



BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

December 9, 2025

Closed Session – 5:00 p.m.

Regular Session – 6:30 p.m.

Board of Education Board Room

1300 17th Street, City CENTRE – Bakersfield, CA 93301

1.0 CLOSED SESSION

1.1 CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL – ANTICIPATED LITIGATION

Significant exposure to litigation pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (d) of Government Code section 54956.9: 1 potential case.

2.0 GENERAL FUNCTIONS

2.1 The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m.

2.2 Pledge of Allegiance

2.3 Roll Call

Board Members Present

Julie Beechinor Towse

Lori J. Cisneros

Lori Eskew

Jose E. Gonzalez, Jr.

Mary M. Little

Joe L. Marcano

James V. Robinson

Anabell Werner, *Student Representative*

KCSOS Employees Present

Dr. John G. Mendiburu, *Superintendent*

Steve Sanders, *Chief of Staff*

Christian Shannon, *Deputy Superintendent*

Merril Clanton, *Senior Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent*

2.4 It was moved by Trustee Beechinor Towse, seconded by Trustee Marcano to approve the agenda.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

2.5 Musical Presentation: Tiny Trebles, Valley Oaks Charter School.

2.6 It was moved by Trustee Eskew, seconded by Trustee Robinson to approve the following selections for the annual Organizational Meeting:

- Trustee Joe Marcano, Board President
- Trustee Lori Cisneros, Board Vice President
- Trustee Julie Beechinor Towse, Trustee Representative

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

2.7 It was moved by Trustee Robinson, seconded by Trustee Marcano to approve the Minutes from Regular Board Meeting held on November 13, 2025.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

3.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS

3.1 Public Comments were heard from the following:

- Cathy Arrieta
- Jocelyn Frias
- Joanna Kendrick

4.0 INFORMATION ITEMS – NO ACTION TAKEN

4.1 Presentation: 2025 California School Dashboard Overview for KCBOE-Authorized Charter Schools- Kimberly Graham, Assistant Superintendent Local, Regional and Statewide System of Support

4.2 2025-2026 Williams Legislation Annual Report.

4.3 Thanksgiving Luncheon at the Blanton Education Center.

5.0 ACTION ITEMS

5.1 Consent Agenda

5.1.1 It was moved by Trustee Marcano, seconded by Trustee Robinson to approve Graduation Diplomas.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

5.2 General Business

5.2.1 It was motioned by Trustee Marcano, seconded by Trustee Eskew to Accept and File the First Interim Report.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

5.2.2 It was motioned by Trustee Marcano, seconded by Trustee Eskew to approve the Resolution before the Kern County Board of Education and the Kern County Superintendent of Schools in the Matter of Impoundment of Local Tax Revenues to Anticipate Pending Claims and/or Litigation.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

5.2.3 It was motioned by Trustee Marcano, seconded by Trustee Cisneros to approve the 2026 Regular Board Meeting Schedule.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, and Trustee Robinson.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

6.0 REPORT OF COUNTY BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBERS

6.1 Trustee Marcano shared that he recently attended his first CSBA Annual Education Conference. He noted that the event was well-organized, offered a wide range of topics, and included a surprise choir performance from his high school, which he particularly enjoyed. While he found Sacramento to be cold and affected by homelessness, he appreciated the overall experience and looks forward to attending future conferences—especially next year's event in San Diego. He concluded by expressing his gratitude to Anabell for her contributions over the past six months and wished her well in her future endeavors.

6.2 Trustee Eskew reflected on completing her first year as a trustee and expressed pride in the board's accomplishments and the resolutions it has supported. She thanked Anabell for her contributions over the past six months and shared her appreciation for having her on the team. Trustee Eskew also highlighted recent community engagements, including visiting Blanton as Santa and Mrs. Claus, where she enjoyed interacting with the students, and participating in the long-standing holiday event at Wasco for KCSOS special needs students—a tradition she and her husband have been part of for nearly 15 years. She noted the joy these experiences bring and looks forward to a busy and productive year ahead.

6.3 Trustee Beechinor Towse reported no formal updates but extended warm holiday wishes to all. She expressed hope that teachers enjoy a restorative break and that students return refreshed after the New Year.

