

The Williamson County Board of Education Member Handbook

Introduction

The Williamson County Board of Education Member Handbook has been developed to provide an overview of the procedures and governing principles guiding the work of the Williamson County Board of Education (the “Board”) and Williamson County Schools (“WCS”). This handbook is intended to serve as a resource to current and prospective WCS Board Members. Additional information relating to school governance is available in the Board Policy Manual which can be accessed at www.wcs.edu.

The Board, by Tennessee law, is the corporate policy making authority for the district. The Superintendent serves as the Chief Executive Officer of WCS and is directly responsible for system operations. Together, the Board and the Superintendent provide for the effective and efficient operations of the district.

A digital edition of this handbook is available at www.wcs.edu. This handbook is reviewed annually.

Our Vision

Williamson County Schools will become a district recognized nationally for students who excel in the academics, the arts, and athletics.

Our Mission

- WCS will achieve its vision by providing exemplary programming which maximizes student development in all areas.
- Instruction will be delivered by a diverse group of effective teachers evaluated on student performance and the ability to build relationships.
- WCS will forge strong partnerships with families and our community to enhance student excellence.

Strategic Plan

The Board adopted a strategic plan for WCS, based on community input. The strategic plan identifies goals and related action within the five strategic areas below:

- Student Programming
- Teacher Quality
- Technology
- Planning and Zoning
- Finance

Authority and Responsibilities of the Board

The powers and mandatory duties of school boards are defined in TCA §49-203. Examples include:

- Selecting and appointing the Superintendent
- Establishing, adopting, and reviewing policies
- Adopting annual operating and capital budgets upon the recommendation of the Superintendent
- Upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, approving the granting of tenure and dismissal of tenured personnel

Composition of the Board and Board Member Qualifications

The Board is comprised of 12 members, each of whom resides in a different legislative district (Districts 1-12 within Williamson County). All Board members must be at least 18 years of age, a registered voter in Williamson County, and have earned a high school diploma or GED. Board members are elected for four year terms on a schedule alternating between even and odd number districts.

Oath of Office/Swearing In

Each new Board member shall appear before the County Mayor or County Clerk to take the Oath of Office. This is traditionally done at a public meeting (see Appendix for oath).

Authority of Individual Board Members

Board members have no legal authority as individuals. Board members do have authority when acting in a legally constituted session, with a quorum being present and by majority vote. The statement or action of an individual or group of the Board members shall not bind the Board itself, except when that statement or action is specifically authorized by an official act of the Board. This does not preclude individual Board members from representing the Board at meetings and ceremonial events or speaking to constituent groups in their capacity as a Board member.

New Board Member Orientation

Following the election or appointment of new Board members, the Board Chairman will provide an orientation addressing Board operations and processes, the working relationships with the Superintendent and staff of WCS, and substantive background information pertaining to school system issues and procedures. A copy of this handbook will be provided during the orientation. New Board members are required to attend the orientation session and submit to a background check.

Board Member Training

Tennessee law mandates that Board members attend seven hours of training annually which is provided by the Tennessee School Board Association (TSBA) in five core modules: Board/Superintendent Relations, Advocacy, Vision, Policy/Board Operations and School Finance. Additionally, in the first year of Board service Board members must also attend a two day Orientation at TSBA.

Removal of Board Seats

The Board has no legal authority to remove a school Board member.

Vacancies of Board Members

Vacancies shall be declared to exist upon death of a current Board member, resignation or moving from the district from which originally elected. When a vacancy occurs, the county legislative body will appoint a new member to serve until the next regularly scheduled election.

Compensation of Board Members

The compensation of Board members is set by the county legislative body. Payment will be made quarterly. As elected officials, Board members shall be eligible to participate in the county's medical, dental and life insurance program.

Annual Organizational Meeting

The Board must conduct an annual meeting for the election of a chairman and vice chairman. The Board traditionally conducts its election of officers as the first order of business at its regular Board meeting in September.

