

Effective Governance: Recommendations from the Field

Findings from the Delegate Assembly Strengthening Local Governance Policy Pillar Committee

By Angela Asch, September 2025

Introduction

School boards are a vital component of public education and an essential part of the United States' foundational [democracy](#). Approximately 5,000 school board members govern nearly 1,000 school districts and 58 county offices of education in [California](#). It is the largest public school system in the country and has a diverse student body. The boards of school districts and county offices of education provide direction and oversight of the professionals who manage the operations of the local educational agencies (LEAs) and ensure accountability to the community. Effective governance is critical in supporting students' academic achievement and building community trust.

Recommendations from CSBA's research report on board governance, *The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement*, highlight that effective boards have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a positive working relationship between leadership and staff. Collaborative and supportive relationships between the board and superintendent, among board members, between the board and staff, and between the governance team and the community are all important in realizing the LEA's vision, mission, and goals.

The report also outlines the five key responsibilities of the governance team:

- ▶ Set direction for the school district or county office of education,
- ▶ Establish structure through policy,
- ▶ Provide support for implementation efforts,
- ▶ Ensure accountability through oversight and monitoring, and
- ▶ Act as community leaders.

Board members fulfill these responsibilities by working together with the superintendent as a governance team to make decisions that best serve all students.



The report also shares six factors that effective governance teams use to support and improve student achievement:

- ▶ An LEA's vision and goals are focused on student achievement and resources are allocated to reinforce the vision and goals,
- ▶ Balancing systemwide coherence and allowing for site-level autonomy,
- ▶ Data-informed supports for student achievement,
- ▶ Strong community partnerships and a culture that champions student achievement,
- ▶ Investment in all staff to build capacity at all levels, and
- ▶ Effective leadership and robust systems to weather changes in leadership.

This fact sheet includes recommendations for effective governance from CSBA's Delegates who attended the May 2025 Delegate Assembly. In their Policy Pillar Committee convenings, Delegates discussed what protocols and practices support effective governance, and how to navigate barriers when they arise. This resource also includes CSBA's recommendations for governance teams to work effectively and efficiently, questions boards should consider, resources for further professional development and learning, and sample board bylaws, board policies, and administrative regulations.

Establishing an effective and efficient governance structure

CSBA has several resources on effective governance for individual board members, governance teams, and superintendents. One foundational resource is the [Professional Governance Standards](#) series. The series outlines the board's responsibilities for establishing and maintaining an organizational structure that supports the LEA's vision and empowers staff.

The board of a school district is responsible for:

- ▶ Employing the superintendent and setting policy for hiring personnel,
- ▶ Overseeing the development and adoption of bylaws and policies,
- ▶ Creating a process for and approving adoption of curriculum,
- ▶ Establishing budget priorities,
- ▶ Adopting the budget and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP),

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Transition to Collaborative Partnerships →

Individual Effectiveness

- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Preparation/Deep learning
- ▶ Strategic focus
- ▶ Manner
- ▶ Commitment
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Systems thinking

The Governance Team

- ▶ Roles and responsibilities
- ▶ Unity of purpose
- ▶ Positive governance culture (norms)
- ▶ Supportive structures and processes

Fulfilling Responsibilities

- ▶ Set the direction
- ▶ Establish the structure
- ▶ Create supportive environment
- ▶ Ensure accountability
- ▶ Demonstrate community leadership

Current Trends and Issues in Public Education

District Functions

- ▶ Setting the district's direction
- ▶ Student achievement
- ▶ Finance
- ▶ Facilities
- ▶ Human resources
- ▶ Policy
- ▶ Judicial review
- ▶ Collective bargaining
- ▶ Community relations
- ▶ Advocacy



SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

- ▶ Overseeing facilities issues, and
- ▶ Providing direction for and adopting collective bargaining agreements.

The board of a county office of education is responsible for:

- ▶ Overseeing the development and adoption of bylaws and policies,
- ▶ Creating a process for and approving adoption of curriculum,
- ▶ Establishing budget priorities,
- ▶ Adopting the budget,
- ▶ Overseeing facilities issues,
- ▶ Reviewing interdistrict transfer appeals, and
- ▶ Overseeing suspensions and expulsions.

Effective governance teams (superintendents and board members working together):

- ▶ Keep the LEA focused on learning and achievement for all students,
- ▶ Communicate regularly and keep their shared vision in mind,
- ▶ Operate openly with trust and integrity,
- ▶ Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with respect,
- ▶ Govern within board-adopted bylaws, policies, and procedures,
- ▶ Take collective responsibility for the board's performance,
- ▶ Evaluate its own effectiveness, and
- ▶ Ensure opportunities for community input to inform board deliberations.

CSBA's Effective Governance System infographic highlights the intersection of the roles and responsibilities of individual board members, the governance team, and how that guides the LEA in supporting all students.

