



BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Cathline Fort, Matthew Gordon, Dr. Fermín Jaramillo, Dayna Karsch, and April McAllaster

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
MINUTES

Thursday, January 15, 2026, 6:30 p.m.

1. **Call to Order**

President Gordon called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. All members were present except Member Karsch and Member Fort. President Gordon announced that all open sessions of the board meeting are audio-recorded and may capture the sounds of participants. President Gordon asked those participating in the meeting to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. **Public Comment on Agenda Items**

*Pursuant to Board Policy 9324, Board Minutes and Recordings: "The minutes shall reflect the names of those individuals who comment during the meeting's public comment period as well as the topics they address."*

A. Comments on agenda items:

- Dez Alvarez commented on the superintendent search process, candidate neutrality, evaluation criteria based on stakeholder input, potential conflicts of interest, including nepotism, and the search firm's professional relationships. She also raised questions regarding ethical leadership, equitable consideration of candidates, stakeholder participation, transparency of evaluation tools, and integrity of survey feedback.
- Whitney Nielson commented that she was speaking on behalf of stakeholders who feel unheard and emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, community input in district leadership decisions. She urged the Board to prioritize meaningful stakeholder engagement in the superintendent selection process and called for leadership that is free from perception of favoritism and demonstrates integrity, humility, and a commitment to serving students and restoring community confidence.
- Antoinette Elaine cited a Public Records Act communication dated October 16, 2025, that she alleges identified superintendent candidates prior to the public search process. She shared allegations of preferential treatment and potential conflict of interest, and urged the Board to ensure transparency and fairness in the superintendent search.

President Gordon noted that Member Fort arrived at 6:41 p.m. during Public Comment.

3. **Review / Adopt Agenda**

A. The Board of Trustees adopted the agenda as presented, on a motion by Member Jaramillo, seconded by Member McAllaster, and carried by a unanimous vote with all members present voting yes.

4. **Business and Legal**

A. Tim Ritter and Dr. Karla Rhay, co-lead consultants with The Cosca Group, shared the following regarding the superintendent search process:

- Overview of search process and timeline;
- Board/search firm protocols during the search;
- Identify stakeholder groups and survey opportunities;
- Board input regarding desired qualities and characteristics of a new superintendent; and
- District strengths and challenges.

The Board of Trustees discussed the following:

- Potential dates for naming the next superintendent, with April 16, 2026, identified as the target date. Member McAllaster noted that she is unavailable on that date and requested that the April 16, board meeting be rescheduled.

**4. Business and Legal (continued)**

- The translation of materials into Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic; the process, time frame, and development of a recruitment flyer; the candidate selection process; reference checks; a special meeting on February 10, to review stakeholder feedback, possible dates for candidate interviews, and the process.
- Confirmed with The Cosca Group that no direction has been given on any specific candidates for the process to identify the best candidates.
- Identified the following stakeholder groups: School Site Council (SSC), African American Parent Educator Advisory Committee (AAPEAC), Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization/Parent Teacher Student Association/Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTA/PTO/PTSA/PTSO) presidents and members, E3 Foundation, District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC), Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Citizens Oversight Committee (COC), teachers, parents, and community members, such local city council members, police and fire chiefs.
- March 12, 2026, to review the candidate pool, and discussed recruitment and reference checks, April 3 and 4 for interviews.
- District strengths include staff commitment to student success; strong parent and community engagement; a family-oriented, student-centered culture; community ties with long-tenured staff; a STEAM-focused curriculum; academic excellence; intramural programs; fiscal responsibility; a comprehensive new teacher induction program; collaboration with the district foundation; and the district's reputation for academic excellence.
- Challenges include budget impacts from state and federal funding, long-term fiscal stability amid declining enrollment, maintaining conservative budgeting practices, valuing classified staff, ensuring equity for all students, appropriate student use of social media, addressing misinformation through credible sources, post-COVID student and staff needs, leadership expectations, and meeting service demands for all students, including special education.
- Desired characteristics of the next superintendent include strong leadership and interpersonal skills; the ability to develop and support staff; approachability, accessibility, adaptability, and visibility at school sites; calm and effective conflict resolution; integrity, impartiality, and trustworthiness; and a servant-leadership mindset focused on students, staff, and families. Additional qualities included strong communication skills, knowledge of board and administrative policies, effective change management, professionalism, resilience, understanding of board dynamics, and recognition of the responsibility of leading a district serving approximately 14,000 students.

**5. Board / Staff Comments or Suggested Items for Discussion at Upcoming Meetings**

Member Gordon emphasized the importance of maximizing community input to identify the best possible candidate for the district. Noting that while many candidates may be qualified, the goal is to find the best fit for the Etiwanda School District, and explained that the Board engaged an independent search firm to ensure a thorough process that incorporates broad stakeholder feedback.

**6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01 p.m. on a motion by Member McAllaster, seconded by Member Fort, and carried by unanimous vote, with all members present voting yes.

Board approved date: February 5, 2026