1620 Board-Superintendent Relationship

The successful operation of schools requires a close, effective working relationship between the Board and the Superintendent. The relationship must be one of mutual respect, trust, goodwill, and candor. As the legally designated governing body, the Board retains final authority within the District. The Superintendent is the Board's professional advisor to whom the Board delegates executive and administrative responsibility.

The Board is charged with setting District policy, and the Superintendent is charged with carrying out and enforcing that policy. It is essential that each recognize and respect one another's areas of responsibility. To clarify their relationship, the following principles are adopted:

1. The Board of Directors and Superintendent together form the governance team of Seattle Public Schools. Both must do their jobs well for the organization to be successful and for the governance team as a whole to be effective.
2. The Superintendent will be directly responsible to the Board for the administration of the District. The Board will vest the Superintendent with executive authority commensurate with that responsibility.
3. Individual Board members will not hold the Superintendent accountable for meeting expectations that do not have the endorsement of the Board.
4. Except for issues involving the Superintendent as an employee, or in exceptional circumstances where the Board deems unilateral action is warranted, the Board will address personnel issues after consultation and upon recommendation by the Superintendent and will issue all orders affecting employees through the Superintendent.
5. The Board will expect from the Superintendent recommendations for the improvement of the District. The Board will adopt or revise policies after consulting with the Superintendent.
6. Since the strength of public policy is derived from diverse and sometimes contradictory views of the policymakers, Board members will freely and openly express their views on all items before the Board. However, all members of the Board will also seek ways to reconcile their diversity in order to provide clear direction to the Superintendent and staff.

In furtherance of these principles, the Board and Superintendent will set annual goals and meet regularly during the year to evaluate the effectiveness of the team.

Board-Superintendent Communications

The Board and the Superintendent will maintain a system of communication and interaction that builds upon mutual respect and trust. In order to perform their responsibilities, Board members must be familiar with the operations of the District. The Superintendent, in order to perform their responsibilities, must also be kept advised of issues and have the authority to control the utilization of District staff. It is therefore the policy of the Board that:

1. The Board and its members shall not issue directives to staff except through the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designated representative(s).
2. Individual Board members shall not request from the Superintendent or staff the preparation of a report or compilation of materials not readily available and involving significant staff time unless the majority of the Board by motion duly made and adopted shall have approved the preparation of the report or the compilation of material.
3. Members of the Board shall refer all personal appeals, applications, complaints, and other communications concerning the administration of the District to the Superintendent or their designated representative(s) for investigation and report to the Board member. Ordinarily, such matters are referred to the Board for decision only upon statutory appeals.
4. Communications between the Board and the Superintendent will be governed by the following practices:
    - Exercise honesty in all written and interpersonal interaction, avoiding misleading information.
    - Demonstrate respect for the opinions and comments of each other.
    - Maintain focus on common goals.
    - Communicate with each other in a timely manner to avoid surprises.
    - Maintain appropriate confidentiality.
    - Openly share personal concerns, information, knowledge, and agendas.
    - Make every reasonable effort to protect the integrity of the District and each other.
    - Respond in a timely manner to requests and inquiries from each other.

Superintendent Procedure:

Policy Cross References:

- 1005 – Responsibilities and Authority of the Board
- 1010 – Oversight and Progress Monitoring
- 1220 – Board Officers and Duties of Board Members
- 1240 – Committees
- 1310 – Board Policies, Manuals, and Superintendent Procedures
- 1620BP – Board-Superintendent Relationship Procedure

- 1630 – Evaluation of the Superintendent
- 1630BP – Evaluation of the Superintendent Procedure
- 1640 – Responsibilities and Authority of the Superintendent
- 1810 – Board Governance Goal-Setting and Self-Evaluation
- 4220 – Complaints Concerning Staff or Programs

Previous Policies:

- B60.00 – School Board-Superintendent Governance Team
- B61.00 – Division of Responsibilities

Legal References:

- RCW 28A.150.230 District school directors' responsibilities.
- RCW 28A.320.010 Corporate powers.
- RCW 28A.330.100 Additional powers of the Board.
- RCW 28A.400.010 Employment of Superintendent—Superintendent's qualification, general powers, term, contract renewal.
- RCW 28A.400.030 Superintendent's duties.

Management Resources:

Last Board Review:

- July 2, 2025

Revisions:

- July 2, 2025 (Administrative Update per Policy No. 1310)
- May 23, 2025 (Administrative Update per Policy No. 1310)
- June 7, 2023
- October 26, 2022

Adopted by the Board:

- June 1, 2011