

CLOSED SESSION PURPOSES AND AGENDAS

Pursuant to Government Code 54962, the Governing Board may hold a closed session only for purposes expressly authorized by the Brown Act (Government Code 54950-54963) or by a provision of the Education Code. The Governing Board is committed to complying with state open meeting laws and modeling transparency in its conduct of district business. The Board shall hold closed sessions only for purposes authorized by law.

A closed session may be held during a regular, special, or emergency meeting in accordance with law. Each agenda shall contain a general description of each closed session item to be discussed at the meeting, as required by law. (Government Code 54954.2)

Agenda Descriptors

Government Code 54954.5 provides acceptable wording for specific agenda descriptors for most closed session items authorized by the Brown Act. These so-called “Safe Harbor” descriptors for closed sessions include the following:

- License/Permits (54956.7)
 - Applicant(s): Specify number of applicants
- Conference with Real Property Negotiations (54956.8)
 - Property: Specify street address or, if not street address, the parcel number or other unique references of the real property.
 - Agency Negotiation: Specify names of negotiators attending the closed session. If the specified negotiator cannot attend, announce at the open session who will attend.
 - Negotiating Parties: Specify name of Party, not the Agent.
 - Under Negotiation: Specify whether instructions to negotiator will concern price, terms of payment, or both.
- Conference with Legal Counsel—Existing Litigation (54956.9)
 - Name of Case: Specify by reference to claimant’s name, names of parties, case or claim numbers.
 - OR
 - Case Name Unspecified: Specify whether disclosure would jeopardize service of process or existing settlement negotiations.
- Conference with Legal Counsel—Anticipated Litigation
 - Significant Exposure to Litigation Pursuant to 54956.9(b): Specify number of potential cases.
 - OR
 - In an oral statement prior to the closed session pursuant to (B) to (E) of 54956.9(b)(3)
 - Initiation of Litigation Pursuant to 54956.9(c): Specify number of potential cases
- Liability Claims
 - Claimant; Specify name unless unspecified pursuant to 54961
- Threat to Public Services or Facilities (54957)
 - Consultation with: Specify name of law enforcement agency and title of officer
- Public Employee Appointment (54957)

- Title: Specify description of position to be filled
 - Public Employment (54957)
 - Title: Specify description of position to be filled
 - Public Employee Performance Evaluation (54957)
 - Title: Specify position title of employee being reviewed
 - Public Employee Discipline/Dismissal Release 954957)
 - No additional information is required.
 - Conference with Labor Negotiators (54957.6)
 - Agency Designated Representatives: Specify names of designated representatives attending the closed session. If designated representative cannot attend, announce who will attend at open session.
 - Employee Organization: Specify name of organization representing employee or employees in question.
- OR
- Unrepresented Employee: Specify position title of unrepresented employee who is the subject of the negotiations.

The Board shall disclose in open session the items to be discussed in closed session. In the closed session, the Board may consider only those matters covered in its statement. After the closed session, the Board shall reconvene in open session before adjourning the meeting and, when applicable, shall disclose any action taken in the closed session in the manner prescribed by Government Code 54957.1. (Government Code 54957.7) (See also OUHSD Board Bylaw 9321.1)

The Board shall not disclose any information that is protected by state or federal law. In addition, no victim or alleged victim of tortious sexual conduct or child abuse shall be identified in any Board agenda, notice, announcement, or report required by the Brown Act unless the identity of the person has previously been publicly disclosed. (Government Code 54957.7, 54961) A Board member shall not disclose confidential information received in a closed session unless the Board authorizes the disclosure of that information. (Government Code 54963)

Personnel Matters

The Board may hold a closed session to consider the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, discipline, or dismissal of an employee. For the purpose of these closed sessions, “employee” includes an officer or independent contractor who function as an officer or employee but excludes Board members. The Attorney General has concluded that it is appropriate to use a closed session to discuss and evaluate Superintendent performance (59 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 532(1976). Such a closed session shall not include discussion or action on proposed compensation except for a reduction of compensation that results from the imposition of discipline (Government Code 54957).

