

Community Relations

Connection with the Community

Public Relations

The Board President is the official spokesperson for the School Board. The Superintendent is the District's chief spokesperson. The Superintendent or designee shall plan and implement a District public relations program that will:

1. Develop community understanding of school operation.
2. Gather community attitudes and desires for the District.
3. Secure adequate financial support for a sound educational program.
4. Help the community feel a more direct responsibility for the quality of education provided by their schools.
5. Earn the community's good will, respect, and confidence.
6. Promote a genuine spirit of cooperation between the school and the community.
7. Keep the news media accurately informed.
8. Coordinate with the District Safety Coordinator to provide accurate and timely information to the appropriate individuals during an emergency.

The public relations program should include:

1. Regular news releases concerning District programs, policies, activities, and special event management for distribution by, for example, posting on the District website, using social media platforms, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc., or sending to the news media.
2. News conferences and interviews, as requested or needed. The Board President and Superintendent will coordinate their respective media relations efforts. Individuals may speak for the District only with prior approval from the Superintendent.
3. Publications having a high quality of editorial content and effective format. All publications shall identify the District, school, department, or classroom and shall include the name of the Superintendent, the Building Principal, and/or the author and the publication date.
4. Other efforts that highlight the District's programs and activities.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a process that the Board uses to actively involve diverse citizens in dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative thinking around common interests for the District's schools.

The Board, in consultation with the Superintendent, determines the purpose(s) and objective(s) of any community engagement initiative.

For each community engagement initiative:

1. The Board will:
 - a. Commit to the determined purpose(s) and objective(s), and
 - b. Provide information about the expected nature of the public's involvement.

2. The Superintendent will:
 - a. Identify the effective tools and tactics that will advance the Board's purpose(s) and objective(s),
 - b. At least annually, prepare a report for the community engagement initiative, and/or
 - c. Prepare a final report of the community engagement initiative.

The Board will periodically: (1) review whether its community engagement initiative(s) are achieving the identified purpose(s) and objective(s); (2) consider what, if any, modifications would improve effectiveness; and (3) determine whether to continue individual initiatives.

CROSS REF.: 2:110 (Qualifications, Term, and Duties of Board Officers)

Adopted by Mercer County School District Board of Education – May 20, 2020

Community Relations

Community Use of School Facilities

School facilities are available to community organizations during non-school hours when such use does not: (1) interfere with any school function or affect the safety of students or employees, or (2) affect the property or liability of the School District. The use of school facilities for school purposes has precedence over all other uses. The District reserves the right to cancel previously scheduled use of facilities by community organizations and other groups. The use of school facilities requires the prior approval of the Superintendent or designee and is subject to applicable procedures.

Persons on school premises must abide by the District's conduct rules at all times.

Student groups, school-related organizations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations are granted the use of school facilities at no costs during regularly staffed hours. Fees and costs shall apply during non-regularly staffed hours and to other organizations granted use of facilities at any time. A fee schedule and other terms of use shall be prepared by the Superintendent and be subject to annual approval by the School Board.

LEGAL REF.: 20 U.S.C. §7905, Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act.
10 ILCS 5/11-4.1, Election Code.
105 ILCS 5/10-20.41, 5/10-22.10, and 5/29-3.5.
Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 533 U.S. 98 (2001).
Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).
Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of Univ. of Va., 515 U.S. 819 (1995).

CROSS REF.: 7:330 (Student Use of Buildings - Equal Access), 8:25 (Advertising and Distributing Materials in Schools Provided by Non-School Related Entities), 8:30 (Visitors to and Conduct on School Property)

Adopted by Mercer County School Board of Education on May 17, 2023.

Community Relations

Advertising and Distributing Materials in Schools Provided by Non-School Related Entities

No material or literature shall be posted or distributed that would: (1) disrupt the educational process, (2) violate the rights or invade the privacy of others, (3) infringe on a trademark or copyright, or (4) be defamatory, obscene, vulgar, or indecent. No material, literature, or advertisement shall be posted or distributed without advance approval as described in this policy.

Community, Educational, Charitable, or Recreational Organizations

Community, educational, charitable, recreational, or similar groups may, under procedures established by the Superintendent, advertise events pertinent to students' interests or involvement. All advertisements must (1) be student-oriented, (2) prominently display the sponsoring organization's name, and (3) be approved in advance by the Superintendent or designee. The District reserves the right to decide where and when any advertisement or flyer is distributed, displayed, or posted.

