



PALO VERDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

BOARD OF TRUSTEES SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, September 22, 2026

Meeting Begins: 4:00 p.m. | Open Session: 5:00 p.m.

Physical Meeting Location: One College Drive, Blythe, CA 92225 - CL 101

Livestream Meeting Location: PVC Needles Educational Center, 725 W. Broadway, Needles, CA 92363

1. OPENING OF MEETING

1.1 CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Board President Gloria Copple.

Following the Call to Order and prior to Roll Call, Board President Copple noted a correction to the agenda regarding Trustee Williams' remote participation. She stated that the agenda referenced Government Code Section 54953(f) and clarified that the correct statutory reference for Trustee Williams' remote participation under the "just cause" provisions of the Brown Act was Government Code Section 54953.8.3(a). Board President Copple then asked Trustee Williams to state the general circumstances for her remote participation and make the required disclosure regarding whether any individuals 18 years of age or older were present with her.

Trustee Williams stated that she was participating remotely under the "just cause" provisions of the Brown Act due to a caregiving need involving her spouse. She disclosed that her husband was present in the room with her at that time and that no other individuals 18 years of age or older were present. Trustee Williams stated that her husband would leave the room before the Board recessed to Closed Session.

1.2 ROLL CALL

Governing Board Members:

- **Present:** Gloria Copple, Jon McNeil, Scott Dean, Brad Arneson, Stella Camargo-Styers, Angel Ramirez, Glenda Williams
- **Not Present:** Student Trustee Grace Wehrli

Also Present at the Board Table:

- Dr. Estella Castillo-Garrison, Superintendent/President
- Naomi Alaniz, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/President and Board of Trustees

REMOTE PARTICIPATION: Trustee Glenda Williams participated remotely pursuant to Government Code Section 54953.8.3(a) under the “just cause” teleconferencing provisions of the Brown Act.

1.3 APPROVAL OF CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

Motion: Approve the Closed Session Agenda for this meeting.

Moved by: Stella Camargo-Styers

Seconded by: Jon McNeil

Action: Motion Carries

Vote:

- **Yes:** Gloria Copple, Jon McNeil, Scott Dean, Brad Arneson, Stella Camargo-Styers, Angel Ramirez, Glenda Williams

2. HEARING OF CITIZENS - CLOSED SESSION ITEMS

2.1 PUBLIC COMMENT ON CLOSED SESSION ITEMS

There were no public comments offered regarding the items on tonight’s Closed Session agenda.

3. RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION

The Governing Board recessed to Closed Session at 4:03 p.m.

3.1 PUBLIC EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE/DISMISSAL/RELEASE (GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 54957)

3.2 CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL - ANTICIPATED LITIGATION; SIGNIFICANT EXPOSURE TO LITIGATION (GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 54956.9)

4. RECONVENE TO OPEN SESSION

The Governing Board reconvened to Open Session at 5:09 p.m.

4.1 FLAG SALUTE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4.2 REPORT ON ANY ACTION TAKEN IN CLOSED SESSION

Board President Copple reported that no action was taken in Closed Session tonight.

4.3 APPROVAL OF OPEN SESSION AGENDA

Motion: Approve the Open Session Agenda for this meeting.

Moved by: Jon McNeil

Seconded by: Angel Ramirez

Action: Motion Carries

Vote:

- **Yes:** Gloria Copple, Jon McNeil, Scott Dean, Brad Arneson, Stella Camargo-Styers, Angel Ramirez, Glenda Williams

5. INTERVIEWS – RFP 2026-01 LEGAL COUNSEL SERVICES

5.1 INTERVIEWS OF RESPONDING LAW FIRMS

On June 9, 2026, the Board of Trustees authorized the issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for additional legal counsel services. The District subsequently issued RFP 2026-01 – Community College District Counsel Legal Services on July 6, 2026.

