



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: Nov. 13, 2025
SUBJECT: **Monitoring Report for EL-5, Communication and Counsel to the Board**

I certify that the following is accurate as of Nov. 13, 2025. The reporting period is from Oct. 1, 2024, through Sept. 30, 2025.

Policy Type: Executive Limitation

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

Last Updated: 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, 2024, through Sept. 30, 2025 (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.

School Safety	Nov. 14, 2024
Artificial Intelligence	April 17, 2025

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
- Roosevelt Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee
- Lowell Elementary Site Enhancements and ADA Upgrades Committee

Parent Advisory Committees

- Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

Teaching and Learning

- CTE General Advisory Council
- High School Schedule Ad hoc Committee 2025
- Instructional Materials Committee
- MTSS Standing Committee
- Title VI Native American Family Committee

Superintendent

- Student Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

Other

- Occupational Health & Safety Standing Committee
- Promise Awards Advisory Group
- Sustainability Standing Committee
- Capital Levy Planning Committee 2025
- Safety and Security Planning 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, 2024– Sept. 30, 2025, media activity and inquiries covered a wide variety of topics. Three topics that received multiple inquiries and/or stories from local and national media were:

- Continued financial challenges in bridging budget gaps caused by Washington state not fully funding basic public education.
- The wide variety of possible ways that decisions made in Washington, D.C. may affect local schools and families, including immigration enforcement, funding freezes/cuts, attention to DEI initiatives and cuts to school food programs.
- Sexual harassment, including policies, training, lawsuit and settlement.

Inquiries and coverage included: the introduction of girls flag football as a winter sport, proposed WIAA amendments regarding transgender athletes, youth mental health, a threat of violence at a BPS middle school, Roosevelt's annual winter production, students experiencing homelessness, immigration enforcement and rumors/possibilities of ICE visiting schools, Dr. Baker narrating "Peter and the Wolf" with the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra, "Bite of Reality" financial literacy event hosted by Shuksan Middle School's AVID program in partnership with WECU, the open house for The Health Center at Options, "Faces in the Crowd" features with a BPS volunteer and a SHS staff member, spotlights on graduating seniors, sexual harassment procedures and policies, unified basketball, dual enrollment / online classes, attendance data, salmon fry release, high school proms, College in the High School, Community Transitions and WWU partnership, summer meal programs, outdoor education, coaching personnel changes at high schools, multi-sport student-athletes, lead testing results from summer 2024 at one school, the sale of the Dupont St. property, immunization rates, AI policies and practices, staffing reductions/budget, German exchange program visits BHS, plus regular and routine coverage of prep sports and student-athletes.

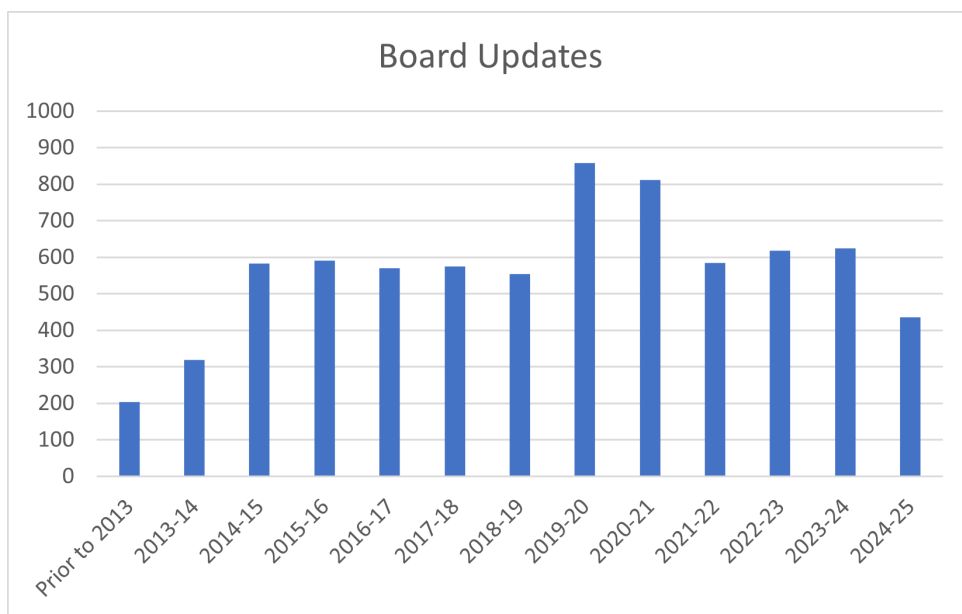
Communications maintains local media email addresses within our community list on ParentSquare, so local media outlets receive messages pushed out to our broader community when that is part of the communications plan for that message. These messages serve as de facto press releases. Our team also pitched stories and sent press releases and/or letters to the editor to local media outlets on select topics, including "How State Budget Impacts K-12 Education in Our Community," cowritten by seven Whatcom County Public Schools superintendents, which was published in the Cascadia Daily and Salish Current in January 2025.

Our media liaison partnered with community partners and/or vendors for press releases of mutual interest:

- With WECU for a press release regarding the "Bite of Reality" event at Shuksan Middle School.
- With Western Solar and Cascadia Renewables regarding solar panel installations on our campuses.