The Board may also hold a closed session to hear complaints or charges brought against an employee by another person or employee, unless the employee requests an open session. Before the Board holds a closed session on specific complaints or charges brought against an employee, the employee shall receive written notice of his/her right to have the complaints or charges heard in open session if desired. This notice shall be delivered personally or by mail at least 24 hours before the time of the session. (Government Code 54957)

The Board may hold a closed session to discuss a district employee's application for early withdrawal of funds in a deferred compensation plan when the application is based on financial hardship arising from an unforeseeable emergency due to illness, accident,

casualty, or other extraordinary event, as specified in the deferred compensation plan. (Government Code 54957.10)

Agenda items related to district employee appointments and employment shall describe the position to be filled. Agenda items related to performance evaluations shall specify the title of the employee being reviewed. Agenda items related to employee discipline, dismissal, or release require no additional information. (Government Code 54954.5)

Negotiations/Collective Bargaining

Unless otherwise agreed upon by the parties involved, the following shall not be subject to the Brown Act: (Government Code 3549.1)

1. Any meeting and negotiating discussion between the district and a recognized or certified employee organization
2. Any meeting of a mediator with either party or both parties to the meeting and negotiating process
3. Any hearing, meeting, or investigation conducted by a factfinder or arbitrator
4. Any executive (closed) session of the district or between the district and its designated representative for the purpose of discussing its position regarding any matter within the scope of representation and instructing its designated representatives

The Board may meet in closed session to review the Board's position and/or instruct its designated representative regarding salaries, salary schedules, or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of its represented and unrepresented employees. Any closed session held for this purpose may include discussions of the district's available funds and funding priorities, but only insofar as they relate to providing instructions to the Board's designated representative. (Government Code 54957.6)

For represented employees, the Board may also meet in closed session regarding any other matter within the statutorily provided scope of representation. (Government Code 54957.6)

Closed sessions may take place prior to and during consultations and discussions with representatives of employee organizations and unrepresented employees. For unrepresented employees, closed sessions held pursuant to Government Code 54957.6 shall not include final action on the proposed compensation of one or more unrepresented employees. (Government Code 54957.6)

The Board also may meet in closed session with a state conciliator or mediator who has intervened in proceedings regarding any of the purposes enumerated in Government Code 54957.6.

Agenda items related to negotiations shall specify the name of the district's designated representative(s) attending the closed session. If circumstances necessitate the absence of a specified designated representative, an agent or designee may participate in place of the absent representative as long as the name of the agent or designee is announced at an open session held prior to the closed session. The agenda shall also specify the name of the organization representing the employee(s) or the position title of the unrepresented employee who is the subject of the negotiations. (Government Code 54954.5)

Matters Related to Students

The Board shall meet in closed session to consider the expulsion of a student, unless the student submits a written request at least five days before the date of the hearing that the hearing be held in open session. Regardless of whether the expulsion hearing is conducted

in open or closed session, the Board may meet in closed session for the purpose of deliberating and determining whether the student should be expelled. (Education Code 48918)

The Board shall meet in closed session to address any student matter that may involve disclosure of confidential student information, or to consider a suspension, disciplinary action, or any other action against a student except expulsion. If a written request for open session is received from the parent/guardian or adult student, it will be honored to the extent that it does not violate the privacy rights of any other student. (Education Code 35146, 48912, 49070)

Agenda items related to student matters shall briefly describe the reason for the closed session, such as "student expulsion hearing" or "grade change appeal," without violating the confidentiality rights of individual students. The student shall not be named on the agenda, but a number may be assigned to the student in order to facilitate record keeping. The agenda shall also state that the Education Code requires closed sessions in these cases in order to prevent the disclosure of confidential student record information.

Security Matters

The Board may meet in closed session with the Governor, Attorney General, district attorney, district legal counsel, sheriff or chief of police, or their respective deputies, or a security consultant or a security operations manager, on matters posing a threat to the security of public buildings; to the security of essential public services, including water, drinking water, wastewater treatment, natural gas service, and electric service; or to the public's right of access to public services or public facilities. (Government Code 54957)

The Board may meet in closed session during an emergency meeting held pursuant to Government Code 54956.5 to meet with law enforcement officials for the emergency purposes specified in Government Code 54957 if agreed to by a two-thirds vote of the Board members present. If less than two-thirds of the members are present, then the Board must agree by a unanimous vote of the members present. (Government Code 54956.5)

