



Responsible Office: Office of the Board of Trustees & Superintendent

BOARD POLICY 9052

COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

PURPOSE

The Board of Trustees (“Board”) commits itself and its members to ethical, professional, and lawful conduct regarding communication and interaction with the media, the public, other Trustees, and with Washoe County School District (“District”) staff.

Communication protocols shall be based on integrity, accuracy, and transparency to encourage the open exchange of ideas and information. Trustees and staff shall adhere to the following protocols when functioning as District representatives and when engaging in communication regarding District business.

POLICY

1. Governing Principles

- a. As representatives of the District, communication based on mutual respect for each other is a priority for all members of the District organization, whether Trustee, employee, or volunteer. Trustees and all staff shall adhere to the guidelines expressed in this policy when communicating with each other, with staff, and constituents.
- b. The Board President is generally the spokesperson for the Board regarding decisions made by the Board and can also determine who is best to speak for the Board in any given situation. The Superintendent is the primary spokesperson for the District. All Board members are encouraged to assist with District communication in the community and the Trustees agree that public presentations will accurately and fairly reflect Board decisions and process.
- c. The Board shall only provide direction to the Superintendent, as its direct employee. The Superintendent, through the delegation of duties provided pursuant to Board Policy 9085 shall direct all other employees. As such, direction to the Superintendent shall only be given by the Board as a whole and not to other individual employees. The sole exception is the Chief Auditor, who reports functionally to the Board and administratively to the Superintendent.

2. Governing Practices

- a. Communication Between Trustees. Board members shall respect relationships with other members of the Board by:
 - i. Recognizing the integrity of predecessors and associates and respecting the dignity of their work.
 - ii. Refraining from making statements about the work of the Board or promises regarding voting on any matter that should properly come before the Board as a whole.
 - iii. Respecting the right of others to their opinions and, while striving for consensus, supporting the majority rule principle.
- b. Communication Between Trustees and Staff
 - i. In order to ensure efficient and complete communication, the preferred method of communication by members of the Board to staff or members or its committees is through the Superintendent or Chief of Staff (Board Services Department). This includes, but is not limited to:
 - 1) All official communications, policies, and directives of the Board will generally be communicated through the Superintendent, who shall also keep staff members informed of the Board's concerns and actions;
 - 2) Questions regarding a meeting of the Board, to include items on the agenda and supporting documents;
 - 3) Requests to meet with District staff.
 - 4) Requests for assistance in securing information and materials for public statements or speeches or media appearances; and
 - 5) Reports, written information, and other requests for information, particularly when such information is not maintained on a routine basis and could require more than a reasonable amount of time to prepare. When such requests are fulfilled, a copy shall be provided to all members of the Board.
- c. Communication Between Trustees and Office of General Counsel
 - i. The Office of General Counsel represents the District through its

authorized constituent the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Chief of Staff, and/or Leadership Team members, however, there are legal reasons that the Office of General Counsel must communicate directly with the Board. Such a decision is at the discretion of the Chief General Counsel, Trustees, or the Board.

- 1) Such communications shall be between the Chief General Counsel and Trustees or the Board.
 - 2) Upon receipt of the information, the Chief General Counsel shall notify the appropriate authorized constituent of the legal issue.
- ii. Requests for information, to include a formal opinion, shall follow the provisions outline within Board Policy 9165, Legal Counsel.

d. Visits to Schools and Other District Facilities

- i. All Trustees shall be provided a District-issued identification badge that shall be worn on their person when visiting a school or other District facility during the school/work day.
 - 1) Trustees may use their own discretion regarding wearing the ID badge at activities which occur outside of school hours or at a non-District property, although displaying the ID badge is always encouraged.
- ii. Trustees are encouraged to pre-arrange visits to schools and other District facilities through the Superintendent or Chief of Staff (Board Services Department). Ideally, such visits should be coordinated with the school principal or site administrator in advance. In most cases, a school or department should be given 24-hour notice prior to a visit during school or work hours.
 - 1) Should a Trustee believe an emergency warrants a more immediate meeting or visit, the Superintendent shall be notified in advance.
- iii. If the site administrator, principal, or administrative team member(s) is not available or indicate the visit occurring at an inconvenient time, Trustees shall respect the decision and request to reschedule. Trustees shall contact the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, or Chief of Staff to address concerns or complaints.
- iv. Trustees are encouraged to visit school sites frequently as well as

to attend any and all before- or after-school events and performances at their discretion. Such visits allow Trustees to engage with their constituents – students, staff, and the community – in a positive way that helps inform their work.

