



County Board Member *Services*

Dear California County Board of Education Trustees,

This letter is prompted by communications the CSBA Board of Directors has received from several county offices of education, including the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Placer County Office of Education, the Riverside County Office of Education, and the San Mateo County Office of Education. It also responds to informal feedback and misinformation we have heard from some members regarding the decision to integrate the former California County Boards of Education (CCBE) into CSBA County Board Member Services.

I think it is important to understand the Board's decision is rooted in an overarching principle — CSBA is and will continue to be fully committed to supporting county boards. We are determined to work in a collaborative manner to achieve the association's shared vision of success: serving as the essential voice of public education. Realizing that vision requires that we work through this transitional period to ensure you have the tools, services, supports, and networking opportunities needed to flourish in your governance role.

We understand that for some county trustees, the decision to integrate CCBE activities more deeply into CSBA has created a sense of loss and frustration. Conversely, other trustees have welcomed this change and the opportunity it presents. Regardless of how one views the Board's decision, I think it's important to expand on the rationale behind it, correct the record where appropriate, and address some of the concerns raised in the aforementioned letters to the CSBA Board of Directors.

We acknowledge that in our effort to develop an even stronger organization for all governing board trustees through this restructuring, we underestimated the amount of dialogue some county trustees may have needed to embrace this change. As a result, some communication gaps emerged that resulted in confusion and discontent. We are working diligently to address these communication gaps in the hope of creating the productive exchange we originally envisioned.

Transitional Working Group: Composition

Concurrent with the establishment of CSBA County Board Member Services, we created a Transitional Working Group composed of 15 county trustees — including past presidents of CCBE and former CCBE Directors — to help guide this transformation. Additionally, then-CCBE President John McPherson identified the majority of the county board members to serve on the committee. I would hasten to add that the Transitional Working Group is only four months into this process and the final chapter has yet to be written.

[View the members of the Transitional Working Group »](#)

The Transitional Working Group is tasked with providing CSBA's Board of Directors with recommendations about the future services and supports county board members need. The members of the Transitional Working Group are demographically and ideologically diverse and include trustees with decades of experience and involvement in CSBA and CCBE. I mention this because, at the County Board Governance Workshop I attended in early March (described by at least one attendee as the best version of the event in some time), some trustees expressed a desire to expand the Transitional Working Group, citing concerns it was not broad enough. Similarly, in its letter to CSBA, the San Mateo County Board of Education requested that we "*commit to directly involving County Board Members as active participants in County Board-only conference and training planning,*" a development that was already in progress via the Transitional Working Group.

As it happens, the 15 members of the Transitional Working Group represent a good sample of the total number of county trustees statewide. In fact, the 15-person working group is larger in comparison to the total number of county trustees than other CSBA committees like the Legislative Committee or Annual Education Conference Committee are in relation to the CSBA membership overall. This, along with the appointment of current and former CCBE leadership to the Working Group, as well as then-CCBE President John McPherson identifying county trustees to serve on the Transitional Working Group, provides strong evidence that this body is broad enough to represent the interests of county trustees at large. Additionally, county trustees are disproportionately represented on the Legislative Committee, accounting for more than one-fifth of committee membership, another sign of CSBA's commitment to elevating the input of county board members.

Transitional Working Group: Activities

The Transitional Working Group, tasked with providing CSBA's Board of Directors with recommendations about the future services and supports county board members need, held its first meeting on January 12, 2024, indicating our desire to prioritize this work at the very start of the new year. The group then met twice a month from January through March and will continue meeting monthly from April through October. These convenings are in addition to numerous meetings of different Transitional Working Group subcommittees dedicated to providing specific recommendations for the September CSBA County Board Member Conference, the County Trustees Handbook, the County Masters in Governance program, and the Jack Bedell Award for county board excellence.

The Transitional Working Group will continue to address issues of concern to county trustees, including, but not exclusive to, many of the items raised in the letters received by CSBA from the aforementioned county boards. Out of respect for the Transitional Working Group and our desire to allow them to reach conclusions free from duress or influence, the Board of Directors will not offer definitive pronouncements on the exact form CCBE legacy items and activities such as the handbook or fall conference, for example, might assume under the new CSBA County Board Member Services. This understandably causes some trepidation, particularly for those who committed time and energy to these endeavors over the years. Please be assured that our reticence to confirm the status of these legacy items is simply a product of our respect for the integrity of the process and the talent and knowledge of those trustees serving on the Transitional Working Group.

Transparency

I understand the tension between the desire for additional transparency and the need to protect the deliberations of the Transitional Working Group so its members are free from unnecessary external pressure, and I accept that the balance will not please everyone. Furthermore, where transparency is concerned, I would like to address an incorrect claim contained in the March 21, 2024, letter from the Placer County Office of Education.

Specifically, the PCOE letter incorrectly states that “*The CSBA Board of Directors acted on November 27, 2023 to dismantle CCBE. Three months later there has been no formal communication explaining these actions nor the rationale for them to the fifty-eight county boards of education.*” In fact, on **December 6, CSBA emailed a letter** and an embedded **Frequently Asked Questions** document to all California county board trustees introducing CSBA County Board Member Services and explaining the reasons behind the transition from CCBE. Whether the PCOE board found it acceptable is another matter and one we will continue to address. The question of whether this communication occurred, however, can be put to rest and we again encourage all county offices to review the **December 6 letter** and **FAQ**.