6.4 Trustee Gonzalez reported no new updates but extended warm holiday greetings, wishing everyone a Merry Christmas, happy holidays, and a Happy New Year.

6.5 Trustee Cisneros delivered an in-depth report on her participation in the CSBA conference, where she attended multiple workshops covering a wide range of educational, legal, and policy-related topics. She began by describing a session on recent developments in Title IX, noting CSBA's claims that California law already provides significant protection and that recent federal actions—such as the Executive Order on gender participation in sports—do not supersede state law, raising important questions about interpretation, enforcement standards, and potential conflicts relating to CSBA's guidance. She also shared insights and concerns from a workshop on federal education developments, where attorneys discussed the limits of presidential authority over the U.S. Department of Education, the anticipated restructuring of responsibilities across federal and state agencies, the stalled operations of the Office for Civil Rights, and California's plan to establish its own state-level civil rights office by 2027, including an anti-Semitism director. Trustee Cisneros highlighted legal discussions about a high-profile opt-out case and predicted potential disputes between California and the federal government over Title IX alignment in 2026, including the likelihood of litigation reaching the U.S. Supreme Court. She then discussed takeaways from a keynote session on artificial intelligence in education, noting concerns that students' reliance on AI may reduce motivation, critical thinking, and the development of foundational academic skills, particularly for those whose brains are still maturing and who may lack the ability to discern AI-generated content, and she emphasized the importance of strong human-led instruction, teaching core competencies thoroughly before introducing AI tools, and promoting trades and hands-on learning pathways, commending Kern County's ongoing commitment to these opportunities. Additionally, she described productive interactions at the conference exhibit hall, including learning about a program designed to strengthen test-taking strategies for English learners by aligning instruction with the structure and language of state assessments, which she noted could help close performance gaps. Trustee Cisneros also reflected on her recent visit to CAAT Charter, observing high levels of classroom engagement, structured instruction, active learning, collaborative groups, independent projects, and a warm, welcoming school environment supported by teachers, classified staff, and parent volunteers, expressing deep appreciation for the school's culture. She reflected on the Thanksgiving Luncheon at Blanton in November recalling a special moment when a student voluntarily shared his personal testimony of getting off the streets, finding faith in God after hearing the Gospel, and overcoming his drug addiction. He found purpose in his life and was thankful for the opportunity to express that at the luncheon. She concluded with personal reflections on gratitude, the historical presence of religious language in national and California documents, and her belief that understanding this context is an important aspect of civic education, noting that the influence of faith on early American institutions remains visible in public monuments and foundational texts, before thanking the board and community for their time and attention.

6.6 Trustee Robinson began by reflecting on a quote that has resonated with him in recent days—one emphasizing the enduring power of truth and love throughout history and the belief that, despite temporary appearances, harmful forces ultimately fall. He shared his personal interpretation, noting that this reflects the overarching influence of a higher power, and connected this idea to earlier comments about humility, gratitude, and recognizing a purpose beyond oneself. He mentioned that the board will revisit discussions related to the Torah and the Ten Commandments. Trustee Robinson then provided an overview of his recent activities, including

attending and speaking at the Leaders in Life general meeting, where 80 students in grades 8–12 are working to develop their communication skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing—skills he believes strengthen critical thinking and positively influence both students' lives and their interactions with others. He expressed support for aligning the program with the Kegley Institute at CSU Bakersfield, which also focuses on public speaking and integrity. He referenced participation at the Kelly Blanton Thanksgiving dinner on November 19, 2025, and described a visit on November 21, 2025, with his wife to the downtown campus of the Central Academy of Art and Technology (CAAT), praising the school's welcoming atmosphere, student confidence, classroom engagement, and incentive-based systems, including an arcade-style game area used to motivate students without reliance on personal devices. He cited CAAT's academic performance and cost efficiency, comparing per-pupil spending favorably with statewide averages, and shared his positive impressions of the December 3, 2025, Christmas program, where he admired students' courage in performing publicly. Trustee Robinson also commented on the challenges CAAT faced during its charter approval process and expressed support for the school's mission and instructional approach. He then shared personal views on identity, student well-being, and the role of values in education, raising concerns about societal and educational influences he perceives as distracting from academic focus. He reflected on the importance of foundational principles, such as those found in the Ten Commandments, and questioned why such references may prompt opposition. Trustee Robinson concluded by affirming the honor he feels in serving on the board, referencing a public inquiry about his decision-making regarding the Ten Commandments resolution, which he stated is grounded in the trust placed in elected board members. He connected local education issues to broader challenges affecting Kern County—including workforce needs, economic development, and community confidence in public schools—and urged the board and community to focus on core educational priorities to ensure strong outcomes for students and the county's future. He closed by thanking everyone for their time.

