

Board Bylaw 9240: Why board training and professional development matter

Research on effective board governance

Introduction

Much is written about the role of school board members and the responsibilities of the board of education. Rightfully so, as the **board's role** is focused on fulfilling its responsibilities of articulating a coherent vision, setting the direction, establishing the local educational agency's (LEA) structures, creating a positive governance culture, ensuring accountability, and leading community engagement.

The California School Boards Association (CSBA), which represents nearly 1,000 local school districts and county boards of education, recognizes there are fundamental principles for governing responsibly and effectively. These principles, the Professional Governance Standards developed by CSBA, reflect a consensus among hundreds of board members throughout the state who serve on the association's Delegate Assembly.

The Professional Governance Standards validate the findings of effective governance research as they describe three components vital to effective school governance:

- ▶ Attributes of an effective individual trustee
 - » Individual board members must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high-quality education is provided to every student. They understand the distinctions between board and staff roles and refrain from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.
- ▶ Attributes of an effective governing board
 - » The governing board assumes collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture to govern effectively.
- ▶ The specific jobs the board performs in its governance role
 - » Boards communicate with the public; they consider, review, evaluate, and update policies; maintain accountability for

***Not all county offices of education hire, support, or evaluate their superintendent.**



student learning; hire, support, and evaluate the superintendent*; approve fiscally responsible budgets; ensure a safe and appropriate educational environment; and provide community leadership.

Equally important, research has identified key characteristics of highly effective boards and high-achieving LEAs. Research finds that boards in high-achieving LEAs exhibit a set of characteristics and practices that are different than low-achieving LEAs. An effective board is defined as having a positive impact on student achievement. CSBA's *The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement — A Review of the Research* outlines the eight characteristics of highly effective school boards and the critical role and impact of board members.

The eight characteristics of highly effective school boards:

- ▶ Hold a shared vision about the capabilities of both students and staff and set the direction and goals of the LEA.
- ▶ Policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and instruction.
- ▶ Engage in goal-setting processes that drive action in the LEA to improve.
- ▶ Align resources to the LEA's goals.
- ▶ Use data to drive continuous improvement efforts.

- ▶ Communicate with and engage staff and their community.
- ▶ Work well together as a team and in collaborative leadership with the superintendent.
- ▶ Commit to their own learning, team development, and building the shared knowledge and skills necessary to govern effectively.

School boards perform responsibilities such as hiring and evaluating the superintendent (in all districts and a few county offices), approving budgets, setting policy, and establishing school boundaries. However, more attention can be given to how the work of school boards impacts student achievement, how board members create a [governance mindset](#), and how they build the knowledge base necessary to make decisions that align with positive student achievement outcomes. To develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively perform board responsibilities, board members should engage in ongoing board training and professional development.

Board training and professional development are fundamental

A commitment to board training can result in [informed board members](#) who are good stewards of public education, understand the importance of public education, and foster a community dedicated to continuous learning and support for public education. From CSBA's Professional Governance Standards to numerous studies on effective governance, one common principle is the importance of board training and professional development.

Updated board bylaw

CSBA remains committed to supporting all LEA board members as they carry out their governance responsibilities, ensuring boards have the necessary tools, strategies, opportunities, and skills necessary to perform their duties. One example is updated CSBA Board Bylaw (BB) 9240 – Board Training for both school district and county board members. Revised Dec. 1, 2024, this policy provides the pathway to implementing effective governance practices to ensure achievement of district and county goals.

CSBA Board Bylaw 9240 – Board Training states, “The Governing Board believes that the Board’s ability to effectively and responsibly govern is essential to promoting student achievement, building positive community relations, and protecting the public interest in district/county schools. Board members shall participate in mandatory ethics training and are encouraged to participate in ongoing opportunities for professional development sufficient to help them understand their responsibilities, stay abreast of new developments in education, and improve governance skills.”

