



BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

January 13, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Board of Education Board Room
1300 17th Street, City CENTRE – Bakersfield, CA 93301

1.0 GENERAL FUNCTIONS

- 1.1 The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.
- 1.2 Pledge of Allegiance
- 1.3 Roll Call

Board Members Present

Julie Beechinor Towse
Lori J. Cisneros
Lori Eskew
Jose E. Gonzalez, Jr.
Mary Little
Joe L. Marcano
James V. Robinson
Lajaya Austin Turner, *Student Representative*

KCSOS Employees Present

Christian Shannon, *Deputy Superintendent*
Steve Sanders, *Chief of Staff*
Merril Clanton, *Senior Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent*

KCSOS Employees Absent

Dr. John G. Mendiburu, *Superintendent*

- 1.4 It was moved by Trustee Little, seconded by Trustee Beechinor Towse to approve the agenda.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, Trustee Robinson, and Student Representative Austin Turner.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

- 1.5 It was moved by Trustee Robinson, seconded by Trustee Eskew to approve the Minutes from Regular Board Meeting held on December 9, 2026, with revisions to Item 6.5.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, Trustee Robinson, and Student Representative Austin Turner.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

2.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS

3.1 Public Comments were heard from the following:

- Ellen Schafhauser
- Adam Blazer
- Emiliano Tristan
- Valeria Angeles
- Paul Linfesty

3.0 INFORMATION ITEMS – NO ACTION TAKEN

3.1 Presentation: April Raguindin – California Teacher of the Year, Dr. Douglas K. Fletcher Elementary School - Bakersfield City School District.

3.2 Presentation: PragerU Book Fair in a Box – Resources for the RISE (Alt Ed) Program.

3.3 Presentation: Camp KEEP – Russell Sentes, Deputy Superintendent – Local Initiatives and Innovation.

4.0 ACTION ITEMS

4.1 Consent Agenda

4.1.1 It was moved by Trustee Robinson, seconded by Trustee Beechinor Towse to approve Graduation Diplomas.

Ayes: Trustee Beechinor Towse, Trustee Cisneros, Trustee Eskew, Trustee Gonzalez, Jr., Trustee Little, Trustee Marcano, Trustee Robinson, and Student Representative Austin Turner.

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Item 5.2.1 – *Approval of the 2024-2025 Annual Audit Report*, was removed from the agenda and was not considered at this meeting.

4.2.2 Annual Resolution of Support for the Kern County Bar Association for 2025-26 Mock Trial Competitions.

4.2.3 Accept and File Williams Act Uniform Complaint Quarterly Reports.

6.0 REPORT OF COUNTY BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBERS

6.1 Trustee Robinson began by reflecting on December as a particularly enjoyable and meaningful month for him, noting that he made two visits to a nearby CAAT charter school. He shared that the school's charter had recently been renewed and described the campus as exceptional, praising its atmosphere, overall quality, and the excellence with which it is being operated. He highlighted attending the school's Christmas program and described it as marvelous, emphasizing the positive vibe of the campus. He strongly recommended the school as an alternative educational option for families seeking one, stating that it is a very strong organization that is doing an outstanding job. Transitioning to the events of the meeting, Trustee Robinson addressed the issue of profanity used during public comments. He apologized for any instances in which he

himself may have used inappropriate language in the past but stressed that profanity should not be tolerated in board meetings, particularly when children are present. He emphasized that clear procedures are outlined on the board's website for how members of the public can sign up to speak and be heard, and he noted that many experienced community members regularly follow that process effectively. He expressed disappointment that, instead of a more robust and orderly response, profanity was allowed to become a platform for expression, acknowledging that while many of the issues discussed are frustrating for both the public and the board, decorum must be maintained. As a governing board, he stated they are obligated to uphold standards of conduct and it is reasonable to expect the same from attendees, especially in the presence of young children. Trustee Robinson then addressed remarks made earlier in the meeting, specifically referencing a speaker, Ellen Schafhauser, and her comments about the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. He asserted that the First Amendment does not explicitly contain language establishing a separation of church and state, nor does it describe a wall between the two. He also responded to comments regarding fascism, offering a definition that characterizes fascism as a mass political movement centered on extreme nationalism, militarism, and the supremacy of the state over the individual. He argued that this definition contradicts claims that America or the current administration is fascist, stating that the United States fundamentally prioritizes individual rights, which is reflected in the very fact that all individuals are given the opportunity to speak at board meetings. He noted that public comments are often thoughtful and, at times, have even influenced his own thinking. Finally, Trustee Robinson expressed a desire for those who oppose board actions or proposals to offer constructive alternatives rather than solely voicing opposition. He encouraged critics to present solutions and ideas that could help advance education in a more productive and appropriate direction, emphasizing that the board's purpose is to work through issues and find workable paths forward. He characterized opposition without proposed solutions as unproductive and cantankerous, while clarifying that all voices are still valued and appreciated, even when there is disagreement. He concluded by reiterating his request that attendees remind one another to refrain from profanity, underscoring the importance of maintaining respect and decorum.

