



December 4, 2012

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Members of the Alameda COE Board of Trustees  
Sheila Jordan, County Superintendent

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ABOUT: Notes from the September & November 2012 Governance Workshops

The following pages reflect the work that was accomplished during the September and November 2012 governance workshops with the Alameda County Office of Education Board of Trustees and County Superintendent.

Notes added from the November 13 workshop are indicated on the table of contents page. The completed strengths and challenges charts for each governance team member are included on pages 9 – 16.

Members of the governance team suggested norm and/or protocol topics at both workshops, and those suggestions are included in these notes. It was also proposed that next steps could be to identify those norms or protocols the board wishes to approve formally and to set up a process to do so. A process might be for a subcommittee of the board to consider the various strengths and challenges charts and to review the suggested norms and protocols in the notes, and then identify additional norms or protocol topics for the governance team to consider. A conversation meeting, (description in Appendix A), could then be scheduled for the governance team to agree on norm and/or protocol language. Agreed upon norms and protocols should be added to a board meeting agenda for approval.

Several of the issues raised by the team are defined in Board Bylaws: BB 9000 - Role of the Board, BB 9005 - Governance Standards, BB 9200 – Limits of Board Member Authority, BB 9125 – Administrative Assistant. Board Policies should also be checked for relevancy: BP Series 0000 - Philosophy, Goals, Objectives and Comprehensive Plans, BP Series 1000 – Community Relations, BP Series 2000 – Administration. Norms and protocols must be consistent with adopted policies and bylaws.

It was a pleasure working with all of you. Governance team members did an excellent job of discussing issues of importance to the team, and Michael and I hope these workshop notes accurately reflect the conversations during the two days.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any comments or questions about the workshop notes, or if we can be of any further assistance.



# *Alameda COE*

## *Governance Workshop Notes* *September & November 2012*

### *Board of Trustees*

Ken Berrick

Yvonne Cerrato

Aisha Knowles

Eileen McDonald

Marlon McWilson

Joaquin Rivera

Fred Sims

### *County Superintendent*

Sheila Jordan



## *Governance Workshop Notes*

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The items listed below indicate the topics discussed during the workshop:*

- Welcome and Introductions
- Agree on Meeting Guidelines
- Workshop Objectives
- Working Styles
- Strengths and Challenges We Bring to the Table

## WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

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*The workshop objectives listed below are a combination of what Leslie and Michael heard during the phone calls with board members, and additional objectives added by board members at the workshop:*

### What We Heard:

- Develop a professional, cohesive Board that operates with civility and respect
- Develop norms and protocols that support effective governance

### Objectives Added At The Workshop:

- Discuss Board dynamics and we how we work together.
- Make sure all of our discussions and agreements are important to our ability to serve our students.
- Gain clarity on the role between the Board's Administrative Assistant, the Board, Board members, and the County Superintendent.
- Unwrap the "stuff" that is getting in our way and clear the air
- Discuss communication skills:
  - In the Board Room
  - Outside the Board Room

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## MEETING GUIDELINES:

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*The meeting guidelines were developed by the board and superintendent during the September 25 governance workshop and followed during both workshops:*

- Be supportive – not judgmental
- Engage in open and honest communication and not hold back, while being kind, direct, and respectful
- Be clear about what you mean
- Paraphrase for understanding
- Listen actively without preparing a response
- Be sensitive to other people's styles and personalities
- Work toward the future learning from the past

## NORM AND/OR PROTOCOL TOPICS TO CONSIDER:

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- Board members as ambassadors for the COE
  - What does that look like?
  - What would board members do?
  - How do "special interests of board members fit into this?"
  - How do we develop Key Messages so that board members have up-to-date, accurate information and are able to be ambassadors for the COE?
- Board's Administrative Assistant - The working relationship with the Board, Board members, and the County Superintendent
- The role and responsibilities of the Board President.
- Election of the Board President
- Board and Board member relationship to COE staff
  - Needs of the organization / staff
  - Needs of the Board / Board members
- Reports to the Board about working committees (committee calendars / timing / interferences are issues that need to be considered in this protocol)

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- How do Board members other than the President communicate about the agenda?
- When do we switch from “discussion” to “deliberation”?
- Scheduling conversation meetings about complex topics

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A COE BOARD OF DISTINCTION:

