



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors  
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent  
DATE: Nov. 5, 2024  
SUBJECT: **Monitoring Report for EL-5, Communication and Counsel to the Board**

I certify that the following is accurate as of Nov. 2, 2023. The reporting period is from Oct. 1, 2023 through Sept. 30, 2024.

**Policy Type:** Executive Limitation

**Policy:** [EL-5 Communication and Counsel to the Board](#)

**Adopted:** Sept. 10, 2009; revised Feb. 10, 2011; Sept. 11, 2014; Jan. 12, 2017

**Interpretation of items:** None in question.

**Background Information:** This report is about Executive Limitation 5 – Communication and Counsel to the Board (EL-5). Information indicating compliance for each of the areas is presented below.

*The superintendent shall not fail through action or inaction to provide the necessary information to the board to make informed decisions in a timely manner.*

1. The superintendent shall not fail to take all reasonable and prudent actions with respect to board communications and counsel that are typical for similar and highly effective organizations.

The policy governance model itself provides direction regarding communications and counsel to the board through the structure of board meetings, linkages, study sessions, school visits, monitoring and ends reports. Our staff seeks best practices nationally, regionally and locally for similar and highly effective organizations. Please see the EL-1 report for more information.

2. The superintendent shall not fail to:

- a. timely inform the board of circumstances of interest, which includes items that will reasonably be reported to the press or of a concern to a majority of the community;

- b. timely inform the board of material changes in district management and oversight;
- c. timely respond to reasonable information requests from board members; and
- d. assure an effective system is in place for board communications and business, including:
  - i. opportunities for participation or attendance at district and school-related events;
  - ii. relevant community, professional, or educational board development events in support of a well-informed board; and
  - iii. an avenue to receive communications from the community.

### **Description of Evidence of Compliance:**

#### **School Board Study Sessions, Oct. 1, 2023 through Sept. 30, 2024 (evidence for 2 a,b,c):**

The purpose of study sessions for the board is to have the opportunity to more deeply study, discuss and review a topic.

|                             |              |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| International Baccalaureate | May 16, 2024 |
|-----------------------------|--------------|

#### **Superintendent Updates at Board Meetings (evidence for 2 a,b,c,d):**

At each board meeting, I provide in-depth updates on topics of interest, which often include visuals and a PowerPoint slideshow. These updates sometimes involve inviting school and district leaders and other staff members to engage with the board directly and to discuss ongoing projects and initiatives.

#### **Committee/Task Force Updates (evidence for 2 a,b):**

I communicate with the board about many issues and use best practices by erring on the side of sharing any timely information that possibly could be of concern to the community or involve significant change in practice. I keep the board informed throughout our work involving change processes.

Examples from the last reporting period include the regular updates that I provided to the board on the work on our committees and groups:

#### **Facilities**

- Carl Cozier Elementary Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee
- Community Transitions Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee
- Kulshan Middle School Field Ad Hoc Committee
- Roosevelt Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee

#### **Parent Advisory Committees**

- Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

#### **Teaching and Learning**

- CTE General Advisory Council
- Inclusionary Instructional Strategies Standing Committee
- Instructional Materials Committee

## **Superintendent**

- Student Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

## **Other**

- Occupational Health & Safety Standing Committee
- Promise Awards Advisory Group
- Sustainability Advisory Committee

## **Board Updates (evidence for 2 a,b,c,d):**

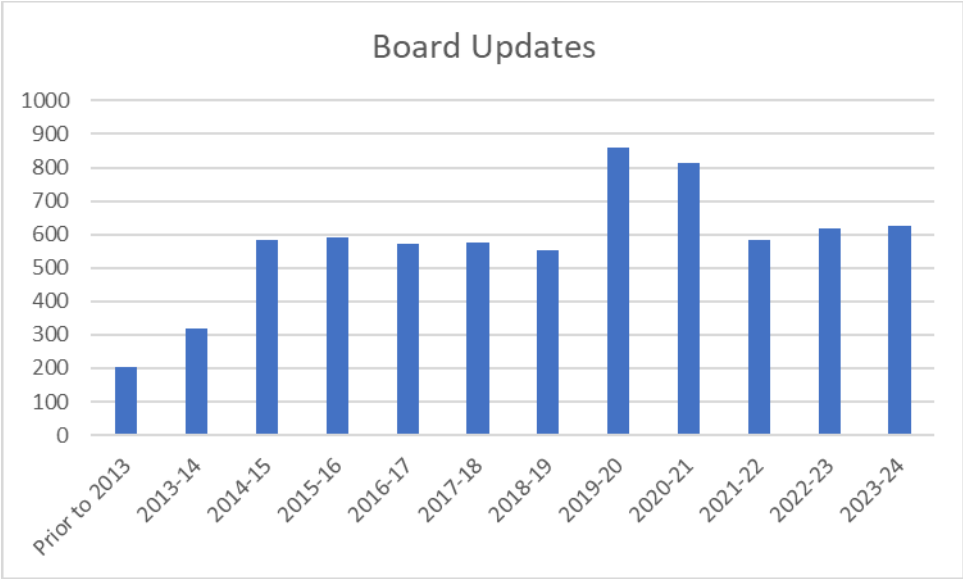
Many methods are used to keep the board informed, including regular Board Updates. In these communications, I share wide-ranging information including my schedule, issues pertaining to specific schools, districtwide issues, state and federal issues impacting education and potential legal issues. I also inform the board immediately of any event that could generate high levels of parent/community concerns or significant media coverage, and I share advance copies of communications.

