



**Responsible Office:** Office of the Superintendent

## **BOARD POLICY 9052**

### **COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

#### **PURPOSE**

The Board of Trustees (Board) commits itself and the Trustees to integrity, accuracy, and transparency regarding communication and interaction with the media, public, other Trustees, and Washoe County School District (District) employees.

#### **POLICY**

1. Trustees and all employees shall adhere to the guidelines expressed in this Board Policy when communicating with students, families, the public, the media, and each other.
  - a. As representatives of the District, communication based on mutual respect for each other is a priority for all members of the District organization, whether Trustee, employee, or volunteer.
  - b. The Board President is the spokesperson for the Board regarding decisions made by the Board and can also determine who is best to speak for the Board in any given situation.
  - c. The Superintendent is the primary spokesperson for the District.
  - d. All Trustees are encouraged to assist with District communication in the community and the Trustees agree that public presentations will accurately and fairly reflect Board decisions and process.
  - e. The Board shall provide direction to the Superintendent, as its direct employee, through action of the Board.
  - f. The Board shall provide direction to the Chief Auditor, as its direct employee, through action of the Board.
  - g. The Board does not expect employees or the Superintendent to act on individual statements, suggestions, direction, or advice from individual Board members.
2. Communication Between Trustees. Trustees shall respect relationships with other Trustees by:

- a. Recognizing the integrity of predecessors and associates and respecting the dignity of their work;
  - b. Refraining from making statements about the work of the Board or promises regarding voting on any matter that should properly come before the Board as a whole; and
  - c. Respecting the right of others to their opinions and, while striving for consensus, supporting the majority rule principle.
3. Communication Between Trustees and Employees
- a. In order to ensure efficient and complete communication, the preferred method of communication by Trustees to employees, is through the Office of the Superintendent or Board Services Department. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - i. All official communications, policies, and directives of the Board will generally be communicated through the Superintendent, who shall also keep employees informed of the Board's concerns and actions;
    - ii. Questions regarding a meeting of the Board, to include items on the agenda and supporting documents;
    - iii. Requests to meet with District employees;
    - iv. Requests for assistance in securing information and materials for public statements or speeches or media appearances; and
    - v. Reports, written information, and other requests for information, particularly when such information is not maintained on a routine basis and could require more than a reasonable amount of time to prepare. When such requests are fulfilled, a copy shall be provided to all members of the Board.
  - b. Communication Between Trustees and the Office of the General Counsel
    - i. The law may require the Office of the General Counsel to communicate directly with the Board, the appropriate Board Officer, or Trustees individually. Such a decision is at the discretion of the Chief General Counsel, Board President, appropriate Board Officer, or the Board. If appropriate, the Chief General Counsel shall communicate the information to the appropriate client representative.
  - c. A Trustee may send the Superintendent an email communication after the close of the workday or on weekends and a response will not be expected

any earlier than the next normal workday unless it is a matter of compelling urgency. Unless there is an imminent threat to District employees or students or to District property, Trustees are encouraged to refrain from calling or messaging the Superintendent or employees after the close of the workday or on weekends.

#### 4. Visits to Schools and Other District Facilities

- a. All Trustees shall be provided a District-issued identification badge that shall be worn on their person when visiting a school or other District facility during the school/workday.
- b. Trustees are encouraged to pre-arrange visits to schools and other District facilities in consultation with the Superintendent's Board Services Department. School visits should be coordinated with the school principal or site administrator in advance. In most cases, a school or department should be given 24-hour notice prior to a visit during school or work hours.
  - i. Should a Trustee believe an emergency warrants a more immediate meeting or visit, the Superintendent shall be notified in advance.
- c. If the site administrator, principal, or administrative team member(s) is not available or indicate the visit occurring at an inconvenient time, Trustees shall respect the decision and request to reschedule. Trustees shall contact the Superintendent to address concerns or complaints.
- d. Trustees are encouraged to visit school sites frequently as well as to attend any and all before- or after-school events and performances at their discretion. Such visits allow Trustees to engage with students, employees, and the community in a positive way that helps inform their work.
- e. Trustees shall be respectful of the work that the administrative, licensed and support employees must complete on a daily basis in order to increase student achievement and meet the goals identified in the Strategic Goals.
- f. The above restrictions do not apply to a Trustee who is a parent/guardian of a student attending a school. However, in such cases the Trustee shall follow school processes required by all other community members regarding school appointments and visits. The Trustee shall endeavor to represent themselves only in their parental role for such visits and meetings and not as a Trustee.
- g. When visiting a school in another Trustee's electoral district, Trustees are

encouraged to inform the Trustees of that school of the visit.