#### *A County Board of Distinction...*

- Has clearly identified goals and benchmarks that are reviewed on a regular basis – with an established evaluation process
- Has clearly defined norms and protocols
- Board members know their constituency base and advocates for them
- Receives updates on “best practices” and policies for working with juvenile population.
- Is proactive rather than reactive
- Acknowledges the work of staff and students and celebrates accomplishments
- Speaks with a common voice about the COE, procedures, mission and goals
- Works effectively with other elected officials to enhance services – not duplicate them
- Understands how legislation affects the COE and our students and families
- Board members are empathetic listeners
- Is respectful of people who come before us
- Is Honest
- Maintains an “open-door” policy
- Listens to what people have to say to us, but only act collectively
- Engages in open and honest conversation and doesn’t keep secrets
- Require complaints to be submitted in writing and to be signed and dated.
- Is accurate on its webpage

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- Is well informed with clearly defined deliberative processes that are predictable, and lead to outcomes that benefit our constituency.
- Collaborates with the superintendent to develop a shared vision and goals for COE implementation
- Gives direction to the County Superintendent only at Board meetings.
- Has knowledge of other County business outside our own constituent areas
- Brings innovations in practices and procedures to our own programs and the districts we serve.

## CRITIQUE OF LUNCH TIME MEETING:

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<u>STRENGTHS</u>	<u>CHALLENGES</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open and honest conversations</li><li>• Dealt with important topics in a non-defensive way</li><li>• Validated each other</li><li>• Tried to take turns</li><li>• Finally got some things in black and white</li><li>• Began building consensus</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Off focus and all over the place</li><li>• No clear direction</li><li>• Got tangential / rushed off track</li><li>• Felt at a loss for not having documents ahead of time</li><li>• No parking lot process</li><li>• Tone / tenor of conversation between Marlon and Damon</li><li>• Lack of respect for board from staff</li><li>• Defensiveness of staff</li><li>• Felt like a firewall between staff and board</li><li>• Felt completely unprepared to facilitate</li></ul>

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### PRIORITIZATION OF PROTOCOL TOPICS:

7 votes	Board member to Board Member Communication
6 votes	Board members “in-the-loop” – no surprises / Reports to the Board from working Committees
3 votes	Handling rumors about board members / superintendent / staff, etc.
2 votes	Board’s relationship with the associate superintendents and director level staff
2 votes	Responding to community or staff concerns or complaints
1 vote	Board’s relationship with the board’s administrative assistant

### DRAFT PROTOCOL: Board Members in the Loop – No Surprises

*Consider using Board meeting to provide sufficient information so that board members know what is going on:*

- 1. One business meeting each month*
- 2. One study session or conversation meeting each month  
(See appendix A – Conversation Meetings)*
  - a. i.e.: 3:30 – 5:30 or 4:00 – 6:00 pm (a time that suits board member schedules)*
  - b. a limited number of topics*
  - c. no action is taken*

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## DRAFT NORM DISCUSSIONS:

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*The following represent norm ideas that were discussed during the workshop on November 13.*

### *We will...*

- *Speak directly to each other when we have interpersonal issues, and take our conflict away from the Board table so that...*
  - *Issues don't fester*
  - *We can move past issues that are dividing us*
  - *Improve our understanding of each other*
  - *Ensure there are no surprises*
  - *We have more fair and open discussion*
  - *There are no secrets*
- *If a board member calls to talk about another board member, we will direct him or her back to the board member with whom they have an issue.*
- *Keep the superintendent out of interpersonal conflicts among board members.*
- *Be honest with each other*
- *Refrain from carrying on side conversations when others are speaking.*
- *Refrain from speaking over other people when they are talking.*
- *Board members should "be in the loop" not the last to know. To ensure there are no surprises:*
  - *Board members will notify the superintendent about rumors or issues that seem to be arising in the community.*
  - *The superintendent will communicate with the board about "unusual" good or bad information about the district. (The kinds of information that board members are likely to hear about from constituents who bump into them in the community.)*

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## WORKING STYLES:

