

# **SAN DIEGO COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT TRAINING**

## ***SUMMARY***

School boards are uniquely an American institution whose main duty is to establish policies that serve as guides for superintendents who manage the schools' daily activities. School boards are made up of mostly laypersons, many who donate their time and experience. Since many do not have a background in education, the school board member or trustee, may face difficulties in actually comprehending what school boards do and how to function in each district's framework of protocols, rules, and policies. The State of California does not mandate formal training for school board members.<sup>1</sup>

Superintendents are well-versed in the educational environment. Most have extensive experience in many areas of administration, curriculum and instruction, and the daily operation of schools and districts. However, many superintendents do not have training in some areas of school-district operation, for instance, fiscal and budget concerns; laws involving schools, such as sexual abuse, bullying, and gender concerns; and human resources.

The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury surveyed 42 San Diego County school districts in September 2016 regarding training for their school board members and superintendents. Thirty seven districts (88 percent) responded to the survey. Out of 37 districts, officials from four districts, Carlsbad Unified School District, San Dieguito Union High School District, Poway Unified School District, and the Santee School District, were chosen to be interviewed.

The Grand Jury found that although mandatory training in districts was inconsistent, voluntary training of school board members and superintendents was widespread. The Grand Jury recommends that the four school districts consider implementing formal, mandatory training for school board members and their superintendents in areas where they lack experience.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Grand Jury investigated San Diego County school districts' boards of education and superintendents to establish what training is given to newly elected and incumbent school board members and superintendents.

## ***PROCEDURE***

The Grand Jury researched relevant documents and websites. Surveys were sent to all 42 school districts in San Diego County in September 2016 asking the following:

1. Does your district require training for school board members?

---

<sup>1</sup> "Mandated Training for School Board Members," National School Boards Association, 2012, <https://cdn-files.nsba.org/s3fs-public/reports/MandatedTraining.pdf?9IvJHjSRMguYoOVcHFi9ghmSmTuU6zOR> (accessed 10/22/2016).

2. Is it mandatory or voluntary?
3. How often is training provided?
4. Please describe the orientation, training, and/or instruction your school board members receive and when they receive it.
5. Does your district provide written rules or guidelines for school board members?
6. Does your district require training for superintendents?
7. Please describe the orientation, training, and/or instruction your superintendent receives and when he or she receives the training.

From the survey, four school districts were chosen that responded they did not require training for school board members and they did not require training for superintendents. The Grand Jury interviewed staff from Carlsbad Unified School District, San Dieguito Union High School District, Poway Unified School District, and the Santee School District.

### ***DISCUSSION***

Within the recent past, a number of school board members' or superintendents' actions have been scrutinized. For instance, past grand juries had issued the following reports on school boards or superintendents:

- "Use of Education Funds for Released or Resigned Superintendents" (1997/1998),
- "Julian Union High School Report" (2000/2001),
- "San Diego Unified School District" (2009/2010),
- "San Diego Unified School District Trustee's Overreach: Abuse of Power?" (2014/2015),
- and "San Ysidro School District Indebtedness" (2015/2016).

While several of the Grand Jury's reports concerned financial issues, other issues such as ethics were also involved. Recurring problems can lead to negative public impressions regarding the lack of training among school board members or superintendents. Furthermore, recent problems at the San Diego County Office of Education have been significant. Responding to a complaint, the Grand Jury surveyed San Diego County's 42 school districts about the training of school board members and superintendents.

The Grand Jury received responses from 37 of the 42 surveys mailed (88 percent). Four of the seven questions required yes or no responses. The results are summarized in the following table.

Question	Number Responding	
	Yes	No
Does your district require training for school board members?	16	21
Is it mandatory (yes) or voluntary (no)?	4	12
Does your district provide written rules or guidelines for school board members?	24	13
Does your district require training for superintendents?	18	19

The remaining three questions that did not require yes or no responses are referred to in the discussion.

### ***School Board Members***

School board members are usually laypersons, from all walks of life, unfamiliar with their board duties and responsibilities. This is especially true for newly elected members. Duties and responsibilities that members may be unfamiliar with include governance, finance, creating and implementing policies and curriculum, facilities issues, compliance with the Brown Act, relations with the superintendent, and collective bargaining.

