

# Board Bylaw

BB 9323

## Board Bylaws

### Meeting Conduct

\*\*\*Note: Education Code 35010 mandates the Board to "prescribe and enforce" rules for its own governance. These rules must not be inconsistent with law or with regulations prescribed by the State Board of Education. The following bylaw provides suggested rules and procedures for meeting conduct and reflects provisions of law as applicable.\*\*\*

#### Meeting Procedures

All Governing Board meetings shall begin on time and shall be guided by an agenda prepared in accordance with Board bylaws and posted and distributed in accordance the Ralph M. Brown Act (open meeting requirements) and other applicable laws.

(cf. 9322 - Agenda/Meeting Materials)

\*\*\*Note: The law does not specify that a particular set of procedures must govern Board meetings. Although Robert's Rules of Order can serve as a useful guide, the Board may adopt any procedure that allows for the efficient and consistent conduct of meetings. \*\*\*

The Board president shall conduct Board meetings in accordance with Board bylaws and procedures that enable the Board to efficiently consider issues and carry out the will of the majority.

(cf. 9121 - President)

\*\*\*Note: The following optional paragraph limits the length of Board meetings and should be revised to reflect district practice. \*\*\*

The Board believes that late night meetings deter public participation, can affect the Board's decision-making ability, and can be a burden to staff. Regular Board meetings shall be adjourned at 10:30 p.m. unless extended to a specific time determined by a majority of the Board. The meeting shall be extended no more than once and subsequently may be adjourned to a later date.

(cf. 9320 - Meetings and Notices)

\*\*\*Note: In *Rubin v. City of Burbank*, an appellate court held that inclusion of "sectarian prayer" at city council meetings, which communicated a preference for a particular religious faith and advanced one faith over another, was unconstitutional by directing the prayer "in the name of Jesus." The court held that it would be constitutional to require the city to advise those people conducting the prayer of this limitation. This opinion is consistent with an unpublished 9th circuit federal court opinion which stated that an invocation "in the name of Jesus" was unconstitutional in that it displayed allegiance to a particular faith. \*\*\*

\*\*\*Note: Some general guidelines for invocations can be found in an Attorney General's opinion (76 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 281 (1993)) which stated that a county board of supervisors could open its sessions with an invocation when the invocation is (1) not required by law as a condition to the official proceedings, (2) not part of the deliberative agenda, (3) not offered, supervised, or approved as to content by a public officer, (4) not officially limited to a particular religion, (5) not disparaging of others, and (6) not directed towards proselytizing. However, because this is an unsettled area of law that is subject to frequent litigation, it is strongly recommended that districts consult legal counsel if they wish to open meetings with an invocation. Note that a different legal analysis applies to student-led or student-initiated prayer; see BP 5127 - Graduation Ceremonies and Activities.\*\*\*

#### Quorum and Abstentions

The Board shall act by majority vote of all of the membership constituting the Board.  
(Education Code 35164)

(cf. 9323.2 - Actions by the Board)

\*\*\*Note: According to an Attorney General opinion (61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 243 (1978)), members of a public body have a duty to vote on issues before them so that the public is represented and receives the services which the public body was created to provide. Issues arise when a motion is tied and one Board member has abstained. The general parliamentary rule is that an abstention is counted as agreeing with the action taken by the majority of those who vote, whether affirmatively or negatively (66 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 336 (1983)). However, a stronger argument could be made that that parliamentary rule is in conflict with Education Code 35164 which requires a majority vote of all of the membership of the Board in order for the Board to act (i.e., a majority of all of the membership of the Board must vote affirmatively in order to approve any action). In 55 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 26 (1972), the Attorney General opined that, when a statutory requirement exists that requires an affirmative action of at least a majority of the members of the Board, the general rule that members not voting were deemed to have agreed with the action taken by the majority of those that voted is not applicable. \*\*\*

\*\*\*Note: The following optional paragraph is consistent with CSBA's opinion that a majority of the Board must vote affirmatively for a motion to carry, but the law is not settled and contrary legal opinions may exist. It is strongly recommended that the district consult with legal counsel and modify the following optional paragraph to ensure consistency with district practice. \*\*\*

The Board believes that when no conflict of interest requires abstention, its members have a duty to vote on issues before them. When a member abstains, his/her abstention shall not be counted for purposes of determining whether a majority of the membership of the Board has taken action.

