



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: Nov. 2, 2022
SUBJECT: **Monitoring Report for EL-5, Communication and Counsel to the Board**

I certify that the following is accurate as of Nov. 2, 2022. The reporting period is from Oct. 1, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2022.

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, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2022 (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.

Since Time Immemorial	April 20, 2022
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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 Rebuild Plan Ad Hoc Committee
- Facilities Planning Task Force
- Sustainability Task Force

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
- Instructional Materials Committee

- Joint District - BEA Professional Development Study Committee

Superintendent

- Student Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

Other

- Promise Awards Advisory Group

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

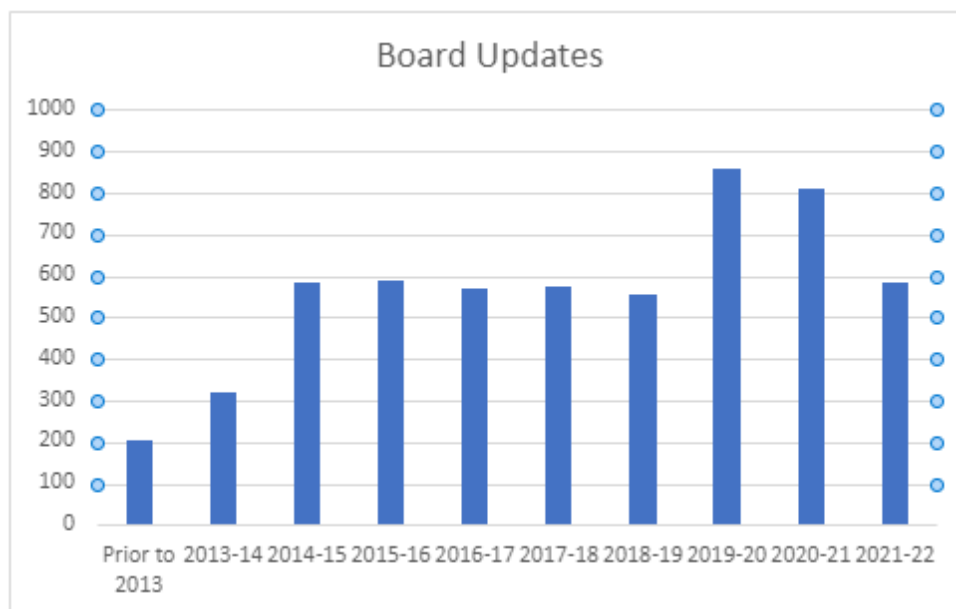
Many methods are used to keep the board informed, including regular Board Updates. In these communications, I share wide-ranging information including my schedule, issues pertaining to specific schools, districtwide issues, state and federal issues impacting education and potential legal issues. I also 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, 2021 – Sept. 30, 2022, media inquiries returned to a wider variety, compared to the COVID-19 focused coverage from the previous reporting period, although COVID-19 and its effects on our public schools still dominated the conversation.

Media inquiries and coverage included: water sports access and COVID-19 restrictions, vaccination rates and requirements for school employees, safety concerns at Sehome High School due to lockdown/lockout, special education staffing, student and staff mental health, the Omicron surge in January 2022 effects on student attendance, hiring and need for substitutes and volunteers, Community Transitions program, our 2022 facilities bond and effect on tax rates, our CTE sports medicine program, Test-to-Stay program, shortage of COVID-19 rapid tests, 2022 facilities bond results and voter turnout, impact of the Delta variant, enrollment numbers and ALE programs, 2022 facilities bond “against” statement(s) and misinformation, catalytic converter theft, BHS mascot change process, lifting mask mandates, student-led protest at WMS re: LGBTQ, student-led protest at SqHS re: sexual assault, inclusive playground at Parkview, the Foundation’s Think BIG contest for student clubs, isolation and restraint data for students served by non-public agencies (NPAs), the visit of the Deputy Secretary of Education Marten, comprehensive sexual health education task force, Green Ribbon Award, CTE programs, District Office and other capital projects, multiple stories about a school board member’s private business, lockdown advice for parents, Whatcom Youth Pride, farewell to old Sunnyland, high school graduations, ARP funds, transportation and bus driver shortages, GRADS program and United Way, salaries of some district employees, kindergarten enrollment, prayer on the field/response to Kennedy vs. Bremerton decision, protection orders between students, safety of new Sunnyland playground and proximity to James St., multiple and ongoing inquiries regarding Sehome High School football program and game forfeit, banned books, International Baccalaureate primary years programme in our elementaries, lewd acts near an elementary school, and 2022-23 enrollment.

From Oct. 1, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2022, I provided 584 electronic updates to the board regarding various issues, which is back to the pre-COVID volume (the chart below shows a two-year spike during COVID). The board and I attended two retreats during this reporting period (Feb. 25 and Aug. 24, 2022).

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:

- [COVID-19 guidance and rules](#), which were pervasive and ever-changing in the 2021-22 school year. This meant frequent and sometimes complicated communications and updates on safety protocols to staff, students and families. These updates included changes to COVID vaccine mandates; implementing “test to stay” at our schools; changes to notification rules and mask requirements; and hosting COVID-19 vaccine clinics for students, staff and families.
- [Capital projects](#), including completing Alderwood and Parkview and their playgrounds; unveiling the story pole at Alderwood; opening the new Sunnyland and demo of the old school; and the planning and designing of new District Office;
- Establishment of a [facilities planning task force](#) to recommend updates the district’s long-range facilities master plan and formalize a recommendation for the school board to consider putting forth a bond measure in Feb. 2022;
- Sharing information related to the [bond](#), including [bond facts](#) and [videos](#) ahead of the special election and [its eventual passage](#);
- [Safety protocols, which were refined and shared](#) after several threatening incidents at Sehome in December 2021 and a tragic [shooting in Uvalde](#), Texas;
- Two significant task forces were kicked off and met throughout the 2021-22 school year: [Dual Language Program Planning Task Force](#) and [Sustainability Task Force](#). Both groups continue into the 2022-23 year;

- [Staff and substitute shortages](#) across our district due to COVID and vaccine mandates;
- Budget and collective bargaining efforts with our employee groups;
- Refinement of our [high school grading practices](#);
- Our district's first [BIPOC job fair](#) at Bellingham High;
- Closing or delaying school due to flooding and [snow](#) in the 2021-22 school year and sharing subsequent calendar updates and information;
- Installation of security cameras in our middle and high schools;
- Responding to questions and inquiries about sustainability and equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in our schools and district; and
- Preparing for and implementing attendance areas changes to Sunnyland, Northern Heights and Silver Beach elementary schools in fall 2022.

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 2021, and select board members attended other WSSDA events, including the legislative conference in January 2022. 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 2022.

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](#), which includes a purposeful effort to meet and hear from students at student round tables.
- [Listening Post](#)
- [Meet the Board webpage](#) with phone and group email contact information
- Board articles in InsideSchools community newsletter that highlight board members and their role; also featured on Promise site [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- Board section on website
- Videos including an [explanation of policy governance and what the board does](#) and [how to attend a board meeting](#)

During this reporting period, our district had returned to in-person activities. The board visited several schools, including Sehome, Fairhaven, Parkview, Sunnyland, Happy Valley, Carl Cozier and

Silver Beach. The board also hosted a [student roundtable meeting at Alderwood with third graders](#) and a [community linkage with Latinx community members](#).

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.