THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board-Superintendent Operating Protocol

Principles, Beliefs and Traditions
Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. To assure a quality operation, leaders must agree on basic ways of working together. Operating principles define the beliefs, values, and methods of working together. Through this protocol the board members and superintendent memorialize principles and traditions and emphasize the importance of clearly communicating the commitment to continuing them.

The manner in which the board members and superintendent conduct their business becomes a model throughout the district for students, teachers, parents, and staff on how problems are solved. The principles set forth here outline a philosophy of cooperative, collaborative, and consultative behavior that is agreed upon by the board and superintendent in Everett Public Schools. The board governs at the policy level of the district always striving to think strategically about the matters over which it deliberates by respecting the distinction between organizational ends and means. As members of the board-superintendent team, the directors and the superintendent are committed to upholding these principles.

Purpose
Students’ interests come first. After their safety, the board members and superintendent value above all else students’ achievement. The board will represent the needs and interests of each child in Everett Public Schools as its primary responsibility.

Communications: Listening, Cooperation and Support
Open communication requires trust, respect and a fundamental belief in goodwill among board members and the superintendent. Messages are open, honest, and tactful. Listening expresses the concern for others by showing an interest in not only the information but the other person. Active listening benefits each party and is a key to effective communication. The board should take sufficient time to summarize and paraphrase what the directors have heard.

As members of a board-superintendent team, the directors will make the following commitments to minimize misunderstandings and reduce conflict by:

- Supporting each other constructively and courteously.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Focusing their discussions on issues, not personalities, keeping the tone and demeanor of discussions professional by avoiding defensiveness and personalized anger.
- Encouraging constructive disagreement.
- Upholding the integrity of every individual.
- Pursuing thorough understanding.
The board will give direction to the superintendent only as a total board through adopted policies or action taken at a board meeting.

If a board member is acting outside his/her defined role, the board president or other board member(s) will talk with the individual board member regarding behaviors not in compliance with board policy.

The board will give the superintendent feedback on his/her performance on a regular basis within executive sessions, which may be requested by either the board or the superintendent. Board members shall refrain from making evaluative comments about the superintendent’s performance except in an executive session designated for the review of the performance of a public employee.

The team is mutually committed to practicing a “no surprises” policy. The superintendent and the board agree that members need to know as soon as possible of any major issue that may affect the welfare of the district; the superintendent will share information in a timely manner with people anticipated to be affected. The board-superintendent team considers a major issue to be one in which student or staff safety, significant liability, or broad public concern could reasonably be attached. The superintendent shall consult with the board president regarding notification of the entire board about highly sensitive investigations. The superintendent shall inform the entire board of any matter forwarded to Washington School’s Risk Management that results in opening a claim file, assignment of an attorney, and conducting an investigation.

The board president will be the official spokesperson for the board, and is the only director authorized to seek legal counsel on behalf of the board. The superintendent will be the official spokesperson for areas of district operation.

Communication between district staff and the board is encouraged. Board members will call the school principal or stop in the office prior to visiting classes or the campus. Board members will channel board-related communications between administrative staff and directors through the superintendent’s office, or through other staff as designated by the superintendent.

In keeping a strong commitment to avoid violating, and to avoid the appearance of violating the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA), whether in letter or in spirit, all directors will:

- Send all communications from one director to two or more other directors through the superintendent’s office; the superintendent will be responsible for distribution and in the event he or she determines forwarding an item of communication may violate the Act, for communicating this to all directors and referring the communication to the board president.
- Not discuss official business with two or more directors via email, including board procedural matters.
- In order to ensure that the district is able to comply with laws concerning public records and school district records retention requirements, use only district email accounts provided for official business in order to conduct official business; the superintendent and other district staff are expected not to respond to emails, texts, or any other electronic communications concerning official business from directors when sent from accounts or by means other than the district-provided email accounts.
Attend and receive, in addition to the superintendent’s cabinet members, training annually on the OPMA and the Public Records Act (PRA).

Expect the superintendent to ensure that emails sent to the entire board via the district website will not be forwarded by an “autorule”; the superintendent will provide for forwarding of email items that in his or her judgment do not violate the OPMA.

The superintendent or a designee shall acknowledge receipt of board member emails requesting information or action within 24 business hours or within one business day following the weekend. The superintendent may consult with the board president or vice-president and choose to refer the email request to the entire board at its next meeting. The superintendent’s vacations shall not be interrupted by board communication with the exception of a district emergency.

Judgment and Trust

The complexities of operating a school district cannot be fully addressed in policies, procedures or operating principles. Working with people and handling difficult and controversial issues on a daily basis requires good judgment, common sense and a strong trust relationship between the board and the superintendent. Every complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved; every issue or concern will not be foreseen. For these reasons trust in each other, allowance for error, and team efforts to address problems through open and transparent discussion of all directors’ and the superintendent’s perspectives are a key part of an effective school district operation. The board and superintendent will approach these situations with the belief the other person is working in good faith with good expectations.

