

DaVinci Academy of Science and The Arts

Policy Number: 605

Policy Section: 600 - Community

POLICY TITLE: Communication Policy

Revision History

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Communication Policy
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**Communication at the DaVinci Academy:
A Roadmap to Having a Voice that is Heard**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this document is to outline a set of procedures for members of the DaVinci community to communicate in such a way as to have impact on the policies, procedures, and practices at the DaVinci Academy.

1.2 As a school based on democratic principles, DaVinci Academy is committed to keeping lines of communication open for all members of its community (students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and board members). However, for such communication to be effective, the communicator must appreciate that there are already existing lines of responsibility and decision-making in the school. Effective communication respects and leverages those lines of responsibility and decision-making.

1.3 The lines of responsibility and decision-making at DaVinci are outlined below (Table 1).

1.4 State law requires that charter schools follow particular policies and procedures, which is the responsibility of the Board of Directors to uphold (C 15).

1.5 The Board is also responsible to uphold, modify, and revise (as it sees fit) and all other internally-driven policies and procedures as specified in the DaVinci Charter (C) and Board Policies (BP).

1.6 The Board has hired one employee, an Executive Administrator (EA), who is charged with implementing the board-approved policies and procedures by creating practices consistent with those policies and procedures. These practices include all aspects of school functioning, many of which are documented in the Teacher and Staff Handbook (TSH) and Student Handbook (SH).

1.7 The Board of Directors directly and through the activities of the Executive Committee (Chair, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer) is the responsible body who supervises and evaluates the job performance of its employee.

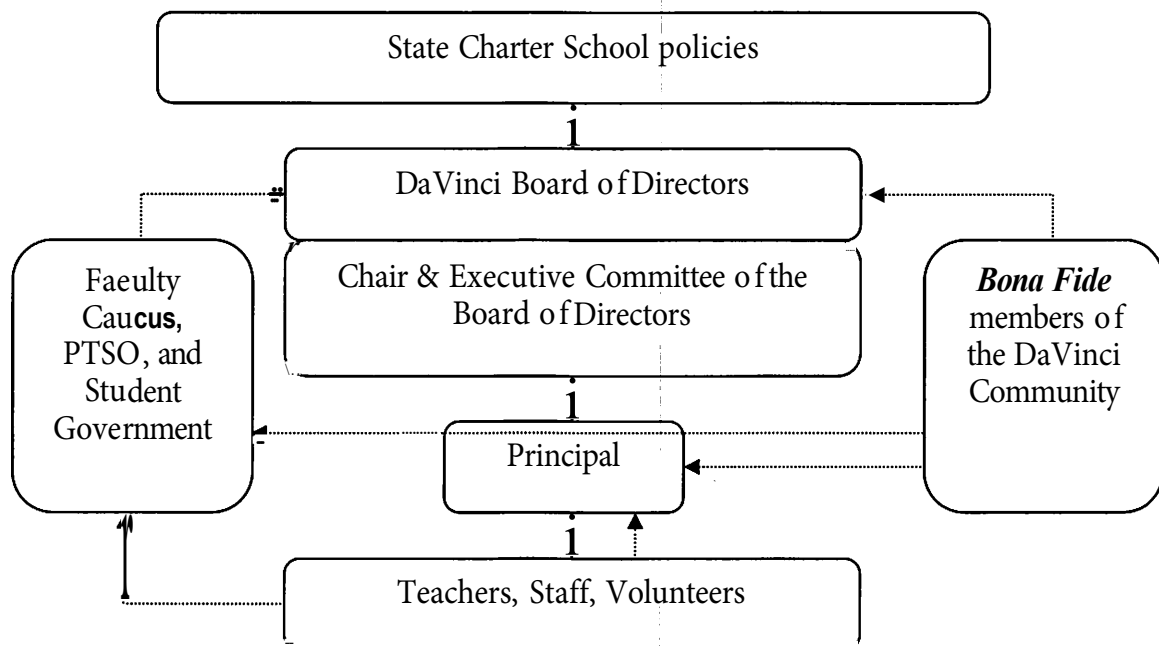
1.8 The Executive Administrator, with input from others, is the responsible administrator who supervises and evaluates the job performance of staff, teachers, and volunteers.

1.9 The Faculty Caucus, PTSO, and Student Government are entities with no direct line of responsibility or decision making in the school, but each may communicate as an

organization with the Board regarding school policies, procedures, and practices (see section III below).

