

Santa Barbara County Committee On School District Organization

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- 1. What is the Santa Barbara County Committee on School District Organization and what does it do?**

The California State Legislature created committees on school district organization in each county in the state in 1949. The Santa Barbara County Committee on School District Organization (referred to in these pages as the County Committee) is governed by the regulations established by the legislature and by its own policies and procedures. Its responsibilities apply to school districts, ranging from kindergarten through community college.

The County Committee is charged by the state to study and make recommendations and decisions in the areas of:

- reorganizing school district boundaries;
- establishing, rearranging, and abolishing trustee areas; *and*
- changing the number of governing board members and the manner in which they are elected.

These actions are initiated in response to proposals submitted to the committee through the avenues outlined on subsequent pages.

The activities of the County Committee are coordinated through the County Superintendent of Schools. The County Committee interacts with the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, and other state and county agencies as appropriate. Expenses and activities are funded from the Santa Barbara County Education Office Service Fund.

2. Who serves on the County Committee?

The County Committee consists of 11 members – two from each of the five county supervisorial districts and one member serving at large.

Members are elected annually by representatives of school district boards. The term of office is four years and it begins upon election. Members serve without pay but may be reimbursed for travel expenses. Neither the county superintendent, any member of her staff, nor any employee of a school district or community college district can be a member of the County Committee. A member of a school board may simultaneously serve as a member of the County Committee. Vacancies that occur during the term of a member are filled by the County Committee or the County Superintendent if the County Committee does not act within a specified time.

3. When and how are County Committee meetings conducted?

The County Committee holds regular meetings throughout the county, typically on the second Mondays of September, December, February, and April. Special meetings and public hearings are held as needed in the communities affected by an impending decision.

The committee must hold one organizational meeting each year. A chairperson and vice-chairperson are elected at that time. A majority of the members of the County Committee constitutes a quorum. All meetings are subject to the provisions of the Brown Act.

4. How do items get on the County Committee's agenda?

The County Superintendent of Schools or her designee serves as secretary to the committee and prepares the agenda for the meetings. Items for the agenda may be suggested by a committee member, or by any employee of a school district, the County Education Office, or by a local citizen. Official minutes of each County Committee meeting are available at the Santa Barbara County Education Office.

5. What is "school district reorganization"?

The reorganization of school districts is one of the major responsibilities of the County Committee. An action to reorganize school districts can refer to any one of the following:

- transfer of territory between or among school districts;
- school district unification or deunification (organizing into a K-12 range or separating a K-12 organization);
- formation of new districts of all types from territory of existing districts;
- dissolution or lapsation of a school district; *or*
- annexation of all or part of one district to another district.

6. What is the process for reorganization?

The process for reorganizing a school district may be initiated in one of the following ways.

- a citizens' petition submitted to the County Committee;

- a request from a school district governing board to the County Committee; *or*
- plans and recommendations formulated by the County Committee.

Each initiation method has a different procedure, prescribed by law, which may include: studies of reorganization, public hearings, and voter approval. In each instance, public action is required of the County Committee to ensure public input to the process.

7. What are the requirements for a citizens' petition?

Any petition submitted to the County Committee must include: a description of what is proposed, the geographic area involved, the reason(s) for the petition, and the districts affected. In order to avoid disqualification for failure to comply with legal requirements, petition forms should be reviewed by the County Education Office before circulation.

Signatures for a petition shall be obtained within a period of 180 days before the submission of the petition to the County Committee.

The number of the signatures required varies depending on the type of action proposed. The outline below describes the requirements in different situations.

A. Proposed Action

1. Transfer of territory between/among districts, or
2. Unification/deunification, or
3. Formation of a new district, or
4. Dissolution or lapsation, or
5. Annexation:

Number of Signatures Required for a Citizens Petition

- Twenty-five percent of the registered voters residing in the territory proposed to be reorganized, or
- Ten percent of the registered voters residing in any district proposed to be reorganized, or
- The owner of uninhabited property if a subdivision map or an application for a project (as defined) has been filed.

B. Proposed Action

1. Trustee areas, or
2. Method of electing governing board, or
3. Increase/decrease in number of governing board members of a school district, or
4. Establishing a common board for a high school district and an elementary district.

Number of Signatures Required for a Citizens Petition

- Five percent or 50 (whichever is less) of the registered voters residing in a district with 2,500 or fewer registered voters; or
- Three percent or 100 (whichever is less) of the registered voters residing in a district with 2,501 to 10,000 registered voters; or

- One percent or 250 (whichever is less) of the registered voters residing in a district of 10,001 to 50,000 registered voters; or
- 500 or more registered voters residing in a district with 50,001 to 100,000 registered voters; or
- 750 or more registered voters residing in a district with 100,001 to 250,000 registered voters; or
- 1,000 or more registered voters residing in a district with 250,001 or more registered voters.

