

# COTATI-ROHNERT PARK UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Learning for a Lifetime – Committed to the Future*

## Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District 2023-24 Governance Handbook

### **Board of Trustees**

Michelle Wing, President

Eric Martin, Board Clerk

Leff Brown

Shirley Johnson

Mark Nelson

### **Superintendent**

Maité Iturri

*On November 28, 2023 the Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District Board of Trustees and Superintendent participated in a workshop on Effective Governance with Governance Consultant, Babs Kavanaugh. This document reflects the governance team's discussion about sustaining a framework for effectiveness that enables the governance team to continue to perform its responsibilities in a way that best serves all students.*

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## **Unity of Purpose**

*Unity of purpose is the common focus, overarching goals, and the core values, beliefs and principles governing body members share in common about children, the district and public education.*

### **UNITY OF PURPOSE**

What We Hope to Accomplish as a Team, to:

- Provide leadership and citizen oversight of the district.
- Ensure that every student has the resources and support they need to reach their potential.
- Improve student achievement and support underrepresented students and families and give them a voice and tools.
- Find money to buy new textbooks that are aligned to the current standards.
- Support student and staff's social/emotional needs

## **District LCAP Goals (in process of updating for 2024-2025)**

Goal 1: Provide and support a relevant and rigorous curriculum based on the California Common State Standards to maximize student achievement

Goal 2: Implement a board course of study that meets all students' needs and interests and prepares them for college and career

Goal 3: Create and maintain optimum learning environment for students and staff

Goal 4: Build and maintain highly effective and relevant family and community Partnerships to increase student achievement and engagement in school

Goal 5: Provide English learner and RFEP students with equitable services (Focus Goal)

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members and the Superintendent**

### **Board Roles**

The role of the board is to provide each student with an education of the highest possible quality within the limits of financial support provided by the State of California. To accomplish this, board members are responsible for the five roles identified by the California School Boards Association (CSBA)

**Setting the direction** for the district by involving parents/guardians, community, students, and staff, while focusing on student learning and achievement

**Establishing an effective and efficient structure, by:**

- Employing the superintendent,
- Developing, and adopting policies,
- Establishing academic expectations, and adopting curriculum and instructional materials,
- Establishing budget priorities and adopting the budget,
- Providing safe and adequate facilities to support student learning,
- And setting parameters for negotiations with employee organizations and ratifying collective bargaining agreements.

**Providing support to the superintendent and staff, by:**

- Following standards of responsible governance,
- making decisions and providing resources that support district priorities and goals,
- Upholding board policies,
- And being an effective spokesperson by being knowledgeable about district programs and goals.

**Ensuring accountability, by:**

- Evaluating the Superintendent,
- Monitoring and evaluating policies,
- Serving as a judicial and appeals body,
- Monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness,
- Approving, monitoring, and adjusting district budgets,
- And monitoring the collective bargaining process.

**We Act as Community Leaders by:**

- Speaking with a common voice about district priorities, goals, and issues.
- Engaging and involving the community in district schools and activities.
- Communicating clear information about policies, programs, and fiscal conditions of the district.
- Educating the community and the media about issues facing the district and public education.
- Advocating for children, district programs and public education to the general public, community, and local, state, and national leaders.

**Superintendent Roles:**

The Board Of Education desires to establish a productive working relationship with the Superintendent 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.

CSBA identifies the following standards and roles for superintendents working with the Board of Education:

- Promotes the success of all students and supports the efforts of the board to focus on student learning and achievement.
- Values, advocates, and supports public education and all stakeholders.
- Recognizes and respects the different perspectives and styles of board members, staff, students, parents, and community, ensuring the diverse range of views inform board decisions.
- Acts with dignity, treats everyone with civility and respect, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Serves as a model for the value of lifelong learning and supports the board's continuous professional development.
- Works with the board as a "governance team" and assures collective responsibility for building a unity of purpose, common vision, and positive organizational culture.
- Recognizes that the board /superintendent governance relationship is supported by the district's management team.
- Understands the distinction between board and staff roles and respects the roles of the board as the representative of the community.
- Understands that the authority rests with the board as a whole, provides guidance to the board to assist in decision making and provides leadership based on the direction of the board as a whole.
- Communicates openly with trust and integrity, including providing all board members equal access to information, and recognizes the importance of both responsive and anticipatory communications.
- Accepts leadership responsibility and accountability for implementing the vision, goals, and policies on the district

## **Gaining Clarity on Roles and Responsibilities**

What the Board needs from the Superintendent:

**The Superintendent will support Trustees in fulfilling their responsibilities by:**

- Communicating - Keeping us informed - providing us with timely ongoing communication.
- Keeping the Board informed - sending the same information to all.
- Telling us both the good and the "not so good."
- Developing an Event Calendar
- Agenda plans- creating a foreword and warning us about the size of the agenda.
- Tell us what you need from us.

