

**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. 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;
- (4) Maintain awareness of the different roles that School Board members play such as a board member, citizen, parent, etc.;
- (5) Be focused on work 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~~
- (6) 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 create a report requested from the administration by a Board Member, then the full School Board must endorse the request. If the amount of time needed to conduct research and create the report will exceed 60 minutes based on the superintendent's good faith estimate of the amount of time needed to perform the work, then the work will be deemed considerable work requiring approval by the School Board before the request can be honored;
- (7) Will strive to be an advocate for students to improve public education;
- (8) Will have integrity in all matters and support the full development of all children and the welfare of the Suffolk Community, Commonwealth of Virginia, and Nation;
- (9) Will attend meetings of the School Board and seek to be informed concerning issues under consideration;

- (10) Will seek to encourage individual School Board member expressions of opinion and will seek to facilitate an open, two-way communication process with all segments of the Suffolk Community;
- (11) Will communicate to the full School Board and superintendent, in accordance with School Board policies, public reaction and opinion regarding School Board policies and programs;
- (12) Will seek to encourage desired changes through legal and ethical procedures, in accordance with all laws, state regulations, and court orders pertaining to schools;
- (13) Will not use the position of School Board member for personal or partisan gain and will seek to avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety;
- (14) Will respect confidentiality of privileged information and will make no individual decisions or commitments that might compromise the actions of the School Board or school administration;
- (15) Will seek to be informed about current educational issues through individual study and participation in appropriate programs, such as those sponsored by the Virginia School Boards Association; and
- (16) Will always remember that the foremost concern of the School Board is to improve and enhance the teaching and learning experience for all students in the public schools in Virginia.

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. The School Board Chair may 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) Hear the problem for a full understanding of the persons involved, date and place;
  - (ii) Repeat the problem back to the community member;
  - (iii) Refer the community member to the Superintendent;

- (iv) 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) 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 communicate directly with subordinate administrators, including employees of Suffolk Public Schools unless the communication pertains to a Board Member's family member over which the Board Member has legal or physical custody and is responsible for the family member's educational progress, 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.
  - (7) The School Board Chair is the official spokesperson for the School Board on issues involving:
    - (i) School Board Policies;
    - (ii) School Board Action;
    - (iii) School programs; and
    - (iv) 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) Personnel;
    - (ii) Student matters;

- (iii) School Programs;
  - (iv) Finance;
  - (v) Condition of school buildings and grounds; and
  - (iv) Exceptional/emergency events, including school openings and closures.
- (9) 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) The Board Member's vote on a particular motion;
  - (ii) The Board Member's campaign positions; and
  - (iii) Current events.
- (10) 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:
- (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.
  - (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 not verified or has not been made available to the public and should never post anonymously about the division business.
  - (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.
  - (D) School Board Members should not post content that indicates they have already formed an opinion on matters pending before the School Board.

- (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.
  - (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.
  - (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.
- (11) 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.
  - (12) 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.
  - (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.
  - (14) 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.
  - (15) School Board Members may volunteer at schools, but must complete the Suffolk Public Schools' volunteer connect application in order to become a school volunteer.
  - (16) 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 issued a formal notice of the alleged violation(s) and afforded an opportunity to respond to the allegations 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 offense occurring within twelve (12) months of the first offense, the consequences imposed by the School Board will be the following:

- (i) Second Offense — Letter of Warning Issued by the Board Chair
- (ii) Third Offense — Public Censure at a public meeting of the School Board
- (iii) Fourth Offense — Removal from standing committees

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

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