1.10 As a democratic institution based on open communication, each member of the DaVinci community is free to communicate with the board, EA, and teachers and can communicate with appropriate and recognized organizations in the school: Faculty Caucus (teachers), PTSO (parents), and Student Government (students).

Table 1: Organizational Chart of DaVinci Academy (bold lines represent direct lines of responsibility, dotted lines represent lines of communication)



2. ISSUES AND MECHANISMS OF COMMUNICATION

2.1 A parent, teacher, or student (or groups of these constituents) may have suggestions, complaints, comments or ideas about the school, its function, structure, curriculum, practices, etc. These forms of communication may address one or more of three issues: Legal, School PPP (Policy/Procedures/Practices), or Contracts (see Figure 2). There are differences in how communication regarding each of these issues should proceed.

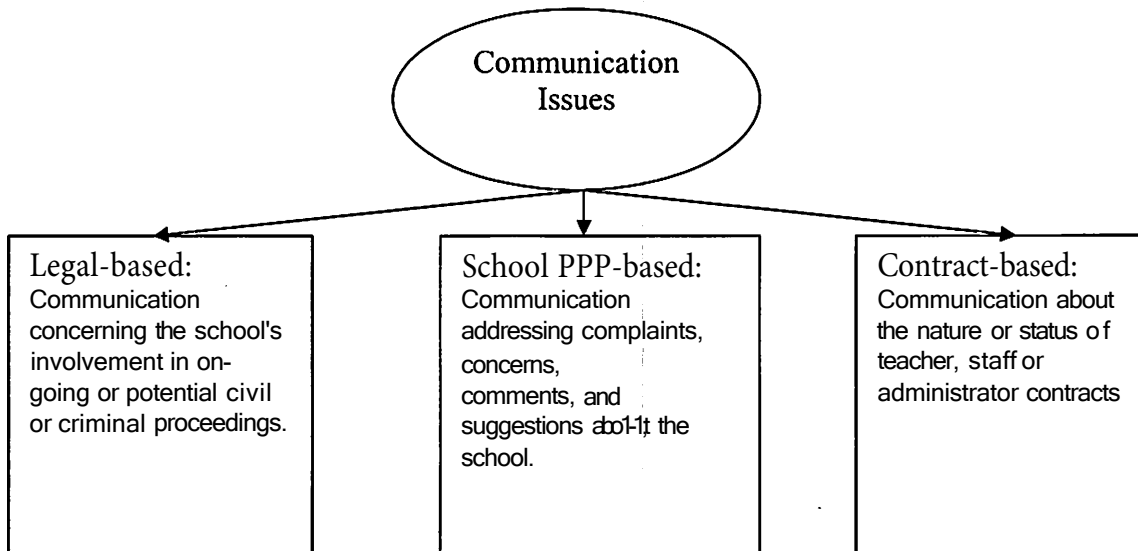
2.1 a Communication about issues in which the school is or may be a plaintiff or defendant in on-going or potential legal proceedings may not be appropriate for public discussion. Issues addressing the school in actual or potential legal proceedings should be directed to the EA or to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

2.1 b Issues addressing school policies, procedures, and practices may take the form of suggestions, complaints, comments or concerns. The most effective way to voice these issues in order to have impact is to follow a bottom-up communication procedure (see II

3, C 10).

2.1 c Faculty and staff contract issues also involve legally protected rights to privacy and thus can not be discussed publicly with parties not directly referred to in the contract. However, standard features of the contracts and evaluation criteria for those awarded contracts are public and available in Teacher and Staff Handbooks and on the DaVinci Academy website.

Table 2: Communication Issues at the DaVinci Academy



2.2 Members of the DaVinci community wishing to communicate anonymously may do so through the Board Secretary.

2.3 All communication which can be heard in public should proceed in a **bottom-up** manner.

Suggestions, complaints, comments concerns must be discussed first with the responsible teacher, staff or administrator, before going to the Board or other bodies.

2.3a An unsatisfactory airing of a suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern from the perspective of the communicator may not necessarily reflect a failure to be heard. Any of the following may result in the perception of being unheard.

2.3ai The teacher, administrator or staff person who was presumed to be responsible was not the appropriate person for the communication. As a result, a communicator may be directed to another responsible teacher, administrator or staff person. A communicator should talk to the EA for help in determining the responsible teacher, administrator, or staff person.