What the Superintendent needs from the Board:

**The Trustees can support the Superintendent in fulfilling her responsibilities by:**

- Asking questions before the meeting and in a timely fashion.
- Not micro-managing
- Keeping the Superintendent informed
- Maintaining an open dialogue
- Maintaining consistency and establishing criteria beforehand
- Calling her when we need clarification
- Ensuring that there are no surprises
- Providing her with support when it is needed

What Board Members need from each other:

**The Trustees can support each other in fulfilling their responsibilities by:**

- Working as a team
- Openly listening to everyone's opinion/actively listen
- Listening to understand multiple perspectives
- Trying to see the issues from another person's point of view
- Waiting for a speaker to finish before speaking
- Be available to others, (but not violating the Brown Act)
- Maintaining an open dialogue

# **Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District Governance Team**

## **AGREEMENTS TO FACILITATE GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP**

### **Governance Team Norms and Protocols:**

The Board of Education for the Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District is entrusted by the community to uphold the Constitutions of California and the United States, to protect the public's interest in the schools, and to ensure that a high-quality education is provided to each student. In order to effectively meet district challenges, the Board and Superintendent must function together as a governance leadership team. Agreed upon behaviors or norms, and operating procedures or protocols, support consistent behavior and actions among team members. The purpose of the Cotati-Rohnert Park USD governance team agreements is to ensure that a positive and productive working relationship exists among board members, the superintendent, district staff, students, and the community. Norms and protocols are developed for and by the members of the governance team and may be modified over time as needed.

### **Our Agreements to Facilitate Governance Leadership:**

#### **Norms/Meeting Guidelines**

- We will remember that our focus is on the best interest of our students.
- We will work toward the future - learning from the past.
- All team members will offer their ideas and resources and look for common ground.
- We will stay focused on our goals and avoid getting sidetracked.
- We will respect differences, show respect and never dismiss or devalue others.
- Each member will take responsibility for the work of the team. We will each be responsible for the success of the meeting- participate equally and address concerns.
- We will listen actively to all ideas. We will listen openly without preparing responses.

#### **Protocols**

##### **Structure and Process**

Effective governance teams discuss and agree upon the formal structures and processes, or protocols, used by the Board and Superintendent in their functioning as a team. These structures and processes guide the operations of the governance team and determine how they do business. Protocols are the agreements that ensure that all members of the team are operating within their agreed upon roles.

The following protocols were developed by the Governance Team:

### **Welcoming New Members to the Board**

The board president meets with each newly elected member individually, prior to being sworn in, to ensure each new trustee has a copy of the Governance Handbook, the schedule of meetings, the format of meetings and governance team operations.

The superintendent meets with each newly elected member to provide an overview of the district and introduce cabinet members and other staff who will be communicating with the board. Newly elected members will receive a copy of the Brown Act and inform them they must conform to its requirements as if they had already assumed office.

### **Orientation of New Board Members**

Immediately following the certification of public election or appointment to the board, new members will be seated following the oath of office. As soon as possible, the board president/superintendent will schedule a governance session with the new member.

### **Communication Among Governance Team Members**

The governance team is committed to continuing the culture of positive collegiality that currently exists. The tone/demeanor set by the board president and governance team will be professional, respectful, and amicable. Trustees will refrain from engaging in private conversations during board meetings as well as sending and receiving electronic communication during board meetings. There should be open lines of communication between the board and the superintendent and there should be no surprises for either the superintendent or the board. It is also the board's responsibility to be positive public relations agents for our district and all of its accomplishments.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Board President/Officers**

#### **Board President**

The Governing Board will elect a President from among its members to provide leadership on behalf of the Board and the educational community it serves. The President shall preside at all Board meetings. The President shall:

- Call the meeting to order at the appointed time
- Announce the business to come before the Board in its proper order
- Carry out the board policies relating to conduct of behavior and help ensure compliance with applicable requirements of the Brown Act
- Recognize persons who desire to speak, and to protect the speaker who has the floor from disturbance or interference
- Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the Board



- Put motion to a vote, and state clearly the results of the vote
- Be responsible for the orderly conduct of all Board meetings
- Consulting with the Superintendent on the preparation of the Board's agendas
- Working with the Superintendent to ensure that Board members have necessary materials and information

#### **Clerk**

At the annual organizational meeting, the Governing Board shall elect a clerk from its own membership.

