Board of Education Norms and Protocols

Introduction

The members of the Newton County Board of Education are dedicated to working together as a highly effective governance team to fulfill the mission of providing excellent education for every child. As a collective, we are committed to leading as a united governance team in fulfillment of our Board Member duties, consistent with best practices, and pursuant to state law.

To enhance our ability to focus on the district's business and communicate transparently, the Newton County School Board has identified the need for developing and adopting norms that reflect shared agreements and guidelines.

These agreed-upon norms supplement our policies, which provide a code of ethics, structure, operating guidelines, meeting parameters, and outline the basic roles and responsibilities of the School Board. They also align with the Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems, approved by the State Board of Education.

While our Board has three specific responsibilities established by Georgia law — hiring and evaluating the Superintendent, passing a budget, and establishing policy — we are unified in our support of the Superintendent while equally being committed to organizational effectiveness, transparency, and continuous improvement. We adhere to the norms and protocols within this document and regard them as a working agreement that can be amended, revised, or updated, as necessary

A. Governance Roles and Responsibilities

The governance team agrees to:

- Always put students first when making decisions and keep student achievement as the main focus of Board actions.
- Educate students ethically and with fiscal responsibility.
- Follow the Code of Ethics and disclose any conflicts of interest.
- Lead as a united team with the Superintendent, each in his/her respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Act as a policy-making body separate from the roles and responsibilities authorized to the Superintendent.
- Not micromanage the Superintendent in the day-to-day operations of the district.
- Follow the chain of command and instruction and encourage others to do so when necessary.
- Support the team, be open-minded and willing to listen.
- Commit to being accountable.

B. Chief Executive Officer

The governance team agrees to:

- Be transparent and respectful.
- Always follow the chain of command and not micromanage the Superintendent.
- Designate the Superintendent as Chief Executive Officer, fully delegating authority to provide educational leadership, manage daily operations, and perform all duties assigned by law.
- Operate as a governance team with the Superintendent as a key member.
- Never surprise the superintendent or executive team in a Board Meeting.
- Respect the Superintendent's professional recommendations and decisions, even when there is disagreement, and never undermine the Superintendent's authority.
- Take recommendations from the Superintendent seriously, and carefully research and review recommendations before taking action.
- Be open and honest in all communications.
- Hold the Superintendent accountable for operations and student performance.
- Establish the Superintendent's annual performance goals jointly with the Superintendent in alignment with the strategic plan and provide feedback to the Superintendent at least biannually via formative and summative evaluation procedures.
- Be supportive of Board decisions, even when there is disagreement.
- Be fair and timely with the Superintendent's Evaluation. The evaluation process includes an annual review in May/June, the setting of new goals in July, and a mid-year evaluation in January of each year.

C. Board – Superintendent Team and Relationship

- The Board and the Superintendent agree that, except for legal matters, the Superintendent is the only employee who reports to the Board of Education. All other employees in the District report to the Superintendent; therefore, the Superintendent has exclusive responsibility for supervising and giving direction to staff.
- The Superintendent has the primary role in the development, oversight, and administration of the budget. The Superintendent will seek the preference of the full Board for Budget preparation sessions.

D. Communication Among Board Members/Superintendent

The governance team agrees to:

- Respectful and timely communications.
- A 24-hour response time from the Superintendent.
- Not inundate the Superintendent with daily phone calls (but definitely call if there is an emergency).
- Expect the Superintendent to communicate with all Board Members regularly using selected modes.
- Direct all stakeholders' questions, input, or discussion to the Superintendent or designee (Special Assistant), who will communicate them as needed.
- Be mindful that in conversations among Board Members and/or the Superintendent, confidentiality is assumed unless otherwise noted. Board Members are encouraged to engage in phone calls privately and to protect the conversations from being overheard.

Note:

- *During times of crisis when the school system is making decisions about how to respond to a crisis or to prepare for a potential closing, individual Board Members will direct concerns or questions to the Board Chair. The Board Chair and Superintendent will maintain daily contact. The concerns from Board Members will be relayed by the Board Chair to the Superintendent, and information will be gathered. The Board Chair will then share updates with the entire Board.*

E. Chain of Command

The governance team agrees that:

- It will support and follow the chain of command and insist that the staff do the same.
- The Superintendent is responsible and accountable for the day-to-day operations with equity and consistency.
- Issues and concerns received by the Board or individual members will be referred to the Superintendent.

- The Board will educate the public about the chain of command and instruct them to follow it when approached with requests about day-to-day operational issues.

F. Decision Making Process

The governance team agrees to:

- Be open-minded and respectful of all opinions.
- Provide a safe space for communications for all stakeholders.
- Seek input and listen to all sides before making decisions.
- Put students first when making decisions.
- Study the issues and discuss with stakeholders, the Superintendent, and fellow Board Members.
- Be prepared and knowledgeable about educational issues and topics.
- Support decisions made by the Board and/or administrative team once a decision is made.
- Support the majority decision.

