AGENDA
AMADOR COUNTY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Special Board Meeting
Wednesday, March 25, 2021
OPEN SESSION at 3:00 PM

Meeting Location: Amador County Building, 810 Court Street, Jackson, Remote meeting via Zoom for public access.

NOTE: Due to COVID-19 this meeting will be available to the public via Zoom and following the meeting recorded audio will be available on our website.
Zoom offers closed captioning during live conferences for disabled persons.
To access the meeting online join the Zoom meeting via
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83279613984?pwd=TFV4UmJqSmJqMVNncEg2Z2lBenY4dz09
Meeting ID: 832 7961 3984
Passcode: 32521
One tap mobile
+16699009128,,83279613984#,,,,*32521# Directions for accessing the meeting will also be included on our webpage with the meeting link. https://amadorcoe.org/minutes-agendas/

NOTE: A copy of the Board agenda and backup materials is available for inspection and review on the Amador County Unified School District Website at www.amadorcoe.org. An audio recording of the Board Meeting is made. If you are in need of a hard copy of the agenda, please email the Communication Specialist at demi.wright@acusd.org.

Board of Trustees meetings are meetings of the Board in public, as per the Brown Act open meeting law. All five Board Members may not have discussion outside an open meeting. This meeting is their opportunity to have discussion in order to conduct their business. Board Meetings are not meetings for the public to interact informally with the Board. Members of the public may speak formally to the Board by completing a speaker card and giving it to the Board Clerk or Communication Specialist.

If a person or group of persons disrupt the orderly conduct of a meeting, the legislative body has a right to order those persons removed from the meeting. If order still cannot be restored after removal of the individuals disrupting the meeting, members of the legislative body can order the room cleared and continue with the meeting.
(Government Code §54957.9; Penal Code §8403; Elections Code §18340; Acosta v. City of Costa Mesa (9th Cir. 2013) 718 F.3d 800; White v. City of Norwalk (9th Cir. 1990) 900F.2d 1421, 1425.)

OUR UNITY OF PURPOSE: We work as a cohesive Governance Team through discussions, actions and decisions that are thoughtful, respectful, and sensitive. We support one another in and away from the Board Room through active listening, vulnerability and honesty. We make policy decisions that ensure equitable support to increase student achievement and foster social, emotional, and physical well-being for all students.

OUR MISSION: Enriched by the diversity and deep traditions of our unique community, Amador County Public Schools will prepare, support, and inspire each student to achieve career and college success in a rapidly evolving world through highly engaging teaching, rigorous learning and innovative pathways supported by strong partnerships in a safe, caring and collaborative environment.

1.0 CALL TO ORDER

2.0 BOARD MEMBERS

The Board may not take action on any item which is not on this agenda, except when (1) an emergency situation exists, (2) there is need to take immediate action and the need for the action came after posting, or (3) the item was posted for a prior meeting within specified time limits.
(Government Code §54954.2)
The Board may not take action on any item which is not on this agenda, except when (1) an emergency situation exists, (2) there is need to take immediate action and the need for the action came after posting, or (3) the item was posted for a prior meeting within specified time limits.

[Government Code §54954.2]

3.0 ROLL TAKEN BY THE BOARD CLERK

4.0 ADDITIONS/DELETIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA

5.0 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

6.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public comments regarding Discussion/Action Items will be addressed during this time. Due to Zoom limitations, all public comments should be addressed at this time. 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. Individual speakers shall be allowed three minutes to address the Board on non-agenda items. The Board shall limit the total time for public input on each item to 20 minutes. With Board consent, the Board 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. NOTE: If you wish to address the Board please complete a speaker card and give it to the Board Clerk or Communications Specialist.

7.0 DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Board Workshop: Equity Work in Our Schools – Discussion/Action (Dr. Slavensky/Mr. Snider) (Approximately 2 hours)
The Board of Trustees participates in workshops periodically to build their capacity as a cohesive governance team. The purpose of this workshop is to: (a) further educate the Board on their role regarding equity in our schools and (b) update the Board about the equity work happening in the schools.

7.2 Governance Handbook – Discussion/Action (President Thompson) (Approximately 1 hour)
The Governance Handbook was developed during the 2016-17 school year and adopted by the Board of Trustees on March 8, 2017. It was subsequently revised and approved by the Board on January 18, 2019 and again on May 13, 2020. Following a CSBA Governance Workshop in February 2021, the Board felt it was necessary to review sections of the handbook.

8.0 NEXT MEETING

ACUSD Regular Meeting: Wednesday, April 14, 2021, tentatively scheduled to be held at the Amador County Administration Building, 810 Court St., Jackson, CA. Open Session will tentatively start at 6:30 PM.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

* The Amador County Unified School District complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Should you require special accommodations, or more information about accessibility, please contact the Superintendent’s Office by calling (209) 257-5353. All efforts will be made for reasonable accommodations.

* Any writings or documents that are provided to the governing board in open session will be made available for public inspection at the meeting or at the Amador County Public Schools District Office located at 217 Rex Avenue, Jackson, CA during normal business hours. Please note that business hours have changed due to COVID-19. If you are need of a hard copy of the agenda, please email the Communication Specialist at demi.wright@acusd.org
AGENDA ITEM #: 7.1

SUBJECT: Workshop: Equity Work in Our Schools – Discussion/Action

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
The Board of Trustees participates in workshops periodically to build their capacity as a cohesive governance team. The purpose of this workshop is to: (a) further educate the Board on their role regarding equity in our schools and (b) update the Board about the equity work happening in the schools.

Attachments:
1. Presentation Slides
2. Cultural Proficiency: The Continuum
5. Chapter 4 from The Equity Framework, by Curtis Linton

At the workshop, Board Members will also be provided a copy of The Equity Framework by Curtis Linton and The Other Side by Jaqueline Woodson. Members of the community may access these resources online by clicking the live links in the titles.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:
None

RECOMMENDATION:
The Superintendent recommends the Board participate in the workshop and have discussion.

PRESENTED BY:
Dr. Amy Slavensky, Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Sean Snider, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services
Equity Work in Our Schools

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES BY:
DR. AMY SLAVENSKY, SUPERINTENDENT
MR. SEAN SNIDER, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
MARCH 25, 2021

Agenda

1. Welcome and Purpose
2. Defining Equity
3. Cultural Proficiency: The Continuum
4. The Equity Framework by Curtis Linton (Chapter 4)
   - Implicit Bias
   - Colorblindness
   - White Privilege
   - Institutional/Structural Racism
5. Examples of Our Equity Work
6. Next Steps
7. Closing
Defining Equity

Linton’s Definition

“Educators provide all students with the individual support they need to reach and exceed a common standard.” – The Equity Framework, p. 22

Our Leaders’ Definition

Amador County Public Schools believes that equity requires us to listen to and understand the unique needs of each student, so we can provide the safe environment, individualized supports, and appropriate tools required to ensure opportunities for success socially, emotionally, and academically to truly give each student a seat and a voice at the table.

Defining Equity

“As educational institutions collectively make the paradigm shift from traditionally teaching all students equally regardless of differences to successfully instructing every individual student equitably according to each student’s unique learning needs, schools can guarantee successful education for each and every student.” – The Equity Framework, p. 23

• What new thinking or questions does this generate for you?
• In what ways might the Governance Team support this work for and with our students?
The essence of equity is that each of us must develop the necessary skills to treat the collective of diverse people around us with the same degree of hope, aspiration, and positive expectation that we afford ourselves.” (p. 75)

**In what ways might this help us better understand our own subconscious biases?**

**How might we explicitly accomplish what this quote is talking about?**
The Equity Framework, Chapter 4
Overcoming Biases

“These successful teachers move past the idea that treating all students the same reflects their caring and fairness – they recognize the inequities of equal treatment.” (p. 77)

“A person who claims color-blindness permits him- or herself to maintain subconscious biases and prejudice, but under the guide of acceptance. It is tolerance of difference without validation of equal worth.” (p. 77)

“Race is real ... Color-blindness attempts to erase the stunning diversity around us, thus forcing each of us into an indistinguishable norm.” (p. 77)
The Equity Framework, Chapter 4
Acknowledging Privilege

“Our challenge with racial privilege is that the recipient does not need to know if its existence in order to benefit from it.” (p. 79)

“Students who struggle are most often blamed for choosing not to work hard, choosing not to care, and ultimately choosing not to succeed.” (p. 79)

“Thus, when addressing inequities, educators must begin by choosing to meet the student at his or her reality in order to help them succeed at school.” (p. 79)

*Personal reflection: What is White privilege to me? Is it hidden or visible to me? In what ways can I support equity work in our schools to better support all students?

The Equity Framework, Chapter 4
Missionary Syndrome

“The missionary syndrome is a condescending attitude that good-meaning people carry when trying to help others ‘less fortunate’ than themselves. It is purely tied to privilege ...” (p. 81)

*The “poor baby” sentimentalist vs the warm demander
*What experiences have you had with this?
*How might this thinking help us better support students?
Diversity is about race, and much more.

“Without explicitly addressing race, educators limit their ability to understand the other diversities students bring with them tied to ethnicity, socioeconomics, gender and language. By addressing race, racism, and institutionalized racism in the drive toward equity, educators directly challenge the traditional norms that have lead to only certain groups of primarily White students predictably succeeding and other groups such as Black male students predictably failing. Furthermore, once educators first learn how to address race in schools, they gain the necessary skills to deal with poverty and other issues that impact student learning.” (p. 60)

Real Time Example of this Work: Equitable Grading Practices

“Four Outdated Grading Practices,” by Joe Feldman

1. Using a 0-100 Scale
2. Curving Grades
3. Including Homework Performance in the Grade
4. Retakes: More than a Second Chance
Real Time Example of this Work: Equitable Grading Practices

“The Case Against Zero,” by Douglas Reeves

“The common use of the zero today is based not on a four-point scale but on a 100-point scale. This defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points.”

Other Examples of Our Equity Work

• Maintaining a standing agenda item in Principals’ Leadership Team meetings, including professional reading and dialogue, strategizing real time issues, and sharing success stories.
• Provided digital access and Chromebooks to every student who needed it during the pandemic and this will continue post-pandemic.
• Using quality children’s literature to teach important concepts about equity and the value of diversity – to children and adults alike.
• Examined secondary math placement criteria and monitoring closely to ensure students have equitable access to rigorous courses.
• Providing English language development (ELD) professional learning and resources to ensure all of our English learners have equitable access to core curriculum in a comprehensible way.
• Permitted cheerleaders to cheer on the sidelines before the CDPH allowed it.
• Continuing support to students living in poverty (resources, counseling, etc.).
Next Steps

• Continue and strengthen our focus on equitable practices and our equity-based MTSS Framework with the Leadership Team.

• Continue professional learning and collaboration to fully engage and support all students in the ways they need.

• Continue and expand the work of the Equity Team, including students and community members.