Commercial Companies and Political Candidates or Parties

Commercial companies may purchase space for their advertisements in or on: (1) athletic field fences; (2) athletic, theater, or music programs; (3) student newspapers or yearbooks; (4) scoreboards; or (5) other appropriate locations. The advertisements must be consistent with this policy and its implementing procedures and be appropriate for display in a school context. Prior approval from the Board is needed for advertisements on athletic fields, scoreboards, or other building locations. Prior approval is needed from the Superintendent or designee for advertisements on athletic, theater, or music programs; student newspapers and yearbooks; and any commercial material related to graduation, class pictures, or class rings.

No individual or entity may advertise or promote its interests by using the names or pictures of the School District, any District school or facility, staff members, or students except as authorized by and consistent with administrative procedures and approved by the Board.

Material from candidates and political parties will not be accepted for posting or distribution, except when used as part of the curriculum.

LEGAL REF.: *Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).

Berger v. Rensselaer Central Sch. Corp., 982 F.2d 1160 (7th Cir. 1993), *cert. denied*, 113 S.Ct. 2344 (1993).

Sherman v. Community Consolidated Sch. Dist. 21, 8 F.3d 1160 (7th Cir. 1993), *cert. denied*, 8 F.3d 1160 (1994).

Hedges v. Wauconda Community Unit Sch. Dist. No. 118, 9 F.3d 1295 (7th Cir. 1993).

Victory Through Jesus Sports Ministry v. Lee's Summit R-7 Sch. Dist., 640 F.3d 329 (8th Cir. 2011), *cert. denied*, 565 U.S. 1036 (2011).

DiLoreto v. Downey Unified Sch. Dist., 196 F.3d 958 (9th Cir. 1999).

CROSS REF.: 7:325 (Student Fundraising Activities), 7:330 (Student Use of Buildings - Equal Access)

Adopted by Mercer County School District #404 Board of Education on July 18, 2018.

Community Relations

Visitors to and Conduct on School Property

The following definitions apply to this policy:

School property - District and school buildings, grounds, and parking areas; vehicles used for school purposes; and any location used for a School Board meeting, school athletic event, or other school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities.

Visitor - Any person other than an enrolled student or District employee.

All visitors to school property are required to report to the Building Principal's office and receive permission to remain on school property. All visitors must sign a visitors' log, show identification, and wear a visitor's badge. When leaving the school, visitors must return their badge. On those occasions when large groups of parents/guardians, friends, and/or community members are invited onto school property or when community members are attending Board meetings, visitors are not required to sign in but must follow school officials' instructions. Persons on school property without permission will be directed to leave and may be subject to criminal prosecution.

Except as provided in the next paragraph, any person wishing to confer with a staff member should contact that staff member to make an appointment. Conferences with teachers are held, to the extent possible, outside school hours or during the teacher's conference/preparation period.

Requests to access a school building, facility, and/or educational program, or to interview personnel or a student for purposes of assessing the student's special education needs, should be made at the appropriate building. Access shall be facilitated according to guidelines from the Superintendent or designee.

The School District expects mutual respect, civility, and orderly conduct among all people on school property or at a school event. No person on school property or at a school event (including visitors, students, and employees) shall perform any of the following acts:

1. Strike, injure, threaten, harass, or intimidate a staff member, Board member, sports official or coach, or any other person.
2. Behave in an unsportsmanlike manner, or use vulgar or obscene language.
3. Unless specifically permitted by State law, possess a weapon, any object that can reasonably be considered a weapon or looks like a weapon, or any dangerous device.
4. Damage or threaten to damage another's property.
5. Damage or deface school property.
6. Violate any Illinois law, or town or county ordinance.
7. Smoke or otherwise use tobacco products.
8. Distribute, consume, use, possess, or be impaired by or under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, cannabis, other lawful product, or illegal drug.
9. Be present when the person's alcoholic beverage, cannabis, other lawful product, or illegal drug consumption is detectable, regardless of when and/or where the use occurred.
10. Use or possess medical cannabis, unless he or she has complied with policy 7:270, *Administering Medicines to Students*, implementing *Ashley's Law*.
11. Impede, delay, disrupt, or otherwise interfere with any school activity or function (including using cellular phones in a disruptive manner).
12. Enter upon any portion of school premises at any time for purposes other than those that are lawful and authorized by the Board.