CSBA Policy Pillars and the Delegate Assembly

With continuous support and improvement top of mind, CSBA regularly convenes meetings to share information and gather input from its membership. The Delegate Assembly is one such convening.

CSBA's Delegate Assembly (DA) convenes twice a year to discuss issues that impact school districts and county offices of education. This past May, Delegates in the Strengthen Local Governance Policy Pillar Committee focused on protocols, policies, and barriers to governance. The following are the committee's recommendations to specific prompts on effective governance. Governance teams should consider implementing these strategies in their LEAs if they have not done so already.

Questions for governance teams to consider:

The following questions are for governance teams to consider when elevating and improving their governance efficacy.

- ▶ What protocols and practices does our board have in place to support new board members and superintendents?
- ▶ What tool(s) does our board use to measure and evaluate our success?
- ▶ What organizational practices does our board have in place to keep us on track to review and update bylaws, policies, and budgets?

CSBA Policy Pillar: Strengthen Local Governance

California schools are public institutions that belong to the communities they serve. Local boards must have authority and flexibility consistent with their responsibilities to ensure achievement for all students and the long-term fiscal stability of the schools.

Practices and protocols

What practices and protocols does your LEA have in place to help facilitate effective meetings?

Top 5 Responses

- ▶ Implement a governance handbook, norms, and protocols and review annually.
- ▶ Agree that when there is a split vote or when the vote is final, everyone supports the final decision.
- ▶ Every board member is responsible for reviewing the board agenda before the meeting.
- ▶ Participate in trainings such as the [Masters in Governance®](#) series and other [professional development offered by CSBA](#), and have all members learn parliamentary procedures.
- ▶ Limit the number of questions per topic during meetings.

Navigating barriers

What protocols and practices does your LEA have in place when there is board disagreement in reaching a decision, and how does your LEA move forward?

Top 5 Responses

- ▶ Obtain assistance from CSBA and/or a mediator if a board dispute cannot be resolved.

- ▶ Use workshops and study sessions to slow down the process and gather information.
- ▶ Adopt a governance calendar so members, staff, and the community know when items will be voted on.
- ▶ Create a culture of discussing topics thoroughly.
- ▶ Conduct a [Board Self-Evaluation](#) annually.

CSBA 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 Orientation for New Trustees Bundle** (which includes Brown Act training, Ethics, Fiscal Responsibility, and orientation)
- ▶ **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 law.
- ▶ **Ethics:** A comprehensive overview of the conflict-of-interest laws applicable to board of education members, including hypothetical situations for deeper learning experiences and resources for additional knowledge. This training is required by law, [Assembly Bill 2158](#), to be completed every two years.

CSBA's webpage on [Effective Governance](#) offers resources such as briefs, fact sheets, and tools to navigate governance. Some essential resources include:

- ▶ [CSBA's Governance Best Practices Guide: Governance In Chaos — Managing board meetings in turbulent times](#)
- ▶ [CSBA's New \(Board\) Member Toolkit](#)

Continuous learning materials

[CSBA's Store](#) offers select books to further learning. Some essential reading includes:

- ▶ **Call to Order: A Blueprint for Great Board Meetings** — This comprehensive resource includes content regarding the structure and leadership for board meetings as well as parliamentary procedure.
- ▶ **The Brown Act: School Boards and Open Meeting Laws** — This guide to the Brown Act is a must-have for any board member.
- ▶ **Charter Schools: A Guide for Governance Teams**
- ▶ **CSBA County Board Governance Handbook**

Other resources

[California Collaborative on District Reform](#)

This group joins researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue and collective action to improve outcomes for all students in California's urban school systems, with particular attention to equity and access for traditionally under-served students in the state.

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 for effective governance in school districts and county offices of education:

BB 9000 – Role of the Board: Describes the major responsibilities of the board

BB 9005 – Governance Standards: Describes the board's commitments

BB 9100 – Board Organization: Describes the board's annual organizational meeting

BB 9200 – Limits of Board Member Authority: Describes the board as the unit of authority

BB 9310 – Board Policies: Describes the process to create, revise, and adopt district policies

BB 9400 – Board Self-Evaluation: Describes the board's annual self-evaluation for accountability to the community

Relevant CSBA sample policies

CSBA [GAMUT Policy](#) and *Policy Plus* subscribers have access to the most up-to-date CSBA sample policy language. The following are sample board policies (BP) and administrative regulations (AR) that have been developed as samples for LEAs to use in adopting their own policies for effective governance:

BP 0000 – Vision

BP 0100 – Philosophy

BP 0200 – Goals for the District

BP 0400 – Comprehensive Plans

BP 0500 – Accountability

BP/AR 1220 – Citizen Advisory Committees

Angela Asch, MA, is a principal research manager for the California School Boards Association.

Special thanks to CSBA's Delegate Assembly Policy Pillars Committee on Effective Governance for their contributions to the recommendations from the field.