



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: Nov. 2, 2023
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, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023.

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, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023 (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.

Dual Language Programs	April 27, 2023
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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

- Elementary School 15 Educational Specifications Design Advisory Committee
- District Office Design Advisory Committee
- Kulshan Middle School Field Ad Hoc Committee

Parent Advisory Committees

- Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

Teaching and Learning

- CTE General Advisory Council
- Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Review and Alignment Task Force
- Dual Language Program Planning Task Force
- High School Advisory Task Force

- Inclusionary Instructional Strategies Standing Committee
- Instructional Materials Committee
- Professional Development Study Joint Committee with BEA
- Student Conduct Joint Committee with BEA

Superintendent

- Student Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

Other

- Occupational Health & Safety Standing Committee
- Promise Awards Advisory Group
- School-Based Health Center Planning Task Force
- 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.

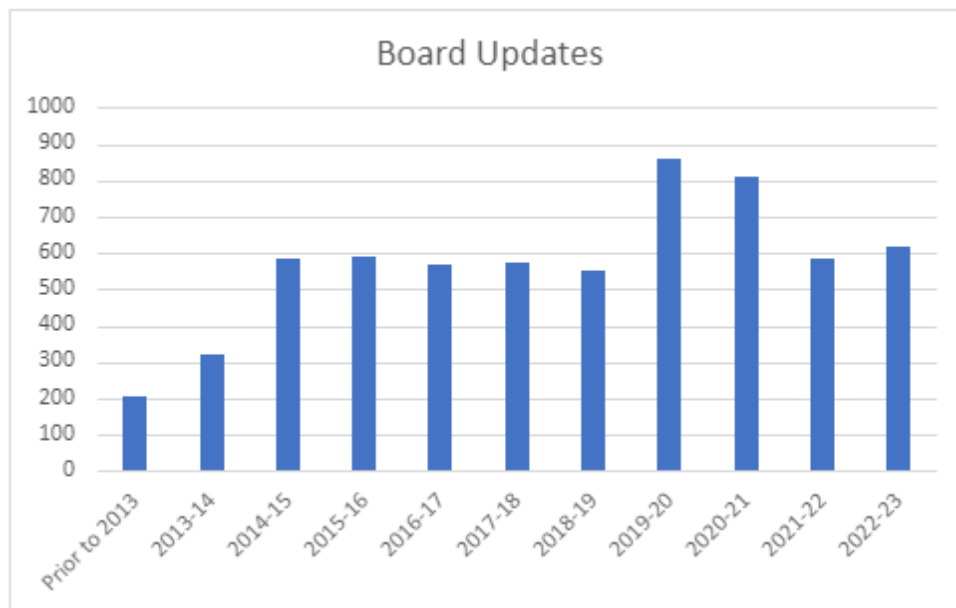
From October 1, 2022 – Sept. 30, 2023, media activity covered a wide variety of topics. Of interest and of note, COVID-19, for the first year since 2020, had very little coverage. The topic that attracted most media inquiries was the criminal citations issued to three of our employees in December 2022 and their ongoing employment and court appearances.

Additional inquiries and coverage included: the effect of air quality on sports and outdoor activities; ongoing inquiries regarding Sehome High School football; McKinney-Vento funding and service models; McKinney-Vento transportation costs; the Sehome solar panel array; the racialized history of Washington state, Whatcom county and Bellingham; inclement weather and flooding effects on schools; information handed out by visitors tabling at Bellingham High; the death of an employee on the train tracks; absenteeism due to flu/cold season; hazing in high school athletics programs; hoax safety threat/"swatting" at Sehome (multiple); student walkout regarding gun violence and school safety; school safety protocols and drills; resignation of football coach; criminal citations of three employees; recommendations for mask-wearing during surge in respiratory illnesses; student walkout regarding safety and sexual assault; lawsuit filed vs. BPS; partnership between Shuksan Middle School and WWU for body image research and lessons; sexual assault and mandatory reporting training for employees; restorative practices; the work assignments for three assistant principals; football team roster for SHS; school district lawsuits against social media companies; effects of social media on student mental health; partnership with UW Haring Center and Sehome for inclusive practices; "Faces in the Crowd" feature on a BHS teacher; CTE programs and cosmetology class; Animals as Natural Therapy; high school robotics program and competitions; former coach's resignation; Ukrainian refugee families in our community; new Sehome football coach hired; prevention of fentanyl overdose; termination of KMS employee (multiple); student protest for LGBTQ+ rights; childcare and the role of Promise K in our community; the importance of environmental science education; bond funding for construction projects in light of lawsuit filed against the state by a small, rural school district; repairs to