13. Operate a motor vehicle: (a) in a risky manner, (b) in excess of 20 miles per hour, or (c) in violation of an authorized District employee's directive.
14. Engage in any risky behavior, including roller-blading, roller-skating, or skateboarding.
15. Violate other District policies or regulations, or a directive from an authorized security officer or District employee.
16. Engage in any conduct that interferes with, disrupts, or adversely affects the District or a School function.

Convicted Child Sex Offender

State law prohibits a child sex offender from being present on school property or loitering within 500 feet of school property when persons under the age of 18 are present, unless the offender is:

1. A parent/guardian of a student attending the school and has notified the Building Principal of his or her presence at the school for the purpose of: (i) attending a conference at the school with school personnel to discuss the progress of his or her child academically or socially, (ii) participating in child review conferences in which evaluation and placement decisions may be made with respect to his or her child regarding special education services, or (iii) attending conferences to discuss other student issues concerning his or her child such as retention and promotion; or
2. Has permission to be present from the Board, Superintendent, or Superintendent's designee. If permission is granted, the Superintendent or Board President shall provide the details of the offender's upcoming visit to the Building Principal.

In all cases, the Superintendent, or designee who is a certified employee, shall supervise a child sex offender whenever the offender is in a child's vicinity.

Exclusive Bargaining Representative Agent

Upon notifying the Building Principal's office, authorized agents of an exclusive bargaining representative will be provided reasonable access to employees in the bargaining unit they represent in accordance with State law. Such access shall be conducted in a manner that will not impede the normal operations of the District.

Enforcement

Any staff member may request identification from any person on school property; refusal to provide such information is a criminal act. The Building Principal or designee shall seek the immediate removal of any person who refuses to provide requested identification.

Any person who engages in conduct prohibited by this policy may be ejected from or denied admission to school property in accordance with State law. The person also may be subject to being denied admission to school athletic or extracurricular events for up to one calendar year in accordance with the procedures below.

Procedures to Deny Future Admission to Athletic or Extracurricular School Events

Before any person may be denied admission to athletic or extracurricular school events, the person has a right to a hearing before the Board. The Superintendent may refuse the person admission pending such hearing. The Superintendent or designee must provide the person with a hearing notice, delivered or sent by certified mail with return receipt requested, at least ten days before the Board hearing date. The hearing notice must contain:

1. The date, time, and place of the Board hearing;
2. A description of the prohibited conduct;
3. The proposed time period that admission to school events will be denied; and
4. Instructions on how to waive a hearing.

- LEGAL REF.: Nuding v. Cerro Gordo Community Unit School Dist., 313 Ill. App.3d 344 (4th Dist. 2000).
20 U.S.C. §7971 et seq., Pro-Children Act of 2001.
105 ILCS 5/10-20.5, 10-20.5b, 5/10-22.10, 5/22-33, 5/24-25, and 5/27-23.7(a).
115 ILCS 5/3(c), Ill. Educational Labor Relations Act.
410 ILCS 130/, Compassionate Use of Medical Cannabis Program Act.
410 ILCS 705/, Cannabis Tax and Regulation Act.
430 ILCS 66/, Firearm Concealed Carry Act.
720 ILCS 5/11-9.3, 5/21-1, 5/21-1.2, 5/21-3, 5/21-5, 5/21-5.5, 5/21-9, and 5/21-11.
- CROSS REF.: 2:200 (Types of School Board Meetings), 2:230 (Public Participation at School Board Meetings and Petitions to the Board), 4:170 (Safety), 5:50 (Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace; E-Cigarette, Tobacco, and Cannabis Prohibition), 6:120 (Education of Children with Disabilities), 6:250 (Community Resource Persons and Volunteers), 7:190 (Student Behavior), 7:270 (Administering Medicines to Students), 8:20 (Community Use of School Facilities)

Adopted by Mercer County School Board of Education on December 13, 2023.

Community Relations

Accommodating Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities shall be provided an opportunity to participate in all school-sponsored services, programs, or activities and will not be subject to illegal discrimination. When appropriate, the District may provide to persons with disabilities aids, benefits, or services that are separate or different from, but as effective as, those provided to others.

The District will provide auxiliary aids and services when necessary to afford individuals with disabilities equal opportunity to participate in or enjoy the benefits of a service, program, or activity.