From Oct. 1, 2024, through Sept. 30, 2025, I provided 435 electronic updates to the board regarding various issues. The board and I attended two retreats during this reporting period (Feb. 7, 2025 and Aug. 27, 2025)

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:

- Budget planning:** Facing significant budget challenges, we adhered to the guiding principle “communicate early and often” about our budget process, offering context, process and avenues for advocacy/education. Generally, we share messaging about the upcoming budget in January through the spring, but in the 2024-25 school year, we started messaging in October. We relied on email messages, videos, and numerous presentations to staff, leaders and community groups. We also communicated via [traditional media and letters to the editor](#) to help amplify school board members' voices, as well as with representatives from state organizations and the state superintendent of public instruction. 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. The webpage was updated throughout the school year to include cost-saving measures and frequently asked questions to demonstrate transparency. We also asked for feedback via a digital form so families, staff and students could weigh in on cost-savings ideas, including reducing the school year by one day and asking families to help subsidize high school sports and traffic safety.
- 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 opening of [Kulshan Middle School turf field](#), the design advisory committee and educational specifications process for both [Roosevelt](#) and [Carl Cozier](#) elementary schools; [ground breaking for the new Community Transitions](#) building on Whatcom Community College’s campus and [committee work on site enhancements and ADA upgrades for Lowell Elementary School](#).

- **Politics / election:** Provocative speech across the country affected our schools, including our students, ahead and after the presidential election in November 2024. We [centered our messaging and resources](#) around care, respect, The Bellingham Promise and humanizing language. We developed [these resources ahead of election day](#), asking schools to share slides with students to guide and provide appropriate boundaries for conversation. In early 2025, concerns regarding funding for immigrants and immigration services were top of mind for many students and families, including threats of ICE agents targeting schools. We shared [this message](#) to offer some reassurance and resources. In February, following federal executive orders regarding equity, diversity and inclusion, we shared [this message](#) to provide information as well as our steadfast focus on supporting our students. These commitments are shared by our staff and many families across our district, and I often talk about our values when speaking to community groups, centering our work on The Bellingham Promise.
- **Safety concerns and utilization of safety protocol:** Our team helps support different safety related concerns and incidents at our schools throughout the year. One incident that occurred during this reporting period included a Bellingham High student being attacked off campus in fall 2024. This event generated attention on traditional and social media, and both the [principal](#) and [I sent out messaging](#) to share concern and clarify our response to emergencies and safety issues.

During this reporting period, Alderwood went into a Secure protocol two different times related to a loud “bang” sound heard on the playground. The source of that noise was a tool that helps scare away birds at the airport (January and March 2025). Northern Heights went into a brief Secure after a bobcat sighting (March 19, 2025). A number of schools briefly utilized the Hold protocol to give space and privacy for student-related issues.

Big picture, our district continues to follow the [standard response protocols](#) and similar templated messaging from the “I Love U Guys” Foundation.

- **Prepping for levy elections:** In spring of 2025, our district pulled together a [Capital Levy Planning Committee](#), representing a variety of stakeholders, to better understand the needs and physical conditions of our schools and facilities to help inform a capital levy proposal for fall 2025. This committee put forward a recommendation in June, which provided a compelling argument to move forward with a six-year facilities maintenance levy on the November ballot. Additionally, the state legislature lifted what is known as the levy lid, allowing districts to ask voters to maximize local funding through its operations levy. We decided to go out for two ballot measures in November, which meant planning and strategizing during the months leading up to the election. During this reporting period, we worked on determining the effective key messages, while staying in bounds of what districts are allowed to share, with an emphasis on educating and informing. We planned and developed a levy [webpage](#), videos, printed fliers, FAQs and several messages in email communication and social media for external communications. We also created a levy toolkit for small-group meetings with staff and parent groups,

empowering principals and other leaders to access a slide deck for back-to-school nights and events at their schools and in their school-based communications.

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 to support their professional development.

The full board and I attended the WSSDA Annual Conference in November 2024 and select board members attended other WSSDA events. The board subscribes to the WSSDA listserv for professional development opportunities.

I joined one board member and attended the WASA-WSSDA-WASBO Legislative Conference in SeaTac in January 2025.

The board and I hosted and attended the WSSDA Area 1 regional meeting in March 2025 at the District Office in Bellingham.

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. His term ends October 2025.

During this reporting period, we instituted **board education plans**, where each board member selects one to two areas of emphasis to learn more about. School board education topics included the gratitude meal at Options, our cosmetology program, Family Resource Center at Shuksan, food services, healthcare, co-teaching and cyber risk. I worked with staff to facilitate these meetings and education sessions, and we heard powerful feedback that board members learned a great deal and appreciated the dedicated time and deep dive into each topic.

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 interviews with board members in our InsideSchools community newsletter and as Promise feature stories (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)), as well as social media posts (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)).
- Video including an [explanation of policy governance and what the board does](#).

During this reporting period, the board visited a number of schools, including Happy Valley Elementary, Sehome High School, Sunnyland Elementary, Fairhaven Middle School, and Silver Beach Elementary.

The board also hosted student roundtables at [Bellingham High re: cell phone policy](#) and at [Squalicum High School with students who had participated in traffic safety \(driver's ed\) at school](#). The board hosted community linkages with [childcare providers and parents](#) and [staff, students and parents connected with re-engagement, Impact and non-traditional paths to graduation](#).

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 examples of practicing timely and informative board communications.

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