From Oct. 1, 2023 – Sept. 30, 2024, media activity and inquiries covered a wide variety of topics, and for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic closure, there was no single dominating topic, although the February levies and incidents involving school safety brought multiple inquiries. Inquiries and coverage included: Profile of long-time swim coach; job coach and vocational placements for students in CTE and/or Special Education programs; high school drama productions; lighting updates at Squalicum; safety issue near Shuksan Middle School; multiple stories regarding regionalization and school funding; national milk carton shortage potential effects on food service; absences and/or illness patterns districtwide and at specific sites; the boiler at the FPP; evacuation due to smoke at BHS; enrollment; resolution of the court cases of several district employees; girls wrestling program; profile of SQHS athlete with a prosthetic limb; Roots of Empathy program in some of our elementary schools; Community Transitions program; cell phone policies in public schools; homeschooling in Whatcom County; the Central Kitchen's involvement in state farm-to-school procurement program; chronic absenteeism; transgender athletes; the Early Learning Center at the new District Office; wildlife near some of our schools; duration of lunch periods for students; and a threat of violence at SMS.

Communications maintains local media email addresses within our community list on ParentSquare, and they receive the messages pushed out to our broader community when that is part of the communications plan for that message. These messages serve as de facto press releases. Our team also pitched stories and sent press releases and/or letters to the editor to local media outlets on select topics, including indoor recreation facilities, school funding and levies (in partnership with all the Whatcom County superintendents), and a large cross-country running competition hosted by Sehome. Our media liaison partnered with a community partner, Compass Health, on a press release regarding the new Health Center at Options High School and with vendor Attune regarding indoor and outdoor air quality monitors.

From Oct. 1, 2023 through Sept. 30, 2024, I provided 624 electronic updates to the board regarding various issues. The board and I attended two retreats during this reporting period (April 26, 2024 and Aug. 16, 2024).

I also meet with the board individually or in pairs monthly to share information and address questions. When board members email me with questions, I make responding to those a priority. If one board member emails a question to me, I reply and copy the entire board for inclusive communications. I regularly consult legal counsel and work with the board to ensure we are in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA).



During this reporting period, I kept the board fully informed of major change initiatives and significant issues, including:

- **Levy elections in February 2024:** Ahead of our levy elections in early 2024, we started sharing [facts and information](#) with staff and our community about why and how levies provide essential funding for programs not fully funded by our state. Both our operations and technology levy were on the special election ballot on Feb. 13, 2024. These levies replace two voter-approved levies from 2020 set to expire. We shared general information as well as specific numbers and figures in the form of [webpages](#), [videos](#), [printed fliers](#), [FAQs](#) and several messages in [email communication](#), at in-person meetings with staff and parent groups (with the help of a levy toolkit) and on social media. Our levies were approved at nearly 64%. We followed up with staff, families, students and community members with a [thank you message](#) from our superintendent.
- **Capital projects:** We regularly [share information](#) and look for ways to engage with our community around construction and capital projects. Projects that were of special importance during this reporting period include the [flooding of the old District Office](#), temporarily relocating staff and programs in our schools and buildings across our district, and [opening of the new District Office](#); publicly sharing that we are [pausing construction of the 15<sup>th</sup> elementary school and collaborating with the city to try to relocate Cozier](#); construction of the new [Kulshan Middle School turf field](#); educational specifications/designing advisory committees for the

following projects: [Community Transitions](#), [Cozier](#) and [Roosevelt](#); and opening of the new tennis courts at Bellingham High School.

