

521.1 STAFF COMMUNICATIONS OF CONCERNS ABOUT OPERATIONS

Process for Communicating Concerns about Programs and Operations

Generally, responsibility for school district programs, operations and communications shall flow simply and clearly from non-supervisory staff to supervisory and administrative staff, to the superintendent. The administration shall identify for each employee a primary supervisor. All employees should refer concerns regarding programs, operations, and other matters requiring supervisory or administrative attention to their supervisor. In the event of a substantive disagreement between an employee and a supervisor that cannot be resolved, the employee and the supervisor will jointly advance the issue to the superintendent. The superintendent may decide that the issue lies within the discretion of the supervisor or take the issue on for further inquiry and analysis. The superintendent makes the final decision regarding operational matters.

For processes for a staff member communicating a complaint about a supervisor, please refer to district policy 512 Employee Harassment and Bullying. Complaints about maltreatment of an employee by an administrator should be made to the administrator's supervisor, who might be the superintendent.

Staff Communications

Notwithstanding the need to have established lines of supervisory responsibility, the school district encourages the regular use of collaborative work structures, such as work teams or committees that enable the school district to fully engage employees' knowledge, skills, talents, and interests for the betterment of school district programs and operations. The school district encourages administrators to listen to the input and ideas of staff members. The school district also 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.

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

It is important for all school district employees to understand that when school district employees communicate verbally or in writing pursuant to their official duties, the extent to which such communications meet the school 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 professional communications.

Similarly, all school district employees are expected to pursue concerns and complaints through the established supervisory lines of authority. Formal concerns and complaints should be filed through the appropriate internal informal or formal complaint processes, or through appropriate external legal channels.

Staff Interactions with Individual Board Members

Except where expressly authorized by School Board action, or by the superintendent, individual employees are not expected to engage in work-related tasks at the direction of individual School Board members. For this reason, if an individual School 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 School 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 School 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 School Board member pursuant to duties and responsibilities of the employee's position, the School Board's expectation is that the individual School Board member should contact and work with the superintendent in resolving and responding to the employee's issue or concern.

This policy does not prohibit an employee from bringing a complaint about the superintendent to the School Board, who is the superintendent's supervisor. Formal concerns and complaints should be filed through the appropriate internal informal or formal complaint processes, or through appropriate external legal channels. Staff point-of-contact for this type of complaint is the School Board President.

The School Board and the school administrators understand that School Board members and district employees share a keen interest in the school district's schools and in education generally. Therefore, it is expected that individual School 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 School Board's expectation is that employees will use sound judgment in ensuring that they are not purposefully undermining the school district's established lines of authority.

Employee Speech and Expression on Matters of Public Concern

The school district shall not take 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 School 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 Section 111.31 (Fair Employment), Section 111.70 (Right of Municipal Employees and Prohibited Labor Practices), Section 118.20 (Teacher Discrimination Prohibited; includes nondiscrimination on the basis of religious or political affiliation)

Cross Reference: 527.1 Grievances Procedures

APPROVED: March 10, 2003, October 9, 2017, November 13, 2017, November 14, 2022

Williams Bay School District
Williams Bay, Wisconsin