The meeting is called to order by the Superintendent. A motion is made to place a name(s) in nomination for Chairman and, subsequently, for Vice Chairman. Through an individually recorded vote, the members elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman from among the current sitting members by a majority vote. The election for Chairman shall precede the election for Vice Chairman. Immediately upon their election, the Chairman and Vice Chairman shall assume the duties of their office.

Duties and Qualification of Board Officers

Chairman

The Chairman presides at all meetings, appoints committees authorized by the Board, serves as chair of the Executive Committee and countersigns all warrants (checks) issued for all

expenditures. The Chairman communicates the views of the Board in all correspondence and performs other duties prescribed by law or by the Board. The Chairman may appoint committees to hear appeals authorized under Tennessee law or Board policy, appoint ad hoc or special committees of the Board and/or staff members to assist the Board with its work, study specific issues, or undertake Board projects, and serve as Ex-Officio member of all committees appointed. The Chairman shall have charge of coordinating Board retreats/strategy sessions as needed. The Chairman has the responsibility to keep the discussion to the motion at hand and may halt discussion that does not apply to the business at hand.

To be nominated for the role of Chairman, a member must have been on the Board at least 12 months prior to his/her nomination.

Vice Chairman

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman performs the duties of the Chairman. If both the Chairman and Vice Chairman are temporarily unavailable to perform the above responsibilities, the remaining members of the Board may designate another member by a majority vote to serve in such a capacity.

To be nominated for the role of Vice Chairman, a member must have served on the Board at least 12 months prior to his/her nomination.

Executive Committee

The Chairman and Superintendent comprise the Executive Committee in accordance with state law. The Executive Committee calls Board meetings and prepares the agendas for all Board meetings in accordance with State law and local policy. The Executive Committee is also authorized to sign all contracts for the Board. Board members may suggest items for the work session agenda as outlined in Board Policy 1.403. The Executive Committee shall set the agenda for any retreats/strategy sessions called by the Board Chairman.

State Ethics Policy and Financial Disclosure

State law requires that each Board member complete an annual financial disclosure form for the preceding calendar year. These statements are required to be filed annually with the state Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance (see www.state.tn.us/tref).

Social Media Guidelines

While WCS School Board members are not required to create or maintain a social media presence to communicate with the community, Facebook and Twitter are recognized as valuable channels to provide information and receive constituent feedback. However, engagement in these public

arenas carries significant responsibility. Board members should strive to conduct themselves within the Board's agreed-upon conduct parameters.

School board members who choose to use social networking sites should take precautions to keep communications about official board business separate from private, personal communications and opinions.

Social media comments and conversations with constituents or fellow public officials made by a Board member in their official capacity and which are about official Board or Williamson County Schools business are public records that should be archived in some fashion (printed or electronically stored), and which are open to public inspection and copying in accordance with the Tennessee Public Records Act.

Board members' use of social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.) should be consistent with the Board's agreed-upon Code of Ethics and Norms and Mores.

Board members should take care to note that feedback on these channels may or may not be representative of the larger population and should not be used as the solitary basis for determining constituent opinion.

Facebook

If a Board member chooses to have a Facebook page that identifies them as a WCS School Board member and is separate from their own personal page, the following guidelines should be considered when sharing and moderating communications:

Page Guidelines for users should be posted in the About section of the Board member's Facebook page, and Board members should consider use of the below language:

This page is a means for sharing information from WCS School Board member [name].

Comments from community users should pertain to the topic at hand.

Use of obscene, threatening, or harassing behavior of any kind is not tolerated or permitted. Users will be banned from commenting if, after a warning from the moderator, they repeatedly disregard this policy.