roof at WMS due to inclement weather damage; the steps at Whatcom Middle School; KAFE kids at Parkview; school food program; CTE skill center; lockdown/safety protocols at Squalicum; budget planning and cuts; ongoing coverage of seasonal high school athletes and graduating seniors; school security systems and locking doors; inclusive playground at SBES; budget cuts, staffing and layoffs (multiple); CTE/Teacher Academy course; environmental club & climate anxiety; fentanyl awareness and followup upon subsequent testing; book challenges; effects of COVID funding and other funding reductions on budget; Transitional Kindergarten legislation; student clubs; debunk rumor about sporting event being cancelled due to student behavior at BHS; new library branch; personnel reports and cuts; reported gas leak at Central Kitchen; firearm legislation and school safety; regionalization and school funding; student death on train trestle; volunteer program; 5th grade track meet; KMS new classroom project; Last day of school bus tour with KAFE; homelessness in BPS students; police incident after OHS graduation; poverty and summer food access; planned reader board project; Compass Health partnership; Future Problem Solvers; food service and CEP schools; SHS partnership with Haring Center; proposed city rule regarding overnight camping near schools; unaccompanied youth coordinator position eliminated; assignment/role of three assistant principals (multiple); “I love u guys” training and school safety protocols; start of the new school year with KAFE radio station.

From Oct. 1, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023, I provided 618 electronic updates to the board regarding various issues. The board and I attended two retreats during this reporting period (Feb. 24 and Aug. 18, 2023).

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 our major change initiatives and significant issues, including:

- **Capital projects:** including construction of new District Office; construction of the new tennis courts at Squalicum and Bellingham high schools; planning and designing the new [elementary school \(elementary 15\) on Cougar Road](#); planning / designing the [new turf field at Kulshan Middle School \(KMS\)](#) and construction of the new classrooms at KMS; and construction/installation of the new playground and reader board at Silver Beach Elementary.
- **Safety concerns and refinement of safety protocols.** Our team helped support different safety related concerns and incidents at our schools including a swatting incident/scare at Sehome in November which led to a lockdown; a series of lockouts at Squalicum High School because of a student needing support; and multiple lockouts due to safety concerns around the Carl Cozier campus. In the summer of 2023, district leadership attended a training on our safety protocols, which helped our principals lead trainings for staff in the fall. Classrooms and departments now have new materials to reflect the [standard response protocol](#), which is based on materials from the I love you guys Foundation.
- **Student safety concerns related to sexual assault and mandatory reporting.** In December 2022, three assistant principals (two at Squalicum and one at Bellingham High) received citations from police related to their duties as mandatory reporters. These incidents sparked a walkout at Squalicum, a student protest at a board meeting, and many concerns and questions from students, our general community and the media. Over the course of several months, we sent messages to the [school communities](#) most impacted and in some cases, the [entire district](#). We received feedback on and reviewed/revised our process for supporting students if/when they have concerns about sexual violence, legal requirements, staff trainings, policies and procedures, and best practices around victim/survivor support. The legal process is continuing for our three administrators, and in August, we shared that the assistant principals would be returning to their posts after working out of the District Office for several months.
- **Hazing incident** on the [football team at Sehome High School](#), which included numerous [media inquiries](#) and stories, managing an investigation and personnel decisions related to the incident and ongoing questions/concerns from students, families and community members.
- A new advisory schedule for our high schools based on recommendations from our [High School Advisory Task Force](#); new climate action plan based on recommendations from the work of the [Sustainability Advisory Committee](#), and plans to build a school-based health center at Options thanks to grant funding and the [School-Based Health Center Planning Task Force](#).
- **Planning for budget challenges in the 2023-24 school year.** We began sharing updates about anticipated [budget challenges in December 2022](#) in an effort to be transparent with staff, families, students and the greater community. We shared several [updates into the spring](#), using [feedback forms](#), [videos](#), [FAQs](#), [visuals](#), [multiple messages](#) and in-person meetings with staff and families to share information, context and next steps.

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 2022, and select board members attended other WSSDA events. The board subscribes to the WSSDA list serve for professional development opportunities and had the option of attending the National School Board Association annual conference in April 2023. 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.

Several board members attended City Club on Oct. 26, 2022, which included speakers for/against the children's levy/ Proposition 5.

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](#) and [how to attend a board meeting](#)

During this reporting period, the board visited several schools, including Birchwood, Options, Columbia, Bellingham Family Partnership, Cordata, Whatcom and Roosevelt. The board also hosted a student roundtables at [Options with GRADS students](#), at [Shuksan with AVID students](#), at [Sunnyland](#) and a [community linkage with students and families served in Special Education](#). 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. During this reporting period, members of the board attended an open house event for the new temporary home of Community Transitions on Birchwood Avenue.

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.