Each service, program, website, or activity operated in existing facilities shall be readily accessible to, and useable by, individuals with disabilities. New construction and alterations to facilities existing before January 26, 1992, will be accessible when viewed in their entirety.

The Superintendent or designee is designated the Title II Coordinator and shall:

1. Oversee the District's compliance efforts, recommend necessary modifications to the School Board, and maintain the District's final Title II self-evaluation document, update it to the extent necessary, and keep it available for public inspection for at least three years after its completion date.
2. Institute plans to make information regarding Title II's protection available to any interested party.

Individuals with disabilities should notify the Superintendent or Building Principal if they have a disability that will require special assistance or services and, if so, what services are required. This notification should occur as far in advance as possible of the school-sponsored function, program, or meeting.

Individuals with disabilities may allege a violation of this policy or federal law by reporting it to the Superintendent or designated Title II Coordinator, or by filing a grievance under the Uniform Grievance Procedure.

LEGAL REF.: Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§12101 et seq. and 12131 et seq.; 28 C.F.R. Part 35.
Rehabilitation Act of 1973 §104, 29 U.S.C. §794 (2006).
105 ILCS 5/10-20.51.
410 ILCS 25/, Environmental Barriers Act.
71 Ill.Admin.Code Part 400, Illinois Accessibility Code.

CROSS REF.: 2:260 (Uniform Grievance Procedure), 4:150 (Facility Management and Building Programs)

Adopted by Mercer County School Board of Education on December 15, 2021.

Community Relations

Gifts to the District

The School Board appreciates gifts from any education foundation, other entities, or individuals. All gifts must adhere to each of the following:

1. Be accepted by the Board or, if less than \$500.00 in value, the Superintendent or designee. Individuals should obtain a pre-acceptance commitment before identifying the District, any school, or school program or activity as a beneficiary in any fundraising attempt, including without limitation, any Internet fundraising attempt.
2. Be given without a stated purpose or with a purpose deemed by the party with authority to accept the gift to be compatible with the Board's educational objectives and policies.
3. Be consistent with the District's mandate to provide equal educational and extracurricular opportunities to all students in the District as provided in Board policy 7:10, *Equal Educational Opportunities*. State and federal laws require the District to provide equal treatment for members of both sexes to educational programming, extracurricular activities, and athletics. This includes the distribution of athletic benefits and opportunities.
4. Permit the District to maintain resource equity among its learning centers.
5. Be viewpoint neutral. The Superintendent or designee shall manage a process for the review and approval of donations involving the incorporation of messages into or placing messages upon school property.
6. Comply with all laws applicable to the District including, without limitation, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Prevailing Wage Act, the Health/Life Safety Code for Public Schools, and all applicable procurement and bidding requirements.

The District will provide equal treatment to all individuals and entities seeking to donate money or a gift. Upon acceptance, all gifts become the District's property. The acceptance of a gift is not an endorsement by the Board, District, or school of any product, service, activity, or program. The method of recognition is determined by the party accepting the gift.

LEGAL REF.: 20 U.S.C. §1681 *et seq.*, Title IX of the Education Amendments implemented by 34 C.F.R. Part 106.
105 ILCS 5/16-1.
23 Ill.Admin.Code §200.40.

CROSS REF.: 4:60 (Purchases and Contracts), 4:150 (Facility Management and Building Programs), 6:10 (Educational Philosophy and Objectives), 6:210 (Instructional Materials), 7:10 (Equal Educational Opportunities)

Adopted by Mercer County School District Board of Education – May 20, 2020

Community Relations

Parent Organizations and Booster Clubs

Parent organizations and booster clubs are invaluable resources to the District's schools. While parent organizations and booster clubs have no administrative authority and cannot determine District policy, the School Board welcomes their suggestions and assistance.