Decision Making

The identification and evaluation of alternatives, an awareness of short- and long-term consequences, and an appreciation for the needs of the group, as well as individuals, and sensitivity toward collective action are essential to the decision-making process.

In order to formulate and execute sound decisions, the board and superintendent agree to:

- Resolve problems as close to the point of origin as possible.
- Provide for input from all concerned when possible.
- Use a decision-making style appropriate to the situation.
- Reevaluate the effectiveness of the decision when appropriate.
- Clearly communicate decisions that are made.
- Manage agreements with positive attention to assumptions in order to avoid making decisions based on false assumptions.
- Guard against creating the impression that any single board member decides in place of the whole board; board decisions are made by the whole, not individuals.
- Once a board decision has been reached, all board members support the outcome.

Using this process, it is recognized that a decision may sometimes be superseded by a higher level of authority. When this occurs, the rationale will be communicated to those involved before releasing the information.
Responding to Complaints and Concerns

Board members will contact the superintendent directly when they hear concerns in the community regarding issues relating to district administration, programs or personnel.

When a board member or the superintendent is contacted by a community member or a staff member who has a complaint, he/she will:

- Listen to the individual’s concern.
- Inquire if the individual has discussed the issue with the person immediately responsible.
- Explain that the district process for resolving concerns and conflicts is to address the concern with the person immediately involved. If this has not been done, tell them how to contact the appropriate person. Describe the appropriate channels that should be followed if the complaint is not resolved.
- Remember that anything a director says as an individual could be given the meaning by the listener as the “position of the board or superintendent”, and therefore a director will be careful not to give the appearance of agreeing with the person when he or she means to actively listen or to listen sympathetically.

The superintendent is responsible for following up with the board members to ensure each is aware of the response provided by the administration.

Board and Board Member Requests

The board seeks to guide the district through four inter-connected sets of priority-setting tools, which are updated periodically.

1. Strategic Plan and related Action Items
2. Superintendent’s Goals
3. Annual Goals for the Board of Directors
4. Annual Operation Budget

Requests for information from the board and its members are intended to advance these priorities established by the board. The superintendent and his/her staff face many challenges in the day-to-day operations of the district, while at the same time providing support for new initiatives. The board prioritizes in order to be clear on the most important strategies and actions for the district. The goals established are ambitious and require extensive focus and attention from the superintendent and his/her staff. Therefore the board seeks to focus its board requests on the goals adopted by the board.

Board Request

This is a request for information or action submitted to the superintendent by the board through concurrence of at least three board members. A board request occurs during a board meeting, whether regular or special, open or closed. In the absence of a board meeting, unless otherwise specified the board president is presumed to make requests on behalf of the board.
**Board Member Request**

**Documents**

Board members are entitled to receive a copy of any public document through the superintendent’s office. All board members’ requests for documents will be submitted through the superintendent (or his/her designee), and will be expedited. Board members shall receive a copy of any public record upon request, and shall have the option of electing to receive records in electronic format whenever practical and not disruptive of district office business.

**General Information**

Board members sometimes seek information through the superintendent. Such requests may be simple or complex, and may have financial, legal or workload implications. Board members are committed to respecting the limited resource of staff time in making individual and whole-board requests for information, and recognize that responses to individual requests for information will be shared with all board members.

The superintendent will determine (in consultation with the board president when in doubt) if information requests from individual board members are easily resolved or will advance the established goals approved by the board (board goals or goals for the superintendent). If the request doesn’t meet this requirement, the superintendent will direct the board member back to the board president or the full board to secure approval as a board request. To avoid misunderstandings, the superintendent shall confirm a director request in writing with the director who originated the request before designating the request a director request; a director will be provided 24 hours to respond in writing with a revision to the confirmation.

**Board Agenda Information**

Information requests regarding policy items, action items for board meetings or reports to the board are treated as requests for elaboration. These are information requests which are pertinent to board decision-making. If these requests are only marginally related to the board agenda topic, or involve significant preparatory time they should come as a full board request. More routine questions would fall in the board member request for information category.

**Non-Public, Confidential Information**

Individual board members shall not have access to non-public, confidential records except by approval of a majority of the board, with the exception of the board president in case of emergency circumstances.
Cross Reference:  

Board Policy 5161  

Civility in the Workplace

Legal References:

RCW 28A.330.010  
Board president, vice president or president pro tempore—Secretary

RCW 28A.330.030  
Duties of president

RCW 28A.330.050  
Duties of superintendent as secretary of the board

RCW 28A.400.030  
Superintendent's duties

Adopted:  
December 7, 2010

Renumbered:  
October 2011

Revised:  
February 28, 2012

Revised:  
May 22, 2012

Admin Review:  
December 2012

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