Further, BB 9240 includes guidance on **state-mandated** training that all LEA board members must participate in: “*Government Code 53234-53235.2 requires a Board member, except for a member whose term of office ends before January 1, 2026, to receive specified training in ethics by January 1, 2026, and at least once every two years thereafter, and for the district/county to maintain records*

of such training. Additionally, Government Code 53235, as amended by AB 2631 (Ch. 201, Statutes of 2024), requires the Fair Political Practices Commission, in consultation with the Attorney General, to create, maintain, and make an ethics training course available to local agency officials, including Board members.”

Focus group findings

In spring 2025, CSBA convened focus groups with board members from across the state. Participants representing large, small, urban, and rural LEAs shared insights, experiences, and best practices related to board training and professional development. The groups were asked to share their thoughts on the importance of board training and professional development, what topics were important for board members to engage in, and what challenges participants faced in accessing board training and professional development activities. The following insights highlight themes that surfaced in the focus groups.

Importance of board training and professional development

There was consensus from board members that engagement in board training was critical to their role. Participants expressed the need for boards to develop a common language, perspective, and a deeper understanding of the role of the board. It is this shared understanding that enables the board to govern more effectively by making informed, strategic decisions that are in the best interest of the school community. In a learning organization such as an LEA, professional development should take place at all levels, including the board level, as the board sets the LEA’s tone and models the way.



As a board member participating in a lot of professional development, I understand more clearly the importance of thought leadership and creative thinking to my role. The formation of thought leadership groups among board members, to discuss challenges and gain new perspectives is needed.

— Board member,
Denair Unified School District

Content areas to consider

Orientation for new board members; the Brown Act; effective governance practices and protocols; the legislative environment; board relationships; and superintendent evaluation, protocols, and budgeting are a few examples of priority topics identified by the focus groups. It was stressed that topic areas aligned to the LEA's goals should also be included in planning for board training.

A significant amount of time was spent on the topic of orientation for new board members. Consensus centered around the need for LEAs to develop a system of ongoing support for [newly elected board members](#). Holding one orientation meeting with various LEA departments or sending new members to a one day "training" is insufficient for new members in understanding their roles and responsibilities. Highly effective boards understand the need for ongoing training and implement impactful long-term strategies to support new members.

Several participants discussed how their board plans for trainings and professional development, which included using the governance calendar for planning and tracking purposes and the annual prioritization of focus areas and budgeting.



It's important for new board members to engage in ongoing learning to better understand the role of the superintendent, their role as board members, and the ongoing challenges facing them.

— Board member,
Monrovia, School District

Challenges

Time commitment, scheduling, and a universal understanding of the importance of board training are some of the challenges mentioned in focus groups. Too often, governance teams may have members who opt out of engaging in board training, which can have a negative impact on decision-making for critical issues. The difficulty of accommodating different schedules highlights the need for more flexible training options and hybrid training models such as combining in-person and virtual learning.

When LEAs face tightening budgets, board members may be asked about their fiduciary decisions on items that don't go directly to the classroom. For example, questions about spending on conferences

or other board training activities may arise. Several participants addressed this question and stressed the importance of communicating the "why" of budgeting decisions to the LEA community. It is important to inform the community that board members engage in board training to gain knowledge and develop a better understanding of critical issues to make informed decisions. Board training allows the board to support the LEA. Increased knowledge leads to more effective governance and decision-making.

Making training meaningful

Finally, participants were asked to share important strategies in implementing an impactful training process for board members. Suggestions included:

- ▶ Commit to learning as an individual and as a board,
- ▶ Identify priorities and goals,
- ▶ Identify opportunities for trainings,
- ▶ Set aside funding, and
- ▶ Tell the LEA's story — explain to the community the need for and importance of board training and professional development.