2.3aii The responsible person disagrees with or rejects the communicator's suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern. Being heard does not mean being agreed with. A communicator may press the issue further up the school's hierarchy (Principal, EA, Board of Directors) after documenting the details of the initial communication (see II 4)

2.3aiii Although the responsible person agrees with or accepts your suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern, there are established policies, procedures, or practices which are inconsistent with it. A communicator may press the issue with the support of the responsible person further up the school's hierarchy (Principal, EA, Board of Directors) after documenting the details of the initial communication (see II 4).

2.4 The results of communication should be documented by a letter or an email from the communicator to the parties involved specifying the time, date and topic of the communication. Such documentation should be acknowledged by the responsible teacher, administrator, or staff to whom it was addressed.

2.5 The communicator has the following responsibilities in the process of making himself or herself heard:

2.5a Find the initial responsible teacher, administrator, or staff to talk to.

2.5b Summarize each conversation and its consequence in a letter or an e-mail and have those summaries confirmed by each responsible teacher, administrator, or staff.

2.6 The responsible teacher, administrator or staff has the following responsibilities:

2.6a Be open to communication from any *bonafide* community member and treat the communicator with respect.

2.6b Be as clear as possible about your reaction to the communication.

2.6c Readily acknowledge summaries of the communication in a timely manner, including writing your own summary if you and the communicator can not agree on a summary.

2.7 The top level of the bottom-up communication process is the Board of Directors, which should be treated as the final group to receive a community member's communication. A *bonafide* community member can always make a short presentation at the start of any board meeting. However, to have the board discuss a suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern from a community member, the person must have it placed on the agenda by the Secretary of the Board of Directors. Only the Secretary can introduce a community member's suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern as either an agenda item or as new Board business.

2.7a In introducing a community member's communication, the Secretary is assuring the other board members that the commentary is relevant and that a paper trail exists about the community member's communication with responsible teachers, administrators, or staff.

2.7b Regardless of whether or not the Secretary agrees with the community member's communication, the Secretary will present it so that the Board may be informed of the issue.

2.7c Only the communicator, or a person representing the communicator (representative of the PTSO, Faculty Caucus, or Student Government) may communicate the issue directly to the board at a board meeting.

3. LINES OF COMMUNICATION

3.1 Although any *bonafide* member of the DaVinci community is entitled to offer suggestions, complaints, comments or concerns regarding policies, procedures, and practices at the school, the most effective line of communication may differ depending on one's role as a parent, teacher, student, or board member.

3.2 **Students:** As part of their education, students in the school should feel encouraged to involve themselves in its governance.

3.3 Beyond talking to the teacher, administrator, or staff directly responsible for the issue, a student can also discuss his or her suggestion, complaint, comment or concern with the Student Government and have that body support the issue. If the issue is accepted by Student Government, then a representative of the body may request time from the Board Secretary to address the Board about the issue.

3.4 Students who are expelled from school may also appeal to the Board of Directors

3.5 **Parents:** Many parents choose a charter school for their children in order to be involved in school governance.

3.6 Beyond talking directly to the teacher, administrator, or staff responsible for the issue, a parent can also discuss his or her suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern with the PTSO and have that body support the issue. If the issue is accepted by the PTSO, then a representative of the body may request time from the Board Secretary to address the Board.

3.7 However, parental perspective on governance should be kept distinct from the students' and teachers' perspectives, and parents should NOT marshal students or teachers in support of a parent issue.

3.8 **Teachers:** Teachers are central in the democratic process and open communication policy at DaVinci.

3.9 The best line of communication for a teacher to express a suggestion, complaint, comment or concern is to talk directly to the department head or administrator responsible for the issue.

3.10 Beyond talking directly to the responsible administrator who is responsible for the issue, a teacher can also discuss his or her suggestion, complaint, comment, or concern with the Faculty Caucus and have that body support their issue. If the issue is accepted by the Faculty Caucus, then a representative of the body may request time from the Board Secretary to directly address the Board.

3.11 As noted in 2.1c above, contracts must remain private communication between the teacher and the EA. Disputes can be reported directly or anonymously to the Board Secretary.

3.12 A teacher perspective on school issues should be kept distinct from those of parents and students, and teachers should NOT marshal other teachers, students or parents in support of their issue.