• Tovi Scruggs-Hussein to provide August All-Staff Kick-off Keynote. [https://www.ticiess.com/about-tovi](https://www.ticiess.com/about-tovi)

• Move the learning into real-time, daily practice – especially as we come out of the pandemic.
## Cultural Proficiency: The Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Destructiveness</th>
<th>Cultural Incapacity</th>
<th>Cultural Blindness</th>
<th>Cultural Pre-Competence</th>
<th>Cultural Competence</th>
<th>Cultural Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to eliminate the cultures of others in all aspects of the school and in relationship to the community served</td>
<td>Trivializing and stereotyping other cultures; seeking to make the cultures of others appear to be wrong or inferior to the dominant culture</td>
<td>Not noticing or acknowledging the cultures of others within the school community; treating everyone in the educational system without recognizing the needs that require differentiated interaction</td>
<td>Increasing awareness of what you and the school don’t know about working in diverse settings; at this level of development, you and the school can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can falter, stop, and possibly regress</td>
<td>Aligning your personal values and behaviors, and the school’s policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive of cultures that are new or different from yours and the school’s; enables healthy and productive interactions</td>
<td>Holding the vision that you and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy; interacting with your colleagues, students, families, and the community as an advocate for life-long learning to serve effectively the educational needs of all cultural groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See the difference and stamp it out.*  
*See the difference and make it wrong.*  
*See the difference and act like you don’t.*  
*See the difference and at times, respond inappropriately.*  
*See the difference and value it.*  
*Seek the difference and esteem it as an advocate for equity.*

- “In this class, we speak English only.”
- “If we could get rid of our special needs students, our scores would improve.”
- “You know that those parents never show up to school functions.”
- “Asian students come to this country and succeed. Why wouldn’t the other students do so as well?”
- “I don’t see color. I just see kids.”
- “Racism and discrimination don’t exist anymore. I really hate it when parents use the race card.”
- “During Christmas time I have a menorah in my classroom.”
- “We value all cultures. We have a night where parents bring food representing their country.”
- “A student made a derogatory remark and I used it as a teachable moment to remind students of the right thing to do.”
- “The co-teach model with the push-in Special Education teacher is allowing us to have honest conversations about differentiation in the classroom.”
- “Our school’s Social Justice and Equity Vertical Team is doing a great job of embedding culturally relevant lessons into our curriculum.”
- “My job as an educator is not only to teach content. I also openly embrace my role as an advocate for each child and their family.”

Adapted from Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009)
The Case against the Zero

Article in Phi Delta Kappan - December 2004
DOI: 10.1177/003172170408600418

1 author:

Douglas Reeves
Leadership and Learning Center

41 PUBLICATIONS 196 CITATIONS

All content following this page was uploaded by Douglas Reeves on 25 April 2020.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.
The Case Against the Zero

Even those who subscribe to the “punishment” theory of grading might want to reconsider the way they use zeros, Mr. Reeves suggests.

BY DOUGLAS B. REEVES

This is not a trick question. If you are using a grading scale in which the numbers 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 correspond to grades of A, B, C, D, and F, then what number is awarded to a student who fails to turn in an assignment? If you responded with a unanimous chorus of “zero,” then you may have a great deal of company. There might be a few people who are familiar with the research that asserts that grading as punishment is an ineffective strategy,1 but many of us curmudgeons want to give the miscreants who failed to complete our assignments the punishment that they richly deserve. No work, no credit — end of story.

Groups as diverse as the New York State United Teachers and the Thomas Fordham Foundation rally around this position.2 Let us, for the sake of argument, accept the point. With the grading system described above, the failure to turn in work would receive a zero. The four-point scale is a rational system, as the increment between each letter grade is proportionate to the increment between each numerical grade — one point.

But the common use of the zero today is based not on a four-point scale but on a 100-point scale. This defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points. Most state standards in mathematics require that fifth-grade students un-

DOUGLAS B. REEVES is the chairman and founder of the Center for Performance Assessment, Boston, Mass. His most recent publications are Assessing Educational Leaders (Corwin Press, 2004) and Accountability for Learning (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004).
nderstand the principles of ratios — for example, A is to B as 4 is to 3; D is to F as 1 is to zero. Yet the persistence of the zero on a 100-point scale indicates that many people with advanced degrees, including those with more background in mathematics than the typical teacher, have not applied the ratio standard to their own professional practices. To insist on the use of a zero on a 100-point scale is to assert that work that is not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than that assessed for work that is done wretchedly and is worth a D. Readers were asked earlier how many points would be awarded to a student who failed to turn in work on a grading scale of 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, but I’ll bet not a single person arrived at the answer “minus 6.” Yet that is precisely the logic that is employed when the zero is awarded on a 100-point scale.

There are two issues at hand. The first, and most important, is to determine the appropriate consequence for students who fail to complete an assignment. The most common answer is to punish these students. Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, there is an almost fanatical belief that punishment through grades will motivate students. In contrast, there are at least a most fanatical belief that punishment through grades can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences.

This issue is as emotional as anything I have encountered since the phonics versus whole language debate. Scholars regress to the persuasive tactics of professional wrestlers (no offense intended to wrestlers — this article will generate enough hate mail as it is), and research and logic are subordinated to vengeance masquerading as high standards. Because the emotional attachment to the zero is so strong, I have given up advocating that 50 points should represent the lowest grade. What I do think we can do to preserve some level of sanity in our grading system is to return to a four-point system. A’s no longer equal 100 points, but four points. If there is a need for greater specificity, then we can choose an infinite number of digits to the right of the decimal point and thus differentiate between the 3.449 and 3.448 to our heart’s content. But at the end of the day in such a system, the F is a zero — one point below the D. It is fair, accurate, and, some people may believe, motivational. But at least the zero on a four-point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when applied to a 100-point system.


Copyright Notice
Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc., holds copyright to this article, which may be reproduced or otherwise used only in accordance with U.S. law governing fair use. MULTIPLE copies, in print and electronic formats, may not be made or distributed without express permission from Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc. All rights reserved.

Note that photographs, artwork, advertising, and other elements to which Phi Delta Kappa does not hold copyright may have been removed from these pages.

Please fax permission requests to the attention of Kappan Permissions Editor at 812/339-0018 or e-mail permission requests to kappan@pdkintl.org.
Taking the Stress Out of Grading

Joe Feldman

Now more than ever, we need to take steps to reduce students' anxiety about grading (while improving their learning). Will we?

This fall, we are bearing witness to how significantly the pandemic has affected and continues to affect our communities: financial instability, the loneliness and stress of physical distancing, sadness and grief over the illness or death of a loved one, and fear of infection. None of us are spared from these experiences, and our schools' most vulnerable students—black and brown students, students from low-income families, and students with special needs, the same students who occupy the lower end of the achievement and opportunity gaps—are the most likely to experience multiple stressors and long-term trauma.

Fortunately, unlike last spring when we were caught flat-footed, we've had the summer months to plan our response to the pandemic-related stress and trauma that students will carry with them into the school year. Yet even if we mobilize counseling services and construct proactive ways to connect and support students, our pledged concern for the psychological well-being of our students will ring hollow if our schooling, whether remote, hybrid, or in-person, causes additional stress. As the 2020–21 school year gets underway, we must identify opportunities to reduce the stress that might be woven, unnecessarily and inadvertently, into our teaching and learning. That means we have to tackle grading.

Relentless pressure to succeed, often measured by grades or a GPA, can contribute to students being sleep-deprived, anxious, and even engaging in self-harm. Particularly now, students have a shallower reservoir of resilience. How then can we ensure that our grading
practices do not add to their anxiety and stress? How can we remain empathetic and responsive to the many learning gaps students have this fall and still ensure that our grades are accurate? And how, with all these considerations, can our grading strengthen our commitment to equity?

Four Outdated Grading Practices

The evidence is overwhelming that grades cause anxiety and stress for students. Between January 2019 and February 2020, Stanford University's Challenge Success program surveyed approximately 54,000 high school students in schools where the majority of graduates go on to selective colleges and universities. The results were sobering:

- 76 percent of students reported that they always or often worry about the possibility of not doing well in school.
- 75 percent of students reported that they always or often feel stressed by their schoolwork.
- 72 percent of students reported that they always or often worry about taking assessments.

"Doing well in school," "schoolwork," and "assessments" all signal grades as a source of stress for students. But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. After all, major decisions about students are based on their grades: extracurricular eligibility, college admission, financial aid, even work permits and insurance rates. At the same time, we know that stress is antithetical to deep learning: It interferes with our brain's ability to process new information, recall prior knowledge, and perform higher cognitive tasks. If we want to maximize students' learning, we need to minimize their stress.

For nearly a decade, my organization has partnered with schools and districts to improve grading systems. We find that, in nearly every situation, grading is not only stressful for students but also stressful for teachers. Even though grades are the most formalized expression of a teacher's professional judgment and expertise, teachers receive little training in how to grade either in preservice credentialing or in-service professional development. As a result, teachers often replicate how they were graded, mimic their colleagues' grading practices, or make it up as they go. No wonder grading is considered "one of the more frustrating aspects of teaching."

Our current circumstances give us every reason to critically examine how some of our traditional grading practices amplify stress and to identify alternatives that not only decrease stress but also improve teaching and learning. Based on our work with teachers and interviews with students, here are four outdated practices, along with constructive alternatives.

1. Using a 0–100 Scale
Most of us, as students and now as educators, are deeply familiar with the 0–100 percentage scale used to assign grades (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. 0–100 Percentage Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This scale seems so ubiquitous and innocuous as to be insulated from critique. But let's represent the 0–100 scale with a pie chart (see fig. 2).

Figure 2. Weighted Toward Failure

Over half of our grading scale is an F, and if we assume a C grade signifies minimum attainment of course standards, then over two-thirds of our grading scale describes insufficient performance, and only one-fifth of the scale describes academic success (A or B). At its most basic level, we're sending students an anxiety-producing message: the
chances are much greater that you'll fail than you'll succeed. What's more, the 0–100 percentage scale makes success less likely, if not impossible, for students who struggle.

Take the student who earned a B (85 percent) on three assignments but received a zero on the fourth assignment because it wasn't submitted (imagine whatever legitimate or illegitimate excuse you'd like). She now has a grade of a D (63 percent) averaged across the four assignments. A single missed assignment caused a 22 percent decrease and a two-grade-level drop. Even if our student tries to redeem herself and earns 85 percent on two subsequent assignments, her grade is revived only to a C- (71 percent).

When we use a scale that is weighted toward failure, it puts tremendous pressure on students. One zero, or even a score below 30 or 40 percent, and the student is in a hole that requires outsized success to dig out. As Stella, a high school student who spoke with my team explained, "I did not do well on a test, so it dropped my grade really badly. It stressed me out. It was infuriating. I didn't know what to do. I've been fighting these past few weeks to try to get my grade back up, but unfortunately, if it drops it becomes really difficult to climb back up the ladder." Another student described the impact of the 0–100 scale more succinctly: "It's so hard to bring your grade up, but so easy to bring it down."

There's nothing sacrosanct about the 0–100 scale. To relieve students of this unnecessary stress, we need a more mathematically sound scale with equal grade distributions, such as a 0–4 scale, or we must correct our 0–100 scale by establishing a minimum floor at 50 percent. Both of these alternatives make our scales fairer, rectify the excessive impact of the zero, and relieve pressure on students. Despite the scale's clear weaknesses, it can be hard to imagine changing this traditional grading structure. Kevin, a high school teacher, was skeptical about altering the 0–100 scale, but saw its impact: "I used to think that 50 percent as a baseline was the craziest thing that I had ever heard, but now I think it's been very useful and keeps students in 'the game.' They have hope."

### 2. Curving Grades

Another common grading practice is to curve students' grades—to adjust each student's score to achieve some desired distribution of scores across the entire group. For example, if a teacher wants a certain percentage of students to receive an A, and the highest grade earned on an exam is a B, applying the curve will shift all the grades upward. Conversely, if more students earn A grades than desired, applying the curve will shift grades downward so that same percentage of A grades is awarded. Teachers may use the curve to accommodate or correct for exams that are especially hard or too easy.

However, grading on a curve by its very design turns learning into a competition, undermining collaborative classrooms. Because the curve limits the number of As, each student's academic success becomes dependent on other students' performance; I do better when you do worse. Plus, the grade scale changes its meaning in every class, depending on the class's composition. The curve adds more stress without offering any pedagogical benefit.
Instead of high grades being a limited resource, a score or grade should signify a level of performance against an external, fixed standard. Students experience less stress when they know that their grade isn’t dependent on or compared to others’ performance. In other words, the bullseye doesn’t change size depending on how many students hit it.

