govern effectively. This means being there, being knowledgeable, participating, understanding the full scope of being a Trustee and being willing to take on all the responsibilities involved.
- Be collaborative.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Learn from history; focus on the present and the future.

### **Code of Ethics - Trustees will:**

- Be fair, just, and impartial in all decisions and actions.
- Accord others the respect I wish for myself.
- Encourage expressions of different opinions and listen with an open mind.
- Accurately represent district policies, programs, priorities, and progress.
- Be accessible to the community to seek its involvement.
- Work to ensure prudent and accountable use of district resources.
- Always tell the truth.
- Share individual views while working for consensus.
- Base his/her decisions on facts rather than suppositions, opinions, or public favor.
- Refuse to surrender my judgement to any individual or group at the expense of the district as a whole.
- Consider each issue on its own merits and not trade votes.
- Consistently uphold all applicable laws, rules, policies, and governance procedures.
- Respect the majority decision as the decision of the board.
- Not disclose information that is confidential by law.
- Prepare for and attend board meetings.
- Not involve myself in activities the board has delegated to the Superintendent.
- Be continuously guided by what is best for all students of the district.



## **Welcoming and Onboarding New Board Members**

Board Bylaw 9240 specifically address requirements for new Trustee orientation. The Board and/or the Superintendent or designee shall provide an orientation to newly elected or appointed Board members which includes comprehensive information regarding Board roles, policies, and procedures and the district's vision and goals, operations, and current challenges. Throughout their first term, Board members shall continue to participate in additional educational opportunities designed to assist them in understanding the principles of effective governance, including, but not limited to, information on school finance and budgets, student achievement and assessment, labor relations, community relations, program evaluation, open meeting laws (the Brown Act), conflict of interest laws, and other topics necessary to govern effectively and in compliance with law.

The Orientation may include, but is not limited to: a meeting(s) with the Superintendent and senior leaders, Brown Act Training with legal counsel. It is encouraged that returning Trustees meet with new Trustees, not to talk about school business (a potential Brown Act violation) but to start developing a relationship.

## Section 5 - Board Governance Protocols

### Leadership Responsibility and Roles of the Board

The only authority rests with the majority of the Board. A majority vote sets such direction. Individuals can request action by bringing up a new idea, explaining their interest in a particular course of action and working to get a Board majority to support moving in that direction. When a majority of the Board, sitting in a formal meeting, requests action, that request should be made in the context of the intended results.

Board Bylaws (BB 9000, 9200 and 9300) of the District relate to the role and responsibility of the Board collectively and Board members individually. “No individual member of the Board, by virtue of holding office, shall exercise any administrative responsibility with respect to the schools; nor as an individual, command the services of any employee.” Board members are to channel their requests and/or concerns directly to the Superintendent (or if necessary through the Board President).

In responding to concerns, board members will:

- **Receive** the information (listen)
- **Repeat** the information – paraphrase to ensure understanding
- **Remind** the individual that a Board member has no authority as an individual and share the appropriate line of command to follow in addressing their concern.
- **Re-Direct** – Thank them for sharing their thoughts and direct them to the Constituent and Customer Service Department (CCS). Additionally a Trustee can share The Path of Successful Communication tool on the CCS Webpage if the person with the concern prefers a traditional path to problem solving and has not yet started that process.
- **Report** – As soon as possible, inform the Constituent and Customer Service Department and, if desired, the Superintendent.

Board members will hold to the highest level of conduct, including emphasizing the positive when in public places or situations. Whenever appropriate, when responding to communications from staff or community members, each Board member will relate the concerns or complaints from such individuals to the Superintendent for action

### The Board’s Role and Relationship with the Staff & Community

School visitations are encouraged to build understanding of the district’s instructional programs, curriculum, and staffs. For formal, extended site visits, where site administrators are asked to accompany Trustees during the school day, Trustees should make appointments through the Superintendent's office who shall coordinate with the principal to respect the principal’s time and mandated responsibilities. The visit can be placed on the board calendar alerting other members and the superintendent to the visit. This may prevent one school from having numerous visits from different board members during a short period of time. During visits, members should be cautious of interrupting the learning environment. Informal visits are welcome and encouraged. Informal visits are ones that do not require site administration to accompany a Trustee. As a professional courtesy, Trustees are asked to inform the Superintendent's office they will be on campus. Nothing in the above paragraph shall prevent Trustees from performing their oversight responsibilities.

Board members will provide input to the Superintendent on issues or concerns that may arise from such a visit. Staff members shall relay requests from Board members to the Superintendent to ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Board members. Such a direction does not imply, to either the staff or to individual Board members, a censoring of any private and informal conversations. The imperative is that: 1) a staff member is not placed in a position, by a Board member, to provide any information (beyond the information that would be provided to any regular community member) and/or complete any duty as requested and 2) a staff member is not feeling unduly pressured to take action or feel concern about their job based on their response.

### **Board Meetings and the Agenda**

Meetings of the Board are held in public, but are not open-forum town hall meetings. Meetings will be conducted in such a way as to allow the public to provide input in the time allotted to ensure that multiple voices of the community inform Board deliberations; however, when the Board deliberates, it will be a time for the Trustees to listen and learn from each other, taking public input into consideration without re-engaging the public. For this to effectively take place, Trustees must read necessary information in a timely and regular manner (Board Communications, emails, Board Agenda and back-up material, etc.)

Board meetings will typically be on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month (annual exceptions are noted on the annual Regular Board Meeting Schedule). Each Board meeting will typically begin with Closed Session. The Regular Public Meeting will typically begin between 6:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Additional Study Sessions and Special meetings shall be scheduled as needed or at the direction of the Board.