Agenda items related to security matters shall specify the name of the law enforcement agency and the title of the officer, or name of applicable agency representative and title, with whom the Board will consult. (Government Code 54954.5)

Conference with Real Property Negotiator

The Board may meet in closed session with its real property negotiator prior to the purchase, sale, exchange, or lease of real property by or for the district in order to grant its negotiator authority regarding the price and terms of payment for the property. (Government Code 54956.8)

Before holding the closed session, the Board shall hold an open and public session to identify its negotiator(s) and the property under negotiation and to specify the person(s) with whom the negotiator may negotiate. (Government Code 54956.8)

For purposes of real property transactions, negotiators may include members of the Board. (Government Code 54956.8)

Agenda items related to real property negotiations shall specify the district negotiator attending the closed session. If circumstances necessitate the absence of a specified negotiator, an agent or designee may participate in place of the absent negotiator as long as the name of the agent or designee is announced at an open session held prior to the closed session. The agenda shall also specify the name of the negotiating parties and the street address of the real property under negotiation. If there is no street address, the agenda item

shall specify the parcel number or another unique reference of the property. The agenda item shall also specify whether instruction to the negotiator will concern price, terms of payment, or both. (Government Code 54954.5)

Pending Litigation

Based on the advice of its legal counsel, the Board may hold a closed session to confer with or receive advice from its legal counsel regarding a pending litigation when a discussion of the matter in open session would prejudice the district's position in the litigation. For this purpose, "litigation" means any adjudicatory proceeding, including eminent domain, before a court, administrative body exercising its adjudicatory authority, hearing officer, or arbitrator. (Government Code 54956.9)

Litigation is considered "pending" in any of the following circumstances: (Government Code 54956.9)

1. Litigation to which the district is a "party" has been initiated formally. (Government Code 54956.9(a))
2. A point has been reached where, in the Board's opinion based on the advice of its legal counsel regarding the "existing facts and circumstances," there is a "significant exposure to litigation" against the district, or the Board is meeting solely to determine whether, based on existing facts or circumstances, a closed session is authorized. (Government Code 54956.9(b)) Existing facts and circumstances for these purposes are limited to the following: (Government Code 54956.9)
 - a. Facts and circumstances that might result in litigation against the district but which the district believes are not yet known to potential plaintiffs and which do not need to be disclosed.
 - b. Facts and circumstances including, but not limited to, an accident, disaster, incident, or transactional occurrence which might result in litigation against the district, which are already known to potential plaintiffs and which must be publicly disclosed before the closed session or specified on the agenda.
 - c. The receipt of a claim pursuant to the Tort Claims Act or a written threat of litigation from a potential plaintiff. The claim or written communication must be available for public inspection.
 - d. A threat of litigation made by a person in an open meeting on a specific matter within the responsibility of the Board.
 - e. A threat of litigation made by a person outside of an open meeting on a specific matter within the responsibility of the Board, provided that the district official or employee receiving knowledge of the threat made a record of the statement before the meeting and the record is available for public inspection. Such record does not need to identify an alleged victim of tortious sexual conduct or anyone making a threat on his/her behalf or identify an employee who is the alleged perpetrator of any unlawful or tortious conduct, unless the identity of this person has been publicly disclosed.
3. Based on existing facts and circumstances, the Board has decided to initiate or is deciding whether to initiate litigation. (Government Code 54956.9(c))

Before holding a closed session pursuant to the pending litigation exception, the Board shall state on the agenda or publicly announce the subdivision of Government Code 54956.9 under which the closed session is being held. If authority is based on Government Code 54956.9(a), the Board shall either state the title or specifically identify the litigation to be discussed or state that doing so would jeopardize the district's ability to effectuate service of

process upon unserved parties or to conclude existing settlement negotiations to its advantage. (Government Code 54956.9)

Agenda items related to pending litigation shall be described as a conference with legal counsel regarding either "existing litigation" or "anticipated litigation." (Government Code 54954.5)

"Existing litigation" items shall identify the name of the case specified by either the claimant's name, names of parties, or case or claim number, unless the Board states that to identify the case would jeopardize service of process or existing settlement negotiations. (Government Code 54954.5)