The District received proposals from five law firms. At its September 8, 2026, Regular Meeting, the Board discussed the proposals and the selection process. Four of the responding firms participated remotely via Microsoft Teams and were interviewed by the Board as part of its continued evaluation and selection process. The firms were interviewed in the following order:

- **Liebert Cassidy Whitmore**
 - Yesenia Z. Carillo
 - Christopher Fallon
 - Eileen O'Hare-Anderson
- **Fagen Friedman & Fulfrost**
 - Jessica Ehrlich
 - Amanda Savage
 - Dan Ojeda
- **Lozano Smith**
 - Sarah Garcia
 - Michelle Cannon
 - Trevin Sims
- **McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson**
 - Randy Erickson
 - Angelique Cramer

Public Comment:

Alice Dean asked about the interview process, noting that the same questions had not been asked of each firm. She specifically referenced Trustee Arneson's question regarding labor negotiations experience and asked whether Liebert Cassidy Whitmore had similar experience.

Trustee Arneson acknowledged Ms. Dean's concern and stated that he wished he had thought of the labor negotiations question in the beginning, before the first interview. He explained that he asked the question when it came to him and continued asking it of the other firms. Trustee Arneson stated that he did not ask McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson the question because the District was already familiar with the firm's involvement in labor negotiations and he already knew the answer.

Trustee McNeil stated that labor negotiations was identified as one of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore's strengths in its proposal materials. He noted that the firms had provided extensive information in their proposals and stated that they offered broad resources, including litigation, negotiations, and labor relations expertise.

Ms. Dean then provided her opinion regarding the firms interviewed. She identified

Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as her preferred firm, followed by Fagen Friedman & Fulfrost and Lozano Smith. She stated that McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson was not among her preferred firms based on her experiences with the firm through labor negotiations and concerns regarding the District's legal expenses. Ms. Dean suggested that Dr. Castillo-Garrison speak with the former Superintendent/President's secretary regarding the District's historical legal expenditures to compare prior legal costs with current expenditures.

Ms. Dean also discussed the role of legal counsel in labor negotiations and stated that she liked the approach described during one of the interviews in which legal counsel could serve as part of the negotiations team without necessarily taking the lead. She stated that she believed the District should lead its negotiations, with legal counsel serving as a team member and providing support as needed. Ms. Dean stated that she believed this approach would be beneficial to the District and a better use of District resources. She concluded by reiterating her opinion that the District should move on from McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson.

Trustee McNeil asked Ms. Dean to clarify her first and second choices among the firms interviewed. Ms. Dean identified Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as her first choice and Fagen Friedman & Fulfrost as her second choice. She stated that she believed Fagen Friedman & Fulfrost was the firm whose representative had discussed the approach she previously described, but noted that it may have been Lozano Smith. Board President Copple clarified that Lozano Smith was the firm that had discussed the approach of legal counsel “staying back.”

Ms. Dean further stated that the three firms had extensive experience and large numbers of attorneys within their organizations, which she believed would provide the District with a broader range of expertise to draw upon. She contrasted those resources with McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson and reiterated her opinion that, with a new Superintendent/President, the District should move forward with new legal counsel.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6.1 SELECTION OF LEGAL COUNSEL PURSUANT TO RFP 2026-01

Motion: To extend offers to Lozano Smith and Liebert Cassidy Whitmore to serve as legal counsel to the District.

Moved by: Stella Camargo-Styers

Seconded by: Jon McNeil

Action: Motion Carries

Vote:

- **Yes:** Gloria Copple, Jon McNeil, Scott Dean, Brad Arneson, Stella Camargo-Styers, Angel Ramirez, Glenda Williams

Board Discussion:

Board President Copple asked whether the Board was ready to select one or two firms. Trustee Dean asked whether the agenda language stating that the Board may select one

or more firms meant that the Board could select more than one firm. Board President Copple responded that they would like to select two firms and stated that the District had always had two firms in the past. She recalled that AALRR had represented the Board and that McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson primarily handled Human Resources matters. Trustee Arneson agreed that the District had usually had two firms.

Trustee McNeil stated that the District had worked with McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson for a long time and reiterated his displeasure with how the relationship had worked. He stated that he did not believe the firm had been as effective as the College needed, noting that labor negotiations had dragged on and seemed to remain in a “quagmire” or go in circles. Trustee McNeil also stated that it felt as though the Board would provide direction and that direction was not always followed. He expressed his dissatisfaction with how labor negotiations had proceeded and asked how the other Trustees felt.