G. School Visits

The governance team agrees to:

- Follow the chain of command and Board protocols when requesting a personal visit.
- All visits to district sites by Board Members should be communicated to the Superintendent at least 24 hours in advance and include a stated purpose for the visit unless the visit is a direct invitation from school administration or the district. Board members should notify the Superintendent upon receiving such notifications.
- Only conduct school visits for an appropriate purpose.
- Follow visitor sign-in procedures, be respectful of the staff's time, and maintain professional conduct.

Note:

- *Protocol does not preclude Board Members from attending school functions as a parent or a community Member.*
- *Invitations to sporting or extracurricular events where Board Members will be recognized in a formal or ceremonial capacity should be sent to the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and the Board.*

H. Capital Projects and Construction Site Visits

The governance team agrees to:

- Tour construction sites when invited by the administration if personal schedules permit.
- Not make unscheduled visits to active construction sites.
- Not have outside individual contact with the CMR, Architect or their staff regarding capital projects. All questions regarding projects and progress will go through the Superintendent or his/her designee.

Note:

- *There will be regular updates on the capital project during Board work sessions that may include images and drone fly-through footage.*

I. Communication

The governance team agrees to:

- Be open-minded, respectful, and professional with all stakeholders.
- Ongoing, transparent communication with community stakeholders while maintaining confidentiality regarding sensitive matters, including items discussed in executive sessions, and refraining from discussing the intentions of fellow Board Members.
- Incorporate good, timely, open, and constant communication.
- Support and encourage each other in serving the public at the highest level of professionalism and ethical conduct. The Board encourages new Board Members in their first year of service to accept support and education about the role and best practices from the Board Chair, Superintendent, or otherwise seek guidance from the Georgia School Boards Association.

J. Constituent Requests and Issues

The governance team understands that:

- Constituents who contact Board Members with a concern or an issue will be referred to the Superintendent.
- Board Members should respond to all constituent requests, indicating that the concern has been forwarded to the Superintendent (For example: “Thank you for your email. I have forwarded your concern to the Superintendent.”)
- The Superintendent shall involve the appropriate district of school staff and inform the Board of the status as appropriate.

K. Email Communication with Constituents

When an individual Board Member receives an email from a constituent…

- The Board Member will reply to the constituent to thank them for emailing.
- The Board Member will note in the reply email that the board protocol is for the email to be shared with the entire governance team and that the Chair will reply on behalf of the Board.
- The Board Member will then forward the email to all additional Board Members and the Superintendent.
- The Board Chair will gain consensus from the majority of the Board that the response reflects the will of the Board.
- The Board Chair will reply on behalf of the Board, typically within twenty-four (24) hours.
- Each Board Member and the Superintendent will be included in the response.

- Individual Board Members will be listed by name and district at the close of the email.

L. Communications by Superintendent to Board Members

- The Superintendent will provide a Weekly Update via email with relevant Department updates and other pertinent information.
- In the event of extreme crises, the Superintendent (or designee) will provide information to the Board Members via email and provide text notification to the Board alerting them of the matter.
- The Superintendent (or designee) will give advance notice via email to the Board members of district events (to the extent possible) where Board Member attendance is welcomed, necessary, preferred, or highly encouraged.

M. Information Requests of Board Members

The governance team understands that:

- If contacting Cabinet or Executive Cabinet members by email, Board Members will copy the Superintendent.
- If contacting Cabinet or Executive Cabinet members by phone, Cabinet member will inform the Superintendent via email of the information requested before responding.
- Any information requested by one Board Member will be provided to the full Board via email (most likely through the Board Weekly).
- Any information requested by one Board Member cannot be handled in the moment of the conversation – will be forwarded to the Superintendent to identify the necessary resources required to fulfill the request.
- Any information requested by one Board Member that requires additional resources, including, but not limited to, the redirection of staff time, will be directed to the Chair of the Board of Education for consideration and solicitation of majority Board support. (ex. Board Member requests that the COO supplies a list of all food service vendors.)

N. Communications with Staff

The governance team understands that:

- The Superintendent is the only employee who reports directly to the Board of Education.
- The Board will go through the Superintendent when the need arises to communicate with the staff.
- The Board will be cohesive as a team and show support for staff.

- If there are concerns regarding a staff member or a school issue, the Board Member will speak privately with the Superintendent about the issue unless the Superintendent directs them to share the concern otherwise (i.e., with another staff member).
- The Board will always be respectful and courteous when interacting with staff.
- There will be no surprises during staff presentations at Board meetings.
- When Board Members are notified of inquiries and/or concerns from stakeholders, they should refer the issue to the Superintendent or his/her designee.

O. Self-Assessment

The governance team agrees to:

- Complete an annual governance team self-assessment aligned with the required eight domains.
- Develop and implement action plans based on the self-assessment results.
- Sign annually the certification of individual and collective agreement of the Georgia State Standards for School Boards, the Code of Ethics, and the Conflict of Interest Policy.