Sixteen of the 37 responding districts (43 percent) require some training for school board members. Of the 16 school districts that replied training was required, 12 reported voluntary annual training was provided. Only four of 37 districts (11 percent), responded that training was mandatory. Two responded training was required initially for new board members; one responded training was required within 60 days of election. One district required biannual training. Most districts encouraged new trustee training. Practically all districts stated that training would be provided when a school board member requests training for specific topics.

Training includes courses, workshops, and/or conferences that specialized statewide organizations or the district themselves give. Topics include new trustee training, bylaws, ethics, the Brown Act, finances, Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), sexual harassment, and governance.

The most common statewide organization that 15 districts mentioned was the California School Boards Association (CSBA). A nonprofit education association of public school districts and county school districts throughout California, CSBA provides workshops, courses, and seminars to school board members, superintendents, and administrators. Besides topic-specific courses, they provide a series of courses such as the Masters in Governance (MIG), a detailed, five-course program that includes governance, finances, school policy, human resources and collective bargaining, and public relations. Courses can be completed in regular classes, webinars, or online classes. A paper concluded that CSBA’s Masters in Governance program could enhance the effectiveness of school board members.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mary Broderick, past president of the National

---

<sup>2</sup> Rocky Murray, “Effects of Masters in Governance Training and School Board Leadership,” USC Libraries, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll3/id/224361> (accessed 10/20/2016).

School Boards Association, stated that “School boards are the vital link between a local community and its public schools.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly, communities and schools would benefit from a formally trained school board.

Other organizations that offer similar programs were School Services of California (SSC), National School Boards Association (NSBA), and Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). All of these organizations offer similar services and courses at a variety of levels. For instance, SSC, a private company, offers workshops on fiscal topics; NSBA, a nonprofit organization, holds yearly conferences on a variety of topics; and ACSA offers training, conferences and programs for administrators and board members.

Of the 12 districts that replied training was voluntary, all stated training was highly encouraged. Training through the above organizations was made available to those who were interested. All 12 districts stated training was offered throughout the year. Conferences, especially those that CSBA, ACSA and NSBA offer, were supported, and some or all board members attended many.

Most of the school districts that replied training was not required also stated that members were encouraged to seek training through statewide organizations. Again, the most-referred-to organization was CSBA. Usually training was inconsistent; one or two of the five board members would attend while others would not. The level of training was also spotty, from little or no training to completed MIG training.

Many districts provide written rules or guidelines, board policies, or bylaws for school board members. Some districts provide initial orientations on board policies. Twenty-four districts provide policies or bylaws in written form and presented the Grand Jury with copies. Many of the 13 that do not, have policies and bylaws available for members online.

The most frequent topic that the responding districts mentioned was training in the Brown Act, California’s open-meeting law. Others included financial topics, LCAP, and sexual harassment.

Opportunities for networking with school board members from other districts, specifically San Diego County school boards, are limited. Districts report no special meetings, formal or informal, for board members to meet and interchange views, opinions, or experiences with board members from other districts. The Grand Jury believes that networking among diverse districts could promote a better understanding among school board members and provide added resources.

Also absent is any opportunity for mentorship between new and experienced board members. Other than personal dialogue between existing members, districts did not report any available programs for mentors. There is little doubt that a mentor program would enhance board professionalism. “These [mentor] relationships can go beyond school board members to include

---

<sup>3</sup> Mary Broderick, “School Boards: Local Leadership and Responsibility for the Future,” *Source*, <http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/school-boards-local-leadership-and-responsibility-future> (accessed 11/9/2016).

board members working in other nonprofits in the community (e.g., local college, hospital, or social support organization).”<sup>4</sup>

Recently there has been a great deal of concern about ethics and school boards.<sup>5, 6</sup> Several districts stated there are specific training for their school board members in ethics. Others have rewritten board policies and bylaws. However, the districts that have reported specific ethics training are a distinct minority.

It is clear that there are a number of organizations such as CSBA, NSBA, and SSC that offer high-quality training for school board members. Training through these organizations can be found in many forms: conferences, formal programs such as MIG, or online. It is also clear that formal training, although widely available, is not mandatory. The Grand Jury understands that many school board members are volunteers who have jobs and families that also demand their time and attention. However, since school boards have important duties and responsibilities, training cannot be ignored. While the Grand Jury cannot recommend a particular program, conference, seminar, or webinar, formal training is a must for effective governance.<sup>7</sup>

When the representatives from each of the four districts school boards were interviewed, all four responded that even though training was not mandatory, training was encouraged for their board members. The Grand Jury found that each school board made exceptional efforts in creating opportunities for individual or group training. Each school board made CSBA training a priority and accessible. Each school board has some current members with MIG certificates. While CSBA training was the most training made available, other organizations such as NSBA or SSC were also mentioned. Each school board representative also cited the different types of training available to their members from conferences, workshops to online courses or webinars. The Grand Jury acknowledges the outstanding effort made by these four school boards.

