

BOARD-STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

Lines of Responsibility for District Programs, Operations and Communications

Generally, responsibility for District programs, operations and communications shall flow simply and clearly from non-supervisory staff, to supervisory and administrative staff, to the District Administrator, and, finally, to the Board. The administration shall make reasonable efforts to identify for each employee a primary supervisor as to any particular major function of the employee's job, and, the administration shall identify such a supervisor(s) at the request of a staff member. All employees are expected to refer concerns regarding District programs and operations and other matters requiring supervisory or administrative attention to the appropriate supervisor(s), without intentionally undermining established procedures and lines of authority. In the event of a substantive disagreement between an employee and a supervisor/administrator that cannot be resolved, the expectation is that the employee and the supervisor/administrator will generally jointly advance the issue to a next-level supervisor, up to the District Administrator. That next-level supervisor may decide that the issue lies within the discretion of the lower-level supervisor, or take the issue up for further inquiry and analysis.

Notwithstanding the need to have established lines of supervisory authority, the Board encourages the regular use of collaborative work structures, such as cross-functional work teams (and even less formal structures) that enable the District to fully engage employees' knowledge, skills, talents, and interests for the betterment of District programs and operations. The Board also encourages supervisors and administrators to seek and listen to the input and ideas of all staff members, including in situations where an employee offers their input in an area outside of the employee's normal day-to-day duties and responsibilities. The Board expects supervisors and administrators to give thoughtful and respectful consideration to input, ideas, and concerns appropriately expressed by any staff member, including in situations where the supervisor or administrator may have a different perspective on the issue.

Staff Communications

It is the District's goal and the Board's expectation that all employees' communications within the scope of their employment (including all verbal communications, electronic communication, and written communication) are accurate, demonstrate sound judgment and professionalism, and promote the District's mission.

It is important for all District employees to understand that when District employees communicate verbally or in writing pursuant to their official duties, the extent to which such communications meet the District's established expectations is an appropriate basis for supervisory inquiry and evaluation, and also could potentially be the cause for disciplinary action. That is, as a general rule, a school district employee does not have an expectation of unimpeded "freedom of speech" as to such communications.

Similarly, all District employees are expected to pursue personal grievances and personal complaints related to their employment through the established supervisory lines of authority, through an appropriate internal complaint/grievance processes, or through appropriate external legal channels.

Staff Interactions with Individual Board Members

Except where (1) expressly authorized by Board action or by the District Administrator, or (2) necessitated by the legal duties related to positions held by Board officers, individual employees are not expected to engage in work-related tasks at the direction of individual Board members. For this reason, if an individual Board member contacts an employee in connection with the employee's assigned duties and responsibilities, the employee is expected to involve his/her immediate supervisor in establishing an appropriate response to the Board member's inquiry—involving such additional supervisors and administrators as the issue may warrant. Each individual employee retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all communications pursuant to his/her assigned duties to the Board and/or to any individual Board member are consistent with this policy and follow appropriate procedures. In the event an individual employee, notwithstanding general expectations concerning the use of established lines of authority, communicates with an individual Board member pursuant to the duties and responsibilities of the employee's position, the Board's expectation is that the individual Board member should contact and work with the District Administrator in resolving and responding to the employee's issue or concern.

The Board and the school administrators understand that Board members and District employees share a keen interest in the District's schools and in education generally. Therefore, it is expected that individual Board members and individual employees will regularly meet in the community, through social events, and school functions and, informally, discuss matters such as district programs and activities and educational trends, issues, and innovations. On such occasions, the Board's expectation is that employees will use sound judgment in ensuring that they are not purposefully undermining the District's established lines of authority.

Employee Speech and Expression on Matters of Public Concern

So long as District employees are speaking as private citizens about matters of public concern (i.e., where they are not speaking pursuant to their assigned duties and official responsibilities), their speech generally enjoys strong First Amendment protection and they will face only those narrow and limited speech restrictions as are consistent with and allowed by applicable law. For example, there is limited authority for a public employer to restrict such speech, or to impose consequences for such speech, in situations where the restrictions or consequences are necessary to preserve the ability of the employer to operate effectively.

The District shall not take or tolerate any unlawful adverse employment action against or retaliatory conduct toward any employee who chooses to engage in legally-protected religious or political expression, legally-protected concerted labor activity, or other forms of legally-protected expression. Similarly, the District shall not discriminate against employees who decline to attend a meeting about or to participate in any communication about religious or political matters.

Legal References

Wisconsin Statutes

<u>Section 111.31</u>	[fair employment laws]
<u>Section 111.70</u>	[right of municipal employees and prohibited labor practices]
<u>Section 118.20</u>	[teacher discrimination prohibited; includes nondiscrimination on the basis of religious or political affiliation]

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