The Clerk shall:

- Certify or attest to actions taken by the Board when required
- Maintain such other records as required by law
- Serve as a presiding officer in the absence of the President
- Perform any other duties assigned by the Board

#### **Using Board Meeting as Strategic Leadership Tools**

All governance team members agree that the board meetings are opportunities to strategically move the district forward, and to communicate direction, district priorities and progress to the community.

#### **Requesting Information from Staff**

Trustees will make every attempt to discuss concerns and questions about the materials in the board packet before the board meeting. Trustees may directly contact administrators and will always copy the superintendent when asking questions or requesting additional information on board meeting agenda items.

Trustees will Self-monitor to ensure one trustee's request for information does not divert an inappropriate amount of time from staff efforts to achieve District priorities. The superintendent may bring requests for information requiring inordinate amounts of time to the board to determine whether the full board supports the request.

#### **Study Sessions/Board Workshops/Conversation Meetings**

To assist the governance team in making informed decisions and to stay current on district issues, the board will periodically schedule board study sessions to provide in depth information on topics critical to the district

**Voting No**

Each board member recognizes and respects the right of other members to vote "no" on an issue or to abstain from voting. The board agrees that as a courtesy, members will explain their reasoning for the "no" vote or the abstention either during deliberations or before casting the vote.



### **Allowing Majority Vote to Set Direction**

The Board agrees that there are multiple right answers in addressing issues. Dissenting opinions are listened to respectfully. The final authority for board decisions rests with the Board as a whole.

Following the decision, if board members are approached by the community, staff, or media about the decision, protocol will be to refer all questions to the board president/superintendent.

### **Meeting Guidelines for Board and Other District Meetings**

The Governing Board may establish Board committees as necessary. The Board shall determine the duties of the committees at the time of the appointment. Unless specifically authorized by the Board to act on its behalf, Board committees shall act in an advisory capacity. When its duties have been completed, the committees shall be dissolved. Board committees shall provide public notice of their meetings and conduct their meetings in accordance with the Brown Act.

### **Public Comment**

Members of the public shall have an opportunity to address the board on any item on the agenda of interest that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board (Education Code section 35145.4, Government Code section 54954.3). If the public comments on items not appearing on the posted board agenda, the board cannot take action or discuss the comments (Government Code section 54954.2), other than briefly acknowledge the comments and, if desired, to ask staff for follow-up information.

### **Handling Concerns/Complaints from the Community/Staff**

The Board and Superintendent are committed to having parent and staff complaints handled as close to the source as possible. When complaints are made, the Governance Team will listen carefully, remembering that it is only one side of an issue. The complainant will be directed to the staff member most appropriate and able to help them resolve their concern. Complainants will be advised about any formal policies that might exist them including the Williams Uniform Complaint Procedures and Complaint Form. A Board member forwarding a complaint will not be perceived to be endorsing the complaint. The Superintendent (or designee) will respond to the complainant, investigate the complaint, and communicate back to the complainant and the Board member in order to close the loop.

### **Speaking with A Common Voice**

All public statements in the name of the board are made by the board president or, if appropriate, by the superintendent. When speaking to community groups, the media or to the

public, individual board members have the responsibility to identify personal viewpoints as such and not as the viewpoint of the board. When a board decision has been reached, all board members shall support the decision until it is amended or rescinded by board action. Any board member who may wish to criticize or oppose any specific board action should do so in an open board meeting.

#### **Managing Difficult Topics/Issues in an Atmosphere of Mutual Respect**

The Board understands and embraces the need to seek multiple perspectives. Discussions on difficult topics will be respectful and the governance team will actively listen to all ideas and keep the best interest of students in mind at all times.

#### **Visiting Schools**

The Board wants to be informed about instructional practices, and the needs of the students and staff regarding school programs. Board members are encouraged to visit schools and attend school events. Board members will schedule site visits through the Superintendents Admin Assistant.

#### **Role of Board Members in Public**

The Board understands the importance of being visible and accessible to the public. Board members will demonstrate their dedication and commitment to the governance team by clarifying their authority as one of five in all board decisions and actions. Trustees represent the board in what they say and do, and will set an example of professionalism.

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In order to support a positive working relationship among Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District Board of Education, Superintendent, the staff, students, and the community, we have reviewed and agreed to the norms and protocols outlined in the 2024 Governance Handbook.

We shall review and renew these agreements annually.

Affirmed on this 23rd day of January, 2024


  
Michelle Wing, Board President

  
Mark Nelson, Trustee

  
Shirley Johnson, Trustee

  
Eric Martin, Clerk

  
Jeff Brown, Trustee

  
Maite Iturri, Superintendent