


# Enhancing Board of Education Transparency and Engagement Through RPIE & Intentional Communication


### Board honors WCPS Teacher Cadet graduates



Lisa Tart, Director of Curriculum Instruction provided the Board a brief update about the WCPS Teacher Cadet Program, which is a "grow your own" teacher program that helps high school students take their first steps to becoming a teacher. The Teacher Cadet program allows participating students to have the opportunity to access beginning classes to become a teacher, participate in field trip opportunities, and pursue pathways to potential scholarships and on-the-job experiences.


Mrs. Tart and the Teacher Cadet Instructor, Laura Taylor, recognized eight senior graduates who completed the WCPS requirements. They highlighted the various achievements of each graduate. Of the graduates, two were named Teaching Fellows and will receive their college education in return for becoming a teacher. Another student was named a NSOU Transformational Scholar.

In addition to celebrating the eight graduates, two special presentations were held. Southern Wayne High senior, Katie Dodson, was presented a North Carolina State University Transformational Scholarship, which is valued at \$10,000 annually. Charles B. Aycock High senior, Breana Kearney, was presented a NC Foundation for Public School Children State Leadership Award and a \$1,000 scholarship.




### Board approves multiple Student Support Programs & Initiatives


As part of a student support update, Ken Derksen, Executive Director for Community Engagement and Student & Family Support shared information from a [Reimagining Student Support](#) presentation that he presented at the C&E Committee and Finance Committee meetings in May. Derksen shared how he and his team were working to position school counselors and social workers to better triage mental health issues that arise as part of a much broader systematic approach to address social emotional and behavioral issues/concerns that our schools are experiencing.



### Board receives update on "Bigger than a Game" video & Recognizes students



Ken Derksen, Executive Director of Community Engagement and Student & Family Support, shared information about the ["Bigger than a Game" video](#) which was produced to highlight an event where two middle school basketball teams came together to make a basketball manager's dream come true by letting him play in game and score a basket. Mr. Derksen shared that the original WCPS Facebook post had over 32,000 impressions and the video had over 3,800 views within the first few days. After a special showing of the [video](#), the two teams were recognized along with Chris Boykin, the star of the video. Following the Board recognition, both teams presented Chris with a basketball with signatures from all of the athletes.



**NSPRA Golden Achievement Award Submission**  
**Submitted by: Ken Derksen**  
**Wayne County Public Schools**  
**Executive Director: Community Engagement and**  
**Student & Family Support**

**March 2025**

**AWARD SUMMARY:** To foster greater understanding, transparency, and stakeholder engagement, the Wayne County Public Schools (WCPS) Department of Community Engagement and Student & Family Support (DCESFS) has worked to embed the RPIE framework and intentional communication practices into Wayne County Board of Education meetings in an effort to increase Board transparency and engagement with stakeholders. Recognizing that complex and sometimes controversial topics require clear messaging, the DCESFS has worked to increase an already proactive communication approach through its live-streaming of meetings and post-meeting digital recaps. This now includes providing strategic presentation support to help department leads present specific agenda items that have the potential to be controversial or complicated to understand by our internal/external stakeholders. In addition, the DCESFS has worked to increase Board engagement through targeted student/staff recognitions, proclamations, and certificates of appreciation. Through these efforts, families, staff, and community members have greater access to relevant information, can feel more informed about key Board/district decisions, and can become more connected to key events and/or district successes.

**RESEARCH:** Understanding the communication needs of stakeholders was essential in the “why” these efforts were put in place and the “how” this communications and engagement initiative was shaped. The DCESFS conducted informal research through:

- Community and staff feedback via social media, direct inquiries, and public comments, which at times was very negative around difficult to understand topics and/or specific items that directly affected their child or school in a perceived negative way.
- Analysis of Board meeting attendance, viewership data, and engagement trends, which tended to have low levels of engagement unless something controversial was being discussed or decided upon (Note: Analytics of WCPS digital communication channels reflected higher levels of engagement when students and/or staff were recognized or if key agenda topics were highlighted as part of digital meeting recaps).
- Review of best practices from other school districts and NSPRA members regarding their efforts around transparent governance communication, focusing on their Board updates, if or how districts are generally using e-newsletters for communications, student/staff recognition programs, and if/how intentional communications efforts are being incorporated within meetings to engage publics.

Findings indicated that stakeholders sought and/or were in need of clearer messaging on agenda topics, especially controversial issues; that student/staff recognitions positively increased participation at meetings (online and in-person) and resulted in positive comments on social media; and that readership of digital meeting recaps tended to increase when students and staff recognitions or important agenda items were prominently displayed - which led to increased stakeholder access to meeting information, materials and other resources.

**PLANNING:** With these insights, the DCESFS set forth three clear objectives:

- Increase transparency and accessibility by establishing a structured template for digital Board communications.
- Improve stakeholder understanding of complex meeting topics through intentional communications and/or partnerships with DCESFS.
- Increase engagement through enhanced focus on Board/district recognition efforts, key agenda items, and overall Board appearance.

