



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: Oct. 15, 2026
SUBJECT: **Monitoring Report for EL-5, Communication and Counsel to the Board**

I certify that the following is accurate as of Oct. 15, 2026. The reporting period is from Oct. 1, 2025, through Sept. 30, 2026.

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, 2025, through Sept. 30, 2026 (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.

Critical Thinking	Nov. 13, 2025
Future Enrollment	March 19, 2026

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 slide deck presentation. 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

- [Facilities Planning Task Force \(2026\)](#)
- [Roosevelt Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee](#)
- [Community Transitions Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee](#)

Parent Advisory Committees

- [Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent](#)

Teaching and Learning

- [6-10 English Language Arts Work Group](#)
- [6-10 Mathematics Work Group](#)
- [CTE General Advisory Council](#)
- [Early Childhood Technology Work Group](#)
- [Elementary Literacy Task Force – 2025-26 School Year](#)
- [High School Schedule Ad Hoc Committee 2025](#)
- [High School Schedule Work Group 2026](#)
- [Instructional Materials Committee](#)
- [Middle School Schedule Ad Hoc Work Group 2026](#)
- [Middle School Technology Work Group](#)
- [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](#)

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, 2025– Sept. 30, 2026, media activity and inquiries covered a wide variety of topics. Topics that received multiple inquiries and/or stories from local and national media were:

- For the second year: **Budget**, including continued financial challenges in bridging budget gaps caused by Washington state not fully funding basic public education. This was covered by all local media outlets including WWU.

- **Bellingham Public Schools levy measures** on the November 2025 ballot: supplemental enrichment levy and facilities maintenance levy. This topic was covered by most local media outlets, including radio interviews with KMRE and KGMI and TV interview with KING 5.
- **Facilities Planning Task Force work** and subsequent recommendation; enrollment/birth rates and consideration of consolidating schools. Most local outlets covered this with multiple stories across many months, including radio interviews with KMRE and KGMI.
- Immigration enforcement activity and its effects on our schools and community.

Additional media inquiries and coverage included: general and routine coverage of high school athletics; foundry10 donor visit to our district to view funded projects in action at Squalicum, Shuksan and Bellingham High; AI use in schools; Sehome cross country team competing in national event; K-12 school funding explainer; BHS employee resignation; student death in auto accident; ICE activity in communities and near schools; ECEAP and early childhood education access; high school schedule change; student freedom of assembly activity; Whatcom county flooding; special event for SQHS girls flag football team with the Seattle Seahawks; loss of grant for community partner working with high school students; state requirements and district actions regarding lead testing and remediation; wildlife sightings near an elementary school; funding loss for mental health in schools; budget planning; lawsuits; school safety (in connection to an act of violence in British Columbia); kindergarten registration; Treaty Day film festival; nurses and health care in schools; high school enrollment; senior spotlight for graduating 12th graders; I-5 landslide effect on school access and transportation; Dupont Street property sale process; cuts to certain groups of employees as part of budget process; cyberbullying and student safety; former BPS employee suspension of certification; student activism regarding food waste in schools; CTE Robotics / engineering classes and competitions; a community event with rental at BHS; graduation rates and retention practices; a school board member's private business; a middle school student's class project re: school funding; Dr. Baker's contract; school librarian role; policy governance model; school board audio access; student death in beach accident; kratom drug and prevention/intervention specialists; academic requirements for high school student-athletes; athletic field/track/gym improvements at SQHS along with other facilities maintenance levy-funded projects; early childhood technology recommendation; race and ethnicity data collected when families register children; 25th anniversary of 9/11; obituary for staff member with community prominence; high school theatre programs; tours of elementary schools; and 2022 bond funds.

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:

- Flag football special event
- Budget and facilities planning

- State funding
- Sustainability efforts

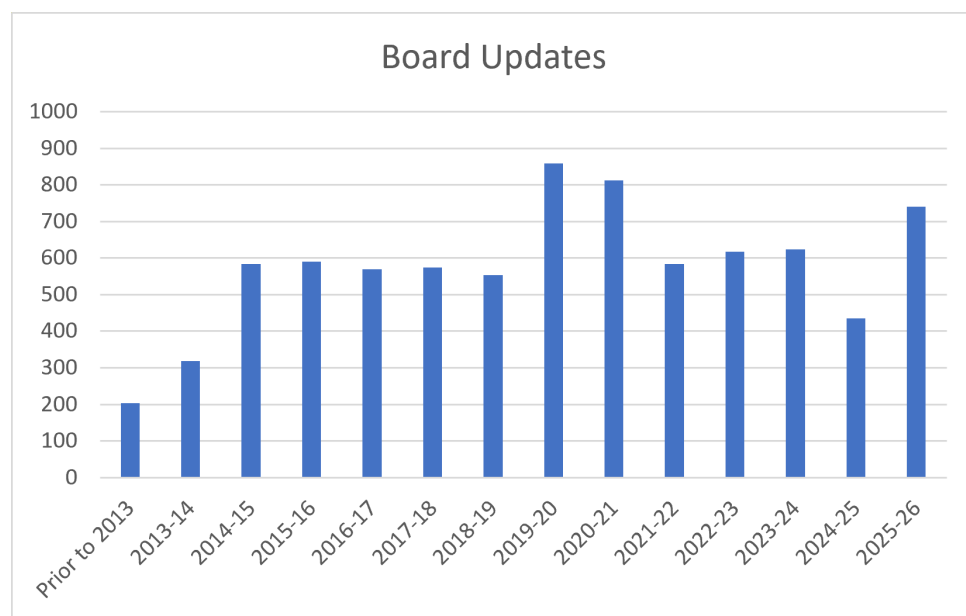
Our media liaison partnered with community partners and/or vendors for press releases of mutual interest:

- With donor foundry10 regarding upcoming visit to view funded projects, including audiology van, musical instruments, and electric car for high school engineering course.
- With the News Literacy Project (newslit.org) regarding BPS grant for media literacy lesson development.

