



Internal Monitoring Report

September 8, 2020

Policy Title: **Dealings with Citizens of Poudre School District**

Policy Type: Executive Limitation

Policy No.: EL 2.9

Period Monitored: July 2019 – August 2020

This report monitors the Board of Education's Executive Limitations Policy.

The Superintendent shall not fail to actively engage with the citizens of Poudre School District, and the Superintendent's relationship with citizens of the District will neither violate the highest standards of transparency nor impede the Board's role as citizen representative.

This report is presented in accordance with the Board's monitoring schedule. I certify that the information is true and complete.

Sandra Smyser, Ph.D.

September 8, 2020

Superintendent of Schools

Executive Summary

This report monitors Executive Limitation 2.9, Dealings with Citizens of Poudre School District, policy language as it deals with how the Superintendent's relationship with



citizens of Poudre School District meets the highest standards of transparency and supports the Board's role as citizen representative.

The evidence included in this monitoring report suggests that the Superintendent engaged with the citizens of PSD, maintaining high standards of transparency through two-way communication with key stakeholders while supporting the role of the Board as citizen representatives.

The evidence included in this monitoring report indicates that the Superintendent complied with the policy by adequately communicating with:

- Community, students, parents and staff
- Principals and administrators
- Schools
- Teachers/Certified employees
- Board of Education
- Classified employees
- Specific education community
- Broader community and media

Additionally, the superintendent was responsive to community, staff and student requests/complaints.

Policy Wording:

The Superintendent shall not fail to actively engage with the citizens of Poudre School District, and the Superintendent's relationship with citizens of the District will neither violate the highest standards of transparency nor impede the Board's role as citizen representative.

Interpretation:

The district interprets the *superintendent's relationship with citizens of Poudre School District* to mean the professional meetings, correspondence, publications, and



conversations conducted by the superintendent, whether through social media, by email, in-person, or by phone.

This is reasonable since these are the means by which the superintendent engages in citizen relationships.

The district interprets *impede the Board's role as citizen representative* as prohibiting or limiting citizens of PSD from contacting Board members. Withholding information so that Board members cannot have answers to questions or information that may assist them when discussing the district with other citizens.

The two standards of permitting citizens of PSD to contact Board members and providing information to Board members are reasonable since to function as citizen representatives, Board members need to hear and read information, so they can make well-informed decisions as representatives. The Superintendent facilitates the Board's interactions with citizens through weekly updates, email, district ends, board meetings and outreach/engagement sessions.

Evidence:

The superintendent has engaged with citizens of PSD and maintained the highest standards of transparency through 2019-2020. This includes the following two-way interaction with stakeholder groups:

Community and Staff Communication. Attended various school, community, and networking events, meetings, and activities, some of which included but were not limited to: the 2019 Poudre Association of School Executives annual networking reception; 2019 Rotary Teacher of the Year luncheon; several scholarship and other student recognition ceremonies; PSD Foundation Excellence in Education banquet; PSD Foundation annual spring fundraising breakfast; meetings with PSD Foundation Board members; regular meetings with the Fort Collins city manager and Larimer County manager; met with the Coloradoan Editorial Board; meetings with Timnath and Wellington town leadership; made remarks at District Advisory Board meetings; met with new district administrators and classified and certified staff; presented to various



community groups, including local realtors; school visits prior to the spring closure of schools; and addressed staff at various staff meetings and retreats.

Additional community and staff communication activities for the 2019-2020 school year included but were not limited to **(Please note the following occurred separate from the COVID-19 pandemic; there is a separate section that addresses the superintendent/staff work in response to the pandemic and closure of schools.):**

- Published a 2019-20 back-to-school message on the PSD website and in the PSD newsletter to parents, staff, and the community.
- Submitted multiple messages to Poudre Retired School Employees Association (PRSEA) membership throughout the school year.
- Shared district news through website superintendent's messages and updates in monthly Great Happens Here e-newsletters to more than 3,800 employees and more than 36,000 parents and community members.
- Informally visited schools to observe learning, hear staff celebrations and concerns and discuss emerging topics.
- Attended meetings held by many PSD departments, as well as principals' levels meetings.
- Presented to numerous organizations across Larimer County on topics ranging from the facts of the 2019 mill levy override to new construction and progress on the 2016 bond-funded projects in PSD.