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<p><b><u>A = Analytical</u></b>  <i>1 = Aisha</i>  <i>2 = Eileen, Joaquin</i></p>		<p><b><u>B = Driver</u></b>  <i>1 = Fred, Joaquin, Ken, Sheila,</i>  <i>2 = Marlon</i></p>	
<p><b><u>Strengths:</u></b>                  Thoroughness                  Want facts and information                  Attempt to bring a sense of order to the situation                  Organized                  Cautious                  Put the brakes on</p>	<p><b><u>Challenges:</u></b>                  Can get lost in information                  Require lots of info – use up staff time                  Full of questions                  Struggle to reach a conclusion                  Bring the process to a halt</p>	<p><b><u>Strengths:</u></b>                  Focused                  Get things done                  Come prepared                  Provide direction                  Disciplined                  Willing to make decisions                  Keep time lines                  Competitive</p>	<p><b><u>Challenges:</u></b>                  Don't bring others along                  Impatient                  Move too fast                  Don't want restrictions                  Without buy-in project can fall apart                  Don't listen                  Competitive</p>
<p><b><u>C = Amiable</u></b>  <i>1 = Eileen, Marlon, Yvonne</i>  <i>2 = Ken</i></p>		<p><b><u>D = Expressive</u></b>  <i>1 = Aisha, Marlon</i>  <i>2 = Eileen, Fred, Yvonne</i></p>	
<p><b><u>Strengths:</u></b>                  Inclusive                  Like working with people                  Sensitive to others                  Good sounding board                  Empathetic                  Collaborative                  Want everyone to get along                  Process oriented</p>	<p><b><u>Challenges:</u></b>                  Can't always involve everyone                  Slow the process down                  Feelings are easily hurt                  May compromise for the wrong reasons                  Feelings over facts</p>	<p><b><u>Strengths:</u></b>                  Think outside the box                  Have lots of ideas                  Flexible                  Inclusive – like working with others                  Very observant                  Lighten the mood                  Creative                  Fun loving</p>	<p><b><u>Challenges:</u></b>                  Not always practical                  Too many ideas                  Lack of focus                  Get things started, but don't follow-through                  Can confuse the situation by continuing to offer alternatives                  Not decisive</p>

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# APPENDIX A

## Conducting Conversation / Discussion Meetings

A conversation / discussion meeting is an opportunity for the board and superintendent to talk with each other in an informal setting where no action will be taken about issues of importance, interest or concern.

Conversation / discussion meetings must be held in open public session unless they fall within the Brown Act restrictions for closed executive session.

## Types of Conversation / Discussion Meetings

- ▶ Conversations about governance effectiveness
- ▶ Review working relationships among governance team members
- ▶ Develop / review / revise governance norms and protocols
- ▶ Develop / review / revise Governance Handbook
- ▶ Framing, Philosophical, Criteria Setting, Discussions (12:00 Discussions)  
- an initial background discussion to frame efforts on an important issue in the district.
- ▶ Develop criteria for problem-solving, action-planning, decision-making
- ▶ Progress reports to the board (might follow a staff report or a study session)
- ▶ An opportunity for the board and superintendent to discuss progress on goals, programs, issues from the 'big' picture, philosophical perspective.

## Rationale for Conversation / Discussion Meetings

Governance team members recognize the difficulty in finding the balance between one's own beliefs and values, interests of constituents, the needs of all children and the pressures of wanting to work effectively together as a team. Add to this the need to consider the district's beliefs, vision and goals; district resources; and laws and regulations and the task can seem insurmountable.

How do we create or sustain a team that has healthy and effective dynamics? Most importantly, by realizing it does not happen automatically. It takes time, effort and nurturing.

### Conversation/Discussion Meetings

CSBA recommends that governance teams set time aside annually, or at a minimum whenever a new member joins the team, to have a conversation about the framework within which this team governs.

Conversation/discussion meetings are public meetings subject to the provisions of the Brown Act. They need to be publicly noticed according to legally required



timelines, held in the district (unless there is a specific exception), at a location compliant with American Disability Act requirements. They can be held at a different time and place than the board's regular meetings. For instance the meeting times might be from 9 to 2 on a Saturday, or from 6 to 9 on two separate weekday evenings. An opportunity must be provided for public input, which can be at the beginning of the meeting. Governance team members may spend the rest of the meeting talking informally with each other.

At this meeting, trustees and the superintendent might discuss the governance team's:

- ▶ Unity of purpose
- ▶ Roles and responsibilities
- ▶ Culture and norms
- ▶ Operating protocols

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**The conversation that leads to shared understanding  
and agreement is what is important.**

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### **Recording Agreements**

Once agreements have been reached, it is important to record them. Recording them in a governance handbook provides a valuable tool for creating a framework within which the governance team can operate effectively.