(cf. 9270 - Conflict of Interest)

### Public Participation

\*\*\*Note: Pursuant to Government Code 54953.3, a member of the public cannot be required to register his/her name, complete a questionnaire, or provide other information as a condition of attending a Board meeting. If an attendance list or similar document is posted near the entrance or circulated during the meeting, it must clearly state that signing or completing the document is voluntary.\*\*\*

Members of the public are encouraged to attend Board meetings and to address the Board concerning any item on the agenda or within the Board's jurisdiction. So as not to inhibit public participation, persons attending Board meetings shall not be requested to sign in, complete a questionnaire, or otherwise provide their name or other information as a condition of attending the meeting.

In order to conduct district business in an orderly and efficient manner, the Board requires that public presentations to the Board comply with the following procedures:

\*\*\*Note: Education Code 35145.5 mandates the Board to adopt regulations which ensure that the public can address the Board regarding agenda items, as specified below.\*\*\*

1. The Board shall give members of the public an opportunity to address the Board on any item of interest to the public that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board, either before or during the Board's consideration of the item. (Education Code 35145.5, Government Code 54954.3)
2. At a time so designated on the agenda at a regular meeting, members of the public may bring before the Board matters that are not listed on the agenda. The Board shall take no action or discussion on any item not appearing on the posted agenda, except as authorized by law. (Education Code 35145.5, Government Code 54954.2)
3. Without taking action, Board members or district staff members may briefly respond to statements made or questions posed by the public about items not appearing

on the agenda. Additionally, on their own initiative or in response to questions posed by the public, a Board or staff member may ask a question for clarification, make a brief announcement, or make a brief report on his/her own activities. (Government Code 54954.2)

Furthermore, the Board or a Board member may provide a reference to staff or other resources for factual information, ask staff to report back to the Board at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter, or take action directing staff to place a matter of business on a future agenda. (Government Code 54954.2)

4. The Board need not allow the public to speak on any item that has already been considered by a committee composed exclusively of Board members at a public meeting where the public had the opportunity to address the committee on that item. However, if the Board determines that the item has been substantially changed since the committee heard the item, the Board shall provide an opportunity for the public to speak. (Government Code 54954.3)

(cf. 9130 - Board Committees)

5. A person wishing to be heard by the Board shall first be recognized by the president and shall then proceed to comment as briefly as the subject permits.

***Note: Government Code 54954.3 authorizes regulations limiting the total amount of time allocated for public testimony on particular issues and for each individual speaker. The following paragraph should be revised to reflect district practice.***
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Individual speakers shall be allowed three minutes to address the Board on each agenda or nonagenda item. The Board shall limit the total time for public input on each item to 20 minutes. With Board consent, the president may increase or decrease the time allowed for public presentation, depending on the topic and the number of persons wishing to be heard. The president may take a poll of speakers for or against a particular issue and may ask that additional persons speak only if they have something new to add.

6. The Board president may rule on the appropriateness of a topic. If the topic would be more suitably addressed at a later time, the president may indicate the time and place when it should be presented.

The Board shall not prohibit public criticism of its policies, procedures, programs, services, acts, or omissions. (Government Code 54954.3) In addition, the Board may not prohibit public criticism of district employees.

\*\*\*Note: The following optional paragraph addresses the issue of specific charges or complaints against district employees in open Board meetings. The Board president must first determine that the speech in question is a specific complaint or charge against a specific employee or employees before invoking the following provision. General criticisms of the district and its employees, no matter how harsh, may not be prohibited. Board members and staff may briefly respond to the concerns raised by the complainant at the meeting.\*\*\*

\*\*\*Note: In *Baca v. Moreno Valley Unified School District*, a federal district court issued a preliminary injunction against the district prohibiting it from enforcing its policy barring criticism of employees at public Board meetings. The court found that the district's policy violated the plaintiff's First Amendment rights by restricting the content of her speech. The court further noted that the district could not legally prevent a person from speaking in open session, even if the speech was clearly defamatory. Districts should note that this decision does not apply to any district other than the Moreno Valley Unified School District at this time. However, a different federal court has also reached the same result in a case involving the Vista Unified School District. Districts should be very cautious in implementing this policy and be guided by the advice of their legal counsel.\*\*\*

\*\*\*Note: For a district to be safe from litigation, the only option is for the Board to place no content restriction on public comments during the Board meeting. This option, however, would permit accusations to be made against an employee without notice or opportunity for employee response.\*\*\*

Whenever a member of the public initiates specific complaints or charges against an employee, the Board president shall inform the complainant that in order to protect the employee's right to adequate notice before a hearing of such complaints and charges, and also to preserve the ability of the Board to legally consider the complaints or charges in any subsequent evaluation of the employee, it is the policy of the Board to hear such complaints or charges in closed session unless otherwise requested by the employee pursuant to Government Code 54957. The Board president shall also encourage the complainant to file a complaint using the appropriate district complaint procedure.

