

Communications Committee Meeting

Friday, March 1, 2024 9:00 AM

Remote Session

I. Call to Order, Verification of Quorum

II. Approval of Minutes

II.A. Approval of minutes from the February 2, 2024 Communications Committee Meeting.

III. Discussion regarding public comment and responses to email communication from the public received by the board

IV. Next scheduled meeting of the communications committee

IV.A. The next scheduled meeting of the Policy Committee is April 5, 2024 (remote meeting).

V. Adjournment

Communications Committee Meeting

Friday, February 2, 2024

9:00 AM

Remote Session

Present: David Felton, Sharon Ferraro, Chad Hoepfner. Present: 3.

I. **CALL TO ORDER, VERIFICATION OF QUORUM**

The meeting was called to order at 9:13 AM

Additional Attendees:

Lisa Barbiero, Superintendent of Schools; Daniel DiVito, Director of Digital Learning and Technology, Jessica Richman Smith, Attorney-Shipman & Goodwin

Move that the Communications Committee begin the February 2, 2024 meeting. Unseconded with a motion by Felton, David.

II. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. **Approval of minutes from the December 1, 2024 Communications Committee Meeting.**

Move that the Communications Committee approve the minutes from the December 1, 2024 meeting. Carried with a motion by Felton, David and a second by Ferraro, Sharon.

David Felton: Yea, Sharon Ferraro: Yea, Chad Hoepfner: Yea
Yea: 3, Nay: 0

III. **DISCUSSION REGARDING PUBLIC COMMENT AND RESPONSES TO EMAIL COMMUNICATION FROM THE PUBLIC RECEIVED BY THE BOARD**

A discussion took place regarding public comment and responses to email communication from the public received by the board. The committee is looking to create a template and set expectations with the public for when they electronically communicate with board members. They are also looking to provide a statement with regard to public comment and why the board does not engage with the public when comment is made. Attorney Richman-Smith provided the committee with guidelines on what the board can and cannot discuss based on various scenarios.

IV. **NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE**

A. **The next scheduled meeting of the Policy Committee is March 1, 2024 (remote meeting).**

V. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:57 AM.

Move that the Communications Committee adjourn the February 2, 2024 meeting. Carried with a motion by Felton, David and a second by Ferraro, Sharon.

David Felton: Yea, Sharon Ferraro: Yea, Chad Hoepfner: Yea
Yea: 3, Nay: 0

Respectfully submitted by:
Jodi Sacchetta

Chairperson

Superintendent

DRAFT



ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGED MEMORANDUM

TO: Communications Committee of the Weston Board of Education;
Lisa Barbiero, Superintendent

FROM: Jessica Richman Smith, Esq.

RE: Templates for Board Engagement with the Public

DATE: February 8, 2024

Background

The Communications Committee of the Weston Board of Education (the “Committee”) requested template responses which the Board’s spokesperson, typically the Chair, may use in answering emails sent to the full Board by members of the public. I previously provided such templates to the Committee, and the Committee discussed them during a public meeting held on February 2, 2024.

During the February 2 Committee meeting, the Committee requested my advice regarding the following additional matters:

1. The Committee asked that I update the template email responses to include a response that an individual Board member may use to respond to an email that is directed to that individual (or multiple individual Board members) rather than to the full Board. ***In reviewing the template responses I previously shared, I have concluded, subject to the Committee’s feedback, that those templates can be used by individual Board members who receive emails individually. I suggest that individual Board members forward (rather than copy) any such responses to the full Board for informational purposes only. Other Board members should not respond.***
2. The Committee asked that I draft a statement that the Chair can read prior to public comment at each Board meeting to explain the purpose of public comment and the reasons why the Board’s responses to it may be limited. As discussed below, an alternative to reading the statement is to print the statement on each Board meeting agenda and post it on the Board’s website.
3. The Committee asked that I provide talking points for the Chair to use if it is decided that the Board should respond to public comment made during Board meetings.

In general, the Board's response to emails received from members of the public should be, as appropriate, to confirm receipt of the communication, to delegate the question or comment to the administration for review and response, and/or to summarize an action previously taken by the Board. Any responses the Board (through the Chair) offers during public comment made during Board meetings should follow a similar paradigm.

The template responses below are designed to serve as starting points. They will need to be tailored to respond more directly and relevantly to the email and/or public comment presented. Bracketed text provides different options depending on the context. Shaded text indicates that details need to be added (*e.g.*, dates, descriptions).