Strategies focused on:

1. Providing a well-structured digital recap: Student/staff recognitions and proclamations were given permanent placement at the top of the recap, which by design would help draw stakeholders in to access the recaps and which would lead them to other agenda information and decisions, relevant materials and other Board resources.
2. Supporting departments in message development: Assisting in crafting clear presentations and messaging on key issues.
3. Multi-Channel Outreach: Leveraging email, website updates, and social media to maximize engagement of items.

**IMPLEMENTATION:** To bring this plan to life, the DCESFS executed the following key actions:

- Consistent digital recap template: Beginning in the [March 2024 Board Recap](#), and as reflected in subsequent meeting recaps throughout the year (examples: [April 2024](#), [May 2024](#), [January 2025](#)), placement of recognition photos, key updates/topics, and proclamations were permanently shifted to the top of the recap. Additionally, other recap items were placed based on relevance as well as placement on

the meeting agenda, with monthly committee updates and follow-up actions shifted to a stand-alone item as to shorten the overall length of the recap.

- Presentation & Messaging Support: As exemplified in the [March 2024 Board Recap](#), departments receive guidance on structuring presentations to ensure clarity and effectiveness, particularly for sensitive or complex topics.
  - With this example, a [highly controversial student move](#) was discussed ([Video TC: 27:46](#)), focusing on the relocation of Edgewood CDS students with significant cognitive disabilities from a “Public Separate School” to a “school within a school” on a traditional campus. This particular presentation was designed to inform the public why these changes were occurring in conjunction with the Board’s efforts to maximize campus facilities; help publicly demonstrate empathy for families facing this difficult change; and build a greater understanding amongst stakeholders about the CDS/CDSP program and why this move was actually positive for students and families.
- Distribution via Multiple Channels: Recaps and meeting highlights are shared through email, posted on the district website, and highlighted on social media platforms as applicable to reach diverse audiences. The DCESFS also takes advantage of the Board live-stream feed to help engage the public, as exemplified at the [March 2024 Meeting](#) ([Video TC: 57:00](#)) where a special student recognition occurred following a live showing of a WCPS produced video titled, “[Bigger than a game](#),” that had thousands of views and social media impressions within our community a few weeks prior. In May 2024, as part of a Boardroom refresh, photos of students were displayed within the room and a new Board seal was designed and placed behind the Board desk. In [February 2025](#) a new Board recognition called “Certificate of Achievement” was also launched to recognize community members or organizations for their support of our schools.

**EVALUATION:** The effectiveness of these efforts is measured through multiple indicators:

- Engagement Metrics: Click-through rates of the digital recap demonstrate strong stakeholder interest, averaging 3,400-4,000 views each month compared to more inconsistent meeting views in previous years that were typically in the hundreds or low thousands unless something significant occurred at a meeting. With regards to the March 2024 student recognition/live showing of the “[Bigger than a game](#)” video, the meeting and recap helped lead our local newspaper to publish an [article](#) on the students.
- Stakeholder Feedback: Informal input from families, staff, and community members indicates increased awareness and clarity on Board topics. For instance, feedback given at a follow-up meeting with affected Edgewood families resulted in questions, and of course feelings of apprehension, but ultimately a sense of understanding for how and why the changes were taking place.
- Improved Board and Public Understanding: A noticeable reduction in misinformation and confusion around key Board decisions and meeting topics reflects the success of our proactive communication effort. This is reflected in media coverage, reduced public comment, and negative emails/social media comments being received by Board members and district leadership. Further, incorporating intentional communications within presentations has proven effective in helping our Board build vision and a greater understanding about areas that they may not have background or experience with, as reflected in the [June 2024](#) recap ([Video TC: 14:42](#)).
  - With this example, the DCESFS introduced a new vision, titled “Reimagining Student & Family Support.” Following this update, the Board immediately approved multiple student support initiatives, including a \$125,000 contract to implement a K-8 SEL program, as part of the district’s efforts to help address the increased social emotional, mental health, and behavioral concerns being experienced in our schools.

**CONCLUSION:** By integrating RPIE and intentional communication strategies, the DCESFS has strengthened transparency, engagement, and trust within our community, ensuring that Board of Education meetings are accessible, informative, and impactful. Through the RPIE planning process, the DCESFS is now looking at how it can incorporate new strategies that can build off of last year’s work to further engage, inform, and promote transparency. This includes: using AI to improve closed captioning of Board meeting videos; providing video hyperlinks within the digital Board recap with specific meeting items to allow families, staff, and community members easier access to watch recognitions and other relevant meeting items; adding a new Board recognition opportunity utilizing “Letters of Commendation;” and developing a highlight reel of Board recognition photos that can run on our website, social media, and E-Channel with hyperlinks back to the recap and/or videos. With this, continued enhancement of Board transparency and engagement remains an ongoing DCESFS effort.