P. Strategic Planning

The governance team agrees to:

- Be engaged and supportive.
- Commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
- Make sure these goals remain in the district's top priorities and that nothing detracts from them.
- Have strong shared beliefs and values that meld the limitless possibilities for student learning with an unshakeable confidence in the district's ability to teach all children at high levels.
- Annually commit to support the action plans outlined in the district's strategic plan.
- Foster an environment and commitment to continuous improvement.

Q. Communication with News Media

The governance team agrees to:

- Have the Board Chair provide his/her statement to the Board ahead of time.
- Embrace the Superintendent or his/her designee as the official spokesperson for the school district.
- A process to ensure that Board Members are kept informed of incidents, district positions, and position statements.
- Not go on camera or radio unless the questions are provided prior in an effort to prevent the message from being manipulated in the editing process.

- Designate the Board Chair as the official spokesperson for the Board when it pertains to matters of the Board. Individual Board Members are strongly discouraged from speaking to the media regarding personal feelings about the school system or decisions made by the district.

R. Social Media Communications

The governance team agrees to:

- Use social media as a tool to promote positive and important news about the school district.
- Not engage with the public on controversial topics on social media that may impact day-to-day district operations, governance, or policy, or otherwise, important decisions.
- Not respond or engage in commentary with constituents that may inflame a matter or otherwise complicate district operations.
- Be positive and mindful of how their actions on social media reflect the whole Board.
- Be mindful on posting about politics.
- Avoid responding during a crisis and rely on the district social media sites to relay critical information.
- Send any social media information that may further an awareness of community concerns or controversy to the Superintendent and Board Chair.

Note:

- *Board Members are reminded that their spouses and direct family members may be inadvertently viewed as representing them on social media as an individual Board Member. Thus, Board Members are strongly encouraged to discuss with their family members how social media responses on behalf of the Board or in defense of the Board would negatively impact the entire board.*

S. Board Meetings

The governance team agrees to:

- Act and conduct the business of the school district before the public.
- Conduct board meetings that reinforce for the public and community stakeholders that the governance team is operating effectively.
- Establish procedures to ensure that meetings are in accordance with local board policy and the open meetings law.
- Recognize the importance of conducting Board business in the public and the sanctity of using Executive Session. Executive Session information should not be discussed outside of executive session meetings or with non-Board members.

T. Board Meeting Preparation and Protocols

- The purpose of the Work Session/Study Session is to review matters pertaining to the district and preview matters requiring Board action.
- The purpose of the Business Meeting/Board Meeting is to vote on business matters, to recognize students, staff members, and/or community or organizational partners, etc., and to hear public comments.
- The Superintendent and appropriate staff will facilitate an Agenda Review Meeting with each Board Member prior to the Work Session/Study Session to ensure the Board's awareness and preparation for items to be presented for report or vote during the upcoming meetings. Agenda Reviews are intended to introduce, clarify, and educate the Board's knowledge about the various topics.
- To the extent possible, Board Members should use Agenda Review to articulate questions that should reasonably be asked during Board Meeting to ensure that staff members are prepared to provide cogent, clear, and concise responses for the benefit of the Board and the public.
- A draft preview of accompanying slide decks will be provided to Board Members the Friday before the Work Session/Study Session.

U. Fundraising with Vendors/Potential Vendors

The governance team agrees to:

- Adhere to the Conflict of Interest policy.

V. Addressing Concerns Regarding Board Norms and Protocols Among Board Members

The governance team agrees to:

- Remain focused on the academic success of Newton County students and in turn remain committed to following the Board Norms and Protocols as closely as possible.
- Recognize that honest and open communication regarding best governance practices is paramount to successful governance and positive working relationships.
- Attempt to resolve any perceived deviation from Board Norms and Protocols in the following manner:
    1) Board Member with a concern about another Board Member will express the concern to the Board Member privately and seek to resolve the concerns.
    2) If the concern is unresolved, the Board Member with the concern about another Board Member will discuss the concern with the Board Chair and/or Superintendent privately.
    3) The Board Chair will meet with the Board Member of concern and remind them of their Code of Ethics, best Board governance practices, the team commitment

to following the Norms and Protocols, as well as any potential impact a deviation from best practices could have on the school system.

4) If the aforementioned actions, in the view of the Chair, do not bring resolution, then the Board Chair and one other Board Member shall meet with the noted Board Member, remind them of their Code of Ethics to follow governing policies and protocols, and seek to garner a commitment to display appropriate action.
5) If the Board Chair is the member of noted concern, the Vice Chair will meet with the Chair and include the Superintendent or another Board Member.

If the above steps are unsuccessful, upon a motion supported by a two-thirds vote, the Board may choose to conduct a hearing concerning a possible violation of these established Norms and Protocols by a member of the Board."