Trustee Arneson identified Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as his first choice, Fagen Friedman & Fulfrost as his second choice, and Lozano Smith as his third choice. He stated that he thought Lozano Smith was good but did not feel their presentation was as strong, describing it as more relationship-driven. Trustee Arneson stated that he preferred a more business-focused, “harder line” approach.

Trustee McNeil expressed his preference for Lozano Smith, noting that its representative discussed controlling legal costs and taking a long-term approach. He stated that, based on his background and familiarity with the firms, he believed the attorney who participated in the interview was considered one of the top educational attorneys working with districts. Trustee McNeil stated that her expertise in developing relationships, taking a long-term approach, and controlling costs would be important to the District. He also discussed the importance of labor negotiations and stated that he wanted the District to negotiate in a way that brought employees “into the fold of the College,” with everyone working in the same direction, rather than taking an oppositional approach. He identified this as a strength he saw in Lozano Smith.

Trustee Styers agreed with Trustee McNeil's comments regarding Lozano Smith and noted that the firm was smaller. She stated that, given the issues facing the District, she believed a smaller firm might be able to tailor its services to the District's needs and work closely with the District.

Trustee Ramirez identified Lozano Smith as his first choice and stated that the firm's opening statement caught his attention. He noted that the firm had approximately 130 attorneys in California who specialized in different areas relevant to the District's needs. Trustee Ramirez stated that the firm appeared to be very ethical and noted that it served approximately 20 colleges. He believed that serving a smaller number of colleges could allow the firm to provide the District with more attention.

Trustee Williams noted Lozano Smith's experience with union contracts and stated that Michelle had approximately 25 to 30 years of experience with contracts, including developing contracts from the beginning.

Trustee Styers asked how the District would navigate not bringing McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson back given the firm's ongoing investigations. Board

President Copple clarified that the Board was not terminating the firm and that the purpose of the item was to select two additional firms. Trustee Arneson stated that McDougal would need to finish the work it was currently handling for the District while the District moved forward with other legal counsel. Trustee McNeil stated that McDougal had an open contract and that the District could simply not call the firm. He added that the firm needed to finish the negotiations it was currently handling and that the negotiations were close to completion. Board President Copple then identified Lozano Smith as her first choice.

Trustee Styers clarified that she believed the increase in legal costs had occurred primarily since December and referenced litigation, changes in Board leadership, and the number of questions being asked during that period. Trustee McNeil stated that legal costs since January were approximately \$500,000.

Board President Copple then asked each Trustee to identify their preferred firms. Trustee McNeil, who had previously identified Lozano Smith as his first choice, identified Fagen Friedman & Fulfroast as his second choice, followed by Liebert Cassidy Whitmore. Trustee Styers identified Lozano Smith as her first choice, then McDougal, Boehmer, Foley, Lyon, Mitchell & Erickson, stating that she would like to retain McDougal. Trustee Ramirez identified Lozano Smith as his first choice, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as his second choice, and Fagen Friedman & Fulfroast as his third choice. Board President Copple identified Lozano Smith as her first choice and Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as her second choice.

Trustee Dean identified Liebert Cassidy Whitmore as his first choice, Lozano Smith as his second choice, and Fagen Friedman & Fulfroast as his third choice. He noted Liebert Cassidy Whitmore's experience working with colleges and stated that, while Lozano Smith was smaller, he believed the firm could provide the District with more attention. He also noted that Lozano Smith had indicated that its attorneys would attend Board meetings if requested and stated that he had been impressed by that.

Trustee Williams stated that she liked all three firms and emphasized the importance of relationships and having legal counsel that could communicate effectively with people. She identified Lozano Smith as her first choice, followed by Liebert Cassidy Whitmore and Fagen Friedman & Fulfroast.

Executive Assistant Alaniz summarized the Trustees' stated preferences, stating that the two firms receiving the most support were Lozano Smith and Liebert Cassidy Whitmore.