Please let me know if there are other categories of emails and/or public comments the Board typically receives from members of the public for which a template response or talking points would be helpful.

Template Responses to Emails

1. ***Responding to questions or feedback about matters that came before the Board or are anticipated to come before the Board.***

Dear _____ :

Thank you for your email. Your feedback is very important to us.

The Board discussed [describe issue] during its meeting on [date] [or: The Board plans to discuss [describe issue] during its meeting scheduled for [date]. [Following deliberations, the Board voted to [describe vote].]

[The Board intends to discuss this matter again during its meeting scheduled for [date]. We encourage you to watch the meeting and hear our further discussion on this matter.]

Thank you again for reaching out. We appreciate your [comments/questions].

Kind regards,

2. ***Responding to questions or feedback about matters normally addressed by the administration, not the Board. Examples of such matters include matters related to students, grades, personnel, facilities repair/complaints, and extracurricular activities.***

Dear _____ :

Thank you for your email. Matters pertaining to [describe – e.g., students, personnel, facilities repair, athletics, extracurricular activities] generally are addressed by the administration. I have therefore referred this matter to Superintendent Barbiero.

Please feel free to reach out directly to Superintendent Barbiero or another member of the administration with any further questions.

Kind regards,

3. *Responding to FOIA requests.*

Dear _____:

Thank you for your email. Requests made of the Board pursuant to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are processed by members of our administrative team. I have therefore forwarded your email below to Superintendent Barbiero for follow-up in accordance with the FOIA.

Please feel free to reach out directly to Superintendent Barbiero with any questions.

Kind regards,

Statement Regarding Public Comment

I shared the draft statement below with Steve Ezzes, who, as Chair, would be responsible for reading the statement. Steve suggested that, given the length of the statement and the limited time allotted to Board meetings, it would be preferable to *print* the statement on each Board meeting agenda and also post it on the Board's website where it would remain indefinitely. The Chair's statement oral statement during each Board meeting would briefly note that the Board generally does not engage substantively (if at all) with public comment for reasons that are explained further in the statement printed in the Board's agenda and posted on the Board's website.

Draft statement:

The Board welcomes the opportunity to hear from members of the public about matters concerning the Weston Public Schools. Public comment is an important chance for the Board to receive input and feedback from our school community. We listen attentively to all comments shared.

While we value and pay close attention to public comment, it is our practice not to respond substantively, or sometimes at all, during public comment. There are several reasons for this:

First, engaging in a discussion on non-agenda items could violate the Board's obligations to comply with the Freedom of Information Act.

Second, the Board or the administration may not be prepared to discuss certain matters raised in the first instance by a public comment. Board discussions typically involve a great deal of preparation by the administration and the Board to facilitate meaningful and productive deliberations in public. Similarly, the Board or the administration may not have answers prepared to questions posed by community members during Board meetings, and may need to follow up at a later time.

Third, the Board develops its meeting agenda carefully to ensure that the Board addresses matters that are pressing or relevant at the time of the meeting. Responding to each public comment could take away the time the Board has to cover its agenda items, which could risk impacting school district operations.

We encourage members of the public with specific questions, concerns, or complaints about our schools to reach out directly to Superintendent Barbiero or the appropriate member of the administration. You may also email the Board at our email address, **[INSERT]**.

Talking Points for Responses to Public Comments

1. ***Responding to questions or feedback about matters that came before the Board or are anticipated to come before the Board.***
 - Thank you for your question/feedback.
 - The Board discussed the matter you have raised during its meeting on [date] [or: The Board plans to discuss the matter you have raised during its meeting scheduled for [date]. [Following deliberations, the Board voted to [describe vote].]
 - [The Board intends to discuss this matter again during its meeting scheduled for [date].

2. ***Responding to questions or feedback about matters normally addressed by the administration, not the Board. Examples of such matters include matters related to students, grades, personnel, facilities repair/complaints, and extracurricular activities.***
 - Thank you for your question/feedback.
 - The type of matter you have raised generally is addressed by the administration.
 - Please feel free to contact the administration directly with your question/feedback.

3. *Responding to questions or feedback about a matter normally within the Board's purview to handle, such as a policy issue, that the Board has not previously addressed and has no current plans to address.*

- Thank you for your question/feedback.
- Although this is not a matter the Board has previously addressed or has current plans to address, we value and listen carefully to all input from members of the public.
- We appreciate your participation this evening.