A governance team's governance handbook must become a living document that is reviewed and updated by the school district governance team in an ongoing manner, annually, or certainly when new members join the governance team.

It is also important to ensure the team is committed to upholding the agreements. Some governance teams recommit to updated agreements at their annual organizational meeting. Others have their superintendent distribute their norms and protocols to district administrators so the management team is aware how the governance team is committed to acting and operating.

- ▶ A governance handbook will provide a framework for our governance efforts, just as the district policy book provides a framework for the staff's efforts.
- ▶ Collective commitments must be made and documented.



## Format for a Conversation Meeting

### **Dialogue – A Definition**

A dialogue is any conversation that is animated by a search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. Dialogue differs from both mediation and debate.

### **A good dialogue offers those who participate the opportunity to:**

- ▶ Listen and be listened to so that all speakers can be heard;
- ▶ Speak and be spoken to in a respectful manner;
- ▶ Develop or deepen mutual understanding; and
- ▶ Learn about the perspectives of others and reflect on one's own views.

Participants in successful dialogues usually agree to follow communication guidelines that support these purposes. The more fundamental and passionate the differences among those involved, the more important it is to clearly articulate and commit to such agreements and to have a facilitator present who can remind participants to observe them.

### **Here are some guidelines for dialogue in its most basic form**

- ▶ We talk about what is really important to us.
- ▶ We genuinely listen to each other. We see how thoroughly we can understand each other's views and experience.
- ▶ We say what's true for us without making each other wrong.
- ▶ We see what we can learn together by exploring things together.
- ▶ We avoid monopolizing the conversation. We make sure everyone has a chance to speak.

### **Tips for a 'Great' Conversation**

- ▶ Focus on what matters
- ▶ Acknowledge one another as equals
- ▶ Speak with your heart and mind
- ▶ Beware of judgments
- ▶ Listen in order to understand – suspend certainty and let go of assumptions
- ▶ Slow down to allow time for thinking and reflection
- ▶ Listen for patterns, insights and deeper questions
- ▶ Share collective discoveries



## The “12:00 Discussion” – Setting the Direction

### **Framing the Issue**

It is the board’s responsibility to establish a philosophical framework - grounded in the district core beliefs and vision - that will serve as the foundation for staff developed plans of action.

### **Balancing Act**

Once elected to serve on a school board - this balancing act defines the areas of focus for the board. This is the balancing act that has to take place every time the board considers a new idea, program, or agenda item. The governance team is the only entity that can perform this balancing act - no one else has that responsibility.

### **Governance Team Leadership means**

The ultimate measure of a group is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

- ▶ Holding true to the notion of serving every child in the school district
  - ▶ Recognizing that a change in priorities or the addition of new projects significantly impacts district resources and the ability to achieve agreed upon goals
  - ▶ Standing ‘tough’ behind the decisions that are necessary in order to achieve the district vision and goals
  - ▶ Understanding that the team has to demonstrate solidarity on the “big” issues - once a decision has been made
- 
- ▶ Upholding the law and carrying out any regulations
  - ▶ Appreciating the right of constituency groups to come before the governing body - but understanding that they are representing only a single interest - and do not have to “balance” anything else
  - ▶ Knowing that sometimes we have to stand on our own principles and will vote against an item -- recognizing that staff will carry out the direction of the board - and not doing anything to undermine the decision.
  - ▶ Behaving and operating in a manner that demonstrates “good government” in action to our students and our community (Theater of Democracy - civil discourse - character education / conflict resolution programs as district wide expectations)



## **Understanding the Context**

Sometimes before the board can establish the criteria for decision-making, there are other issues that have to be considered:

- ▶ Is there district history or politics that have to be factored into the conversation?
- ▶ Does the board have sufficient background information for discussion?
- ▶ Is there any important data that should be considered?
- ▶ Who are the people who will be involved/affected by the situation?
- ▶ What is a reasonable timeline?
- ▶ How are we going to communicate with stakeholders as we move ahead?

Some of these may be issues that can be left up to staff to include in the action plan -- but there may be times when it is important for the board to establish the philosophical framework in these areas -- especially for highly sensitive or political topics.

