POLICY 0144.5 APPROVAL IN SEPTEMBER

po0144.5 - Optional language regarding social media and instant communication between Board members and students per Act 89

# Copy of BOARD MEMBER BEHAVIOR, COMMUNICATIONS, AND CODE OF CONDUCT

ADOPTED Apr 5, 2021 · REVISED Apr 20, 2026

## 0144.5 - **BOARD MEMBER BEHAVIOR, COMMUNICATIONS, AND CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Board functions most effectively when individual Board members act ethically, professionally, and responsibly. School Board members serve as a member of the School District's governing body and do not have individual authority to represent a policy or enforce positions that are not supported by a majority of the Board, as evidenced by official action of the Board (See Bylaw 0143 - Authority of Individual Board Members).

Board members accept responsibility for the well-being and positive leadership of the School District, for protecting the interests of the School District as a legal entity, and for facilitating governance for the purpose of delivering the highest quality educational and related services to all of the District's students. Conduct by Board members that compromises the legal position of the District should be avoided.

Any authority delegated to the Board President in this bylaw is automatically vested in the Board Vice President in the event that either the Board President is unavailable or the Board President is the Board member accused of violating this bylaw.

### General Expectations of All Board Members

A. Attend all scheduled Board meetings insofar as possible, and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings. Board members are expected to review agenda materials prior to a Board meeting and to submit questions to the District Administrator in advance of the meeting, whenever practicable, to allow for efficient and respectful meetings; this expectation does not in any way intrude upon a Board member's right to ask questions or engage in discussion at a Board meeting.

B. Be familiar with and follow applicable local, State, and Federal laws and regulations.

C. Be familiar with and comply with Board bylaws/policies, including bylaws governing Board member conduct and Board member ethics, rules of incompatibility of

office, qualifications of the office, and conflicts of interest (see Bylaw 0144.3 - Conflict of Interest).

D. Conduct themselves with integrity, honesty, and in a manner that reflects positively on the Board and on the District.

E. Be accountable for guiding and supporting the policy decision-making process that impacts students, staff, and the community. The operation of the District is the responsibility of the administration.

F. Establish and maintain a high level of honesty, credibility, and truthfulness in all matters dealt with by the Board.

G. Treat others with respect and dignity at all times, and maintain decorum, and always communicate in a way that does not violate or illustrate disregard for Board policy concerning harassment or discrimination. This decency expectation applies in all communications.

H. At all times conduct themselves in the best interest of the School District, including avoiding implicating the District in unlawful activity or supporting or encouraging efforts to harm the reputation, legal standing, or to bring other material harm to the interests of the District or the Board.

I. Recognize that they should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held Board meetings.

J. Render all decisions based on the available facts and independent judgment.

K. Encourage the free expression of opinion by all Board members, and seek systematic communications between the Board and students, staff, and all elements of the community.

L. Work with the other Board members to establish effective Board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the District to the District Administrator in accordance with Policy 1100 - District Organization.

M. Communicate to other Board members, in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, and the District Administrator expressions of public reaction to Board policies and school programs (see Board Member Communication section below, Bylaw 0143.1 - Public Expression of Board Members, and Bylaw 0167.5 - Use of Electronic Mail).

N. Inform themselves about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by the State and National School Boards Associations.

O. Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff, and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.

P. Refrain from using their Board positions for personal or partisan gain.

Q. Take no private action that will compromise the Board or administration, and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.

R. Remember always that their first and greatest concern must be for the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools.

S. No Board member shall act or fail to act in his/her position as a Board member in violation of 946.12, Wis. Stats.

**Board Member Communication**

Board members are expected to refrain from engaging in communication on behalf of the Board or on behalf of the District unless authorized to do so by majority vote of the Board (See Bylaw 0143.1 - Public Expression of Board Members).

