

Section 2-2.6:1. School Board norms; protocols; violations. —

A. The School Board adopts the following norms to govern interactions by School Board Members.

School Board members will ~~adhere to the following:~~

- (1) Speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. *When expressing a different viewpoint, School Board Members shall refrain from pressuring, intimidating, or accusing other board members.* ~~Board Members will help each other to depersonalize disagreements. Once the School Board reaches a decision or compromise, board members will each support the will of the School Board in word and deed;~~
- ~~(2) Not represent the School Board without the consent of the School Board. When making personal statements in any format including, speeches, articles, social media posts, etc., the school board member should clearly state that their statements are their opinion and not necessarily that of the School Board;~~
- ~~(3) Be respectful of the different roles and responsibilities throughout the school division and maintain focus on policy and governance;~~
- (2) Maintain awareness of the different roles that School Board Members play, such as a board member, citizen, parent, etc., *when participating in school activities.*
- (3) *Maintain focus* ~~Be focused on work~~ *policy and governance* as a School Board Member and not interfere with the day to day operations of Suffolk Public Schools, ~~which is the delegated responsibility of the school superintendent; and~~
- (4) Maintain open communication with other School Board Members, the administration and the community-at-large. Information shared with one Board Member will be shared with all members, unless the sharing of information is prohibited by law. If considerable work or time is required to generate information requested from the administration by a Board Member, then a full *majority (4 or more) of the School Board Members* must endorse the request. Considerable work or time means research that requires more than 60 minutes to generate.

B. The School Board adopts the following protocols to govern actions of School Board Members. School Board Members will adhere to the following:

- (1) The School Board welcomes comments from the public as appropriate. School Board Members are to listen to Public Comment and Public Hearing presentations, but are not to comment, deliberate or take action on them *during public comment time.* *School Board Members may ask* the School Board Chair to direct the Superintendent to investigate item(s) and report back to the School Board at a subsequent meeting.

- (2) When receiving requests or complaints from members of the public, School Board Members should:
- (i) ~~(a)~~ Hear the problem for a full understanding of the persons involved, date and place;
 - (ii) ~~(b)~~ Repeat the problem back to the community member;
 - (iii) ~~(c)~~ Refer *Instruct* the community member to *follow the proper chain of command (i.e. principal, chief, superintendent) and to document steps taken;* ~~the Superintendent;~~
 - (iv) ~~(d)~~ Remind the community member of due process and that the School Board Member must remain impartial in the event that the situation may come before the School Board; and
 - (v) ~~(e)~~ Request permission to share the information and to use the name(s) of the complainant with the Superintendent. The Superintendent will notify the entire School Board, if appropriate, as to the issue, action and resolution.
- (3) School Board Members may contact each other one by one. However, School Board Members are not to assemble in groups of more than two outside of a public meeting and discuss public business.
- (4) School Board Members may communicate with the School Superintendent by phone, email or in person meetings. In-person meetings between individual School Board Members and the School Superintendent and/or two School Board Members and the School Superintendent are encouraged.
- (5) Individual School Board Members are not to *interfere with day-to-day operations when communicating with subordinate administrators and shall not engage in a manner that is deemed intimidating. All requests for reports must be directed to the School Superintendent and not to staff.* ~~communicate directly with subordinate administrators without first discussing with the School Superintendent.~~
- (6) School Board Members serving on standing committees are to report on the work of standing committees at a public meeting of the School Board. **Revised Feb. 2025**
- ~~(7) The School Board Chair is the official spokesperson for the School Board on issues involving:~~
- ~~(i) ~~(a)~~ School Board Policies;~~
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~~(ii) (b) School Board Action;~~

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~~(iii) (c) School programs; and~~

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~~(iv) (d) Emergency/events.~~

~~(8) School Board Members who receive calls from the media regarding school division operations and not the Board Member's personal position on an issue, must direct the caller to the Chair and notify the School Superintendent of the call. Examples of school division operations include:~~