2019 mill levy override: The superintendent and other district leaders met with the Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce's Legislative Affairs Committee; the 2019-20 class of PSD Insight; and other organizations and leaders across Larimer County to share fact-based information about Ballot Measure 4A, a mill levy override that passed in November 2019 with about 61 percent of voters support the issue.

The superintendent's staff created extensive fact-based communications about the mill levy override and how the district would use the approximately \$18 million generated annually to raise first-year teacher salaries; restructure the teacher salary schedule to maintain competitive wages; maintain competitive wages for support staff; support students' mental health by hiring mental health professionals; and enhancing safety and security. Those fact-based materials were made available on print and online platforms, as well as in English, Spanish and Arabic.



Progress on 2016 bond-funded construction:

The superintendent met with the Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce, service and community organizations and local business leaders to present information on the status of the Long-Range Plan. This work will continue through the 2019-2020 school year.

Additionally, during the 2019-2020 school year, staff coordinated with the building architects to hold community information sessions at school locations to preview draft drawings of the new schools. These drawings were also shown to the Board of Education and were posted in the JSSC lobby for public viewings ahead of multiple board meetings, as well as on the PSD website and social platforms and highlighted in the Great Happens Here e-newsletter. Communications and Construction staff also collaborated to produce photos, and written and video stories to show our community progress on construction of the three new schools; completion of the new addition at Zach Elementary; as well as projects on the list of \$40 million in improvements to all schools. The superintendent and staff also celebrated with families, community leadership and other stakeholders at respective groundbreaking ceremonies for the new middle/high school in Wellington and the new southeast elementary school.

School Start Times. Leading up to the Board of Education's vote to shift back school start times, the superintendent's staff conducted extensive research and robust community outreach opportunities at the direction of the Board of Education during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. After the Board of Education's vote to change start times, the superintendent's staff worked extensively to communicate the change, and answer questions from families and the community to ensure the transition to new bell schedules at the start of the 2019-20 school year went as smooth as possible.

Principals and Administrators. The superintendent met with principals and administrators throughout the 2019-2020 school year to discuss emerging issues and long-term plans regarding improvement, leadership and the direction of the district. The superintendent also spoke to new administrators at the New Administrator Orientation and addressed administrators at the two leadership retreats. Additionally, the superintendent had dialogue with principals at some of their monthly levels meetings



and held frequent cabinet meetings throughout the year. The superintendent also received regular updates from the nine administrators who reported directly to her.

Schools. The superintendent visited many but not all PSD schools during the school year to see the learning process first-hand and to talk with students and staff. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic response and spring closure of schools, the superintendent was not able to visit all schools.

Teachers. The superintendent worked with assistant superintendents and principals to talk with teachers about emerging issues, as needed, and also met with Poudre Education Association leadership during the 2019-20 school year.

Board of Education. The superintendent communicated frequently with Board of Education members to support their roles as citizen representatives through personal phone calls, and timely e-mail updates, electronic meeting agendas, as well as through work sessions, special meetings, and retreats. Weekly updates were sent to the Board to provide information related to district functioning and issues of interest so they would be prepared for interactions with the community.

The superintendent encouraged PSD staff to direct citizens to Board member contact information when asked. The superintendent met with Board leadership several times each month to plan Board business and work session meetings. The superintendent also met with several Board members routinely at their request.

Education/Community, Local, State, and National Activities. In order to listen and learn from stakeholders and gain strategic direction and best practices for the district, the superintendent was a member of/participated in a leadership role in local and national organizations such as the Poudre School District Foundation, Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), PSD/City of Fort Collins/Larimer County Liaison Committee, the Denver Area School Superintendent's Council (DASSC), Institute of Education Innovation (IEI), District Administrator Leadership Institute, National Association of School Superintendents (NASS), and Colorado Association of School Executives.



Broader Community and Media. The superintendent utilized the PSD website, social media platforms, email, and the news media to convey and publish messages/updates to staff, family, retired educators, and other groups.

Responsiveness to community requests. The superintendent modeled accessibility and honest, open communication with the public and news media. Her staff worked diligently to respond to media requests and proactively met with reporters from local media outlets during the 2019-20 school year. In addition, the superintendent and her staff responded to and/or appropriately routed email, phone calls and general correspondence from the public, staff, and students as appropriate in a timely manner.

Community Engagement Process. The superintendent's staff utilizes multiple communications mediums available to share information and involve stakeholders in major initiatives being considered by the district.