### ***Superintendents***

Superintendents usually move through the educational system from teacher to school administrator to district administrator before becoming a superintendent. This progression allows them to gain the necessary experience for their role. All are required to hold an administrative credential authorized by the state. Most have a master’s or doctorate degree with emphasis in educational administration, curriculum and instruction, or pupil services. Superintendents are well-versed in the educational environment, both by education and experience.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lauren Morando Rhim, “Moving Beyond the Killer B’s: The Role of School Boards in School Accountability and Transformation,” Academic Development Institute, <http://www.adi.org/about/downloads/KillerBs2.pdf> (accessed 10/15/2016).

<sup>5</sup> San Diego County Grand Jury Report. <http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/grandjury/reports/2014-2015/SDUSDTrusteeOverreachAbuseofPowerReport.pdf> (accessed 10/22/2016).

<sup>6</sup> Christine Huard, “School Trustee Resigns over Recall Threat,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 24, 2015, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/sdut-san-ysidro-school-board-jose-barajas-resigns-2015aug24-story.html> (accessed 10/20/2016).

<sup>7</sup> “Eight characteristics of effective school boards: full report,” Center for Public Education, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards.html> (accessed 10/20/2016).

Yet many new superintendents find themselves in novel and extraordinary situations where additional training would be beneficial. For instance, despite being well educated, "...few new superintendents say they have acquired the managerial experience or the political savvy necessary [for the job]."<sup>8</sup>

Duties and responsibilities that superintendents may be unfamiliar with mirror those of school board members. They may include governance, finance, creating and implementing policies and curriculum, facilities issues, and compliance with the Brown Act. Other topics requiring familiarity include child abuse, sexual harassment, ethics, effective communications, relations with board members, and collective bargaining.

Eighteen of the 37 responding school districts (49 percent) require their superintendents to attend training. The districts report a variety of topics for training including governance, finance, human resources, legal issues pertaining to superintendents and schools, assessments, child abuse, sexual harassment, ethics, bylaws, the Brown Act, and new superintendent training or orientation. Five districts report having a coach or mentor, usually a successful retired superintendent, who advises a new superintendent for one or two years. Typically, mentor programs are available through the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) or through the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE). With the exception of initial training, superintendents, especially incumbents, are free to choose what areas of training they need.

As with school board members, districts turn to state or national organizations for much of the training. The most mentioned organization was the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). Twelve of the 18 responding districts use programs developed by ACSA. Most report superintendents attending professional development through ACSA conferences, seminars, and webinars. As mentioned above, ACSA also provides a leadership coaching service.

Other organizations include Small School District Association (SSDA), California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), Schools for Sound Finance (SSF), and CSBA. Three superintendents report holding a MIG certificate from CSBA. Other districts report that courses offered by CSBA are available for their superintendents. Some superintendents also completed financial training by attending meetings and conferences sponsored by the County of San Diego Treasurer, CASBO, and SSF. As with school board members, there are diverse methods of instruction ranging from formal programs, conferences, seminars, online instruction, and webinars.

Other than CSBA's MIG program, there are no California-based certificate programs specifically for superintendents. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in 2015 created a new national superintendent certification program. The 18-month program, with

---

<sup>8</sup> Corey Mitchell "National Program Preps Novice Schools Chiefs to Lead Districts," *Education Week*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/21/national-program-preps-novice-schools-chiefs-to.html> (accessed 10/22/2016).

mentors and guest instructors, is imbued with finance and business-management procedures, effective communications, and school board relations.<sup>9</sup>

Opportunities are prevalent for networking with other San Diego County superintendents at monthly superintendent meetings at SDCOE. Districts report the meetings as a way for superintendents to remain current with county activities.

Although the Grand Jury's questionnaire did not ask, districts reported that they offer training or orientation on board policies and procedures upon the initial hiring of the new superintendent. Other training on specific topics is offered annually through ACSA, CSBA, or the other educational organizations. By far, most districts report that they encourage superintendents to attend ACSA's annual conference. Some report that they encourage both superintendents and school board members to attend CSBA's annual conference as a team. Attendance at annual conferences allows both superintendents and school board members access to current information that would serve all.