The design of the Board agenda will follow the historical structure utilized by the Board. The design of the agenda may only be altered with the approval of the Board.

The Superintendent, with the support of staff, will create each Board Agenda. Board members may request items to be placed on the agenda to the Superintendent or the Board President. The Board President and the Superintendent will discuss the contents of the agenda and the process that will be followed at the meeting, in advance of the publication of the Agenda. Once a school year (July 1-June 30) a Trustee can add an item for discussion to be agendaized within the next 3 board meetings. The discussion item must be aligned with the district's vision, goals, core beliefs and/or commitments. The discussion items requires no preparation or work from staff. The length of the discussion will be in alignment with Board Bylaws and will be dependent on the majority of the Board's interest in discussing the topic. The item will list the name as the person responsible as the Trustee responsible for requesting the item on the agenda. No Trustee will request an item placed on the agenda during a Trustee election year from August - November.

When an individual Board member requests information, that information will be provided to all Board members. Trustees will make every effort to submit, prior to the meeting, questions they intend to ask so that the Superintendent and district staff have the opportunity to prepare to answer Trustees' questions at board meetings. If unforeseen questions arrive during the meeting, Trustees will acknowledge their question or comment as spontaneous and that they understand that staff may not have the information on hand to answer the question.

Board members will read the information provided to them and commit to ongoing professional development and training.

Each Trustee respects the right of other Trustees to vote “no” on an issue. Everyone agrees it is a courtesy to the governance team to explain the reasons for the “no” vote either during deliberation or before casting the vote. Abstaining on a vote should be announced at the time the topic is first brought up and should be based on one of the following: 1) the matter affects a close relative of the board member (Education Code section 35707); 2) the vote is to replace the board member’s position on the board (Education Code section 35178); or 3) “remote interests” as listed in Government Code section 1091.

Each Trustee respects the right of other Trustees to vote in the minority position. If so doing, each Trustee should, as a courtesy to the team, explain the reason for their minority vote, either during deliberation or before casting the vote.

The governance team will strive for brevity in deliberations, keeping remarks brief and to the point so that all opinions can be expressed and meetings can be efficient. Addressing each agenda item the Board shall, normally, adhere to the following process:

- Staff Presentation/addressing questions from the Board
- Input from the Community
- Board Discussion and Deliberation

The Board wishes to maintain a culture of professionalism, stay focused, and respect the need of Trustees to be available to their families:

- Cell phones will be set for ‘silent’ or vibrate.
- Trustees will be discreet in checking cell phones, when necessary.
- Phones in closed session will be limited as they provide concerns regarding confidentiality

Closed Session: The Brown Act and Education Code delineate the circumstances under which a local agency may meet in Closed Session. Closed Sessions are authorized for the following:

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Real Property Transactions | 5. Personnel Exception    |
| 2. Pending Litigation         | 6. Collective Bargaining  |
| 3. Joint Power Agency Issues  | 7. Student Discipline     |
| 4. Public Security            | 8. Assessment Instruments |

### **The Board’s Role in Collective Bargaining**

Board members will be actively involved in the collective bargaining process to ensure that the District is represented well by those selected to negotiate on behalf of the Board and the Community.

The involvement of the Board will be to:

- Ensure that the ethical, fiscal and educational goals of the Community are represented in the actions taken throughout the collective bargaining process;
- Participate by providing direction and guidance to those selected to represent the Board (District Negotiation Team);
- Establish the bargaining approach to be utilized by its negotiation team;
- Set the District’s collective bargaining parameters for its negotiation team; and,

- Expect, as the representative of the Board, that the Superintendent will ensure that the Board, collectively and individually, is informed on the issues and strategies implemented within the collective bargaining process

### **The Board's Relationship with the Superintendent**

The Board will commit to work through and with the Superintendent on issues regarding the running of the District. The Board and Superintendent are expected to protect confidential information. The Superintendent will inform the Board as soon as possible of:

- serious safety concerns;
- serious disciplinary action;
- serious / unexpected personnel changes;
- legal or liability concerns; and,
- notable achievements

The Superintendent shall organize the staff in any way he or she deems appropriate to serve the needs of the District. Where appropriate, the Superintendent shall proactively inform the Board of the action being taken.

The Board designates the Superintendent as the official spokesperson for the district. The superintendent will inform the Board, as appropriate, regarding media coverage for certain events and issues. The Board President or designee is authorized to speak on behalf of the Board, when necessary.

All conflicts between the Superintendent and the Board will be handled in Closed Session. When appropriate, the Superintendent shall be in attendance. Conflicts between individual governance team members will be addressed privately between those who hold the conflict

The Board commits to complete an annual evaluation of the Superintendent. The Board will set aside at least one special meeting for the purpose of completing the annual evaluation of the Superintendent. In consultation with the Superintendent, the evaluation process and associated documents will be developed and approved by the Board, not later than the first Board meeting in September. The evaluation process and instrument is designed to bring about the collective view of the Board

### **The Ongoing Implementation of Board Approved Protocols**

An agenda item will be scheduled every January to review governance team agreements and processes.

In order to support a positive working relationship among the Natomas Unified School District Board of Education, the staff, students, and the community, we have reviewed and agreed to the norms and protocols outlined in the 2020 Governance Handbook. We shall renew these agreements annually in January.

Affirmed on this day, January 20, 2021.

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Jag Bains, Member  
Natomas Unified School District Board of Education

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Micah Grant, Member  
Natomas Unified School District Board of Education

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Ericka Harden, Member  
Natomas Unified School District Board of Education

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Susan Heredia, Member  
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Lisa Kaplan, Member  
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Chris Evans, Superintendent/Executive Secretary  
Natomas Unified School District Board of Education