The following actions/posts by commenters will immediately be removed by the Board member (or their moderator), and the commenter will receive a warning via public and/or private message that they are at risk of being banned from the page for the following violation(s) of policy:

- Using vulgarity or insulting entire groups (racism, sexism, etc.)
- Threatening or implying violence
- Launching slanderous attacks on an individual or group of people

- Directing personal insults at other commenters

Negative comments that do not fall into the above categories should not be deleted by the Board member or their moderator, and the Board member should make efforts to respond to feedback and questions appropriately and respectfully as well as in a timely and consistent manner. Challenges to a position or action taken by a Board member are an expected result of open communication and should be respected as the citizen's expression of Free Speech.

The Board member should refrain from banning or blocking Williamson County residents from communicating via their page unless deemed absolutely necessary based on a violation of the stated Page rules.

Twitter

If a Board member identifies themselves as such on a personal Twitter handle, all posts from that handle should be treated as opinions and communications from their public persona for the duration of their time in office. Board members should conduct themselves with the utmost respect and professionalism as a member of the Board, and at all times within accordance with the Board's agreed-upon Code of Ethics and Norms and Mores.

Annual Agenda and Meeting Schedule

The Board approves an annual agenda and meeting schedule by September of each year which guides the Board's work. The annual agenda and meeting schedule shall be posted on the Board's website at www.wcs.edu.

Meeting Materials and Equipment

Before every business meeting, electronic packets of Board agenda materials are prepared for Board members and key staff. Board information and meeting packet materials are not released to the public until Board members have received them. Previous minutes, agendas, and documents from prior meetings may be found within the **Administration/School Board** section of the district's website.

Board members shall be provided, upon request, with a WCS laptop computer, to be used for WCS business. Board members adhere to the district's Acceptable Use Guidelines for employees.

Open Public Meetings and Notice

Meetings of the Board, including Board committees, are open to the public, except when held pursuant to Tennessee law governing attorney-client meetings as described below. WCS publishes meeting dates, times, and agendas in accordance with Tennessee law.

The Board has the authority to adopt and enforce reasonable rules regarding the conduct of persons attending its meetings. If the Chairman or presiding officer concludes that the behavior of an individual(s) is disrupting a meeting, he/she may have them removed.

Attorney-Client Meetings (Executive Sessions)

Attorney-client meetings, also called “Executive Sessions”, are held for attorney advice regarding pending or threatened litigation. The Board cannot deliberate or vote at these meetings.

Discussions during executive sessions must remain confidential.

Regular Business Meetings

1. As a matter of practice, the Board generally conducts one business meeting per month which is held on the third Monday of the month. Board meetings are generally held in the Williamson County Administrative Complex auditorium. Based on the business volume and need, the Board Chairman may cancel a meeting. It is common for the Board to not conduct meetings in July and December due to a lack of business.
2. Board policy provides time for members of the public to address the Board. Board policy provides for a maximum of 30 cumulative minutes at each Board meeting for the public to provide input on policy, programming, and organizational practices. Board meetings are not an appropriate venue to address specific student or employee concerns.
3. Routine, non-controversial business items shall be placed on the consent agenda and adopted by a single vote. Any member may request the removal of a consent agenda item, resulting in the placement of the item at the end of the regular agenda.
4. Meetings begin promptly at the starting time on the agenda, provided a quorum is present.
5. All votes which involve the expenditure of money must be recorded by electronic vote or by roll call.
6. All votes for any expenditure, tenure, dismissal or policy shall be considered only after the recommendation of the Superintendent.
7. A Board member absent due to work, family emergency, or military service may participate in a Board meeting by electronic means so long as the Board Chairman can visually identify the member, a quorum of the Board is physically present, and the member (if absence is work related) has provided the Board Chairman his/her intent to participate electronically no less than five (5) days prior to the meeting. A Board member may only participate electronically twice annually, unless the absence is due to military service.

8. Regular Board meeting agendas will follow the order outlined below (BOE Policy 1.403) unless modified by the Executive Committee:

- Call to Order (Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence)
- Approval of Agenda
- Consent Agenda
- Items of Particular Public Interest (Public Comment)
- Communications to the Board
- Unfinished Business
- New Business
- Adjournment

Special Called Meetings

Special meetings may be called by the Executive Committee or when requested by a majority of the Board. The Chairman shall give reasonable notice of the time, location, and specific purpose of the special called meeting. Official minutes will be recorded.

