Washington County
BOARD OF
EDUCATION

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Washington County Board of Education Communication Processes

Communication Processes should be reviewed and/or revised by the full Board at least at each reorganization following an election.

A. Communication with Concerned Individuals

1. Board members should refer individuals to the staff person closest to the problem (e.g., teacher, school counselor, principal, departmental director, etc.). If an individual has already contacted the staff person closest to the problem and needs further assistance or is reluctant to contact the staff person closest to the problem for fear of retribution, Board members should refer the issue to the Superintendent who will, to the extent that it is possible, maintain confidentiality. The Superintendent will be the sole point of contact for Board members.

2. In any matters that may come before the Board in their capacity to serve in any quasi-judicial role, Board members should not compromise their role to serve in this capacity by listening to details of the concern. (For example, any hearings that may come before the Board for review, appeal, or determination.) They should limit the response and feedback. (Staff is responsible for responding.)

3. Board members may invite a follow-up call from the individual to confirm that a staff member has contacted the individual to address the concern.

4. Issues that are not day-to-day management should be referred to the appropriate standing committee (policy, curriculum, facilities, finance, and human resources) after consultation with the Superintendent. The Board member will explain the committee process while not promising action.

5. Letters or e-mails containing complaints received by individual Board members should be forwarded to the Superintendent and other Board members; Board member responses should also be forwarded.

6. Board officers will make sure that a complaint sent to all Board members is forwarded to the Superintendent. Staff responses to signed complaints will be copied to all Board members.

7. The Board president, or designee, shall respond to emails from concerned individuals that are sent to the collective Board and said response shall be copied to the Board and Superintendent.

B. Communications and Board Meetings

1. Board meetings are conducted in an orderly and businesslike manner using *Robert's Rules of Order* as a guide.

2. Board members should give their questions to the Superintendent in advance of all meetings, whenever possible.

3. At all Board meetings, Board members should ask questions at the end of each presentation, not during unless there is a need to clarify an important or key point. This format may be changed with the consent of the Board.

4. Where possible, a consent agenda should be used for consideration of multiple items at one Board meeting.

5. When an agenda item for a future Board meeting is proposed by a Board member, the Board president will seek Board consensus on whether that item should be placed on a future Board meeting agenda.

6. Board meetings may be viewed live on the school system's website or on YouTube following the meeting. Written minutes of the meeting will be published to the school system's website and made available for review at the Center for Educational Services during normal business hours, upon request.

7. Extra time should be built into closed meetings when negotiations or other complex issues are on the agenda.

8. The Superintendent will provide a written summary after a closed session that delineates action items, timelines, and persons responsible.

9. The Board president will designate a Board member to collect a duplicate set of materials handed out at closed sessions and business meetings to forward to an absent Board member.

C. Requesting Information and Lines of Communication

1. All information provided to one Board member that would affect Board governance or would significantly affect the school system should be provided to all other Board members and the Superintendent.

2. Individual requests for information, not subject for Board action, should be made in writing or e-mail to the Superintendent and copied to all Board members. The Superintendent will refer the request to the full Board for consensus before taking any action.

3. Board members should let the Superintendent know promptly about concerns of significance in the community related to the school system's services or its employees. The Superintendent shall share this information with all Board members.

4. Board member committees are organized to deliberate, discuss, and become familiar with issues in depth. As appropriate, the committee shall make recommendations to the Board.

5. Board member committee chairs may direct questions to staff liaisons. Board members should direct questions to the appropriate committee chair. The staff liaison will inform the Superintendent of any such requests as soon as possible.

6. Board member committee chairs may request information directly from the Chief Legal Counsel regarding issues pertinent to the committee's business; individual Board members may request information directly from the Chief Legal Counsel regarding issues of Board member liability and ethics. The Chief Legal Counsel will inform the Superintendent of any such request as soon as possible.

7. Communication guidelines regarding legislative matters can be found in Policy BJ, entitled "School Board Legislative Program."

8. Speakers and writers should refrain from using acronyms unless the acronym has been explained fully at the first usage.

9. When making a public and/or official statement, the Board president (or vice president in the absence of the president) will speak on behalf of the Board. The president or vice president speaks for the Board only on positions adopted/agreed to by a majority of the Board.

10. When acting in their official capacity as Board leadership when meeting with other elected officials or members of the public, the president and/or vice president will make a report to the Board as to what was discussed and/or any outcomes of the meetings. Advance notice should be given, when reasonable, to the Board of scheduled meetings.

D. Communications and Negotiations

1. Board members must protect the confidentiality of the Board's negotiations' parameters and strategy.

2. Board members must avoid communications with school system negotiators outside of official Board sessions and at all times with union negotiators, individual employees, and the press about negotiations during the negotiations process.

3. Board members must not attempt to play the role of mediator in negotiations, employee relations, or disputes between the school system and community members.

E. Communications and Confidentiality

Board members must respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.

F. **Communications and Social Media**

1. Any professional social media presence must adhere to federal, state, and local laws and school system policies, administrative regulations, and procedures. Board members must also adhere to all policies and procedures and all applicable laws with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks, or devices when accessing school system-sponsored social media sites.

2. Board members are required to use appropriately respectful speech in their social media posts on school system-sponsored sites and to refrain from harassing, defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, threatening, or other inappropriate communications.

3. Board members shall not, through their personal social media presence, state or imply that they are a representative of the school system or Board of Education, or mention, discuss, or reference the Board, school system or its individual schools, programs, or teams unless the Board member also states that the post is the personal communication of the Board member and that the views posted are the Board member's alone and do not represent the view of the school system or the Board of Education. Board members also shall not use any logos and trademarks of WCPS or WCBOE as part of their personal social media presence without the explicit permission of the Superintendent or his/her designee.

4. Board members must refrain from mentioning other Board of Education members, school system employees, or other members of the school community (e.g., parents or others) on personal social networking sites without such individuals' express consent unless the Board member is addressing an issue of public concern and the Board member's speech falls under applicable constitutional protections pertaining to same.

5. Board members are individually responsible for their personal posts on social media. Board members may be held personally liable and sued by other Board members, school system employees, parents, or others, as well as any individual that views a Board member's social media posts as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or creating a hostile work environment.