- 6.2 Trustee Eskew opened her remarks by reflecting positively on the holiday season, describing it as an exceptionally busy and rewarding time. She shared that she participated in approximately eighty Santa appearances between December 1st and December 25th, noting that the season went very well, children responded positively, and the overall experience was great. Trustee Eskew commented on a significant development that occurred on December 24th, when a judge ruled that schools may not withhold information from parents regarding a student's gender transition. Trustee Eskew emphasized that this issue had been a central part of her campaign and expressed strong disappointment that the ruling was later reversed, adding that she anticipated further legal or political challenges from the state government in Sacramento. She explained that the case originated with two teachers in Escondido, CA who sued the Escondido Union School District over what they believed to be a harmful policy. Trustee Eskew stressed her belief that teachers do not want to hide information from parents and that strong, open lines of communication between parents and educators are essential. She stated that existing systems are already in place to protect students who fear abuse or unsafe situations at home, including mandated reporting requirements for teachers. In her opinion, these protections apply to all students and should not involve separating children from their parents based on gender identity concerns. She argued that educators already have clear responsibilities to act if a child may be at risk and that additional secrecy undermines trust between families and schools. She went on to express her personal views on gender identity, asserting that individuals are born male or female and that no mistakes are made in that regard. Trustee Eskew stated that students experiencing gender identity struggles should seek counseling and support, emphasizing that individuals are made perfect as they are and should be loved and accepted in that state. She extended this message to adults as well, suggesting that those who encourage children should

also seek help. She framed her position as rooted in what she described as basic biology, referencing the male-female distinction in humans and animals as foundational. Concluding her remarks, Trustee Eskew referenced Assembly Bill 1955, stating that it had been reversed and expressed strong approval of that outcome. She closed by wishing everyone a happy new year and remarked that her year was beginning on the right foot.

6.3 Trustee Beechinor Towse began by noting that there were no major updates from her area but highlighted a few upcoming opportunities for high school students. She shared that Bakersfield College will be hosting a large public speaking competition on January 23rd, which will be open to and include participation from several high schools throughout Kern County. She also announced that Bakersfield College is working on hosting a statewide FFA field day, an event expected to bring approximately 800 high school students from across California to the campus. She described this as an exciting opportunity and a significant event for both students and the college. She then turned her attention to the presentations discussed during the meeting. From her perspective, she explained that the board is not typically in the position of recommending specific presentations or instructional materials. She noted that this was her first exposure to PragerU and stated that she found the presentation both interesting and informative, while also acknowledging that it raised questions for her. She expressed appreciation for having such items placed on the agenda, as it allows board members to explore, examine, and better understand new resources or perspectives. Trustee Beechinor Towse concluded by addressing the public, emphasizing the core mission of the Kern County Board of Education. She reminded attendees that the board primarily serves court and community schools, whose students often face significant academic and personal challenges. She underscored that many of these students have experienced disrupted educational paths and difficult life circumstances, and that the board's responsibility is to reach them in the most effective ways possible. In that context, she stated that she values the opportunity to consider different avenues for sharing information and engaging students, particularly those who have faced the greatest obstacles. She closed her remarks by expressing appreciation for the item being on the agenda.

6.4 Trustee Little began her remarks by welcoming the new student representative, Lajaya Austin Turner noting that it was a strong meeting to begin her participation. She then shared a point of pride for local students, announcing that Centennial High School took first place in the "We the People" competition, defeating Arvin High School, which she described as an impressive accomplishment deserving of recognition. She then turned to the presentation given earlier in the meeting, stating that she found it very informative. Trustee Little emphasized that she did not perceive any intent to teach biblical history or to promote religious views, noting that the presenter explicitly stated that other religions are also discussed. Echoing comments made by Trustee Beechinor Towse, she stressed that the board's focus is on helping students, particularly those who have experienced significant hardship or disruption in their lives. She reflected personally on her own experience as a student, recalling that taking a finance class in high school was life-changing for her because she did not have parental guidance at home. She shared that the skills she learned helped her manage her household after marrying right out of high school and said that a course teaching practical life skills, such as financial literacy, would have been invaluable to her. Drawing a parallel to the students the county serves today, she suggested that similar classes or supplemental resources could be extremely beneficial for students who lack support at home. She expressed interest in learning more about PragerU and potentially continuing the conversation with the Superintendent, while acknowledging that no decisions have been made yet. Trustee Little also shared recent professional engagements, including being interviewed by Greg Ardoin with the California Teachers Association. She described the conversation, which included Greg Ardoin and his mother, as enjoyable and thoughtful, covering her views, motivations, and the reasons behind her work as a trustee. She noted that Greg had followed her work for many years and expressed appreciation for the time and dialogue. Additionally, she

explained that the California School Boards Association (CSBA) invited her to participate in a focus group called the “Students in Focus” series. She said the focus group would contribute to a research brief intended to be useful for superintendents and trustees statewide. During that process, she was asked about the importance and effectiveness of court and community schools, common misconceptions about county-operated programs, and the physical, structural, and systemic challenges facing the field. She shared that she was able to highlight areas where Kern County excels and expressed excitement about the potential impact of her contributions. Finally, Trustee Little discussed a legal issue related to an amicus brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court concerning gender and Title IX. She stated that the case was heard that day, although no ruling had yet been issued. She summarized reporting suggesting that the Court may uphold state laws that restrict transgender athletes from competing on girls’ sports teams, while noting that such a decision might not immediately affect California or other more liberal-leaning states. She cited information indicating that 25 states currently base athletic participation on biological sex and referenced questions raised by Justices Roberts, Alito, and Kavanaugh regarding how “sex” should be defined under Title IX. She expressed concern that some individuals questioned during proceedings were unable to clearly define biological sex, which she found troubling. Trustee Little concluded by saying she was watching the issue closely and wanted to keep the board informed.