Appeals

Appeals to the Board will follow Policy 1.404.

Complaints/Grievances:

All complaints dealing with school district operations shall be handled at the lowest appropriate level of responsibility. Board members receiving complaints should direct them to the Superintendent for disposition. The Board will only hear complaints or grievances over which it has authority (Board Policy 5.501; 6.305).

Work Sessions

The Board conducts a work session prior to regularly scheduled Board meetings to discuss agenda items in detail. Monthly Board work sessions are generally held the Thursday prior to monthly Board meetings. Board member participation in work sessions is essential. No votes are taken during work sessions. Board meeting agendas may be modified as a result of work session

discussions. Work sessions also provide Board members with the opportunity to request additional information in advance of a vote.

Informational Sessions

From time to time, to obtain public input and communicate Board initiatives, the Board may conduct public meetings that are held at different locations within the county. These meetings are held to update the public on school matters. Public notice will be given of the location and times. No official minutes are taken at these meetings

Rules of Order

The Board observes Robert's Rules of Order, in conducting its meetings. Moreover, the Board is guided by its policies and Tennessee law.

1. A quorum consisting of a majority of the full Board shall be present to convene a meeting and transact business.
2. The Board adopts its agenda by majority vote at the beginning of meetings.
3. Tennessee law requires a majority of sitting Board members to approve any Board action.

Conduct at Meetings

Board members should follow the Board Code of Ethics and norms at all times (See appendix).

Retreats/Strategy Sessions

The Board Chairman may schedule planning retreats from time to time. These meeting are open to the public.

Record of Board Meetings

The Board maintains records of meetings as follows:

1. Records of the Board's business meetings are retained in the Central Office and are open to public review. Monthly Board meeting minutes are maintained online. Monthly Board meetings are generally televised, and copies are maintained on file.
2. The minutes of all public meetings contain actions taken by the Board and a summary of the discussions. A Board member may specifically request that a statement on a subject be reflected in the minutes. Minutes of each Board meeting must be approved by majority vote at the next regular Board meeting.

3. Board votes are published in Board meeting minutes. Board meeting minutes must reflect how individual Board members voted on any particular agenda item.

School Board Attorney

Pursuant to State law, the Board may hire legal counsel to represent its interests in legal matters. Pursuant to policy, the Board's attorney represents the organization's interests in working with the Superintendent and in-house legal counsel.

Board of Education Correspondence Procedure

Individual Board members often receive numerous e-mails and letters from constituents about matters relating to the school system. Individual Board members have the option of responding directly to correspondence addressed to an individual member; however, the correspondence must clearly reflect that the views expressed therein are those of the individual member and not necessarily those of the Board. Inasmuch as identical e-mails are often personalized to each Board member, it may be prudent to contact the Superintendent's Executive Assistant to ascertain if the same one has been received by all, with a response to be sent on behalf of the Board Chairman. Board members shall restrict electronic communication regarding Board business to their wcs.edu email account. Board members should not use personal email accounts for public business.

Board Member Visits to Schools

Board members are strongly encouraged to visit schools to better understand the individuality of schools and the responsibility of staff within the school system. When feasible, Board members, working through the Superintendent, should schedule the visit so as to provide the school principal the courtesy of optimum advance notice, to avoid potential conflicts with student testing, staff evaluations, or other critical activity necessitating the attention or presence of the school principal. In the event of such conflict, the Superintendent will schedule the visit for a mutually convenient time.

Board members should refrain from direct involvement in the day to day system or school operations and refer all public requests to the Superintendent or his or her designee.

