

# Document Status: Draft Update

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS

### 8:10 Connection with the Community

#### Public Relations

The Board President is the official spokesperson for the Board of Education. The Superintendent is the District's chief spokesperson. The Board, in collaboration with the Superintendent<sup>PRESSPlus1</sup> or designee, shall plan and implement a District public relations program that will:

1. Develop community understanding of school operation.
2. Gather community attitudes and desires for the District.
3. ~~Secure~~ Ensure<sup>PRESSPlus2</sup> adequate financial support for a sound educational program.
4. Help the community feel a more direct responsibility for the quality of education provided by their schools.
5. Earn the community's goodwill, respect, and trust~~confidence~~.
6. Promote a genuine spirit of cooperation between the school and the community.
7. Keep the news media and community accurately informed.
8. ~~Coordinate with the District Safety Coordinator to provide accurate and timely information to the appropriate individuals during an emergency.~~

The public relations program should include:

1. Regular news releases concerning District programs, policies, activities, and special event management for distribution by, for example, posting on the District website, using District social media ~~platforms~~ accounts,<sup>PRESSPlus3</sup> ~~e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.,~~ and/or sending to the news media.
2. News conferences, ~~and~~ interviews, and official Board or District statements, as requested or needed. The Board President and Superintendent will coordinate their respective media relations efforts. As official spokesperson for the Board,<sup>PRESSPlus4</sup> the Board President will communicate on behalf of the Board to the news media and community. Statements made by Board members when not authorized by the Board will be considered personal comments of the Board member, and Board members are encouraged to identify such statements as their personal opinions. Official Board or District statements (other than those made directly to the media) will be made through the District website and/or its social media accounts, at official District events, or through other official

communication methods, such as District email or mailings. Individuals may speak for the District only with prior approval from the Superintendent. [PRESSPlus5](#)

3. Publications having a high quality of editorial content and effective format. All publications shall identify the District, school, department, or classroom and shall include the name of the Superintendent, the Building Principal, and/or the author and the publication date.
4. Other efforts that highlight the District's programs and activities.

## Community Engagement

Community engagement is a process that the Board uses to actively involve diverse citizens in dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative thinking around common interests for the District's schools. Effective community engagement [PRESSPlus6](#) is essential to create trust and support among the community, Board, Superintendent, and District staff. [PRESSPlus7](#)

The Board, in consultation with the Superintendent, ~~determines the purpose(s) and objective(s) of any community engagement initiative~~ articulates the District's community engagement goals.

~~For each community engagement initiative:~~

1. ~~The Board will:~~
  1. ~~Commit to the determined purpose(s) and objective(s), and~~
  2. ~~Provide information about the expected nature of the public's involvement.~~
2. ~~The Superintendent will:~~
  1. ~~Identify the effective tools and tactics that will advance the Board's purpose(s) and objective(s),~~
  2. ~~At least annually, prepare a report for the community engagement initiative, and/or~~
  3. ~~Prepare a final report of the community engagement initiative.~~

The Board will periodically: (1) review whether its community engagement ~~initiative~~ goals(s) are achieving the identified purpose(s) and objective(s); (2) consider what, if any, modifications would improve effectiveness; and (3) determine whether to continue individual ~~initiatives~~ tactics.

## PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

Any person or group having a legitimate interest in the operations of this District shall have the right to present a request, suggestion, complaint, or grievance concerning District personnel, the program, or the operations of the District. At the same time, the Board of Education has a duty to protect its staff from unnecessary harassment. It is the intent of this policy to provide the means for judging each public complaint and grievance in a fair and impartial manner and to seek a remedy where appropriate.

It is the desire of the Board to rectify any misunderstandings between the public and the District by direct discussions of an informal type among the interested parties. It is only when such informal meetings fail to resolve the differences shall more formal procedures be employed.

Any requests, suggestions, complaints, or grievances reaching the Board, Board members, and the administration shall be referred to the Superintendent, or designee, for consideration according to the following procedure.

### **Matters Regarding a Staff Member**

#### A. First Level

If it is a matter specifically directed toward a professional staff member, the matter must be addressed, initially, to the concerned staff member who shall discuss it promptly with the complainant and make every effort to provide a reasoned explanation or take appropriate action within his/her authority and District administrative guidelines.

This level does not apply if the matter involves suspected child abuse, substance abuse, or any other serious allegation which may require investigation or inquiry by school officials prior to approaching the professional staff member.

#### B. Second Level

If the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved at the First Level, the complainant may request to meet with the staff member's supervisor. The request for the meeting should include the nature of the complaint and a brief statement of facts related to the complaint. The supervisor will meet with the complainant in compliance with provisions of a collective bargaining agreement, if applicable. The supervisor's decision is final.