8. What is the process for proposing a transfer of territory?

An action to transfer territory from one school district to another is initiated by submitting a valid petition to the County Committee. The petition may be initiated by:

- at least twenty-five percent of the registered voters residing in the area proposed for transfer, or by ten percent of the registered voters of the school district, in which case the County Committee must decide whether to fully consider the matter; *or*
- the owner of the property if it is uninhabited; *or*
- a majority of the members of the governing boards of each affected district.

The Secretary to the County Committee assists petitioners in securing the appropriate documentation.

After the County Committee has studied the proposal and held hearings on the matter in each affected school district, it prepares a series of findings, a report, and makes a determination to approve or disapprove the proposal.

If the County Committee does not approve the proposal, the process ends. If the proposal is approved, an election is held in territory selected by the County Committee. If the proposal passes at the election, the transfer action is implemented by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. An election is not required if the territory is uninhabited or contains less than ten percent of the assessed value of the district from which the transfer is being made, and the governing boards of all districts have approved the transfer.

Appeals to the State Board of Education on a decision of the County Committee to approve or disapprove a proposal are allowed under certain circumstances.

9. What is the process for proposing a school unification action?

An action to unify a school district is initiated by submitting a valid petition to the County Committee. The petition may be initiated by:

- 1) at least twenty-five percent of the registered voters residing in the area proposed for reorganization; or
- 2) ten percent of the registered voters of a school district, in which case the County Committee must decide whether to fully consider the matter, or
- 3) a majority of the members of the governing boards of each affected school district.

It is now possible to unify a high school district with less than all of its component elementary districts.

After the County Committee has studied the proposal and held hearings on the matter in each of the affected school districts, it prepares a series of findings, a recommendation and a unification plan for submission to the State Board of Education.

However, under certain specified conditions in Education Code Section 35710(b), the County Committee may approve a unification. These conditions include:

- 1) the County Committee accepting the approval authority from the County Superintendent of Schools
- 2) The governing boards of each affected school district consenting to the petition
- 3) all affected school districts agreeing to share all costs related to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

The State Board of Education approves or denies the petition. If approved, the proposal goes to an election in territory selected by the State Board of Education. If the proposal passes at the election, the unification action is implemented by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. All school district unification proposals in Santa Barbara County must go through the State Board of Education; the board cannot be bypassed.

10. What is the County Committee's role in relation to the number of trustees and the manner in which they are elected?

Except in a school district governed by a board of education provided for in the charter of a city, the County Committee has the power to establish or abolish trustee areas, rearrange the boundaries of trustee areas, increase or decrease the number of members of the governing board of a school district, or adopt an alternative method of electing governing board members.

Board members can be elected by the registered voters of the entire district and reside anywhere in the district ("at large" method), or be elected by the registered voters of the entire district but reside in a trustee area ("trustee area" method), or be elected by the registered voters of the trustee area in which they reside ("ward" method).

A request for such an action may be initiated by the County Committee, a petition of the qualified electors in a district, or a resolution of the governing board of a district. At the conclusion of a hearing held within the district, the County Committee will approve or disapprove the proposal. Except for a proposal to rearrange the boundaries of trustee areas, approval constitutes an order of election; denial terminates the proposal. The decision of the County Committee to rearrange trustee areas or to change the method of electing governing board members is final unless a petition for an election is filed by five percent of the registered voters of the district. The decision of the County Committee to change the method of electing governing board members is effective for the next district election.

If a petition requesting an election to establish or abolish trustee areas, to increase or decrease the number of trustees, or to adopt another method of electing board members is signed by at least ten percent of the district's registered voters, an election must be held. The County Committee may conduct public hearings on the proposal.

11. Can the County Committee be bypassed?

No. Any proposal to reorganize a school district must be considered by the County Committee. Through a process of public hearings, the committee makes its decision or recommendation.

12. Where is the specific authority for the County Committee?

Authorization for the County Committee and its actions can be found in the California Education Code Sections 4000 et seq., 5019 et seq., 3550 et seq., 74000 et seq., and the California Administrative Code, Title 5.

13. What is the role of the County Superintendent of Schools?

The County Education Office provides the staff support to the County Committee. Neither the superintendent nor her delegate serves on the County Committee, nor has any authority over the decisions of the County Committee. The County Superintendent's office remains neutral on issues under consideration.

The decision-making process of the County Committee generally honors the philosophy of local control, with the final decision being made by the districts and citizens affected.

14. Where can I get more information about the County Committee?

Further information can be obtained from the Secretary to the County Committee:

Denice Cora
Administrator, School Business Advisory Services
Santa Barbara County Education Office
4400 Cathedral Oaks Road
P.O. Box 6307
Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307
(805) 964-4711