Board President Copple asked for a motion. Trustee Styers made the motion, and Trustee McNeil seconded. Executive Assistant Alaniz asked for clarification of the motion and stated, "The motion is to extend an offer to Lozano Smith and Liebert Cassidy Whitmore to serve as legal counsel." Board President Copple confirmed the clarification.

6.2 2026–2027 GANN APPROPRIATIONS LIMIT

Jim Thomas provided a brief overview of the Gann Appropriations Limit and reviewed the District's 2026–2027 calculation with the Board. He explained that the Gann Limit originated with Proposition 4 in 1979 and is intended to limit state and local government spending, with the limit adjusted annually based on factors including revenues, attendance, and inflation. Mr. Thomas explained that the District's revenues exceeded its

calculated appropriations limit this year and that the District could request an additional limit from the State. He stated that he contacted the Chancellor's Office regarding the difference and was advised that there were no funding or spending implications and that a request for an additional limit would be automatically approved.

Mr. Thomas then reviewed the current year's report, explaining how amounts from the prior year's report carry forward and how the District's prior-year revenues are used in calculating the current year's appropriations limit. He stated that he compared the current report with reports from the previous two to three years because, in those years, the District's appropriations limit had been higher than its revenues. Mr. Thomas identified approximately \$2.1 million in deferred General Fund revenue in lieu of Education Protection Act funds as the largest difference he found between the prior year's and current year's reports.

Motion: Adopt the Palo Verde Community College District 2026–2027 Gann Appropriations Limit as presented.

Moved by: Jon McNeil

Seconded by: Angel Ramirez

Action: Motion Carries

Vote:

- **Yes:** Gloria Copple, Jon McNeil, Scott Dean, Brad Arneson, Stella Camargo-Styers, Angel Ramirez, Glenda Williams

Board Discussion:

Trustee Dean asked whether Executive Assistant Alaniz had spoken with Mr. Thomas regarding the concern he had previously raised about an approximately \$3.138 million difference reflected in the report. Executive Assistant Alaniz confirmed that she had. Mr. Thomas stated that he had contacted the Chancellor's Office before Executive Assistant Alaniz brought the concern to him. He explained that much of the difference resulted from approximately \$2 million in deferred General Fund revenue in lieu of Education Protection Act funds that had been adjusted in the prior year's report and carried forward into the current report. Mr. Thomas added that higher revenues from the Student Centered Funding Formula also accounted for part of the difference.

Trustee Dean asked Mr. Thomas whether he had spoken with the Chancellor's Office and whether everything was all right. Mr. Thomas confirmed that the Chancellor's Office advised there would be no impact to the District's funding or spending. Trustee Dean then asked whether the District would be required to return any of the money to the government. Mr. Thomas confirmed that the District would not be required to return any of the money.

Trustee McNeil stated that he had previously completed the Gann Limit calculation and explained that it was completed once a year by following the formula, filling in the report, and submitting it. Mr. Thomas added that the calculation becomes part of the District's 311 financial report submitted to the State.

**RECONVENE TO CLOSED SESSION / RECONVENE TO OPEN SESSION / REPORT ON ACTION
TAKEN IN CLOSED SESSION**

Following Item 6.2, the Board reconvened to Closed Session at 7:07 p.m. Upon reconvening to Open Session at 7:24 p.m., Board President Copple reported that no action was taken in Closed Session.

7. CLOSING OF MEETING

7.1 NEXT REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, October 13, 2026 | Closed Session: 4:00 p.m. | Open Session: 5:00 p.m. | Physical Meeting Location: Main Campus, One College Drive, Blythe, CA 92225 - CL 101 | Livestream Meeting Location: Needles Educational Center, 725 W. Broadway, Needles, CA 92363

7.2 ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Dr. Estella Castillo-Garrison

Dr. Estella Castillo-Garrison, Superintendent/President

Minutes approved at the October 13, 2026, Regular Board Meeting

Minutes prepared by Naomi Alaniz, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/President and Board of Trustees. These minutes are a summary of reports, discussions, and actions taken at this meeting. Audio/video recordings of Board of Trustees meetings are available on the District's website for public review and may be consulted for a more complete record of meeting discussions.