APPROVED

Tacoma School District

Minutes

Board of Directors Retreat

Date and Time
Thursday August 14, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location
Oakland High School
Room 306
3319 South Adams Street
Tacoma, WA 98409

The Tacoma Public Schools Board of Directors will meet for a Board Retreat on Thursday, August 14, 2025, 5:30-8:30pm at Oakland High School, 3319 South Adams St., Tacoma, WA 98409. All regular Board Business Meetings, special meetings, Committee of the Whole, and Study Session meetings are open public meetings, and everyone is encouraged to attend. Executive sessions are closed to the public.

ACCOMMODATION
Persons requiring accommodations for a disability in order to attend a Board meeting (including the services of a sign language interpreter or those who want to speak at a board meeting but are advised not to attend in-person due to health risks) should contact the Board Office at 253.571.1443 before 4:30 p.m. at least three working days before the meeting to ensure that the District has time to implement appropriate accommodations.

NONDISCRIMINATION
Tacoma Public Schools does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following employees have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination:

- **Civil Rights Coordinator:** Tiffany Davis-Brantley, 253-571-1252, civilrights@tacoma.k12.wa.us
- **Title IX Coordinator:** Tiffany Davis-Brantley, 253-571-1252, civilrights@tacoma.k12.wa.us
- **504 Coordinator:** Elise Friedrich-Nielsen, 253-571-1085, efriedr@tacoma.k12.wa.us

Mailing address: P.O. Box 1357, Tacoma, WA 98401-1357.

INTERPRETER
Individuals requiring a language interpreter for a Board meeting for any language, other than a sign language interpreter, should contact the Board Office at 253-571-1443 before 4:30 p.m., at least three working days before the meeting to ensure that the District has sufficient time to identify an interpreter.

Directors Present
C. McElroy, E. Bonbright, E. Leon, K. Strozier, L. Keating

Directors Absent
None

Guests Present
Deputy Superintendent Nolan, General Counsel Gbenro, Superintendent Garcia, T. Jones

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I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

K. Strozier called a meeting of Tacoma School District to order on Thursday Aug 14, 2025 at 5:30 PM.

II. Welcome

A. Tour of Oakland High School

Superintendent Garcia led Board directors on a tour of the newly remodeled Oakland Campus, sharing about its past history and showing how the updated spaces will be used going into the future, including as lab spaces for use by the Tacoma Online program. It also helps consolidate services, which will help the district with budget savings as well.

III. Policy Consideration

A. Cell Phone Policy Considerations

The Board discussed considerations around what a possible District student cell phone policy could look like, or whether it should remain up to each school to set the policy that works for their particular needs, as is the case at schools currently. No vote was taken as the meeting topic was intended for open dialogue and an exploration of the different perspectives held by members.

Key take-aways from the conversation were:

- The decision requires thoughtful discussion and decisions should not be rushed.
- Clarification needs to be made between a "ban" vs. an "Electronic Use" policy, as language matters.
- Director Leon shared data he's researched regarding the impacts to academic and behavior and mental health concerns linked to social media accessed via phones. He shared that 27 states have implemented similar policies and feels that the district should have a unified approach. He and Director Bonbright held a few informal student-led listening sessions last spring. In those sessions, social media/cell phones at school were topics that were routinely brought up by the students.
    - Superintendent Garcia reminded that Board Members are always welcome to work with him to set up opportunities to meet with students to get input. Any board member can ask for that.
- Superintendent Garcia noted that there have been mixed reactions from our schools and from families in the schools that are limiting cell phone use. Some have appreciated the reduced distractions while others have expressed frustration. He hasn't received a lot of pushbacks from the schools, but he also hasn't put specific parameters on them.
- Directors McElroy and Keating raised concerns about equity, especially for marginalized groups like students of color, homeless youth, LGBTQ+, and English as Second Language students.
- The group recognized that there would likely be needed exceptions, such as specifications as part of students' 504 plans, etc.
- There will be legal and technological considerations that will need to be taken into account. Superintendent Garcia shared that he can explore with the Technology Services department to see if there are ways to block access to social media channels and apps on our guest networks while in the schools.
- There was a reminder that we are a consensus board in our governing outreach.
- There was recognition that students may be using certain apps on their cell phones in school for academic use, such as a calculator that would have cost $200, but was a free app on the phone, or using camera phones for a photography class. There is the possibility that banning phones could lead to inequities for students.

- Director Bonbright reminded that policy making is about compromise at any level of governance.

Next Steps:

- We will follow the process previously established for exploring the creation of new policies and subsequent enaction if adopted. If we do, i**t is vital to gather stakeholder feedback and do strategic outreach with the different stakeholder groups before we work on any policy development.**
  - We will continue gathering data from schools on their practices and outcomes to have a clear picture of what is currently being done.
  - Following the process will not be simple and fast, and it must be equitable.
  - Bottom line: Our focus is how to give our students the safest space within our buildings to learn.

IV. WSSDA Self-Assessment Tool: Review

A. WSSDA Self-Assessment Tool

This topic was tabled as there was not enough turn-around time to thoroughly review the report.

V. Superintendent Goals: Two Cents

A. Thoughts on Superintendent Goals

Progress & Process:
The last two years the Board has worked to update the Superintendent's annual review process. In 2023, they fixed issues with the scoring rubric, and in 2024 they focused on making goals more realistic and measurable. Superintendent Garcia noted that the updated processes are functioning well and provide a strong foundation for the year. He and his team have already begun identifying their broad focus areas, with goals to be finalized by May and measured by performance and/or process.

Federal Funding Considerations:
Director Keating raised concerns about the unpredictability of the federal administration and its impact on funding tied to specific goals. The Superintendent acknowledged these challenges and emphasized that the team works on continuous improvement despite the uncertain financial conditions.

Financial Focus:
Director Bonbright stressed the importance of addressing the district’s financial situation and suggested incorporating a financial goal to demonstrate their support. The Superintendent noted that, while financial constraints are real, the focus remains on

systems improvement across departments. He reminded the Board that this next year will be extremely tight financially again, so having a specific financial goal is difficult.

VI. Formulating Board Goals: 2025-2026

A. Identification of 2025-2026 Board Goals

The Board discussed limiting the number of goals due to the amount of time and depth required to do them justice.

The Board will focus on the following goals this year:

Primary Goal: Cell Phone Policy

- This is proposed as a central focus under the theme of ***Safety and Belonging***.
- Suggested actions include listening sessions, surveys, and work-study sessions.
- Emphasis on equity and inclusion, with potential partnerships (e.g., Oasis, McKinney Vento students, others).

Secondary Goal: Safety and Supportive Environments:

- Directors proposed expanding the goal to include support for marginalized student populations such as McKinney-Vento students and non-binary youth.

VII. Closing Items

A. Closing Comments

Superintendent Garcia will work with staff to begin the process to study whether or not to adopt a cell phone policy. Directors are encouraged to share any stakeholders that should be included.

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
T. Jones