~~—(i) (a) Personnel;~~

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~~—(ii) (b) Student matters; —~~

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~~—(iii) (c) School Programs;~~

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~~—(iv) (d) Finance;~~

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~~—(v) (e) Condition of school buildings and grounds; and~~

~~—(iv) (f) Exceptional/emergency events, including school openings and closures.~~

(7) When speaking with the media, School Board Members will respond to questions by expressing their personal position and opinions, and will not serve as the official spokesperson of the School Board or the School Division. The Board Chair will serve as the official spokesperson of the School Board and the superintendent will serve as the official spokesperson of the School Division. ~~School Board Members may respond to questions from the media related to their personal position on an issue but must clearly indicate they are speaking for themselves and not for the School Board. Examples of personal position issues include:~~

~~—(i) (a) The Board Member's vote on a particular motion;~~

~~—(ii) (b) The Board Member's campaign positions; and~~

~~—(iii) (c) Current **issues and** events.~~

~~(8) Social media can be a positive tool for School Board Members to foster community engagement. While the School Board and Suffolk Public Schools are not responsible for the online activity of individual School Board Members, School Board Members are to operate within appropriate guidelines when communicating division business through social media. The following guidelines are applicable to School Board Members when posting on a social media site:~~

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(A) ~~(a) School Board Members must indicate that they are communicating as an individual member of the School Board and that their statements reflect their own views and not necessarily the official position of the School Board or that of Suffolk Public Schools. School Board Members should only post on behalf of the division if delegated to do so by the School Board.~~

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(B) ~~(b) School Board Members should keep in mind that they may be perceived by the public as an official spokesperson for the division. As such, School Board Members must not post information **that has not been** not verified or has not been made available to the public and should never post anonymously about the division business.~~

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(C) ~~(c) School Board Members should encourage community input through appropriate channels. School Board Members should not use social media to formulate their decisions regarding School Board business.~~

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(D) ~~(d) School Board Members should not post content that indicates they have already formed an opinion on matters pending before the School Board.~~

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(E) ~~(e) When attempting to communicate about matters from a previous School Board meeting, School Board Members should clarify that the posting is not an official record of the school Board meeting and only share information from the open portions of the meeting.~~

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(F) ~~(f) School Board Members are required to report communications that are harassing, discriminatory, bullying or defamatory to the School Superintendent if the communications involve division officials, staff, students or school business.~~

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(G) ~~(g) School Board Members are to comply with federal and state law regarding student privacy and the protection of student educational records. Posting images or information created and/or obtained about students in the educational context may violate a student's privacy rights. Posting such information on the Internet without express permission of the administration and the student [if 18 years of age] or the student's parent [if under 18 years of age] is prohibited.~~

(8) Social media is a valuable tool for School Board Members to foster community engagement, share information, and communicate directly with the public. While the School Board and Suffolk Public Schools are not responsible for the online activity of individual School Board Members, the following guidelines apply to the use of social media:

(A) **Independent Communication:** School Board Members are free to communicate on social media as individuals and may express their views openly. While their statements may not necessarily represent the official position of the School Board or Suffolk Public Schools, they are encouraged to engage in discussions that foster transparency and accountability.

(B) **Encouraging Public Engagement:** School Board Members should promote open discussion and engage with the public on matters related to Suffolk Public Schools. They may use social media to share verified information and clarify issues affecting the community.

(C) **Freedom to Form Opinions:** School Board Members are free to express their views on issues, including those pending before the School Board. Their perspectives contribute to an open and informed dialogue between elected officials and the community.

(D) **Transparency in Communication:** School Board Members may freely discuss matters from previous School Board meetings without restriction. They may share information from open portions of meetings and engage in discussions regarding board decisions as they see fit.