3. Including Homework Performance in the Grade

Teachers assign homework to give students an opportunity to practice, to make mistakes, and to show us their learning gaps so we can help them succeed on summative assessments—all low-stakes purposes. In traditional grading, students are incentivized to do their homework by earning points toward their final grade; if they don't do their homework, their grade will be lower (and if they get a zero on the 0–100 scale, much lower)—high-stakes consequences.

Therefore, the pressure to earn (and avoid losing) homework points eclipses and undermines our intended purpose for homework. We create a constant pressure to perform, where every mistake or incomplete answer on homework lowers a student's grade. Whether students don't have enough time to do the homework, don't understand it, forgot about it, or didn't want to do it, it's no surprise that many students copy their peers' homework. Our misguided incentives lead to students' misguided behaviors. As Isaiah, a high school student, explained: "If I don't do the work then it affects me big time. That's why some of us copy, not because we want to be lazy, but because our grade depends on it."

If we genuinely want homework to be an opportunity to practice, the message should be unambiguous: "Your performance on homework will not be included in your grade, so I expect you to take risks and make mistakes, to share with me your academic confusion and weaknesses without fear that your grade will be lowered because of those mistakes." Of course, many teachers fear that without points as a carrot and stick, students won't do their homework. However, across dozens of schools and districts, hundreds of teachers, and thousands of students, we have found the opposite: When homework isn't included in the grade but students understand its connection to mistake-making, learning, and summative assessment performance, students do just as much homework, sometimes even more. As Matt, a high school teacher who no longer includes homework performance in the grade explained, "Students are doing the homework but aren't feeling the pressure."

4. Grading Participation

In many gradebooks, teachers create a "participation" category to catalogue points that students earn for showing certain behaviors, such as contributing to the discussion, taking notes, completing classwork before the end of the period, or collaborating in a pair-share. Students can also lose points for an array of missteps, such as arriving late to class, not getting their syllabus signed, submitting assignments past the deadline, or talking out of turn. We may believe this traditional grading practice reinforces effective learning habits and smooth-running classrooms, but similar to our use of homework performance in the grade, with "participation" points we're focusing students not on learning, but on
"performing." We're creating pressure-cooker classrooms where students are constantly judged, where every desired behavior is recorded, and no error goes unpenalized.

We make learning less stressful when we create a space where students can take risks without penalty, not feel constantly scrutinized, and not have the pressure to perform perfectly every class period every day. Of course, we want to clearly enforce and encourage certain behaviors and discourage others, but we have an almost infinite universe of conversations and consequences within our classroom and school to do so. Our traditional practice of grading everything students do as "participation" inadvertently fosters distrust, shame, and deceit—feelings that undermine learning in ways that awarding a thousand points cannot repair. Besides, constantly evaluating behaviors requires significant time from teachers both during class and after class for gradebook data entry, creating more stress for them as well.

Retakes: More Than a Second Chance

What all these stressful grading practices have in common is that they don't allow for mistakes. Even though we espouse belief in Carol Dweck's theory of growth mindset and preach, "We love mistakes because you need them to learn!" our grading practices hang a sword above every student's head. Every error costs points that push success farther out of reach, and any success is tenuous and can vanish at a misstep. In other words, these grading practices deprive our classrooms of two ingredients necessary for effective learning: the motivation that comes from the possibility of redemption and the safety that not everything will "count."

In addition to ending the four aforementioned practices, a proactive way to reduce stress and improve learning is to allow retakes. Retakes sit at the nexus of improving our calculations and reducing pressure on students to constantly be at their best.

Traditionally, the relationship between assessments and grading has two key features: a student gets a single opportunity to demonstrate their learning on an assessment, and every assessment performance is included in the calculation of a grade. If a student struggles and scores low on early assessments, her final grade will be pulled down by those scores even if she demonstrates successful learning on subsequent, cumulative assessments. There is pressure, then, to succeed on every assessment. By contrast, retakes, and permitting replacement of a prior score with the retake score, allow students to learn from mistakes and have their grade reflect the most current and accurate description of their understanding, undampened by their earlier score. Students overwhelmingly recognize that retakes don't just give them a second chance at success; they improve how the classroom feels. Here are some statements from students in schools I've worked with:

Our teacher said we would get as many retakes as we needed to get a good grade. That made me feel really good because it's like she cares and actually wants us to succeed.—Yozi
I think it's really, really good to have retakes because if you didn't do well on the first try, it still encourages you to learn the material rather than just taking the grade and sucking it up. You can improve your grade and learn.—Vivian

Math can be hard and challenging for a lot of people, especially me. Knowing that I have this retake waiting for me that can potentially replace a poor grade really gives us comfort. And our math teacher, we love her. She wants us all to learn. She doesn't want us to feel like we're in an unsafe environment where grades are all that matters.—Ahmad

Teachers use many different designs and procedures for retakes, but the most successful teachers balance practical limitations with their belief in every student's success. For example, many teachers provide support before students retake an assessment, allow retakes for any student who wants to keep learning (or occasionally mandate retakes for students who need a confidence boost), and spiral content so each assessment becomes a "retake" of earlier assessments. Every retake approach has its challenges, but almost any iteration reduces stress and makes grades more current and accurate. In fact, teachers report that for students with test anxiety, knowing that a retake will be available reduces stress, which allows them to perform better on the initial exam, thereby eliminating their need for a retake.

**Lowering Stress, Increasing Equity**

We can see how shifting away from these traditional and stress-inducing grading practices can bolster equity. Evaluating behavior with "participation" points makes our grades more susceptible to our implicit biases. Students who have fewer supports at home may be less able to complete homework, so excluding homework performance ensures our grades reflect only students' learning, not their external supports. When we stop curving grades or using the 0–100 percentage scale, students who make early mistakes aren't mathematically prohibited from success. Retakes give students multiple chances to succeed, regardless of how long it takes them. These examples of alternative grading approaches help all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved—whose vulnerability may be amplified because of the pandemic—to have a full opportunity for academic success.

Perhaps more than ever, as stress and fatigue from the pandemic continues for the foreseeable future, we need to use less stressful grading practices this school year and replace them with practices that are not only more accurate and equitable, but also infuse our classrooms with more care, forgiveness, and hope. Perhaps we may even discover that these less stressful grading practices have value after the pandemic is over.
CHAPTER 4

Personal Equity

I once visited a classroom in rural Louisiana of a veteran teacher who had been very resistant to change. This school sat on the Mississippi River right in between two petrochemical plants. It was one of the poorest and lowest-achieving elementary schools in all of Louisiana. A colleague of mine, Steve Olsen, was contracted to work with this school over time. He was yet another one in a long line of consultants paid to visit this school and help these teachers change how they taught students. I was surprised to hear that on Steve’s first day in this school, he spent nearly half the day teaching a very simple formative assessment practice, fist-to-five. “Half the day!” I thought, “Wow, what about their belief systems? What about understanding their students better? What about leadership structures within the school?” These were typical things I believed needed to be addressed up front in a failing school. But, Steve spent half the day perfecting with these teachers a simple strategy that tells them whether or not their students have learned the lesson.

Then I heard from this veteran teacher about the impact this simple strategy had on her as an educator. She went back to her classroom the next day, taught her math lesson, and asked her students to show whether or not they understood the concept by holding up their hands in a fist if they did not understand at all, or up to five fingers if they fully understood the concept. When she asked them to show fist-to-five, her students held up nothing but fists and one finger.

Purely shocked that none of her students had learned what she just taught, she decided to teach the lesson once again, and again, and again over the next several days until every student in her class was holding up four and five fingers.

Never in her entire career had she realized that her students’ lack of learning had something to do with her rather than with them. A few weeks later, when Steve was back at the school for the second day of training, this formerly resistant veteran teacher marched right up to him and pleasantly demanded, “What else do you have for me?” In all of her many years of teaching, she had never known that the reason her students failed was because of her own ineffective teaching rather than her students perceived lack of interest in learning. She now knew that she held the responsibility in her classroom for student learning, and has been a different teacher ever since.

Most educators deserve to feel proud for an individual job well done. But a school or school system is really only as good as its least effective educator. My high school football coach often said that the team was only as good as its weakest player. We once lost because of me—I was that weakest player who had too many fumbles, and too many missed blocks. Despite a strong team effort, we once lost in the playoffs because of critical mistakes made by a couple of players. I can blame that senior year playoff loss on my teammates, but in the end, it is the team that wins or loses based on how the various individuals perform.

Schools and school systems are the same—they are only as strong as the weakest teacher or administrator on staff, despite the dedicated and heroic efforts of their best educators. In order to succeed through the end of high school, a student needs to spend the majority of his or her school years with effective teachers, as a year here or there with a great teacher cannot make up for the lack of a student’s learning in one or two years with an ineffective teacher. This is why the search for systemic educational equity begins within each of us personally. Unless every one of us commits ourselves to pursuing equity for each and every student, no institution can overcome our individual deficiencies.

In all the schools I have observed that have closed and eliminated their achievement gaps, the educators have always been remarkably authentic. Their efforts to build equity were not for their own recognition, or because some outside entity had “forced” them to do this. Some schools and educators may have started the process because of a disciplinary action, but this is not why they ultimately
succeeded at equitizing their school. They built equity because they developed a great sense of responsibility for the learning of all their students. These educators did not wait for the legislature to fund their schools, or for the students’ parents to show up and help out. They were driven by the powerful realization that each of them personally has significant impact upon the academic success (or failure) of their students—equitable educators see no valid excuse for not succeeding with every student.

Centering yourself in equity begins with a personal acknowledgment of who you are as a person and what constitutes your own belief systems, then authenticating those beliefs in your actions, and finally claiming full responsibility as a professional educator—an exciting “journey to racial literacy” as described by Bonnie Davis (2009). As you center yourself within equity, you will find the strength, conviction, courage, and voice necessary to be an active participant in building institutional equity, the subject of the next chapter. But without your personal engagement as an equitable educator, can your school or school system ever be fully equitable?

**Equity Success: Frankford Elementary**

Powerful examples of educational equity are often found in unexpected places. Driving up to Frankford Elementary in Frankford, Delaware, I noticed the farms surrounding the school. It was a long drive from nearly anywhere. But the U.S. assistant secretary of education had just visited this rural school to recognize its remarkable turnaround in student achievement. We were looking forward to documenting how Frankford went from one of the lowest-performing elementary schools in Delaware to the annual number-one or number-two school in the state.

According to Sharon Brittingham, the principal,

When I first came here, when I was first hired, there was a mandate from the superintendent that things had to change at Frankford. I did not want to know where the students lived. I did not want to know who their parents were. I did not want to know what their IQ was. I just wanted to know that you the teacher could have growth with the child. I think in the beginning, teachers did not have the belief in themselves that they could make it work for all kids.

Frankford Elementary sits in a poor rural chicken-farming area of Delaware. The school is evenly divided between White, Black, and Latino students; 76 percent of the students are on free and reduced-price lunch, 22 percent of students are designated for special education, and 23 percent of students are English language learners. Demographically, this is a school that was historically excused for lower student achievement, but that dramatically changed under the leadership of Sharon Brittingham, a veteran White principal who—though soft-spoken—was firmly in charge.

Fourth-grade teacher Kimberlee Kleinstuber describes that when she first came to the school, she had a certain expectation of what she was going to experience in her classroom based on the student profiles. Sharon shares that the teachers “believed that all kids could learn, but most kids could only learn a certain amount.” At Frankford, failure with students was no longer an option.

Tracy Hudson, reading specialist at Frankford, recalls the beginning of her teaching career: “It could be a lonely profession—you get in your classroom; you’re there by yourself.” Teaming and collaboration became one of the first objectives that Sharon implemented in the school. Yet, she struggled to convince the staff that teaming worked. So, she recruited a teacher to the school with whom she had previously worked who knew how to effectively collaborate. This provided another teacher on staff who could model and build trust in the collaborative process. Fifth-grade teacher David Grise shares that “it’s a hard thing when you start these professional learning communities. You don’t want to be the person who sits there and says, ‘My kids are struggling.’”