Parent organizations and booster clubs may be recognized by the Board and permitted to use the District's name, a District school's name, or a District school's team name, or any logo attributable to the District provided they first receive the Superintendent or designee's express written consent. Consent to use one of the above-mentioned names or logos will generally be granted if the organization or club has by-laws containing the following:

1. The organization's or club's name and purpose, such as, to enhance students' educational experiences, to help meet educational needs of students, to provide extra athletic benefits to students, to assist specific sports teams or academic clubs through financial support, or to enrich extracurricular activities.
2. The rules and procedures under which it operates.
3. An agreement to adhere to all Board policies and administrative procedures.
4. A statement that membership is open and unrestricted, meaning that membership is open to all parents/guardians of students enrolled in the school, District staff, and community members.
5. A statement that the District is not, and will not be, responsible for the organization's or club's business or the conduct of its members, including on any organization or club websites or social media accounts.
6. An agreement to maintain and protect its own finances.
7. A recognition that money given to a school cannot be earmarked for any particular expense. Booster clubs may make recommendations, but cash or other valuable consideration must be given to the District to use at its discretion. The Board's legal obligation to comply with Title IX by providing equal athletic opportunity for members of both genders will supersede an organization or club's recommendation.

Permission to use one of the above-mentioned names or logos may be rescinded at any time and does not constitute permission to act as the District's representative. At no time does the District accept responsibility for the actions of any parent organization or booster club regardless of whether it was recognized and/or permitted to use any of the above-mentioned names or logos. The Superintendent shall designate an administrative staff member to serve as the recognized liaison to parent organizations or booster clubs. The liaison will serve as a resource person and provide information about school programs, resources, policies, problems, concerns, and emerging issues. Building staff will be encouraged to participate in the organizations.

CROSS REF.: 8:80 (Gifts to the District)

Adopted by Mercer County School Board of Education on July 21, 2021

Community Relations

Parental Involvement

In order to assure collaborative relationships between students' families and the District, and to enable parents/guardians to become active partners in their children's education, the Superintendent shall:

1. Keep parents/guardians thoroughly informed about their child's school and education.
2. Encourage parents/guardians to be involved in their child's school and education.
3. Establish effective two-way communication between parents/guardians and the District.
4. Seek input from parents/guardians on significant school-related issues.
5. Inform parents/guardians on how they can assist their children's learning.

The Superintendent shall periodically report to the School Board on the implementation of this policy.

CROSS REF.: 6:170 (Title I Programs), 6:250 (Community Resource Persons and Volunteers), 8:10 (Connection with the Community), 8:90 (Parent Organizations and Booster Clubs)

ADMIN. PROC.: 6:170-AP1, E1 (District-Level Parent and Family Engagement Compact), 6:170-AP1, E2 (School-Level Parent and Family Engagement Compact)

Adopted by Mercer County School District #404 Board of Education on May 15, 2019

Community Relations

Relations with Other Organizations and Agencies

The District shall cooperate with other organizations and agencies, including but not limited to:

- County Health Department
- Law enforcement agencies
- Fire authorities
- Planning authorities
- Zoning authorities
- Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), local organizations for civil defense, and other appropriate disaster relief organizations concerned with civil defense
- Other school districts

CROSS REF.: 1:20 (District Organization, Operations, and Cooperative Agreements), 4:170 (Safety), 4:180 (Pandemic Preparedness; Management; and Recovery), 5:90 (Abused and Neglected Child Reporting), 7:150 (Agency and Police Interviews)

Adopted by Mercer County School Board of Education on December 15, 2021.

Community Relations

Public Suggestions and Concerns

The School Board is interested in receiving suggestions and concerns from members of the community. Any individual may make a suggestion or express a concern by contacting any District or School office. Community members who e-mail the District or any District employee or board member are expected to abide by the standards in Board policy 6:235, *Access to Electronic Networks*, and should, to the extent possible, limit their communications to relevant individuals. All suggestions and/or concerns will be referred to the appropriate level staff member or District administrator who is most able to respond in a timely manner. Each concern or suggestion shall be considered on its merit.

An individual who is not satisfied may file a grievance under Board policy 2:260, *Uniform Grievance Procedure*. The Board encourages, but does not require, individuals to follow the channels of authority prior to filing a grievance. Neither this policy nor the *Uniform Grievance Procedure* create an independent right to a hearing before the Board.

LEGAL REF.: 115 ILCS 5/14(c-5), Ill. Educational Labor Relations Act.

CROSS REF.: 2:140 (Communications To and From the Board), 2:230 (Public Participation at School Board Meetings and Petitions to the Board), 2:260 (Uniform Grievance Procedure), 3:30 (Chain of Command), 6:235 (Access to Electronic Networks), 6:260 (Complaints About Curriculum, Instructional Materials and Programs), 8:10 (Connection with the Community)

Adopted by Mercer County School District Board of Education – May 20, 2020