"Anticipated litigation" items shall state that there is significant exposure to litigation pursuant to Government Code 54956.9(b) and shall specify the potential number of cases. When the district expects to initiate a suit, items related to anticipated litigation shall state that the discussion relates to the initiation of litigation pursuant to Government Code 54956.9(c) and shall specify the potential number of cases. The agenda or an oral statement before the closed session may be required to provide additional information regarding existing facts and circumstances described in item #2 b-e above. (Government Code 54954.5)

Joint Powers Agency Issues

The Board may meet in closed session to discuss a claim for the payment of tort liability losses, public liability losses, or workers' compensation liability incurred by a joint powers agency (JPA) formed for the purpose of insurance pooling or self-insurance authority of which the district is a member. (Government Code 54956.95)

Closed session agenda items related to liability claims shall specify the claimant's name and the name of the agency against which the claim is made. (Government Code 54954.5)

When the board of the JPA has so authorized and upon advice of district legal counsel, the Board may meet in closed session in order to receive, discuss, and take action concerning information obtained in a closed session of the JPA. During the Board's closed session, a Board member serving on the JPA board may disclose confidential information acquired during a closed session of the JPA to fellow Board members. (Government Code 54956.96)

The Board member may also disclose the confidential JPA information to district legal counsel in order to obtain advice on whether the matter has direct financial or liability implications for the district. (Government Code 54956.96)

Closed session agenda items related to conferences involving a JPA shall specify the closed session description used by the JPA and the name of the Board member representing the district on the JPA board. Additional information listing the names of agencies or titles of representatives attending the closed session as consultants or other representatives shall also be included. (Government Code 54954.5)

Review of Audit Report from California State Auditor's Office

Upon receipt of a confidential final draft audit report from the California State Auditor's Office, the Board may meet in closed session to discuss its response to that report. After public release of the report from the California State Auditor's Office, any Board meeting to discuss the report must be conducted in open session, unless exempted from that requirement by some other provision of law. (Government Code 54956.75)

Closed session agenda items related to an audit by the California State Auditor's Office shall state "Audit by California State Auditor's Office." (Government Code 54954.5)

Review of Assessment Instruments

The Board may meet in closed session to review the contents of any student assessment instrument approved or adopted for the statewide testing system. Before any such meeting, the Board shall agree by resolution to accept any terms or conditions established by the State Board of Education for this review. (Education Code 60617)

Agenda items related to the review of student assessment instruments shall state that the Board is reviewing the contents of an assessment instrument approved or adopted for the statewide testing program and that Education Code 60617 authorizes a closed session for this purpose in order to maintain the confidentiality of the assessment under review.

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

- 35145 Public meetings
- 35146 Closed session (re student suspension)
- 44929.21 Districts with ADA of 250 or more
- 48912 Governing board suspension
- 48918 Rules governing expulsion procedures; hearings and notice
- 49070 Challenging content of students records
- 60617 Meetings of governing board

GOVERNMENT CODE

- 3540-3549.3 Educational Employment Relations Act
- 6252-6270 California Public Records Act
- 54950-54963 The Ralph M. Brown Act

COURT DECISIONS

- Morrison v. Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Board of Commissioners, (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 860
- Bell v. Vista Unified School District, (2001) 82 Cal.App. 4th 672
- Fischer v. Los Angeles Unified School District, (1999) 70 Cal.App. 4th 87
- Furtado v. Sierra Community College District (1998) 68 Cal.App. 4th 876
- Roberts v. City of Palmdale, (1993) 5 Cal.App. 4th 363
- Sacramento Newspaper Guild v. Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, (1968) 263 Cal.App. 2d 41

ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS

- 94 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 82 (2011)
- 86 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 210 (2003)
- 78 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 218 (1995)
- 59 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 532 (1976)

Management Resources:

CSBA PUBLICATIONS

The Brown Act: School Boards and Open Meeting Laws, 2009

ATTORNEY GENERAL PUBLICATIONS

The Brown Act: Open Meetings for Legislative Bodies, 2002

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES PUBLICATIONS

Open and Public IV: A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act, rev. July 2010

WEB SITES

CSBA: <http://www.csba.org>

California Attorney General's Office: <http://www.oag.ca.gov>

League of California Cities: <http://www.cacities.org>

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