The school recognized that they needed to honor the individual learning needs of every student. According to Sharon, “It’s as though we created an IEP [Individual Education Plan] for every student.” Rather than just students in special education receiving individual focus and planning, every student at Frankford—the high, low, and average performers—were supported daily in their personal learning needs, leading them toward clearly set learning targets.

Once the capacity of the teachers started growing as a result of their PLCs, the staff realized that there was nothing they could not do—and would not do—to create a successful environment for their
students. The simple question of “what’s good for the kids?” became the driver of what the school did for its students in creating numerous strong approaches to increase student achievement.

One of these ideas is a highly successful mentoring program wherein the school gets well over one hundred parents and community members who sit down and work one-on-one with individual students each week. This is a school that cannot rely upon highly educated parents or a nearby college or university for its mentors. But they realized that any community member—no matter their education—can spend valuable time with a student each week. An immigrant Latino parent with only a fifth-grade education is still capable of sitting down and reading with a first-grade English language learning student. Innovative ideas like this brought great benefit to Frankford—and at zero increase to the budget since the mentoring is all volunteer.

Reading specialist Jennifer Babcock states that teachers now “take ownership. They don’t come to me and say, ‘I’ve got this student—you take care of him.’ They come and they say, ‘I have a problem. What can I do to help [the student]?’” The culture of the school is such that teachers can try innovative practices and if something doesn’t work, they feel safe to admit it and get additional assistance to succeed at the new teaching methodology. Jennifer continues, explaining that teachers “are not admitting defeat. They are just trying to find what’s best for the student in their classroom.”

Data played a huge role in the culture change of the school. Sharon says, “[The] data is not lying about what is happening—that these children are being successful.” Remarkably, student achievement at Frankford Elementary is now at the following level:

- Since 2003, over 90 percent of all students have met state standard in every subject area.
- For several years in a row, 100 percent of students met state standard in reading and science.

Tracy shares further how these new strategies influenced her role as one of the reading specialists: “When teachers saw that they were being successful, they wanted the change. They wanted to do the things that we were talking about.”

One of the strongest moments of impact on the school, according to Sharon, occurred “when we had students that were in our intensive learning center, the lowest-functioning students, pass the state test—I think that was a big turning point.” Seeing the success and growth in their own school has a profound impact upon the expectations and drive of the staff toward higher achievement.

As illustrated in the equity lens for Frankford Elementary that follows, a combination of appropriate student learning strategies with a belief system focused on the learning of the students led to equity for all students.

Frankford Elementary has received numerous honors since achieving this success, including Education Trust’s Dispelling the Myth Award. In a diverse school with no racial, gender, or economic achievement inequities, success is a given for all students. According to Kimberlee, “I think we found the formula. The formula is not one teacher here, and one teacher there, it’s the package.”
INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIVISM

As illustrated at Frankford Elementary, the search for equity begins within each of us personally. For me to be equitable means that I must recognize honestly where I come from, my own biases and beliefs, and the lens through which I look upon the world. Rosemary Henze and colleagues, in Leading for Diversity, write:

It is a recipe for conflict to act in the world based on the assumption that we have an objective view of it. In contrast, to assume that we each have a valid view of the world and have something to learn from each other’s perspectives is the basis for mutual respect and appreciation. (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, & Walker, 2002, p. 20)

The essence of equity is that each of us must develop the necessary skills to treat the collective of diverse people around us with the same degree of hope, aspiration, and positive expectation that we afford ourselves.

As I center myself in equity, I become aware of how my race, culture, and background impact the way I see and interpret others. Growing up privileged within society, White middle-class people do not always intuitively offer others who differ from the norm the same amount of respect and dignity they afford themselves. The basis of White privilege in Western society is the assumption that one’s own way of thinking and living is inherently the right way. To be in a position of privilege and surrounded by people like myself, it feels natural to assume that the whole world is just like me. But equity is not about just creating equality or trying to make others fit our perceived norms; it is about individualizing fairness, justice, and opportunity for everyone, regardless of whether or not they fit the dominant norm.

This tension between the “norm” and diversity in U.S. society stems from the very origin of this country. From the beginning, we have been challenged to describe ourselves either as a nation of individuals or as a nation with a collective identity. In describing the tension between the individual and the collective in U.S. society, Carlos Cortes (2002) describes the delicate balancing act found within the U.S. Constitution’s emphasis on pluribus unum:
Such *pluralibus* values as freedom, individualism, and diversity live in constant and inevitable tension with such *unum* values as authority, conformity, and commonality... because the United States began and has evolved not just as a nation of individuals, but also as a nation of groups—racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, to name just a few. (p. 145)

I have often observed individuals espousing a *pluralibus* belief that emphasizes the individual, but acting in a *unum* approach wherein another's diverse individuality threatens the collective security of one's affinity groups. This likely leads to the subconscious thought, "If they were only more like me, this might not be a problem." But equity demands that we recognize the individual while valuing the collective—it is the act of consciously honoring both perspectives.

**OVERCOMING BIASES**

This need to equitably honor *pluralibus unum* begins with overcoming one's biases and stereotypes. This is harder than it may appear. Just because we may care for someone different from ourselves does not necessarily mean we have overcome prejudice toward that individual or people like that person. In the book *Freedom Writers Diary*, teacher Erin Gruwell (1999) writes about facing stiff opposition from other teachers who did not believe it was appropriate to treat her unruly and disengaged students as high-level learners. Their opposition wasn't from a lack of caring, as the other teachers were also dedicated educators. Rather, these teachers allowed their biases and prejudices to influence their teaching in a way that placed these students at a disadvantage.

Internal biases such as these lead to lowered expectations, especially for students who differ from the norm. If a teacher does not internally believe that a student is capable of learning at a high level, it is very unlikely the teacher will instruct the student to that level. Several times, I have met educators of Color who speak of going to the parent-teacher conferences for their own children, and having to convince the teacher that their child is capable of the highest levels of learning. The most effective educators, however, overcome their own internal biases and lowered expectations for disadvantaged students. Students succeed in these classrooms because they know the teacher individually believes in them. These successful teachers move past the idea that treating all students the same reflects their caring and fairness—they recognize the inequities of equal treatment.

Similarly, the belief in color-blindness continues to be one of the most destructive and inequitable mind-sets in today's schools. Even though it is purported to be an "open-minded" way of thinking, it can severely restrict a person of Color's chances for success in a diverse world. This is because it allows those of us in the majority to ignore the foremost identifier of diversity—one's race. As discussed earlier, color-blindness is especially pernicious because we actually see race—outside of physical blindness, it is impossible not to see the skin color of another.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes color-blindness as "racism without racists" (p. 1). A person who claims color-blindness permits him- or herself to maintain subconscious biases and prejudice, but under the guise of acceptance. It is tolerance of difference without validation of equal worth. Bonilla-Silva goes on to describe the benefits of this approach for White people, specifically, "The beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of White privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards" (p. 3).

Race is real. Even though the labels and values associated with racial identity are historical social and political constructions designed to differentiate between communities and justify prejudiced treatment, the identity of skin color—race—is ever present. Thus, race may technically be a label that identifies one's skin pigmentation, but the judgments, privileges, and oppression based on this perception of race persist. According to straightforward racial identifiers that avoid ethnicity, I am White, my friends and colleagues are Black, Brown, Yellow, and Red. In identifying my own race and the race of others, I acknowledge not only our ancestral heritages, but also our differing present-day realities. Color-blindness attempts to erase the stunning diversity around us, thus forcing each of us into an indistinguishable norm.

Overcoming our personal and internal biases, stereotypes, and prejudices begins with an honest acknowledgment that they actually exist within us. Rosemary Henze and coauthors (2002), in *Leading for Diversity*, state:
As educators, it is especially important for us to recognize that we, too, are subjective and that this is a part of being human. We don’t need to feel guilty about being subjective and, in fact, coming to terms with our subjectivity frees us to move around the circle of perception. (pp. 20–21)

With this increased consciousness comes the ability to check our assumptions at the door and accept and treat others as they really are without forcing them into our preformed prejudices.

Stereotypes develop over time because of generalized traits that stand in contrast to dominant norms. Our society is dominated by White cultural values. White people as well as people of Color are constantly subjected to these values, and thus we all easily connect with associated stereotypes. One stereotype of African Americans is that they are loud and physical. This stands in contrast to the traditional White value of being reserved and soft-spoken. Of course, not all Black people are loud and physical, just as not all White people are reserved and soft-spoken. But, White people encounter few negative judgments based upon being quiet and unassuming, whereas there are significant negative judgments Black people hear because they stand in contrast to the traditional White norm.

As a White person working toward equity, I especially must acknowledge my own limitations toward diversity, which come from growing up heavily exposed to stereotypes of all sorts. This begins with understanding my own Whiteness as a precursor to understanding the differences in others. In *How to Teach Students Who Don’t Look Like You*, Bonnie Davis (2006) writes:

> If I, as a White educator, do not understand what Whiteness brings to my diverse classroom, I lack important information. What does it mean to be White in America? . . . If I am White, I don’t have to think about it unless I choose to put myself into a minority position or am forced into one. Yet people of Color do not have that option. (p. 55)

**ACKNOWLEDGING PRIVILEGE**

After engaging in honest self-reflection, the privileges associated with being White become readily apparent. I have never been the victim of racial profiling from law enforcement. This means that when I am pulled over while driving, I have been caught breaking the law. Not until after personally hearing the stories of numerous persons of Color being victimized by racial profiling did I finally believe it was happening. Being victimized because of my race has never been part of my reality and, hence, it is easy to let this aspect of White privilege remain hidden from my view.

The challenge with racial privilege is that the recipient does not need to know of its existence in order to benefit from it. Thus, an assumption grows within the recipient that the privileges granted unto him or her is just the way the world operates. If I am never profiled racially while driving, there is no necessity for me to understand racial profiling. When my privilege compels me to believe that my paradigm is the only truth, it is easy to dismiss contrasting paradigms when presented by those who differ from myself.

White people, perhaps unknowingly, tend to assign blame rather than empathy when hearing of racial inequities. This stems from a conflicting view of difference between White culture and people of Color. For someone who is White, difference often feels like a choice rather than a reality. Whites typically work to either hide their differences and “blend in,” or highlight their differences in order to prove their individualism. People of Color cannot hide their racial difference—it is an unalterable reality. Hence, Whites tend to project choice of difference upon people of Color. This especially manifests itself in schools. Students who struggle are most often blamed for choosing not to work hard, choosing not to care, and ultimately choosing not to succeed. But, the student of Color understands that his or her difference from the school’s dominant norm is a reality and not a choice—it is the student’s reality that the educators do not understand the student, where the student comes from, nor how the student learns. Thus, when addressing inequities, educators must begin by choosing to meet the student at his or her reality in order to help them succeed in school.

At the same time, unacknowledged privilege limits an educator’s ability to address racialized inequities. Consider the following thoughts about White privilege by Peggy McIntosh (1989), a professor at Wellesley College:

> I think Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege.
So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have White privilege. I have come to see White privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (p. 10)

Adding up my privileges because of my Whiteness, I realize that I have never been accused of shoplifting, never been frisked, and never been suspected of laziness, anger, or a lack of intelligence or talent just because of my race. Even more powerful, I have often benefitted from other’s assumptions in me of intelligence, capabilities, and likelihood to succeed just because of my color. After recognizing my White privilege, I am deeply compelled to ask whether my son Dominic and my daughter Maya will experience the same privileges I have enjoyed, or will they face prejudices that I have never personally experienced? Likewise, can today’s students benefit from an assumption of success like I did? Or, if I am a White teacher, do my unacknowledged privileges actually prevent my students of Color from receiving the education they need simply because I am thrusting my privileged paradigms upon them and not instructing them within their own reality?