- h. If a Trustee is in a school or other District facility or property, he/she shall be respectful of employees' time and work. Trustees shall refrain from actions that may prevent employees from engaging in their work. If a lengthy conversation or research is needed, Trustees shall set up a time with the Superintendent for a meeting or phone call to address specific concerns or issues.

#### 5. Communication with Constituents

- a. As applicable, Trustees agree to contact the appropriate person to resolve concerns, seek information, or provide input and encourage that constituents reach out to the appropriate person to resolve concerns, seek information, or provide input.
- b. The Communications Department shall assist the Board in responding to constituent concerns by responding in a timely manner. Trustees shall receive notice of such communication as soon as reasonably possible.
- c. Trustees shall meet responsibilities to the community by engaging in proactive and on-going dialogue with the community. This shall be achieved by:
  - i. Structured and intentional coordination of Trustees to serve on or attend meetings and events held by external stakeholders throughout the District. As a courtesy, Trustees should advise Board Services of their attendance at community events;
  - ii. Expansion of community committee service should be planned during a Board work session at least annually. Trustees shall report briefly on relevant and significant updates raised by external entities during a scheduled time at each Board meeting; and
  - iii. Seeking to involve the community in the schools and the educational process.

#### 6. General Protocols

- a. In all communications, Trustees and employees shall seek to respect the sensitivity of policies, initiatives, and issues that are in the planning stages, and shall seek to improve rather than undermine proposals. This includes not posting opinions on social media regarding issues that may be socially or politically sensitive and may be perceived as coming from the District or the full Board.

- b. Trustees shall not divulge confidential information, particularly related to students, with anyone. This includes not posting information about students, to include pictures of students or groups of students, to social media when such posts could violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) or where no media release is on file with the District.
- c. Trustees should be aware of comments or behaviors that could result in harassment complaints or potential lawsuits. When dealing with employees, volunteers, students, and their families, appropriate language and behavior shall be used by Trustees. Opportunities for training in personnel harassment shall be provided to Trustees by the District.
- d. When Trustees and employees or members of the community interact at social affairs and other functions, they will informally discuss such matters as educational trends, issues, and innovations, and general activities of the District. Nothing in this Board Policy shall prohibit Trustees and others from welcoming input on areas for improvement in District matters. Trustees and employees shall, however, utilize established District complaint or grievance procedures to have concerns, complaints, or grievances addressed.
- e. If any Trustee testifies before any public or legislative body on behalf of the District or regarding any District issue, he/she shall do so to represent positions of the Board as the whole. If testifying on a personal level, the Trustee shall identify that he/she is not testifying on behalf of the District or the Board. Trustees shall inform the Superintendent of any contacts made with Legislators if regarding any District issue. Regarding legislation on which the Board has not taken a position, the Superintendent will keep the Board informed of the District's response. Trustees will inform colleagues and the Superintendent of their testimony at legislative hearings.

### **LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

- 1. This Board Policy reflects the goals of the District's Strategic Plan and aligns/complies and complies with the governing documents of the District, to include:
  - a. Board Policy 9050, Board of Trustees' Governing Mission;
  - b. Board Policy 9051, Board Conduct, Ethics, and Operational Protocols; and
  - c. Board Policy 9165, Legal Counsel.

**REVISION HISTORY**

Date	Revision	Modification
10/25/2016	1.0	Adopted as new policy
01/15/2019	2.0	Revised: Clarify language related to staff communication and school visit
11/24/2020	3.0	Revised: Clarity for Trustees, staff, and constituents
01/21/2022	3.1	Revised: Update format pursuant to BP 9070
10/25/2022	4.0	Revised: Clarify language