(cf. 1312.1 - Complaints Concerning District Employees)  
(cf. 9321 - Closed Session Purposes and Agendas)

\*\*\*Note: As provided in item #7 below, Government Code 54957.9 authorizes the Board to remove persons who willfully disrupt or disturb a meeting. Examples of disruptive conduct might include conduct that is extremely loud, disturbing, or creates a health or safety risk. In *McMahon v. Albany Unified School District*, a court held that a speaker's constitutional rights were not violated when he was removed from a Board meeting after dumping a substantial amount of garbage on the floor of the meeting room. The speaker had come to the Board meeting to complain about high school students littering, but did not stop dumping garbage when admonished by the Board president. Because he was not removed based on the content of his speech, a court upheld his conviction for a willful disruption of a public meeting. \*\*\*

7. The Board president shall not permit any disturbance or willful interruption of Board meetings. Persistent disruption by an individual or group shall be grounds for the president to terminate the privilege of addressing the Board.

The Board may remove disruptive individuals and order the room cleared if necessary. In this case, members of the media not participating in the disturbance shall be allowed to remain, and individuals not participating in such disturbances may be allowed to remain at the discretion of the Board. When the room is ordered cleared due to a disturbance, further Board proceedings shall concern only matters appearing on the agenda. (Government Code 54957.9)

When such disruptive conduct occurs, the Superintendent or designee shall contact local law enforcement.

#### Recording by the Public

\*\*\*Note: Government Code 54953.5 provides that any person attending an open meeting may record it with an audio or video tape recorder or a still or movie camera unless the Board makes a reasonable finding that the recording cannot continue without noise, illumination, or obstruction of view which would persistently disrupt the meeting. Government Code 54953.6 requires a similar finding before the Board can prohibit or restrict a broadcast of its meetings.\*\*\*

The Superintendent or designee shall designate locations from which members of the public may broadcast, photograph, or tape record open meetings without causing a distraction.

(cf. 9324 - Board Minutes and Recordings)

If the Board finds that noise, illumination, or obstruction of view related to these activities would persistently disrupt the proceedings, these activities shall be discontinued or restricted as determined by the Board. (Government Code 54953.5, 54953.6)

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

- 5095 Powers of remaining board members and new appointees
- 32210 Willful disturbance of public school or meeting a misdemeanor
- 35010 Prescription and enforcement of rules
- 35145.5 Agenda; public participation; regulations
- 35163 Official actions, minutes and journal
- 35164 Vote requirements
- 35165 Effect of vacancies upon majority and unanimous votes by seven member board

GOVERNMENT CODE

- 54953.5 Audio or video tape recording of proceedings
- 54953.6 Broadcasting of proceedings
- 54954.2 Agenda; posting; action on other matters
- 54954.3 Opportunity for public to address legislative body; regulations
- 54957 Closed sessions
- 54957.9 Disorderly conduct of general public during meeting; clearing of room

PENAL CODE

- 403 Disruption of assembly or meeting

COURT DECISIONS

- McMahon v. Albany Unified School District, (2002) 104 Cal.App.4th 1275
- Rubin v. City of Burbank, (2002) 101 Cal.App.4th 1194
- Baca v. Moreno Valley Unified School District, (1996) 936 F.Supp. 719

ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS

- 76 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 281 (1993)
- 66 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 336 (1983)
- 63 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 215 (1980)
- 61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 243, 253 (1978)
- 55 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 26 (1972)
- 59 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 532 (1976)

Management Resources:

CSBA PUBLICATIONS

- The Brown Act: School Boards and Open Meeting Laws, rev. 2005
- Board Presidents' Handbook, rev. 2002
- Maximizing School Board Governance: Boardsmanship

ATTORNEY GENERAL PUBLICATIONS

- The Brown Act: Open Meetings for Legislative Bodies, 2003

WEB SITES

- CSBA: <http://www.csba.org>
- California Attorney General's Office: <http://www.caag.state.ca.us>

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**Gravenstein Union School District  
Sebastopol, California**