**MISSIONARY SYNDROME**

In his book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, multicultural author Gary Howard (1999) describes his time as a student at Yale when, as a White person, he moved to “the Hill” of New Haven, Connecticut, a primarily Black inner-city enclave, to work with poor Black and Hispanic youth at the YMCA. He lived on the Hill during the civil rights riots of 1968 when blocks all around him burned to the ground. This was a pinnacle moment for Howard as he discovered that the anxiety and despair felt by the ethnic communities surrounding him were real, and that a young White guy from the suburbs couldn’t exactly bring them hope just because of his good intentions.

He describes this time as his “missionary” phase—he was the enlightened individual coming with the “answers” to show the destitute a better way to live. Reflecting on this period, Howard (1999) writes, “How can White Americans, those who have never been touched viscerally by the realities of race, break out of their cultural isolation and ignorance?” Howard continues, “I didn’t realize it at the time, but this naïve missionary period was merely the tentative beginning of a long journey toward multicultural awareness” (p. 14).

The *missionary syndrome* is a condescending attitude that good-meaning people carry when trying to help others “less fortunate” than themselves. It is purely tied to privilege—when we have much and society works for us, then it appears easy to help others because if they were just “more like me” (a subconscious thought), they might overcome their challenges. By no means should we avoid helping others, for the very purpose of education is giving people the tools they need to succeed in life and in society. It is the approach that matters.

Authenticity within us as exhibited in our motives and attitudes is critical to accomplishing equity at the personal level. Authenticity is realness in purpose, honesty in beliefs and understandings, and integrity in our relations with others. Authenticity also helps us value a situation for both its potential and limitations. Educators are often either optimistic or pessimistic about what a school can accomplish. When centering one’s self in equity, we need both. A simple formula follows:

![A cup half-full (optimism) + a cup half-empty (pessimism) = a full cup](image-url)
To accomplish equity within a school requires that the educators look both at what they are good at, and where they struggle—the full cup of education. So many answers already exist within schools—some struggling students succeed with one teacher but not with others—but schools often lack the culture and tools to authentically assess why some teachers find success and others do not.

Without authenticity about who we are and why we do what we do, we cannot center ourselves in equity because we have not fully valued the diversity surrounding us. Without authenticity in our work as educators, we can never fully achieve equity because this allows us to continuously measure our students by how much they differ from us and the norm, rather than seeing them as equal to ourselves in hope, aspiration, and potential—and worthy of our very best efforts.

**Personal Equity Equals Passion**

Bonnie Davis (2009) writes, “When we approach others with our authentic selves and our body language is congruent with our words, we tend to win them over. Then we connect as human beings who respect each other as unique individuals” (p. 33). In personal equity, we must ask whether we have authentic passion for the daily work of changing schools and increasing student performance. Passion is both an enabling and sustaining force in equitizing education—it allows us to take on the tough challenges of persistent achievement inequities and stick with this work even when obstacles and resistance confront us head-on. The key characteristic of our personal equity work is passion.

Equity work can most challenge educators when it becomes evident that their “tried and true” practices are simply not serving their diverse students. Every teacher and administrator working today—regardless of race—figured out how to succeed in the system at some point. When most educators were students, the status quo served them well. Thus, educators often conclude that what worked for them should serve today’s students equally well. This is when one’s own successful background becomes an obstacle to accomplishing equity. Raymond Terrell and Randall Lindsey (2009) write that “reaction to equity issues is often dependent on one’s own experiences as a student” (p. 11). An equitable educator will acknowledge that just because it worked for me does not mean it works for my students. Passion for equity leads to a creative process of building a new educational system that works for all students and all educators all of the time.

To sustain this passion requires acknowledging the barriers that can neutralize passionate dedication to equity, both individually and collectively. In the Moral Imperative of School Leadership, Michael Fullan (2003) lists five self-imposed barriers to school change that prevent individual educational leaders from acting proactively (commentary added in italics):

1. Perceived system limitations (out of my control).
2. If-only dependency (if only x would happen, then I could . . .).
3. Loss of moral compass (becoming overloaded with tasks rather than purpose).
4. Inability to take charge of one’s own learning (just tell me how to . . .).
5. Responsibility virus (overresponsibility and underresponsibility). (p. 17)

By addressing these obstacles forthright, we gain the strength to overcome them and progress toward equity. Personal equity always reverts back to honestly assessing who we are and why we do what we do. It is on-all-the-time consciousness that allows us to quickly assess, change our actions, and empathetically respond to others as we equitize our practice.

According to Gary Howard (1999),

We cannot fully and fruitfully engage in meaningful dialogue across the differences of race and culture without doing the work of personal transformation. If we as White educators are not deeply moved and transformed, there is little hope that anything else will significantly shift . . . We cannot help our students overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still lingers in our minds, hearts, and habits. (p. 4)
Equity Discussion

Discuss with a colleague your understanding of equity, especially as it relates to your own privilege and difference. What experiences do you draw upon to help others succeed, such as students and educators? In what ways do these experiences resonate with your discussion partner? Can the person relate, or are your experiences disconnected from your partner’s reality?

My colleague and friend Jamie Almanzan has often said, “We teach first who we are,” which means that when we teach or work in a school, our own ethnicity, race, culture, and background comes first in our actions and efforts with students and colleagues alike. Apply the equity lens to your own understanding of personal equity by engaging in the following reflections:

Who Are You?

Identify your race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, culture, sexual orientation, and politics. In what ways do these traits impact how you describe yourself as an educator? How are these traits similar or different from the students in your classroom, school, and/or school system?

What Do You Believe?

Based on the characteristics you identified in the previous section, what values do you hold and what matters to you in regards to education? How is this similar or different from the students in your classroom, school, and/or school system?

What Do You Do?

Related to the characteristics you identified in the previous sections, describe what you do or don’t do as an educator to build equity for each and every one of your students. How do your actions serve or not serve the individual students in your classroom, school, and/or school system?
EQUITY ACTION #4

Identify what you need to do personally to center yourself in equity so as to ensure that all students under your supervision receive an equitable education. Describe your commitment to equity both in terms of your internal work around your own beliefs, understandings, and expectations, and your external actions toward your students and colleagues. Engage in changing one of these things you identified.

Deepening Equity: Personal Reflection

Whether White or of Color, analyze yourself according to the characteristics of Whiteness. What privileges, beliefs, and/or expectations do you have related to the norms and experiences of majority culture? How does this impact your ability to address biases and challenge stereotypes, both in your personal life and your work as an educator?

Recently, I worked in Jones County, Georgia. At lunch, Verneda Appling, a kind and quiet African American woman who was only days away from retiring as assistant superintendent, engaged me in conversation about the morning’s training. With the district leadership, we had engaged in a great discussion defining equity and describing what it looks like. Putting forth one additional effort to positively impact the school system she had so faithfully served, Appling leaned over toward me and said, “It’s only equity if they actually do it.”

To reiterate, the definition of equity works to describe what a equitable classroom, school, and school system looks like:

Educators provide all students with the individual support they need to reach and exceed a common standard.

A viable challenge to this definition is to ask, so what? Once equity is defined, what does one do with it? Operationalizing equity requires educators to formally change the way things operate in order to equitize the system—the institution itself must change. Working with Verneda, we created a definition for institutionalized equity:

Institutionalized policies, processes, and practices that guarantee educators provide all students with the individual support they need to reach and exceed a common standard or expectation.
AGENDA ITEM #: 7.2

SUBJECT: Governance Handbook – Discussion/Action

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The Governance Handbook was developed during the 2016-17 school year and adopted by the Board of Trustees on March 8, 2017. It was subsequently revised and approved by the Board on January 18, 2019 and again on May 13, 2020. Following a CSBA Governance Workshop in February 2021, the Board felt it was necessary to review sections of the handbook.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: None

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the Board review, discuss and approve the recommended revisions.

PRESENTED BY: Kandi Thompson, Board President
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. MISSION STATEMENT 1

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES 2

III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNANCE TEAM

The Board of Education 3

The Superintendent of Schools 5

IV. NORMS AND PROTOCOLS 7

A. NORMS:

Positive Governance Team Culture 6

Our Governance Norms 7

Open and Honest Communications 7

Creating and Sustaining a Positive Culture 8

How We Will Operate in a Spirit of “Moving Forward” 10

B. PROTOCOLS:

Orienting a New Board Member 11

Board Role in Public 11

Speaking With a Common Voice 12

Addressing Conflict Among Board Members 12

Confidentiality/Closed Session Practices 13

Board Member Response to Complaints From the Community or Staff 14

Board Member Interaction with TV, Radio, Newspaper and Social Media 15

Board Member Use of Electronic Devices 16

Board Member Use of Electronic Media 17

Board Member Potential Conflict of Interest 18

Acting as a Board Member With a Close Relative in The District 18
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Self-Evaluation and Self-Monitoring of Governance Team Effectiveness</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Role with Employee Bargaining Unit Leaders</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting School Sites</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Members Participation in Meetings at School Sites</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A District Wide Emergency</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censure Policy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reorganization of the Board</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. BOARD MEETING PROTOCOLS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Meeting Guidelines</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requesting Items to be Placed on Board Agendas</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request to Place An Item on a Board Agenda Form</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Board Meetings as Strategic Leadership Tools</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Board Members During Board Meetings</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Member Interaction With Public at Board Meetings</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Board Member’s Request for Information, Materials or Action</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motion and Voting</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting No or Abstaining</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quorum</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Consent Agenda</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of Board Meetings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimizing Environmental Impact</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MISSION STATEMENT

Enriched by the diversity and deep traditions of our unique community, Amador County Public Schools will prepare, support, and inspire each student to achieve career and college success in a rapidly evolving world through highly engaging teaching, rigorous learning and innovative pathways supported by strong partnerships in a safe, caring and collaborative environment.
“GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE BOARDS OF ACUSD AND ACOE”
(From Board ByLaw 9001)

1. Guiding principles are a tool designed by those who will use them to advance their mutual interest in promoting effectiveness, civility, and willingness to compromise in their on-going work together on behalf of Amador County Public Schools and the success of its students.

2. It is understood that how the Board operates and engages with the Superintendents, school Community, and public, impacts its effectiveness as well as the effectiveness of others in the school community, and the District’s and County Office of Education’s work and educational environments.

3. It is mutually understood that it is the intent of each Trustee and the Superintendent to act in good faith on behalf of the district.

4. There will be robust, honest, respectful and patient debate on any matter of concern to a Trustee or the Superintendent that is within the purview of the Board.

5. When disputes or disagreements occur, the governance team will work together to resolve them within the team and with a spirit of unity of purpose.

6. Decisions will be based on relevant data and other credible sources of information that have been made available to all members.

7. Trustees will avoid back-tracking; once the Board has heard and considered the views of its members and acted, all members will respect the action of the quorum, unless and until the Board takes up the matter again.

8. The Board will respect the requests of members to revisit issues when based on new information.

9. Trustees will hold each other accountable for following these guiding principles. No single Trustee can sidetrack the Board without the Board’s acquiescence.

10. Continued board development will occur through the purposeful application of these agreed-upon guiding principles during all board processes.

11. By engaging in transparent professional development activities, the Board and Superintendent lead by example.

It is the intent of this policy to provide an environment in which Trustees, the Superintendent and District staff are able to work in a proactive and dignified manner to provide solutions to the typical operational problems that districts and schools encounter, as well as, crafting policy for future challenges and educational needs. The Board believes that the best interests of students and the growth and development of the district’s employees are best served by an environment that is based on dignity, trust, integrity and civil treatment for all.
Roles and Responsibilities of the Governance Team

The Board of Education:

Citizen oversight of local government is the cornerstone of democracy in the United States. The role of the trustees, who sit on locally elected school boards, is to ensure that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs and priorities of their communities. Boards fulfill this role by performing five major responsibilities. These are setting direction; establishing an effective and efficient structure; providing support; ensuring accountability; and providing community leadership as advocates for children, the school district and public schools.