### **Guidelines for Matters Regarding Enrollment Disputes**

If the matter relates to disputes concerning student residency determination, Homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act, or related issues, the matter should be addressed to the District's Residency or Homelessness Coordinator, who will follow the Second Level procedures set forth above.

### **Matters Regarding the Educational Program**

If the request, suggestion, complaint, or grievance relates to a matter of District program, it should be addressed, initially, to the building principal who will follow the Second Level procedures set forth above.

### **Matters Regarding Instructional Materials**

The Superintendent, or designee, shall prepare administrative guidelines to ensure that students and parents are adequately informed each year regarding their right to inspect instructional materials and the procedure for completing such an inspection.

If the request, suggestion, or complaint, relates to instructional materials such as library books, reference works, and other instructional aids used in the District, it should be addressed at a meeting with the building principal and the staff member(s) using the instructional materials. The building principal will work with the complainant and the staff member(s) to reach a resolution regarding the request, suggestion or complaint.

LEGAL REF.:

[20 U.S.C. 1232h](#)

[105 ILCS 5/28-19](#) and [5/28-20](#)

CROSS REF.: 2:110 (Qualifications, Term, and Duties of Board Officers)

### **PRESSPlus Comments**

[PRESSPlus 1.](#) The board and superintendent should have a conversation regarding which objectives the board, superintendent, or both the board and superintendent together will implement. **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 2.](#) Updated throughout for continuous improvement. **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 3.](#) Updated in response to the U.S. Supreme Court case [Lindke v. Freed](#), 601 U.S. 187 (2024), which held that a government official's speech on social media is attributable to the government if the official: (1) has actual authority to speak on behalf of the government on a particular matter; and (2) purports to exercise that authority when speaking on social media. If an official's speech on social media is attributable to the government, then the official's social media posts will be subject to scrutiny under the First Amendment. Social media accounts of government officials that are clearly labeled as personal (e.g., "This is the personal page of [insert name]") or with a disclaimer (e.g., "the views expressed are strictly my own") are presumed to contain only personal posts, though that presumption can be challenged depending on the particular facts. The Court did not distinguish between elected or appointed government officials and employees, suggesting that the same test would apply to government employees.

Because those who post on a district's social media accounts typically have authority to speak on the district's behalf, such accounts are likely either *limited public forums* (also referred to as *nonpublic forums*) or *public forums*. See, e.g., [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals v. Tabak](#), 2024 WL 3573661 (D.C. Cir. 2024)(finding the National

Institutes of Health's (NIH) social media accounts were limited public forums because use of the accounts was limited to discussion of certain subjects; however, the NIH violated the First Amendment when it filtered out comments based on the plaintiff's viewpoints). Consider that school districts are different than federal government agencies and must ensure other duties to students, e.g., safety and security, which may require excluding certain comments from the district's social media accounts. **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 4.](#) In alignment with the IASB *Foundational Principles of Effective Governance*, the school board president is the board's spokesperson (see sample policy 2:110, *Qualifications, Term, and Duties of Board Officers*) and the superintendent is the district's spokesperson. **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 5.](#) This item aligns with sample policy 2:110, *Qualifications, Term, and Duties of Board Officers*, and the board member oath of office in 105 ILCS 5/10-16.5, which requires board members to swear or affirm that they "shall recognize that a board member has no legal authority as an individual and that decisions can only be made by a majority vote at a public board meeting." Making official statements through the district's website and official social media accounts, rather than through personal or "mixed use" accounts is a best practice and a strategy to mitigate First Amendment liability for board members and employees who communicate through social media platforms. Additionally, it is a best practice for board members or employees with social media accounts to clearly label their personal accounts as personal and limit district-related communications to official district accounts. **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 6.](#) For training resources, see [www.iasb.com/conference-training-and-events/training/workshops/reflecting-on-communication-and-community-engagemen/](http://www.iasb.com/conference-training-and-events/training/workshops/reflecting-on-communication-and-community-engagemen/) and [www.iasb.com/about-us/publications/journal/2022-illinois-school-board-journal/september-october-2022/engaging-with-the-community-%C2%A0a-time-to-reflect-and/](http://www.iasb.com/about-us/publications/journal/2022-illinois-school-board-journal/september-october-2022/engaging-with-the-community-%C2%A0a-time-to-reflect-and/) **Issue 117, October 2024**

[PRESSPlus 7.](#) These statements are based on IASB's *Foundational Principles of Effective Governance*, principle #2, "The board connects with the community." The first sentence applies the definition of community engagement to a board and its school district. See [www.iasb.com/conference-training-and-events/training/training-resources/foundational-principles-of-effective-governance/](http://www.iasb.com/conference-training-and-events/training/training-resources/foundational-principles-of-effective-governance/). **Issue 117, October 2024**