6.7 Trustee Little provided a detailed report on her experience at the CSBA Conference, expressing disappointment that the event offered limited content specifically focused on county boards and insufficient opportunities for engagement or targeted learning. She noted, however, that the County Board Breakfast featured a compelling presentation on the "Foster Ferret," a digital platform created by foster youth to help students navigate the foster care system by offering real-time access to information, support, and communication tools—an initiative she believes could eventually benefit local foster youth as it expands statewide and potentially nationally. Trustee Little also described a productive discussion with representatives from Connect Literacy, a program that offers a money-back guarantee if students do not advance at least one grade level in language acquisition, and she shared that the organization claims it can successfully support English language learners and even transient county students while helping agencies reduce costs. She then addressed her absence at the previous board meeting, explaining it was due to illness, and transitioned into an extensive reflection on the ongoing community dialogue surrounding the proposed posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms. She acknowledged the significant volume of emails, phone calls, and public engagement received; emphasized her appreciation for the diverse viewpoints shared; and expressed that the discussions have been emotional yet valuable for the board and community. Trustee Little shared excerpts from a constituent's letter advocating for the Ten Commandments as a universal moral code and discussing their historical, ethical, and social significance, while also outlining the writer's concerns about perceived inconsistencies in how various belief systems and ideologies are treated in public education. She expanded on related issues, including interpretations of the First Amendment, the historical context of the separation of church and state, and the broader debate about the role of religion and personal values in public policy. After extensive research and deliberation, she stated that, due to ongoing legal challenges in other states—including a stay in Texas and an active lawsuit elsewhere—she does not believe it is prudent for the board to move

forward with the proposal at this time, though she anticipates the topic may reemerge in the future and expressed confidence that the board is now better prepared to address it. Trustee Little thanked all community members for their contributions to the conversation, expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve as board president, wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and concluded by congratulating Trustee Marcano as he transitions into the role of board president.

7.0 REPORT OF COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT

7.1 Superintendent Mendiburu began by expressing sincere appreciation to student board member Anabell for her contributions, commending her performance, professionalism, and positive impact during her time with the board, and assuring her that she will always be welcomed back as part of the KCBOE educational family. He then informed the board of a leadership change at REALMS, noting that the organization is currently operating under an interim CEO and that additional updates will be shared as more information becomes available. Superintendent Mendiburu also highlighted the Thanksgiving photo placed at each board member's seat, explaining that the event continues to receive enthusiastic feedback from students and staff, and reaffirmed gratitude to the Board of Trustees for supporting and sustaining this meaningful tradition. He extended special thanks to "Santa and Mrs. Claus" for joining the evening's festivities, delighting students with hot cocoa, cookies, and photos, and contributing to a joyful start to the holiday season. Superintendent Mendiburu moved into the Christmas season, expressing heartfelt appreciation to the entire Board of Trustees for their unwavering commitment to students and their consistent advocacy on behalf of children. Concluding his remarks, Superintendent Mendiburu recognized Board President Mary Little for her exceptional leadership throughout the year, inviting her to stand so he could present a personalized gavel engraved with her name and the board's logo as a token of appreciation for her dedicated service as the 2025 KCBOE Board President, offering congratulations and gratitude on behalf of the entire board.

8.0 AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

8.1 There were no recommendations for agenda items for the next meeting.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

9.1 Unless otherwise posted, the next regularly scheduled meeting will be held on January 13, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

9.2 The meeting was adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

John G. Mendiburu, Ed.D., Ex-Officio Secretary to the Board of Education