These five responsibilities represent core functions that are so fundamental to a school system’s accountability to the public that they can only be performed by an elected governing body. Authority is granted to the board as a whole, not each member individually. Therefore, board members fulfill these responsibilities by working together as a governance team with the superintendent to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community.

The board carries out these responsibilities in each of the following job areas:

- Setting the District’s Direction
- Student Learning and Achievement
  - Finance
  - Facilities
  - Human Resources
  - Policy
  - Judicial Review
  - Collective Bargaining
- Community Relations and Advocacy

The Superintendents assists the board in carrying out its responsibilities in each of the job areas, and leads the staff toward the accomplishment of the agreed upon district vision and goals. The following page provides more detail on how the board performs its governance responsibilities in each job area. It’s important to remember that boards who inadvertently get involved in staff functions undercut their ability to hold the superintendents accountable for the results of those efforts.
Performing Governance Responsibilities

We agree with the responsibilities of school boards as described below by the California School Boards Association:

Set the direction for the community’s schools
Focus on student learning
Assess needs/obtain baseline data
Generate, review or revise setting direction documents (beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators)
Ensure that an appropriate inclusive process is used to develop the above listed documents
Ensure that these documents are the driving force for all district efforts

Establish an effective and efficient structure for the school district
Employ and support the superintendent
Establish a human resources framework that includes policies for hiring and evaluating other personnel
Oversee the development of and adopt policies
Set a direction for and adopt the curriculum and require data-producing assessment systems
Establish budget priorities, adopt the budget and oversee facilities issues
Provide direction for and vote to accept collective bargaining agreements

Provide support through our behavior and actions
Act with professional demeanor that models the district’s beliefs and vision
Make decisions and provide resources that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals
Uphold board approved district policies and support staff implementation of board direction
Ensure a positive working climate exists
Be knowledgeable enough about district efforts to be able to explain them to the public

Ensure accountability to the public
Evaluate the superintendent
Monitor, review and revise policies
Serve as a judicial and appeals body
Monitor student achievement and program effectiveness and require program changes as indicated
Monitor and adjust district finances and periodically review facilities issues
Monitor the collective bargaining process

Act as community leaders
Speak with a common voice about district priorities, goals and issues
Engage and involve the community in district schools and activities
Communicate clear information about policies, programs and fiscal condition of the district
Educate the community and the media about the issues facing students, the district and public education
 Advocate for children, district programs and public education to the general public, key community members and local, state and national leaders
The Superintendents of Amador County Unified School District & Amador County Office of Education:

The Superintendent of the Amador County Unified School District and the Superintendent of the Amador County Office of Education are members of the governance team. It is expected that the members of the Board will communicate with the Superintendents to address any concerns regarding issues or projects. The Superintendent’s duties and job description are outlined in Board Policy and/or his/her contract. The contract specifies an annual evaluation and times of contract renewal for the District Superintendent. The County Office of Education Superintendent is subject to the electorate and is not formally evaluated.

The Superintendent is responsible to:

- Promote the success, safety and well being of all students through regular coaching visits to the schools, professional learning with teachers, staff and leaders, and ensure other appropriate actions and services;
- Lead, coach and supervise leaders, managers, and other support staff including assistant superintendents, directors, principals, and other managers so they can effectively lead, coach and supervise their teams and schools;
- Support the efforts of the USD Board of Trustees to keep them focused on learning and achievement;
- Respond appropriately and honestly to concerns and complaints from stakeholders with the goal of listening and collaborative problem solving;
- Respect the role of the Board as the representative of the community;
- Respect the role of the Superintendent to supervise and support all staff;
- Provide guidance and recommendations to the Board to assist in policy development, decision making, and leadership based on the direction of the Board as a whole;
- Plan, implement, monitor, and modify as needed all educational programs to ensure success for all students including English learners, low income students, foster youth, and students with mild to moderate Special Education needs.

Norms and Protocols

Positive Governance Team Culture

Culture is the positive or negative atmosphere created by the way people in an organization treat each other. Teams have unwritten (implicit) or written (explicit) agreements about how they will behave toward each other and other individuals. These behavioral ground rules, of-
ten called norms, enable teams to build and maintain a positive culture or shift a negative one.

Because the community elects school board members to set and monitor the direction of the school district, and the district superintendents translates all efforts into action, it is vital that the board and superintendents have a respectful and productive working relationship based on trust and open, honest communications.
Norms

Our Governance Norms

We agree to:

- Focus on the best interests of our students
- Show respect (never dismiss/devalue others)
- Commit to having effective deliberations; we will listen openly to the opinions of others.
- Devote the time necessary to govern effectively. This means being there, being knowledgeable, participating, understanding the full scope of being a board member and being willing to take on all the responsibilities involved.
- Be collaborative.
- Maintain confidentiality
- Learn from the past while focusing on the present and the future.

Open and Honest Communication

The governance team recognizes the value of mutual trust, open team dialogue, and being fully informed as a condition of mutual trust.

Toward the objective of open and honest communication:

- We will not be afraid to say what we think. We will let team members know what is on our minds in a respectful and dignified manner. We will let team members know the impact their communication has on us personally, so they can clarify their intent with us firsthand.
- We will listen openly and respectfully to what others have to say, recognizing that each individual’s opinion is as important as our own.
- We will take responsibility for our individual communications and be mindful of our own body language, voice tone, and words. We will endeavor to ensure that our body language and voice tone match the message we intend to send.
- We will communicate in a manner that enhances the Board discussions and deliberations. We will take the time necessary, prior to the Board meetings, to become fully informed about issues before the Board.
- We will offer validation when an individual team member makes the effort to communicate honestly and respectfully with us individually or during Board meetings. We will be supportive of each other’s attempts to be honest and open at Board meetings even when we don’t agree with what the other person is saying.
Norms

- We recognize that “respecting” and “attempting to understand” each other’s points of view are essential to building trust among team members. We will ask questions or paraphrase the comments of other team members to clarify for understanding.
- To enhance our deliberations during Board meetings, we will ask questions when we don’t understand, be respectful when we disagree, and build on each other’s comments and ideas whenever possible during our discussions.
- We will keep all closed session discussion confidential. Confidential information means a communication made in a closed session that is specifically related to the basis for the Board to meet lawfully in closed session. Team members will not disclose confidential information acquired in the course of their official duties, including confidential information that is not a public record subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act, information that by law may not be disclosed, and information that may have a material financial effect on the team member.

Creating and Sustaining a Positive Culture (From Board ByLaw 9001)

Operating as a Team

Each Board member brings unique skills, values, and beliefs to the Board table. Board members must work together with the Superintendent to govern effectively and to ensure that a high quality education is provided to all students. Authority rests with the Board as a whole, not with individual Board members. Board members understand and respect the separate roles of the Board and the Superintendent. Together as a governance, the Board and the Superintendent will take collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture where there is acceptance of honest mistakes.

Collective Authority of the Board

- Individual Board members do not have authority and will not direct action or make individual requests of staff.
- Authority to direct action rests with the Board when seated at Board meetings.
  - A majority vote of Board members provides direction to the Superintendent.
  - Board members will not undermine the ability of staff to carry out Board directions.
Norms

The Board Works With One Another at Public Board Meetings

- Reports to the Board will focus primarily on accountability for student learning.
- The Superintendent is the chief executive officer of the district and will recommend, propose, or suggest on most matters before the Board.
- The Board will consider research, best practices, and public input in its decision-making process.
- Board meetings are for decision making, actions, and votes.
  - Board members agree to speak to the issues on the agenda and to be attentive to each other.
  - Board discussions should be concise and pertinent to the issues.
  - Facts and information needed for administration will be requested through the Superintendent.

The Practice of “No Surprises” Toward Each Other and District Staff

- Surprises to the Board or the Superintendent will be the exception.
- There should be no surprises at Board meetings.
  - The Superintendent will be contacted before the meeting when a Board member needs additional information or has questions about an agenda item.
  - New ideas should not be brought up unexpectedly at a Board meeting. Board members will follow protocol for bringing up new ideas or for adding items to a Board agenda, such as during Board member reports and requests.
  - Board members will respect each Board member’s right to request that Board action be deferred in an instance where there is legitimate concern about the adequacy of information on which to make an “informed decision.”
Norms

A Consistent Voice for the District (From Board ByLaw 9001(d))

- The Board president or designee will be the official spokesperson for the Board.
- When the Board president resigns or is absent or disabled, the clerk will perform the Board president’s duties as spokesperson.
- Board members will remember that they represent the Board in everything they say and do and will endeavor to state the Board’s opinion, not an individual perspective or position.
- Members of the governance team agree to avoid words or actions that leave a negative impression on an individual, the Board, or the district.

How We Will Operate in a Spirit of Moving Forward (From Board ByLaw 9005)

Governance team members recognize the importance of establishing and sustaining “positive momentum” as the team endeavors to lead the district. In that spirit, we recognize that:

- We are people of good will with a common agenda for moving the district forward.
- Actions will speak louder than words and we will focus on building trust.
- As a district and as a governance team, we will be forgiving and strive to remember our successes. We will treat a step backwards as merely temporary.
- We will give each other the benefit of the doubt.
- We will strive to forgive errors in judgment and clumsy attempts.
- We will remind each other about why we are here and use the phrase “STUDENTS FIRST” when we falter.
Protocols

Orienting a New Board Member

Principle:
A new member of the board will need to invest time in training, understanding the job in order to be effective. The more experienced Board members will mentor and support new members during their first year so the entire board can be efficient and effective.

Protocol:

- The Board president and the superintendent will provide the new member resources, guidance and opportunities for training as soon as possible. The CSBA workshops for new Board members are one such opportunity.
- The Board president and superintendent will welcome the new member and provide him/her the “New Board Member Handbook” and the “Board Governance Handbook.” The Board president will provide support as needed regarding any questions about the information in the handbooks.
- The Board president and clerk will ask one of the experienced Board members to serve as a mentor for the new member and the mentor will meet/talk regularly with the new member to answer any questions and provide the support necessary.

Board Role in Public [From Board ByLaw 9010(a)]

Principle:
Board members have been elected by the community to provide leadership and oversight of the district. Board members understand the importance and value of being visible and accessible to the community and of ensuring the district is responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of the community.

Protocol:

- Board members will strive to educate the public about their role as public servants, entrusted with the education of children in the district.
- Board members will demonstrate their dedication and commitment to public education and actively engage community members in discussions about critical, public education matters impacting the district.
- When speaking to community groups, the media, social media, or other members of the public, individual Board members will recognize that their statements may be perceived as views and positions of the Board and will act responsibly to identify personal viewpoints as such and not as viewpoints of the Board.
- Confidentiality will be maintained when communicating with members of the public regarding matters prescribed as confidential by law or Board bylaws.
Protocols

Speaking With a Common Voice

Principle:

All public statements in the name of the Board are made by the Board president, or if appropriate, by the superintendent or designee.

Protocol:

- When speaking to community groups, the media, or to the public, individual board members have a 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 that 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.

Addressing Conflict Among Board Members

Principle:

Because the governance team norms are designed to create open, respectful, collaborative culture, members will engage in dialogue while welcoming an open discussion with different points of view.

Protocol:

Members will demonstrate an ability to disagree on issues without taking the disagreements personally. Members will endeavor to maintain neutral body language and tone during deliberations.

Bring Up New Ideas/Decide to Move New Ideas Forward

Principle:

- Board members have a responsibility to lead and bring forth new and fresh ideas that represent creative thinking and problem solving.