(E) **Discretion in Communication:** School Board Members are trusted to use their best judgment when posting about division matters and are not restricted from discussing school-related topics unless legally required to maintain confidentiality. School Board Members are to comply with federal and state law regarding student privacy and the protection of student educational records. Posting images or information created and/or obtained about students in the educational context may violate a student's privacy rights. Posting such information on the Internet without express permission of the administration and the student [if 18 years of age] or the student's parent [if under 18 years of age] is prohibited.

(9) School Board Members are encouraged to attend school activities when possible, ~~and to visit schools periodically to maintain contact with building employees, and increase understanding of actual educational practices.~~

(10) ~~School Board Members are to notify the School Superintendent prior to visiting schools, and unless invited by the building principal, must notify the building principal in advance of the visit. Upon arrival at the school, School Board Members must check in at the main office during the school day.~~ *School Board Members are encouraged to visit schools periodically in order to maintain contact with building employees, increase understanding of actual educational practices, and expand their knowledge of school programs, as well as staff and student needs.*

When visiting schools, School Board Members:

(a) Must check in at the main office during the school day, notifying the principal of their presence on campus;

(b) Will identify when they are visiting the school in their role as a board member, versus when they are visiting the school in another role (i.e.; as parent/guardian, relative or emergency contact, professional or organizational affiliation, etc.);

(c) Will follow all school policies and procedures;

(d) May not go into a classroom unless invited by a teacher or escorted by an administrator;

(e) May not visit schools during scheduled formal assessments blocks as listed on the SPS website;

(e) Must bring any concerns raised as a result of school visits to the attention of the Superintendent and not subordinate administrators or staff.

(13) ~~After checking in for a school visit, School Board Members may not go unannounced into a classroom unless attending a scheduled activity or attending a parental duty.~~

(11) Unless specifically authorized to act on behalf of the School Board, School Board Members are not to make an official visit to schools for the purpose of inspecting schools, ~~gathering information,~~ or giving directions to any employee of schools.

(12) School Board Members may volunteer at schools, but must complete the Suffolk Public Schools' volunteer connect application in order to become a school volunteer.

(13) School Board Members are to participate in professional development annually ~~and are to receive an academy level through VSBA.~~

C. Any School Board Member alleged to have violated any of the norms or protocols herein, will be addressed in the following manner:

(i) **First Offense — Verbal warning:** Any School Board Member alleged to have violated any of the norms or protocols will be issued a ~~formal~~ **verbal** notice of the alleged violation(s) **by the Board Chair** and afforded an opportunity to respond to the allegation(s). ~~in a closed meeting of the School Board. If the charges are founded, for a First Offense the School Board Member will be issued a verbal warning in a closed meeting of the School Board. For any subsequent repeat offense occurring within twelve (12) months of the first offense, the consequences imposed by the School Board will be the following:~~

(ii) **Second Offense of the Same Violation —Letter of Warning:** *Any School Board Member alleged to have violated the same norm or protocol for a second time within 12 months of the first offense will be issued a formal written notice of the alleged violation(s) by the School Board Chair and afforded an opportunity to respond in writing to the allegation(s). The Letter of Warning will be distributed to all School Board Members.*

(iii) **Third Offense of the Same Violation— Public Censure:** *Any School Board Member alleged to have violated any of the norms or protocols herein for a third time within 12 months of the first offense will, at a public meeting of the School Board, be issued a formal statement outlining the alleged violation(s) and afforded an opportunity to respond to the allegation(s) during the same public meeting.*

(iv) **Fourth Offense — ~~Removal from standing committees~~ Public Censure with Sanctions;** *Any School Board Member alleged to have violated any of the norms or protocols herein for a fourth time within 12 months of the first offense*

will, at a public meeting of the School Board, be issued a formal statement outlining the alleged violation(s) and afforded an opportunity to respond to the allegation(s) during the same public meeting. If allegations are determined to be founded and confirmed by a majority School Board vote, the School Board may administer suitable sanctions.

(Adopted July 11, 2019, Ordinance No: 19/20-3)

Legal Authority - Virginia Code § 22.1-78 (1950), as amended.