Communications also submitted guest commentary regarding the state funding model to local outlets on behalf of the School Board.

From Oct. 1, 2025, through Sept. 30, 2026, I provided 741 electronic updates to the board regarding various issues. The board and I attended two retreats during this reporting period (March 5, 2026 and Aug. 21, 2026).

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:** During this reporting period, we shared information and facts about two November 2025 ballot measures: Bellingham Public Schools supplemental operations levy and facilities maintenance levy. Our communications plan included development of a levy [webpage](#), [videos](#), [printed fliers](#), [FAQs](#) and several messages via [email](#), social and traditional media for external communications.

We 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. We created and shared a dynamic webpage titled “[How my school will benefit](#),” which allows users to see a list of improvement projects by school or site. Voters approved our supplemental operations levy by 69% and our facilities maintenance levy by 64.5%. We continue to maintain these webpages so the public can see timelines for projects, including completion.

- **Budget planning:** Bellingham Public Schools continues to face budget challenges and during this reporting period, we provided regular updates and information to our community, including staff, families, students and community members, including context of state funding, inflation, rising costs and declining enrollment. Budget messaging was integrated in some of the levy communications in the fall, and we shared updates as cost-saving measures were explored, including a [change in the high school schedule](#) that was eventually finalized. In March, we shared an update on budget plans, including a [comprehensive list of reductions](#) in addition to state funding context and links to our website.

For budget communications, we rely on email messages, presentations and regular meetings/conversations with staff, leaders, labor groups, students and families. We use a [webpage as a key resource](#) to post and update budget messages and tools, including the final budget (which is often referred to as the “budget book”), and Priorities for Progress, which helps identify our key investments. The webpage is updated throughout the school year to include cost-saving measures and frequently asked questions to demonstrate transparency. We also asked for feedback via digital form.

- **Declining enrollment and facilities planning:** In January 2026, we received a report from a demographer that shows projections of declining birth rates and declining enrollment in Bellingham over the next 10 years. To help us process this report and data and consider next steps with schools and long-term capital and facilities planning, we formed a [facilities planning task force](#).

Staff and members of the task force hosted and attended parent and public meetings at schools and the District Office in the spring to help answer questions and share information. In the meantime, we communicated regularly with our community, including email messages, frequently asked questions, videos and a myriad of resources and reports that were [available and accessible on our website](#) to our staff, students, parents and community. Staff participated in numerous media interviews, including [KMRE](#) and

[KGMI.](#)

After months of a listening phase, we [shared an update in September with our community about plans to close and repurpose Columbia and Carl Cozier](#), pending board approval. The update included [a new webpage](#) with a video, links to two analyses, a “checking the facts” link (e.g., frequently asked questions), attendance area maps, resources for families and more.

We know that even considering closing and repurposing schools is challenging, much less moving forward with actual plans. We value and understand our community’s perspectives and sense of loss when a school closes. It has been additionally confusing and frustrating for some parents who were looking forward to Columbia and Carl Cozier eventually being rebuilt with future bonds and instead are faced with closures.

It was and continues to be challenging to keep pace with a steady stream of social media posts that aim to discredit and sometimes include mis-/dis-information about data and enrollment projections, our processes, bond funding and other topics. We remain steadfast in our commitment to listen and respond to constructive feedback about our decisions/processes and present and share facts and information in different ways.

- **Capital projects:** During this reporting period, after our enrollment picture became clearer, we paused our plans to relocate and rebuild a new Carl Cozier within the Civic Complex and halted conversations with the city to enter into a property purchase/sale agreement. We [shared this news](#) with families both in messaging and during an in-person meeting.

While our capital projects and facilities teams waited for clarity on our long-term capital plans based on the work of the task force, they focused on other projects, including playgrounds at Geneva and Northern Heights and the new gym and track at Squalicum. In May, we sent out [an update about construction news and upcoming projects](#).

- **Safety concerns and utilization of safety protocol:** Communications helps support safety related concerns and incidents at our schools throughout the year. Our district continues to follow the [standard response protocols](#) and uses similar templated messaging from the “I Love U Guys” Foundation for incidents that occur during school hours that disrupt the flow of the school day.

We supported schools with a variety of safety related events and high profile incidents, including a student protest regarding state funding that occurred at Sehome in November; a Lowell parent who was arrested in Washington, D.C., in November; student protests against ICE activity in January and February at our middle schools; a former Bellingham High School teacher who was investigated due to a violation of the code of professional conduct through OSPI; police investigation into a Kulshan student who made threats against the school; a substitute custodian who had a behavioral health crisis in the Cordata parking lot; and Fairhaven Middle School going into a Secure

protocol briefly in September to support a student after they left the school and damaged a door.

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 2025 and select board members attended other WSSDA events. The board subscribes to the WSSDA listserv for professional development opportunities.

I joined a board member and attended the WASA-WSSDA-WASBO Legislative Conference in SeaTac in January 2026.

One board member attended the WSSDA Area 1 regional meeting in April 2026 in Arlington.

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 student discipline, human resources, cyber risk, transportation, bias response and campus monitors. 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](#)).
- Video including an [explanation of policy governance and what the board does](#).

During this reporting period, the board visited a number of schools, including Parkview Elementary, Columbia Elementary, Whatcom Middle School, Carl Cozier Elementary, Cordata Elementary and Options High School

The board also hosted student roundtables at [Birchwood Elementary](#) and [Bellingham High School](#). The board hosted community linkages with [Mental Health Providers](#) and with students, families and community members and organizations with connections to [Community Transitions](#).

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.