- 6.5 Trustee Cisneros began her remarks by welcoming the new student representative, Lajaya Austin Turner to the board, expressing appreciation for her presence and encouraging her to stay engaged. She emphasized that serving in this role would be a valuable learning experience, offering insight into the community, the country, and a wide range of perspectives. She recalled meeting Lajaya previously at the Blanton Thanksgiving luncheon and noted that she remembered their conversation, which she described as a positive connection. She then reported on her recent participation in a training hosted by the Association of California County Boards of Education (ACCBE), explaining that she had been nominated to attend and has found the experience both enjoyable and informative. Trustee Cisneros shared that ACCBE’s mission is to empower county board trustees through confidence-building and collaboration with peers, and she spoke positively about meeting trustees from across California. She highlighted ACCBE’s website as a valuable resource, noting that it includes a downloadable trustee handbook and other helpful materials, and indicated that she would continue to share insights from future trainings. She also mentioned an upcoming ACCBE conference scheduled for February, noting that she was looking forward to attending. Trustee Cisneros then turned to a national milestone, noting that this year marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United States. She explained that many schools and county boards nationwide are planning special commemorations and introduced the 1776 Project, which offers a downloadable resolution template for boards to designate an “America’s Semiquincentennial Week.” She described the proposed weeklong celebration as including patriotic assemblies, lessons on the Constitution and founding documents, projects honoring veterans and civic leaders, and activities celebrating the nation’s history, and achievements. She expressed interest in having the board consider adopting a resolution and requested that the item be placed on the February agenda, volunteering to draft the resolution herself. With the board president’s agreement, she confirmed that it could be brought forward for discussion. She also highlighted student opportunities connected to the semiquincentennial. Trustee Cisneros described “America’s Field Trip,” a nationwide contest sponsored by America 250, the nonpartisan entity designated by Congress to plan the anniversary observances. She explained that students in grades 3 through 12 are invited to share what America means to them for a chance to win a three-day, two-night field trip to one of 16 iconic American landmarks or cultural sites, such as Mount Rushmore, the National Archives, the Kennedy Space Center, or Yellowstone National Park. She noted that trips would take place in July or August and encouraged interested students to apply through the America250 website. In addition, Trustee Cisneros shared information about another student competition launched by the U.S. Department of Education and Secretary Linda McMahon. She explained that the Presidential

1776 Award competition invites high school students to demonstrate their knowledge of America's founding ideals through essays, with a total of \$250,000 in awards available. She encouraged students and families to explore this opportunity as well. Trustee Cisneros concluded her comments by reflecting on her appreciation for living in the United States, stating that her favorite aspect of America is the freedom of speech. She acknowledged that some of the discussions earlier in the meeting were uncomfortable but emphasized that the ability to openly discuss difficult and opposing viewpoints is fundamental to what makes America unique. She welcomed such dialogue, describing it as valuable and enriching, and thanked those present.

- 6.6 Student Representative, Lajaya Austin Turner thanked the Board of Trustees for having her.
- 6.7 Trustee Marcano began his remarks by congratulating the Delano-based Kennedy Thunderbirds for winning a state championship. He noted that this was the first state title in the program's history and offered his congratulations for the milestone accomplishment. He then addressed the public comment portion of the meeting, thanking those community members who spoke and followed the established procedures. Trustee Marcano explained that five individuals properly submitted their names prior to the start of the meeting, as required, and reminded attendees that public comment is governed by set rules, including a three-minute limit per speaker or a twenty-minute limit per topic. He emphasized that while he did not create these rules, they are the rules the board must follow. He expressed understanding for those who were unable to speak because they were unfamiliar with the process and encouraged everyone to be mindful of the procedures in the future. Trustee Marcano stressed the importance of decorum, particularly given the presence of students, including the student trustee, Lejaya Austin Turner. He urged attendees to model respectful and adult behavior, emphasizing that disagreement is a normal and expected part of public service, but it can and should be handled respectfully. Drawing on his own experience, he noted that he regularly disagrees with others yet believes strongly in doing so in a civil and constructive manner. He called for mutual respect, and avoiding speaking over one another during meetings. Trustee Marcano concluded by welcoming continued public participation and encouraging individuals to speak at future meetings as long as they follow the established protocols. He thanked everyone for attending.

7.0 REPORT OF COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT

- 7.1 No Report.

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 February 10, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- 9.2 The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.