In general, the engagement process includes:

- Forming committees with representatives from stakeholder groups (parents, district and school staff, community, and students, when appropriate) to gather input through face to face meetings, focus groups and surveys, research options, and recommendations to the superintendent's cabinet and Board of Education.
- Information and updates are shared throughout the process utilizing the PSD website, social media, traditional media, school and district newsletters, staff and parent email and e-newsletters, and face-to-face meetings with principals, administrators, community members and staff.
- Public input meetings are held to gather feedback to inform decision-making.
- Decisions are shared widely with stakeholders, utilizing a variety of the communication vehicles named above.



PSD's response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Starting in spring 2020, amid the district's response to COVID-19, the superintendent was also engaged in numerous virtual meetings, conference calls and planning efforts at the state and local levels. Such engagements included but weren't limited to: multiple calls weekly with Larimer County Department of Health and Environment leaders, as well as community leaders and Thompson School District and Estes Park School District leadership teams; ongoing calls with superintendents across the State of Colorado; ongoing calls with Larimer County community liaisons working to solve shared community challenges during the pandemic; ongoing calls with State of Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and his leadership team, as well as Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment staff; ongoing calls with State of Colorado Commissioner of Education Katy Anthes and Colorado Department of Education leadership; meetings with PSD's three employee associations; as well as individual calls, virtual meetings and email exchanges with community partners, leadership, families and more.

The superintendent's staff further amplified these efforts, attending collectively countless meetings to support students and staff, plan the district's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and work with community partners on solutions to community-wide issues.

Timely and accurate communication about the district's response to COVID-19 was and continues to be critical. The district first started communicating with families and the community in February 2020, at that point ensuring stakeholders that PSD was closely monitoring the situation. Between February and early March 2020, the superintendent and her staff communicated in a timely fashion about major decisions, including but not limited to canceling staff and student travel due to COVID-19. Communications efforts went into higher gear still in mid-March when PSD closed schools before Spring Break 2020 and remained in remote education through the end of the school year.

Communications efforts included but were not limited to:

- Creation of a PSD COVID-19 Response web page, a central resource for the district's comprehensive response plan; community resources (mental health, internet services, and more); critical health and safety information; links to reputable sites, such as the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Colorado Department of Health and Environment; and more. District webpages were kept up to date throughout winter and spring 2020, requiring countless updates to reflect the most accurate and timeline information.



- The Communications Department supported other departments and schools with communication through means including but not limited to: letter templates to ensure consistency and accuracy; district-produced news items and family updates about critical services, from meal and laptop distribution to positive #PSDTogether stories; production of twice-weekly and then weekly staff and families newsletters (family newsletters were produced in English, Spanish, Arabic, Korean and Mandarin); facilitation of numerous media interviews; creation of videos from the superintendent; creation of Frequently Asked Questions guides, updated frequently to reflect the most-current information available; and collaboration on health safety messages with external partners, including but not limited to the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment.
- Working with the assistant superintendent of secondary schools and his staff, along with PSD's Operations division, schools and many others, the superintendent and her staff submitted a detailed safety plan and obtained a variance from the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment to hold seven in-person, high school graduation ceremonies July 23-25, 2020 at French Field and the gymnasium at Fossil Ridge High School. The Communications Department supported these efforts through creation of printed and online communications, ranging from attendance requirements (i.e. wear a mask, maintain social distancing, guest limitations) to a tremendous suite of videos, photos and stories in the 2020 Grads at a Glance series. Additionally, PSDTV and a talented crew livestreamed (in English and Spanish) the ceremonies and produced celebration videos for each high school. As of July 27, the livestreams had nearly 17,000 views collectively, amounting to about 5,200 hours of watch time. PSDTV also produced virtual graduation celebration videos for all schools as a proactive step, in case PSD had not been able to host in-person graduation ceremonies.
- The Communications Department also continued its work with the Language Culture and Equity Department to ensure the highest possible equity of access to information through translation of all district announcements and family newsletters in multiple languages; through robocalls in multiple languages; and the addition of the Google translate tool on the PSD website, among other efforts.
- Additionally, the superintendent and/or the superintendent's staff presented 2020-21 planning updates at Board of Education meetings; as well as shared planning updates with numerous community groups including but not limited to:



LatinX family/community partners; City of Fort Collins staff; Integrated Services families; members of the media; and many more.

- The superintendent and her staff also directly responded to thousands of calls, emails and direct messages on PSD's social media platforms from families and community members between February and August 2020.

Due to the evidence provided, the district meets the expectations described in Executive Limitation 2.9.