Any Board member who chooses to engage in individual communication on matters related to Board and/or District business is expected to clearly identify whether the Board member is communicating in the following capacity:

A. On behalf of the Board: normally, this is the function of the Board President or, in the President's absence, the Vice President. The Board may, by majority vote, delegate this responsibility to another Board member in a specific circumstance. In every case, the Board member communicating the Board's position shall do so as determined by the Board and avoiding individual interpretation or editorializing.

B. As an individual Board member, but not on behalf of the Board: a Board member who speaks, including online, in social media forums, or in any other public forum, on matters related to Board and/or District business, but not as an officially designated spokesperson of the Board. The Board member must specify that any statement is not sponsored by the District and is a personal viewpoint.

Board members who fail to adhere to this expectation, or who publicly communicate false or intentionally misleading information pertaining to Board action or District policy, will be asked to correct such communication in a way that is likely to reach the same audience as the false or misleading information. The Board President is authorized to communicate such requests to the pertinent Board member.

The Board President is authorized to issue public statements on behalf of the Board in the event a Board member expresses false or misleading information, or makes statements without properly identifying whether he or she is speaking as an individual Board member. The President's communication should be limited to correcting the false or misleading statement, clarifying that the Board member was not speaking on behalf of the Board, and providing information relative to Board action, if any, on the subject matter.

**Board Member Interaction with Staff**

The general expectations of Board member decorum and civility apply to interactions with employees; however, because the Board is the employer of all District staff, this responsibility is appropriate for special reference. Each Board member is an individual with authority to bring matters to the Board and to influence matters related to staff. Therefore, it is imperative that Board members treat all employees with respect and as professionals. Board members are also required to comply with Board policies governing employee anti-harassment, nondiscrimination, and threatening behavior.

No Board member has inherent authority to require any staff member to respond to the Board member regarding a specific request for information, or to direct any staff member to perform or not perform any task, except as provided by Board policy or as directed by majority vote of the Board.

Board member access to and request for School District records and information is governed by Board Bylaw 0143.2- Board Member Information Requests.

**Board Member Records and Confidentiality**

Board members are expected to maintain their own public records created on resources not controlled by and thus not maintained by the School District. Each Board member is an elected official responsible for preserving all public records the Board member creates, and to comply with requests to inspect such records. The District has no obligation nor responsibility to assist any Board member in fulfilling this responsibility with respect to records that are not maintained by the District.

Board members are encouraged to review Board policy defining and explaining public records, their maintenance, and public access (See Board Policy 8310- Public Records).

Board members are expected to maintain and protect the privacy of District records, including student records, and communications received in closed-session meetings of the Board.

**Enforcement**

Complaints alleging violations of the Board Member Code of Conduct may be brought by any person and can be submitted to the Board President or, if the Board President is the member accused of violating this policy, to the Vice President.

The President or Vice President shall review the complaint and determine whether the officer can investigate the matter, or if the President or Vice President needs to contact the School District's legal counsel for support. Upon completion of the investigation, if the conclusion reached is that the Board member violated the policy, the investigator shall brief the Board and may recommend action to be taken.

Board members are elected officials and therefore cannot be prevented from participating in Board meetings, or removed from office by the Board. The Board may consider the following:

A. formal censure by resolution passed by a majority of the Board in an open session meeting of the Board;

B. removal from Board committee assignments for the remainder of the year and until the following organizational meeting of the Board, at which time the President is authorized to continue to withhold committee assignment. exception to Bylaw 0155 - Committees;

C. restriction on Board member rights granted by policy, including requesting items for a Board meeting agenda;

D. referral to proceed with efforts to remove the Board member from office for cause, which means inefficiency, neglect of duty, official misconduct, or malfeasance in office;

E. referral to law enforcement if any alleged misconduct constitutes potentially unlawful conduct;

F. other efforts to pursue compliance with and adherence to the policy as determined by the Board and not prohibited by law.

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**Legal**
17.13, Wis. Stats.

946.12, Wis. Stats.
The Consortium of State School Board Associations
The National Association of School Boards
The Wisconsin Association of School Boards