There are numerous ways and organizations through which superintendents can receive additional training in areas that are unfamiliar to them. Superintendents are generally free to choose the area for their training. The Grand Jury does not recommend any single program or method of instruction. The key is that only 49 percent of the responding school districts require some form of additional training. While many superintendents avail themselves of extra training, it is clear that mandatory training, in topics chosen by the individual superintendents, should be implemented.

As with the school boards, superintendent training in all four districts was encouraged but not mandatory. The Grand Jury found that each district also made exceptional efforts in creating opportunities for superintendent training. CSBA training was a priority and readily accessible. MIG certificates were prevalent. Again, other organizations such as NSBA, SSC, or specialized workshops with the San Diego County Office of Education were cited. Specialized conferences, workshops, and online courses or webinars were customary. Superintendents often sought training in areas where they lacked knowledge or experience. The Grand Jury acknowledges the outstanding effort made by these four districts in obtaining opportunities for suitable training.

## ***SUMMARY***

The Grand Jury survey of San Diego County School Districts indicated that few districts mandate training for school board members. It also showed about half of the districts do not mandate training for superintendents. The Grand Jury recognizes the lack of public knowledge concerning training of school board members and superintendents. However, when district officials were interviewed, all indicated strong endorsements for voluntary training, especially in areas where knowledge is lacking. Each board or district made voluntary training easily accessible and a strong priority. The Grand Jury acknowledges the efforts made in training by these districts and school boards. The Grand Jury also recognizes the diverse background of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Corey Mitchell, "National Program Preps Novice Schools Chiefs to Lead Districts," *Education Week*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/21/national-program-preps-novice-schools-chiefs-to.html> (accessed 10/22/2016).

remaining districts' superintendents and school boards that were not included in the interviews. The Grand Jury strongly suggests that other districts and school boards in the county emulate those districts that encourage training.

### ***FACTS AND FINDINGS***

***Fact:*** Most school board members are laypersons not familiar with the duties and responsibilities of being on a school board.

***Fact:*** Sixteen of the 37 responding districts (43 percent) require training of school board members.

***Fact:*** Only four of the 37 responding districts, 11 percent, require mandatory training of school board members.

***Fact:*** There are a number of California-based institutions that offer quality training for school board members.

***Fact:*** Training for school board members is available in diverse modalities.

***Fact:*** In each of the four school boards interviewed, while school board member training was not mandatory, it was encouraged.

***Fact:*** In each of the four school boards interviewed, member training was a priority and readily accessible from various organizations.

***Finding 01:*** Formal training for school board members is inconsistent throughout San Diego County school districts.

***Finding 02:*** School board members would benefit from additional formal training.

***Fact:*** Superintendents are well educated and experienced in the educational settings.

***Fact:*** There are a number of California-based institutions that offer quality training for superintendents.

***Fact:*** Eighteen of the 37 responding school districts (49 percent) require training of their superintendents.

***Fact:*** Training for superintendents is available in diverse modalities.

***Fact:*** In each of the four districts interviewed, while superintendent training was not mandatory, it was encouraged.

***Fact:*** In each of the four districts interviewed, superintendent training was a priority and readily accessible in different organizations.



**Finding 03:** Many superintendents find themselves in novel and extraordinary situations where additional training would be beneficial.

**Finding 04:** Formal training for superintendents is inconsistent throughout San Diego County school districts.

### ***RECOMMENDATION***

**The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that Carlsbad Unified School District, San Dieguito Union High School District, Poway Unified School District, and the Santee School District:**

**17-23: Review their process for training of school board members and their superintendents in areas where they lack experience and consider mandating training.**

### ***REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS***

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
  - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
  - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
  - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
  - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
  - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<b><u>Responding Agency</u></b>	<b><u>Recommendations</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>
<b>Carlsbad Unified School District</b>	<b>17-23</b>	<b>8/1/17</b>
<b>Poway Unified School District</b>	<b>17-23</b>	<b>8/1/17</b>
<b>San Dieguito Union High School Dist.</b>	<b>17-23</b>	<b>8/1/17</b>
<b>Santee School District</b>	<b>17-23</b>	<b>8/1/17</b>