“New ideas” are defined as any proposal brought forth by a Board member, at his or her own initiative or at the request of a constituent, which has not previously been discussed during a Board meeting. It is the Board member’s responsibility to communicate new ideas with the Board President or Superintendent before engaging the full Board or staff in an expectation that would increase staff work.
Protocols

- The Board will frame new ideas in ways that address agreed upon district goals and the future focus of district efforts toward student learning and achievement.
- An individual Board member has no authority to commit the Board to a course of action or to initially develop a new idea to the point that it comes to the Board for the first time with a “request for action.” This would be disrespectful to the Board as a whole.

Protocol:
- Board members agree to follow a process that supports bringing forth new ideas while maintaining the Board’s primary focus on identified district goals.
- Board members will first notify the Board President and/or the superintendent of their interest in bringing forth a new idea. The preliminary discussion of new ideas will not require staff research. Initially, staff will be expected to respond to new ideas based on current knowledge.
- An individual Board member will not direct staff to conduct research regarding the exploration of a new idea. Only the full Board may direct the superintendent to take action. The superintendent will decide on the delegation of assignments to other district staff.
- New ideas may will be presented to the full Board at regular Board meetings during the “Request and Reports from Board Members” agenda item. The full Board will decide if the new idea should be further developed and studied and if staff time should be invested in researching or exploring new ideas. If the Board agrees, appropriate staff will be directed by the superintendent to research the idea and make a recommendation through the superintendent. Research by individual Board members does not follow protocol. Research is defined as the extensive or ongoing study or exploration of an idea, program or practice for consideration by the Board. Examples of research include wage/compensation studies, policies or practices implemented by other school districts, surveying teachers, staff and/or parents/guardians for input and feedback, etc.

Confidentiality/Closed Session Practices

Principle:
- The Brown Act establishes conditions for discussing some Board business in confidential, closed sessions. The Brown Act strongly supports “the public’s right to know” but recognizes that some highly sensitive matters are best discussed in a confidential setting, in part to protect the legal rights of other parties.
- The Board recognizes that decisions made in closed session must be reported out in public session.
Protocols

- The public’s trust and the trust among Board members are breached if confidential information is shared in a public manner.

Caution: If items not on the closed session agenda are discussed during closed session, the entire closed session becomes public.

Protocol:

- The Board will maintain confidentiality around all matters so prescribed by the Brown Act, including matters about employee labor contract negotiations, district litigation, personnel matters, the substance of the Superintendent evaluation, and other matters permitted by the Brown Act.

- The Board will maintain the public’s and each other’s trust by not breaching confidentiality.

- If a Board member inadvertently or accidentally violates a confidential issue, the Board president and the superintendent will take immediate action to rectify the matter.

- At the conclusion of each closed session, the Board president will clarify for the entire Board that specific information is to remain confidential under the Brown Act.

Board Member Response to Complaints From the Community or Staff [From Board ByLaw 9200(a)]

Principle:

- Board members will be responsive to the community and strive to be good listeners.

- It’s important for Board members to be consistent in their responses to staff and to the community.

- Board members will stay within their function and not attempt to personally “fix” the problem. Designated staff members are assigned to remedy or deal with student and/or staff situations.

- Students and staff members have due process and confidentiality rights that must not be violated.

- The Board is potentially the “court of last resort” and Board members who become involved early in the situation may have to recuse themselves if they are unable to be impartial or would not be perceived as impartial.

Protocol:

- The Board will consider its judicial review responsibility, staff and student confidentiality rights, and due process issues to assess whether an issue is appropriate for Board members to hear.

- The Board will use empathetic listening skills when approached by community or staff members with questions or concerns.
Protocols

- The Board will utilize the “6R’s” to ensure that they actively listen to the constituent:
  - **Receive** — Listen to what the person has to say without preparing a response.
  - **Repeat** — Paraphrase or ask a question to clarify for understanding. Ask the person to identify those spoken to about the matter prior to contacting a Board member.
  - **Request** — Ask what the person would like the Board member to do with the information and/or what he or she sees as a solution to the problem.
  - **Review** — Go over options available to the person to remedy the situation.
  - **Redirect** — Put the person back into the system at the appropriate place—remembering lines of authority and chains of command. Remember: students and employees have legal and due process rights that must be honored. Confidential information will not be divulged to community or staff members.
  - **Report** — The Board will maintain open lines of communication between the Board and the superintendent and will notify the superintendent of the conversation as soon as possible, so the superintendent can verify or clarify the situation and follow-through as appropriate. This protocol also ensures the superintendent knows firsthand what the Board member said to the community or staff member.

- Any complaint or request for information should be forwarded to the superintendent in accordance with Board bylaws and protocols so that the issue may receive proper consideration and be handled through the appropriate district process. As appropriate, communication received from the press shall be forwarded to the designated district spokesperson.

**Board Member Interaction with TV, Radio, Newspaper and Social Media**

**Principle:**

Board members will be courteous to the media. It is important for the Board and staff to have a consistent, clear message on issues.

**Protocol:**

- Board members will refer all representatives of TV, radio, newspaper, and social media who have questions regarding the school district to the Superintendent.

- Should a Board member choose to comment in response to a question the Board member will preface the comment with “I am speaking as an individual and not for the Board of Education. My comments are mine alone and do no necessarily reflect those of other Board members or the Amador County Unified School District.” If the Board of Education has made a decision or approved a policy, a Board member may state what the Board of Education’s position is.
• The superintendent will communicate with members of the Board when issues occur that may entail media interest to explain what is happening and what his/her response/message to the community is.

• The superintendent will communicate with the Board members if it is necessary or appropriate to have a spokesperson for the Board on an issue to the media. In addition, the superintendent and designated spokesperson for the Board will confer on appropriate talking points for the media.

• If asked to comment on a matter of policy about which the Board has not reached a consensus or held a vote, the superintendent will state only that the matter has not yet been decided by the Board.

**Board Member Use of Electronic Devices (Taken from Board Bylaw 9012)**

**Principle:**
The Governing Board recognizes that electronic communication among Board members and between Board members, district administration, and members of the public is an efficient and convenient way to communicate and expedite the exchange of information and to help keep the community informed about the goals, programs, and achievements of the district and its schools. Board members shall exercise caution so as to ensure that electronic communications are not used as a means for the Board to deliberate outside of an agendized Board meeting.

**Protocol:**
A majority of the Board shall not, outside of an authorized meeting, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board (Government Code 54952.2)

• Examples of permissible electronic communications concerning district business include, but are not limited to, dissemination of Board meeting agendas and agenda packets, reports of activities from the superintendent, and reminders regarding meeting times, dates, and places.

• Board members shall make every effort to ensure that their electronic communications conform to the same standards and protocols established for other forms of communication. A Board member may respond, as appropriate, to an electronic communication received from a member of the community and should make clear that his/her response does not necessarily reflect the views of the Board as a whole.
Protocols

- In order to minimize the risk of improper disclosure, Board members shall avoid reference to confidential information and information acquired during closed session.
- Board members may use electronic communications to discuss matters other than district business with each other, regardless of the number of members participating in the discussion.
- Like other writings concerning district business, a Board member's electronic communication may be subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.
- During Board meetings Board members shall have electronic devices silenced and turned to “Airplane Mode” or similar settings.

Board Member Use of Electronic Media

**Principle:**
The Board of Trustees will use electronic media (e.g., email, texting, social media) carefully to ensure that there is no violation of the Brown Act (Government Code sections 54950-54962). Board members will be aware of and follow district policy as it pertains to electronic communications. The district is subject to requests for public documents as provided by in the California Public Records Act. Public documents include emails and other correspondence from Board members as well as from employees.

**Protocol:**
The Brown Act prohibits Board members from exchanging information outside of a Board meeting to:
- Develop collective concurrence
- Advance or clarify an issue
- Facilitate agreement or compromise, or
- Advance an ultimate resolution.

The Board recognizes that by using “Reply All” in email responses, the email:
- Becomes part of the deliberative process
- Creates a Public Record, and
- Inhibits opportunity for any other two Board members to have a conversation topic.
Protocols

Board Member Potential Conflict of Interest (From Board ByLaw 9270)

Principle:
The Governing Board desires to maintain the highest ethical standards and help ensure that
decisions are made in the best interest of the district and the public. Accordingly, no Board
member, district employee, or other person in a designated position shall participate in the
making of any decision for the district when the decision will or may be affected by his/her
financial, family, or other personal interest or consideration.

Protocol:
• Even if a prohibited conflict of interest does not exist, a Board member shall abstain from
  voting on personnel matters that uniquely affect his/her relatives. However, a Board
  member may vote on collective bargaining agreements and personnel matters that affect
  a class of employees to which his/her relative belongs.
• Relative means an adult who is related to the Board member by blood or affinity within the
  third degree, as determined by the common law, or an individual in an adoptive
  relationship within the third degree. (Education Code 35107)

Acting as a Board Member with a Close Relative in the District

Principle:
Board members who have children or other close relatives enrolled in the district should
articulate how their relative’s experience in the schools may affect their opinions and judgment
with regard to Board decisions. Board member’s experience as relatives of students in the
district can be helpful in informing the Board as they create policy and make decisions.

Protocol:
• Board members should identify, in open session, any agenda items being discussed and
  voted upon that may impact the education of their relative(s).
• While Board members have the right to request that their relative’s privacy be respected, it
  is acceptable for other Board members or members of the public to ask a Board
  member’s opinion from a relative’s perspective on agenda issues being discussed.
Protocols

Board Self-Evaluation and Self-Monitoring of Governance Team Effectiveness
(From Board ByLaw 9400)

Principle:
Board members understand the value of periodically assessing the Board’s performance as part of a comprehensive approach to hold the entire district accountable to the public. The governance team should be committed to increasing its effectiveness. In addition, the process of self-monitoring should help raise community awareness about the role of the Board in the district and the community.

Protocol:
• The Board will schedule at least one self-evaluation session annually to review governance team performance.
• Following the completion of the self-evaluation, the Board will set governance goals for the following year. The goals will identify areas in which the Board would like to improve its performance.
• Annually, the Board will review the Governance Handbook.
• Annually, the Board will conduct a survey of management staff that includes the self-evaluation survey completed by the Board members and any feedback they have to the Board with regard to the norms and protocols outlined in the Governance Handbook.

Board Role with Employee Bargaining Unit Leaders

Principle:
The Board has a responsibility to establish district parameters for collective bargaining with each bargaining unit and to adopt collective bargaining agreements on behalf of the district.

The Board has a strong interest in developing and sustaining positive and cooperative working relationships with designated leaders of each bargaining unit within the district.

Protocol:
• The Board may appoint one member to join the Superintendent in periodically meeting with the leadership of each bargaining unit within the district to share perspectives regarding district programs, activities, and the general state of the district culture and climate as it affects employees.
Protocols

- These meetings will not be used to undermine the rights and responsibilities of either party under the Educational Employment Relations Act.
- Discussions will not address issues within the scope of negotiation or contract administration that specifically includes matters relating to wages, hours of employment, and other terms and conditions of employment.
- The Board member serving on any of these groups will periodically update the entire Board concerning issues discussed.

Visiting School Sites

Principle:
Board members are encouraged to visit schools. These visits provide valuable insight into how Board policy is implemented at the school site level. Visits to schools help demonstrate Board support for the effort and accomplishments of district staff. Board members visit classrooms and other district offices to observe and learn, not to openly question operations and activities. Questions about specific events observed during school visits should be directed to the Superintendent.

Protocols:
- As a professional courtesy, Board members will inform the Superintendent of their intention to visit specific schools and functions and will apprise the Superintendent of their impressions following visits.
- Board members will advise school site administrators in advance of their planned visits and will follow all building protocols for sign-in and movement of visitors while on school grounds.
- Board members are free to choose which schools they will visit; however, consideration should be given to coordinating visitation schedules among all Board members to help ensure maximum Board exposure to every school in the district.