Professional development is critical in supporting governance teams in making informed decisions, advancing the goals of the LEA, and navigating challenges effectively when they arise. Of note, two recent legislative bills passed in 2025 in support of further professional development: [Senate Bill 707](#), which requires that a copy of the Brown Act be given to all board members and members of Brown Act committees, and [Assembly Bill 640](#), which requires any member of the governing board of a school district or of a county office of education to receive training before April 1, 2028 (for members who are serving as of April 1, 2027) in public education on school finance and accountability laws.

Questions for governance teams to consider

The following questions are for governance teams to consider when evaluating and implementing their board training and professional development plans.

- ▶ Has our board reviewed and discussed Board Bylaws 9230 and 9240 (updated December 2024)?
- ▶ Has the board adopted policies regarding board training and professional development for its members?
- ▶ Do all members participate in board training and professional development?
- ▶ Has the board completed the mandatory ethics training? If not, when will the board complete the training? For those who have completed ethics training, what is the deadline for their 2-year renewal?
- ▶ What specific board training or professional development are all board members expected to complete?



It's important that board members be competent; therefore there is a critical need for them to attend trainings in order to make informed decisions. I can't emphasize enough the need for roles and responsibilities, understanding the superintendent's role, and effective superintendent's evaluation trainings.

— Board member,
Gonzales Unified School District

- ▶ Does the board have specific board training expectations for the board president?
- ▶ Has an annual calendar been established for board training and professional development?
- ▶ Does the LEA budget include funding for board training and professional development each year?
- ▶ How is the LEA community made aware of board training and professional development?

Resources

CSBA offers a continuum of professional development opportunities, both in person and virtually. All [trainings](#) are based on the latest governance research and best practices. Training courses that support governance teams include:

- ▶ Orientation for New Trustees and the Orientation for New Trustees Bundle (which also includes Brown Act training, Ethics, and Fiscal Responsibility)
- ▶ Masters in Governance® programs for districts and county offices of education: A five-part series to equip governance teams with the knowledge and skills to build and support an effective governance structure.
- ▶ The Brown Act: Explore the intricacies of the complex act and learn how to apply the open-meeting law.
- ▶ Ethics: A comprehensive overview of the conflict-of-interest laws applicable to board members, including hypothetical situations for deeper learning experiences and resources for additional knowledge. This training is required by [Assembly Bill 2158](#) and must be completed every two years.

- ▶ Annual Education Conference and Trade Show: Come away with practical ideas and a renewed commitment to help your board accomplish the critical work ahead.
- ▶ Governance Consulting Services: Provides tailored workshops that can help governance teams work through common issues such as setting vision, dealing with leadership transition, evaluations, and much more.

Board bylaws

There are essential documents developed to assist the board in managing the responsibilities within its role. The board bylaws (BB) in the 9000 series of the Board Policy book are the operating guidelines of the governance team for districts and county offices of education. The following board bylaws are relevant to board training and professional development:

- ▶ BB 9000 – Role of the Board: Describes the general board roles and responsibilities consistent with the Professional Governance Standards.
- ▶ BB 9005 – Governance Standards: Describes the board's expectations and responsibilities based on the Professional Governance Standards.
- ▶ BB 9100 – Board Organization: Describes the board's annual organizational meeting.
- ▶ BB 9150 – Student Board Member: Describes the eligibility, selection, term, roles and responsibilities of the student board member, and the expectations for training to enhance their knowledge, understanding, and performance of leadership skills and their board responsibilities.
- ▶ BB 9200 – Limits of Board Member Authority: Describes the board as the unit of authority.
- ▶ BB 9230 – Orientation: Recognizes the importance and describes components of new board member orientation.
- ▶ BB 9240 – Board Training: Describes expectations for board member training, the required mandatory ethics training, and includes mechanisms to effectuate board member training.
- ▶ BB 9310 – Board Policies: Describes the process for policy development and adoption.
- ▶ BB 9400 – Board Self-Evaluation: Describes the board's self-evaluation, mechanisms to effectuate a self-evaluation, and the importance of self-evaluation related to accountability to the community.

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