Milestones of these projects are shared with photos and opportunities for feedback from staff, families, students, other stakeholders and neighbors. A variety of public meetings (e.g., [Roosevelt](#)) and feedback forms are used throughout the timeline of a project, from brainstorming and dreams and wishes to offering input on layout and logistics.

- **Safety concerns and utilization of safety protocols.** Our team helps support different safety related concerns and incidents at our schools throughout the year. Some of the incidents that occurred during this reporting period include [Roosevelt going into a Secure protocol](#) due to a concern near the school; [Kulshan going into a Secure due to a nearby burglary](#); [Sehome going into a lockdown briefly due to a swatting incident/false alarm](#); and a [middle school student being the target of a racist attack during a walking field trip](#).

Our district continues to follow the [standard response protocols](#) and similar templated messaging from the “I Love U Guys” Foundation. Almost always, our principals send a follow-up message to staff, students and families with more context and information about what occurred and why the school went into the protocol. There are times when the scope necessitates [a message from the superintendent](#). Also related to student safety, the superintendent sent and posted the following messages about [safety concerns at Wade King Elementary](#) and a [follow up on the charges against three high school administrators](#). We continue to look for opportunities to proactively share updated policies and staff and student rights related to sex discrimination and sex-based harassment; bias incident and hate speech; and student discipline. These include [messages](#), annual [handbook](#), posters, lessons and trainings.

- **Budget planning:** we regularly send out messages related to the district’s budget planning and process, and we followed our practice during this reporting period. Our message for budget planning for the 2024-25 school year was a “hold steady” year. We shared messaging and information widely in [May 2024](#), [March 2024](#) and [January 2024](#), in addition to numerous presentations to staff, leaders and community groups. We use a [webpage as a key resource to track our budget messages and tools](#), including our [Final Budget](#) (which is often referred to as the “budget book”), and [Priorities for Progress](#), which helps identify our key investments. (Note: we published Priorities for Progress a few days beyond this reporting period.) Our budget messages include indications that we’d likely be facing challenges for the 2025-26 school year, along with many, if not all, districts, in our state.

### **Opportunities for Participation or Attendance at Events (evidence for 2di):**

I informed the board of opportunities for participation or attendance at district and school-related events during this reporting period through the board calendar that is maintained by the superintendent’s office. Our office emailed the board reminders of events; board members also received district/school emails; I provided reminders of major events at board meetings; and board members accessed the [districtwide calendar](#).

### **Opportunities for Board Development (evidence for 2dii):**

I informed the board of relevant community, professional or educational board development events in support of a well-informed board during this reporting period by helping the board identify some study session topics that are professional development in nature.

The full board and I attended the WSSDA Annual Conference in November 2023 and select board members attended other WSSDA events. The board subscribes to the WSSDA listserv for professional development opportunities. Two board members attended the 2024 WASA-WSSDA-WASBO Legislative Conference in Olympia January 2024. All five board members and Dr. Baker attended the WSSDA DA-1 Regional Meeting on April 27, 2024, on San Juan Island. One board member attended the 2024 WSSDA General Assembly in Des Moines, WA September 2024.

One board member serves on the WSSDA board as a director and regularly shares information and updates with our school board, including opportunities for feedback and priority issues.

**An Avenue to Receive Communications from the Community (evidence for 2diii):**

In addition to the public comment time during board meetings, we provide the following avenues for communication to the school board in the context of a policy governance model:

- [Board linkages and student roundtables](#) include a purposeful effort to meet and receive student and parent feedback, which continues to be a board interest and priority
- [Listening Post](#)
- [School board](#) section on website
- [Meet the Board webpage](#) with phone and group email contact information
- We feature board members in articles in our InsideSchools community newsletter as well as social media posts. See features during this reporting period [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- Videos including an [explanation of policy governance and what the board does](#).

**During this reporting period**, the board visited several schools, including Shuksan, Geneva, Bellingham High, Northern Heights, Kulshan, Lowell, Squalicum, Alderwood and Wade King.

The board also hosted student roundtables at [Bellingham High with current and former students of Teacher Academy](#) and at [Whatcom Middle School with students who participate in the GSA club](#). The board hosted community linkages with [staff, students, parents and community partners connected to our Career and Technical program](#) and [staff and parents of the Bellingham Family Partnership](#)

Members of the board regularly attend events across our district, including graduation ceremonies, the all-staff kick-off event in August, and special events and open houses.

These are just some of the examples of practicing timely and informative board communications.

**Statement of Compliance:** The superintendent is **in compliance** with EL-5.