Board Members Participation in Meetings at School Sites

Principles:
Board members may choose to attend meetings at schools such as PTA meetings in their outreach to the community and to better understand what is going on in the schools. Board members may also want to volunteer to help school activities to serve the community and learn more about the schools.
Protocols

Protocol:
- At meetings where discussions about school issues occur, a Board member should primarily be listening to the discussion and learning what community members think.
- If a Board member is asked to give an opinion or chooses to give an opinion, she/he should make clear that she/he is speaking as an individual community member, not on behalf of the Board.
- A Board member can explain and clarify decisions the board has made if asked to or if relevant to the discussion.

A District Wide Emergency

Principles:
Board members should be informed and updated about the state of emergency by the Superintendent or designee as soon as possible.

Protocol:
The superintendent or designee will inform the Board president as soon as possible as to the nature of the emergency and will keep the Board president updated with regard to actions leading to resolution of the emergency. The Board president or designee is responsible for relaying information to all other Board members.

Censure Policy

Principle:
The Board of Education of the Amador County Unified School District has a strong commitment to ethical behavior. The public expects and must receive the highest standards of behavior from all of those in public service. In order to be able to enforce conformance to its policies, the Board of Education must have a procedure by which it can censure its own members for violations of the policies or bylaws of the Board of Education.

Protocol:
Board bylaw BB 9401 provides the mechanism by which the Board of Education, acting as a whole, can censure any of its members who violate state or federal laws applicable to the District or for violation of the Board policies or bylaws of the Board of Education.
Protocols

Annual Reorganization of the Board:

Principles:
It is in the best interest of the Board that its officers be both willing and able to carry out the relevant duties. Effective Board members are not necessarily effective Board presidents, nor do all members have the time needed to provide effective leadership.

Protocol:
- At the first regular meeting in December, the Board elects a president and clerk to the governing board.
- At the reorganization meeting, the superintendent will preside over the election of the president. The newly elected president will preside over the election of the clerk.
- Any Board member may nominate any member, including the current officers, for either office.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member may serve as an officer, nor is there any expectation that all members will serve as officers or automatically rotate into either position.

Board Meeting Protocols

Board Meeting Guidelines

It is important to recognize that a Board meeting is the time for the Board to do their work in public view. After staff input and public comment, Board members are encouraged to ask questions and explain their thinking related to the topic at hand. The Board president recognizes members who desire to speak, alternating so that all members have the opportunity to speak. There is not a time limit or limit to the number of questions or comments that a Board member may make, but each Board member should be respectful of giving other members the opportunity to speak. Nothing in this section will preclude members from speaking multiple times until all discussion is concluded.

Unless a point is important to further understanding of the immediate discussion, the Board President will allow all other members to speak first and then add his/her comments or questions.
Board Meeting Protocols

Requesting Items to be Placed on Board Agendas [From Board ByLaw 9323.2(a)]

Board members and other stakeholders may request items to be placed on a Board agenda. The following steps will be followed:

1. The interested party will complete the Request for Board of Trustees Meeting Agenda Item and submit it to the Superintendent.

2. A subcommittee of the Board including the Board President, Board Clerk, Superintendent, and two Cabinet members will meet to review the request and determine if the request is approved, denied, or could be addressed by staff.

3. If research is needed to fully understand or respond to the requested Board agenda item, the Superintendent or designee will communicate with the requesting party.

4. If the agenda item is approved by the subcommittee, the item will be placed on a future agenda.

5. If the approved agenda item request requires action to be taken by the Board, it will be placed on the agenda two times, the first for a report and Board discussion, and the second for discussion and potential action.

6. Whether approved or not approved, the Superintendent or Board President will respond to the requester in writing with an explanation as needed.
Request to Place an Item on a Board Agenda

Name: ____________________________________________

Position/Role in Community: ____________________________________________________________

Primary Phone: ____________________ Secondary Phone: ____________________

Home Address: ____________________________________________________________

Email: _______________________________________________________________________

Date of Request: __________________________

Requested Board Meeting Date: __________________________________________

Nature of Request:  
☐ Open Session
☐ Closed Session – For Board Member use only

Cite Brown Act justification: _______________________________________________________

Agenda Item Title: _________________________________________________________________

Agenda Type/Action Requested (choose one):  
☐ Discussion ☐ Discussion/Action ☐ Report
☐ Public Hearing ☐ Resolution

Background information:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Please attach any additional information or items, such as PowerPoint slides, photos, or cited reports you wish to present to the Board.

Completed forms can be submitted via:
Email: aslevensky@acUSD.org (District) or rrussell@acUSD.org (County)
Mail: 217 Rex Avenue, Jackson, CA 95642
Fax: 209-257-5360
Board Meeting Protocols

Using Board Meetings as Strategic Leadership Tools

Board meetings are opportunities to strategically move the district forward, and to communicate direction, district priorities and progress to the community. When the public understands the process and the thinking behind Board decisions, there is generally more community support for the decision.

- Board members and the superintendent will regularly link Board meeting agenda items and discussions to the district vision, goals and strategic plan.
- Board members will ask clarifying questions about agenda items in order to demonstrate and make as clear and transparent as possible the dialogue leading up to decisions made by the Board.
- At the end of each discussion, the Board president may sum up the points of view and any consensus reached and ask the members to confirm whether the summary is accurate.
- When a Board member makes a motion, if necessary the Board president will clarify the meaning of a yes or no vote on the motion. After a vote, the Board president will clarify for staff and the public the meaning of the vote. This clarification will be memorialized in the minutes along with the number of ayes, nays, and abstentions.
Board Meeting Protocols

The Role of Board Members During Board Meetings

The authority to direct action rests solely with the full board during public meetings. A majority vote provides direction to the superintendent. By carefully reviewing the board packet prior to the board meeting, Board members are encouraged to contact the superintendent for questions about an item prior to the Board meeting. All members share a common responsibility to ensure the Brown Act is followed.

Board Member Interaction With the Public at Board Meetings

Principle:

- The Board encourages members of the public to attend Board meetings and to address the Board.
- Board meetings are meetings of the Board held in public for the purpose of accomplishing district business. They are not “town hall meetings” where elected officials and community members freely engage in an unstructured manner.
- The purpose of public participation at Board meetings is to inform Board deliberations.
- Board members want to ensure that all and multiple voices of the community are heard at the designated times during Board meetings.
- Meetings will be conducted in a civil, orderly, and respectful manner under the administration and discretion of the Board president.
- The Board president will not permit any disturbance or willful interruption of Board meetings.

Protocol:

- Time will be scheduled at Board meetings for public comment on agenda and non-agenda items within the Board’s jurisdiction.
- The total time for public testimony will be limited to 20 minutes at the beginning of each regular board meeting. Any person whose name remains on the speaker list at the end of 20 minute time period will be granted no more than three minutes to speak at the end of the open session Board meeting.
Board Meeting Protocols

During a special Board meeting, the Board is not required to provide a public comment section unless the Board wishes to do so. In recognition of the limited subject matter of special Board meetings, the time for public testimony at the beginning of special Board meetings may be less than 30 minutes at the discretion of the Board president and with Board consent.

Board members will strive to adhere to time limits to ensure sufficient time for Board members to conduct district business as denoted on the Board agenda.

The Board will establish and adopt guidelines for public comment that balance efficient Board meeting management and full participation of the public.

- The total time for public input on each agenda or non-agenda item will not exceed 20 minutes.
- Each speaker will be allotted a maximum of three (3) minutes.
- Each speaker may speak once at the podium on each agenda item.
- Each speaker requiring language translation will be allowed a maximum of three (3) minutes to speak and three (3) minutes for translation.
- With Board consent, the Board president may exceed or decrease the 20 minute time allotment on agenda and non-agenda items or make other modifications to the public comment period and process to accommodate special circumstances consistent with the Board’s stated principles.
- The Board 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.
- The Board will consistently abide by these agreements so all persons are treated fairly and equally.
- All public comments or questions should be addressed to the Board through the Board president.
- Speakers at Board meetings will be listened to with respect.
- Complaints and concerns will be responded to as quickly as possible. The Board president will delegate responsibility for a response when appropriate.
- The Board president may place a public initiated item on a future Board meeting agenda.
- The Board president will confirm that the Board stands by its decision if comments or concerns are specific to a past Board decision.
Board Meeting Protocols

Individual Board Member’s Request for Information

It is important for Board members to be well informed, as oversight of the district and County Office of Education is one of the main functions of the Board. Board members recognize that they have no power as individuals to direct staff action, and that compiling information in response to Board member requests can take staff away from their day-to-day operations of schools and the district. An individual Board member will—insofar as possible—work to let the superintendent know in advance when a request for information will be made in a public meeting so staff can be prepared to provide a thorough response. Staff will make every effort to ensure that board agenda items include thorough background and information. Requests for information not on the board agenda should be made to the superintendent who will ensure the appropriate staff person responds. All information provided by the administration in response to a request by a Board member shall be provided to all other Board members at the same time. Board members should self-regulate the amount of requests for information regarding issues not on the board agenda.

Motion and Voting

The Board president will accept a motion and a second on action items following the close of the regular public comment period. For action items which receive a motion and a second, the Board president will recognize each Board member for deliberation on the item. Comments will address substantive issues related to the action item and will be respectful of the Board’s important deliberative responsibility. A vote will be taken following Board deliberations. The majority position will prevail and Board members agree to abide by the prevailing vote.

A majority vote of all Members of the Board is necessary for the election of officers or for any other action by the Board unless otherwise specified by law. Voting shall be by voice and the Board administrative assistant records the votes by member which is placed into the minutes of the meeting.

Unless otherwise provided by law, affirmative votes by majority of the board’s membership are required to approve any action under consideration, regardless of the number of members present.

The Board shall take no action outside of a public meeting except on those matters and under those conditions authorized for closed sessions (Government Code sections 54957, 54957.7).
Board Meeting Protocols

Voting or Abstaining

Each Trustee respects the right of other Trustees to vote “no” on an issue. Everyone agrees it is a courtesy to the Governance Team to explain the reasons for the “no” vote either during deliberation or before casting the vote. If a Board member abstains, his/her abstention shall be considered to concur with the action taken by the majority of those who vote, whether affirmatively or negatively. If a member is absent at the previous meeting, he/she will abstain from voting on the approval of that meeting’s minutes.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of voting members who must be present at a properly called Board meeting in order to conduct business in the name of the Board, and is established when a majority of the Board members (at least three of the filled positions) are in attendance (Education Code section 35164).

Purpose of the Consent Agenda

Board members should keep in mind that the purpose of the consent agenda is to expedite the handling of routine business.

- Board members should not discuss or pull any items unless it is very important to do so.
- Questions on the consent agenda, once asked and answered in advance of a Board meeting, should not be asked again at the meeting unless the Board member feels there is information that is important for the public to know, or unless the member wants a separate vote on the item. In the latter case, the member should ask that the item be pulled from the consent agenda.
- New contracts should not be placed on the consent agenda only recurring contracts.
- Consent agenda items should be routine and non-controversial.
Board Meeting Protocols

Timing of Board Meetings

The Board and the public should understand the relative importance of a meeting agenda item and know when to anticipate the discussion of an item of interest.

- Each item on the meeting agenda will include the time for the discussion and the amount of time reserved for that item.
- The Board president or designee will keep track of the time and if it appears that any item will take more than five minutes over the time allotted for it, the Board president will ask the Board to indicate by the showing of hands whether they want to continue discussion of the item and, if so, by how long.

Minimizing Environmental Impact

The Board desires to minimize the environmental impact of the printing of Board agendas and ancillary materials. The district will distribute all Board-meeting-related materials electronically rather than on paper to the degree practicable and allowed by law.