



## County Committee Advisory

*This is an external advisory that has been approved by the Placer County Committee on School District Organization. It is intended to help guide school districts when developing maps for trustee areas.*

**Number:** CCA - 01

**Date:** July 1, 2026

**Department:** Superintendent's Office

**Revised:** N/A

**Subject:** Transition to Trustee Area Elections – Legal Requirements and Mapping Standards

---

### Overview

#### Transition to Trustee Area Elections – Legal Requirements and Mapping Standards

#### Purpose and Role of the Advisory

This advisory is designed to assist local school districts and county boards of education should they choose to develop proposals to move from at-large elections to trustee area elections and/or adjust existing trustee boundaries. The County Committee is responsible for providing oversight throughout this process, ensuring that any trustee area maps proposed are in full compliance with California law. In addition, the Committee ensures that these maps are created in a manner that is transparent to the public and that all legally required criteria are followed during their development.

#### Details

##### 1. Statutory “Waterfall Criteria” for Trustee Area Maps (Mandatory Order of Priority)

When reviewing or developing trustee area maps, school districts and county boards of education are required to strictly follow the ranked criteria outlined in the California Elections Code. These criteria are mandatory and must be applied in the specific order described below, without discretion or deviation.

##### Primary Criteria (Highest Priority)

According to Elections Code § 21130(b), the initial and foremost considerations in drawing trustee area maps are as follows:

1. Compliance with the United States Constitution and the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. § 10301 et seq.) - Trustee area boundaries must be drawn to ensure compliance with constitutional requirements and the federal Voting Rights Act. This includes the prohibition against dilution of the voting strength of protected classes.
2. Substantially Equal Population - Trustee areas must be created so that each area is “as nearly equal in population as practicable,” ensuring fair representation for all residents.

## **Secondary Criteria (Applied in Order After Primary Criteria)**

Once the primary criteria are satisfied, additional considerations outlined in Elections Code § 21130(c) should be applied, in the following order, to the extent practicable:

1. Geographical Contiguity - Trustee areas should consist of geographically connected territory, with no disconnected segments.
2. Respect for Geographic Integrity - Where possible, trustee areas should respect the geographic integrity of local neighborhoods or communities of interest. These are defined as populations that share common social or economic interests and should be included within a single trustee area to promote effective and fair representation.
3. Identifiability and Understandability - Trustee areas should be easily identifiable and understandable by residents, using natural and man-made boundaries to enhance clarity.
4. Compactness - Trustee areas should be compact, avoiding the bypass of nearby populations in favor of more distant ones.

These criteria are structured in a hierarchical “waterfall” order. Lower-ranked criteria may only be considered after all higher-ranked criteria have been satisfied. For instance, the criterion of compactness cannot take precedence over compliance with the Voting Rights Act or the requirement for population equality.

### **2. Transparency and Map Clarity Requirements**

School districts and county boards of education are required to uphold rigorous standards of transparency and usability when proposing trustee area maps. This ensures that the mapping process remains open to public scrutiny and that the resulting maps are easily understood by all stakeholders.

To meet these standards, all trustee area maps must include reference features that are clearly identifiable. Essential reference features include major and minor roads, city boundaries, school sites, and prominent natural landmarks such as rivers and parks. These elements help residents and stakeholders visualize and comprehend the boundaries of each trustee area.

Additionally, mapping materials should be made available in formats that are accessible to the public. This includes providing high-resolution visual maps that offer detailed depictions of trustee areas. Where necessary, descriptive boundary narratives should be included to further clarify the boundaries and characteristics of each area. Such narratives serve to supplement visual materials, making the information more interpretable for the public.

The overarching goal of these requirements is to guarantee that trustee areas are not only compliant with legal standards but are also transparent, clear, and defensible in the public domain. By providing accessible mapping materials and ensuring the clarity of reference features, school districts and county boards of education promote trust and understanding among the communities they serve.

### 3. Subordination of Local Guidelines to State Law

School districts and county boards of education may establish locally developed guidelines or preferences for trustee area mapping, such as preserving school feeder patterns or aligning boundaries with city limits. While these considerations can inform the mapping process, they must always remain subordinate to the statutory requirements outlined in Elections Code § 21130.

Any local criteria or preferences must not override or conflict with the mandatory legal standards established in state and federal law. Specifically, local guidelines must not take precedence over the following:

- Compliance with the Federal Voting Rights Act
- Requirements to ensure equal population across trustee areas
- The ordered “waterfall criteria” detailed previously

In instances where a conflict arises between locally developed guidelines and state or federal legal requirements, the County Committee is obligated to ensure that legal standards prevail. This ensures that all trustee area maps are created in accordance with the law, maintaining the integrity and compliance of the mapping process.

Number:	CCA-01
Date:	July 1, 2026
Revised:	