Ownership

In that same December 6 email, we wrote that, “*the partnership will be guided by the County Board Transition Working Group, a panel of county board members established to make recommendations to CSBA’s Board of Directors about services and programs that would most benefit county board members,*” a statement that remains true today. The email also mentions the transition was motivated by a desire for greater alignment across CSBA, more cohesive representation for county trustees in the Delegate Assembly and on the CSBA Board of Directors, and the opportunity to supplement and expand existing CCBE products and services with new opportunities.

In response to this last point, the letter from PCOE stated that county boards, “*need to belong to an organization where they feel ownership ... and not a service provider.*” I agree with this sentiment but also recognize the transition from CCBE to County Board Member Services is challenging and that it may take time for members to become comfortable with the new configuration. Nevertheless, I am optimistic that a sense of ownership will grow as CSBA demonstrates continued commitment to county boards and as county trustees help guide and influence County Board Member Services.

I would also be remiss if I failed to point out that overexuberance where ownership is concerned led CCBE to repeatedly negotiate and make agreements with the leadership of other organizations without the knowledge of CSBA’s Board of Directors. This occurred despite warnings that such action was ill-advised and that, as the legal body assuming liability on behalf of the association, such action was not welcomed by CSBA. As noted in the **FAQ**, CSBA’s Board of Directors also expressed concern about CCBE taking positions on legislation outside of the CSBA structure, maintaining separate Bylaws and Standing Rules, and having separate officers and a separate Board of Directors.

This is where our shared, stated vision is most instructive: CSBA is the essential voice of public education, not two voices in recurring conflict with one another. We firmly believe that vision is fully compatible with and, in fact, best served when county services are crafted by county trustees, for county trustees, and under the banner of CSBA. The Transitional Working Group is currently engaged in forging this path. From this new beginning, that sense of ownership will re-emerge absent any questions of legality as part of the foundational structure of CSBA.

Influence

On the topic of influence, it bears mentioning that, back in January, the Board of Directors increased the number of dedicated county seats in three of our nine standing committees, including some of our most impactful: Education Legal Alliance, Policy Platform, and Annual Education Conference and Trade Show. This is a significant increase in county representation in some of the most important seats at the CSBA table, even though county trustees were already disproportionately represented on the Board of Directors, in the Delegate Assembly and on the Legislative Committee. And with respect to the Legislative

Committee — perhaps the most sought-after committee in CSBA — county board members are disproportionately represented. Despite accounting for approximately 0.06 percent of the total number of board members in California, county trustees occupy 20 percent of the Legislative Committee. Overall, county boards have greater proportional representation in CSBA's organizational structure than local school districts. This is not the sign of an organization that undervalues county boards or is seeking to diminish the role of county trustees.

Finances

Another way in which county boards differ from local school districts is in the area of dues. As noted in multiple letters, the current structure of CSBA includes dues specific to county boards for CCBE membership. For the current fiscal year, the sum total of those dues paid from among all 58 county boards was approximately \$165,000. The majority of those funds are used to provide total compensation (salary, benefits, employment tax) for a dedicated CSBA employee to support CCBE and now County Board Member Services. This allocation of funds to retain an employee dedicated to county board services and activities was specifically requested by the then-CCBE President as being a priority from the beginning of the transition, which CSBA has honored. No funds have been diverted to purposes that were not previously requested by CCBE leadership or used for purposes unconnected to CCBE. Suggestions to the contrary are spurious as the former CCBE leadership is aware of the nature of these expenditures and their role in determining them.

SB 1380

Another issue concerns CSBA-sponsored Senate Bill 1380. This bill would address statutory loopholes in the charter school authorization process. There has been some concerns raised around the development of this proposal without consulting county board members. Prior to the bill's formal introduction in the Senate, it was discussed as part of CSBA's sponsored bill package before the Legislative Committee. During that same time, the Governmental Relations staff contacted numerous county board members on the topic of SB 1380, including multiple county trustees who were part of the leadership structure of the former CCBE. CSBA staff continue to do so now in an effort to improve the charter school authorizing process and protect county and district board authority. However, our team did not involve county trustees during the initial stages of the bill development process. County trustees should have been consulted earlier. We acknowledge this error and staff is already planning to take steps to improve their internal process so this type of oversight does not happen again. In the meantime, we will continue working with our members to address serious concerns with the charter authorizing process and push SB 1380 forward as it will help ensure county boards have a seat at the table when important policy changes to the Charter Schools Act are being discussed by the Legislature this year.

In closing, it is our desire to develop County Board Member Services — so it is fully inclusive, effective, and empowering to all county trustees. It is a work in progress, and it is one to which we are completely committed. CSBA will not shy from the effort needed to make this initiative a success, nor will we be deterred by criticism or difficult conversations. We will navigate this transitional period to a safe harbor where county trustees feel supported, valued, and engaged. This change represents a new horizon for CSBA and its support of county board members, and I believe there is significant opportunity for further collaboration, advocacy, and training under one unified trustee association. I look forward to working with you as we build a better future for our members and the association.

Respectfully,

Albert Gonzalez
CSBA President