- v. Trustees shall be respectful of the work that the administrative, licensed and support staff must complete on a daily basis in order to increase student achievement and meet the goals identified in the Strategic Goals.
- vi. The above restrictions do not apply to a Trustee who is a parent/guardian of a student attending a school. However, in such cases the Trustee shall follow school processes required by all other community members regarding school appointments and visits. The Board member shall endeavor to represent themselves only in their parental role for such visits and meetings and not as a Board member.
- vii. When visiting a school in another Trustee's electoral district, Trustees are encouraged to inform the Trustee(s) of that school of the visit.
- viii. If a Trustee is in a school or other District facility or property, he/she shall be respectful of staffs' time and work. Trustees shall refrain from actions that may prevent staff from engaging in their work. If a lengthy conversation or research is needed, Trustees shall set up a time with the Superintendent for a meeting or phone call to address specific concerns or issues.

e. Communication with Constituents

- i. The Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, or Chief of Staff (Board Services Department) shall assist the Board in responding to constituent concerns by responding in a timely manner. Board members shall receive notice of such communication as soon as reasonably possible.
- ii. Board members shall meet responsibilities to the community by engaging in proactive and on-going dialogue with the community. This shall be achieved by:
 - 1) Structured and intentional coordination of Board members to serve on or attend meetings and events held by external stakeholders throughout the District. As a courtesy, Board members should advise Board Services of their attendance at community events.

- 2) Expansion of community committee service should be planned during a Board work session at least annually. Board members shall report briefly on relevant and significant updates raised by external entities during a scheduled time at each Board meeting.
- 3) Seeking to involve the community in the schools and the educational process.

f. General Protocols

- i. In all communications, Trustees and staff shall seek to respect the sensitivity of policies, initiatives, and issues that are in the planning stages, and shall seek to improve rather than undermine proposals. This includes not posting opinions on social media regarding issues that may be socially or politically sensitive and may be perceived as coming from the District or the full Board.
- ii. Trustees shall not divulge confidential information, particularly related to students, with anyone. This includes not posting information about students, to include pictures of students or groups of students, to social media when such posts could violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) or where no media release is on file with the District.
- iii. Trustees should be aware of comments or behaviors that could result in harassment complaints or potential lawsuits. When dealing with employees, volunteers, students, and their families, appropriate language and behavior shall be used by Trustees. Opportunities for training in personnel harassment shall be provided to Trustees by the District.
- iv. When Board members and staff or members of the community interact at social affairs and other functions, they will informally discuss such matters as educational trends, issues, and innovations, and general activities of the District. Nothing in this policy shall prohibit Board members and others from welcoming input on areas for improvement in District matters. Board members and staff shall, however, utilize established District complaint or grievance procedures to have concerns, complaints, or grievances addressed, and all Board member or constituent concerns shall be first directed to the Superintendent, Chief of Staff, or Deputy Superintendent.
- v. If any Board member testifies before any public or legislative body

on behalf of the District or regarding any District issue, he/she shall do so to represent positions of the Board as the whole. If testifying on a personal level, the Trustee shall identify that he/she is not testifying on behalf of the District or the Board. Trustees shall inform the Superintendent of any contacts made with Legislators if regarding any District issue. Regarding legislation on which the Board has not taken a position, the Superintendent will keep the Board informed of the District's response. Board members will inform colleagues and the Superintendent of their testimony at legislative hearings.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. Through its governing policies, Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Core Beliefs, the Board of Trustees strives to eliminate the achievement gap by ensuring every student is challenged academically.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES & ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

1. This policy reflects the goals of the District's Strategic Plan and aligns and complies with the governing documents of the District, to include:
 - a. Board Policy 9050, Board of Trustees' Governing Mission
 - b. Board Policy 9051, Board Conduct, Ethics and Operational Protocols
 - c. Board Policy 9165, Legal Counsel

REVIEW AND REPORTING

1. This document shall be reviewed as part of the bi-annual review process for the governance policies of the Board. The Board of Trustees shall receive notification of any required and/or suggested changes to the policy as well as an audit of any accompanying governing documents.
2. The Superintendent shall develop administrative regulations, and/or other associated documents, as necessary to implement this policy.

REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision	Modification
10/25/2016	1.0	Adopted as new policy
1/15/2019	2.0	Revised to clarify language related to staff communication and school visits