Board Member Requests for Information

Requests by Board members for specific information, data, and/or reports from administrative staff – whether as a follow-up to an item discussed at a prior meeting or a separate matter of interest to an individual member – shall be made through the Superintendent, but not directly to administrative staff. By doing so, requests may be coordinated, duplication can be avoided, and the Superintendent can best determine the appropriate use of staff in responding timely to such

requests. Within reason, and excluding individual student or personnel records, the Superintendent will be responsive to all reasonable requests. If a request is deemed overly time consuming or unreasonable, the matter will be brought to the attention of the Board Chairman for consideration by the Board. Materials and information requested by individual members will be distributed to all Board members.

Individual Board members shall not make requests for printing or media work of the communications office or the Superintendent which entail labor and materials, whether for use in their capacity or in the community, without bringing such request to the full Board for its approval.

Policy Development

The Board has a policy that provides a format for policy development. Discussion of a new or revised policy usually occurs over the course of six total meetings: review by the Board's Policy Committee of a draft policy prepared by the Superintendent's staff; review and discussion at the subsequent Board Work Session, the scheduling and first reading of a draft policy at a public Board meeting; a second discussion at a later Policy Committee and Board Work Session followed by adoption upon second reading of the policy at a public Board of Education meeting. Procedures to implement policy are within the domain of the Superintendent to adopt. All adopted policies and procedures will be posted on the Board's website.

The Board can suspend policy of a vote by of a majority of the members. However, if the Board suspends policy during a Board meeting, the suspended policy shall be referred to the next Policy Committee meeting for review.

In the case where an action must be taken on an issue within the Board's statutory responsibilities and the Board has not provided policy guidelines, the Superintendent has the power to act. The Superintendent must report the action to the Board at its next regular meeting, and the Board should determine if there is a need for development of a policy.

Budget Adoption

Fiscal Operating Budget and Capital Plans

- The Superintendent is charged with the preparation of the annual operating budget. Principals and the administrative team gather personnel and operation needs of the district for the ensuing fiscal period. The administrative team uses the Board's strategic plan to develop their budget requests. The operating budget includes expenditures for salaries and benefits of all employees and for all expenses incurred in the day to day operation of WCS. In addition, a separate capital budget which reflects yearly maintenance and technology

requests of a capital nature (roof replacement, yearly computer replacement in bulk, etc.) will be presented that will be requested outside of the operating budget with funding to either come from the unappropriated fund balance or a request to the county for debt issuance.

- Budget documents are distributed to the Board during the latter part of the month of February.
- Policy requires review of the prepared budget by the Board at two meetings no less than two weeks apart unless after the first review, the Board holds a special called meeting to cancel the second meeting.
- The Board will adopt a budget prior to April 1 each year at either a regular or special called meeting held for that purpose.
- The budget is not adopted until action is taken by the county legislative body on the proposed operating and capital budgets at its July meeting. If the county legislative body changes the request of the Board at that meeting, the budget does not become final until the Board approves that action.

Five Year Capital Plan

The county passed a privilege tax that requires all entities that receive these funds to file a five year capital plan reflecting capital needs of the future.

1. The capital budget includes funding for the construction and planning for new facilities, modifications, renovations, and revitalizations; furniture and equipment associated with these projects; major roof replacements; and related expenditures and costs.
2. The capital improvement budget will be prepared and submitted to the Board at a meeting by November so that it can be included in the January session of the County Commission.
3. The Superintendent, upon approval of this plan, shall submit intents to fund to the county legislative body to request funding for projects if plans materialize as projected. This plan is updated yearly to ensure that expected projects are still needed.
4. Approval of this document by the county legislative body is not approval of funding for those projects. The approval by the county legislative body of subsequent intents to fund particular projects is the approval of funding for those projects.

Conclusion

The role of the Board, whether appointed or elected, is as important as ever. Its decisions impact everything within the school boundaries. As reflected in this handbook, the Board's authority encompasses a wide range of Executive, Legislative, and Quasi-Judicial responsibilities.

As individuals aspire to be elected and/or appointed to the Williamson County Board of Education and are fortunate to be chosen to serve, this handbook will assist in understanding the authority and responsibilities to display the foregoing qualities, skills, and experience.

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