



# Charlottesville City School Board Board Retreat – Learning Plan

*January 2026*



Presented To  
**Charlottesville City School Board**

Presented by  
**Hutchings & Associates**

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## Board Work Session Learning Plan

**January 24, 2026 | 8:30 AM–12:30 PM**

**Facilitator:** Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr.

**Audience:** School Board Members and Superintendent

**Format:** In person Board Work Session

### Purpose of the Session

This work session is designed to strengthen collective governance practice by clarifying appropriate communication protocols between the board, superintendent, staff, families, and the broader community. The session focuses on how boards communicate in complex situations, not on individual actions.

It uses common governance situations that arise in many districts to help the board establish shared expectations and consistent practices moving forward. This session is developmental and forward looking, focused on alignment, clarity, and trust.

### Session Framing

This session is grounded in the understanding that:

- Governance challenges most often result from unclear systems rather than poor intentions
- Effective boards routinely revisit and refine how they communicate
- Consistent communication practices protect students, staff, and the board

This is a collective learning opportunity rather than an evaluative or corrective session.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, board members will be able to:

1. Apply consistent communication protocols in common governance situations
2. Distinguish between listening, redirecting, and intervening
3. Identify when communication should be routed through the superintendent
4. Understand how board communication practices affect staff trust and system coherence
5. Use shared language that supports disciplined and unified governance



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## Draft Agenda

### 8:30–8:45 | Welcome, Framing, and Norms

*Purpose: Establish clarity, safety, and shared responsibility*

- Welcome and overview of session goals
- Review of norms including curiosity, confidentiality, and collective accountability
- Framing reflection: How do our communication practices support strong governance?

*Engagement*

- Individual reflection
- Optional pair share with no report out

### 8:45–10:15 | Governance Foundations Through a Communication Lens

*Focus Areas*

- Governance versus management as a communication practice
- Collective authority versus individual action
- Superintendent as the primary communication conduit
- Why consistency matters more than intent

*Content Emphasis*

- Communication as an expression of governance
- How well intentioned actions can create confusion without shared protocols
- The difference between visibility and oversight

### Interactive Activity 1 - Governance or Management? Common Communication Situations

*Time:* Embedded within the block

*Activity Design:* Small groups examine hypothetical but realistic situations that commonly occur in school districts, such as:

- A board member is contacted by a family seeking help navigating a school concern
- Community members repeatedly email a board member about an issue at a school
- A board member attends a school event and is asked to follow up on a concern
- A board member requests additional information outside the regular reporting cycle

*Guiding Questions*

1. What role is the board playing in this situation?
2. What communication pathway is most appropriate?
3. What response aligns with governance responsibilities?
4. When should the superintendent be involved?

*Debrief*

- Focus on patterns rather than people
- Emphasis on strengthening systems rather than correcting individuals

### 10:15–10:25 | Break



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## 10:25–11:55 | Communication Protocols in Practice

**Core Focus:** Building shared understanding of communication expectations related to:

- Constituent concerns and complaints
- School visits and presence
- Staff interactions
- Requests for information or follow up
- Public meetings and public statements

### **Content Highlights**

- Review of existing protocol language
- Where ambiguity commonly arises for boards
- Why redirection is a governance responsibility rather than avoidance

## **Interactive Activity 2 - Communication Protocol Application Lab**

**Time:** Embedded within the block

**Activity Design** - Using current board policy and protocols, small groups:

1. Identify appropriate communication flow for common governance situations
2. Practice neutral and protocol aligned language that acknowledges concerns while maintaining boundaries

### **Example Language Practice**

- “Thank you for raising this concern. The appropriate next step is...”
- “As a board, we address concerns through established channels...”
- “This matter has been shared with the superintendent for follow up...”

### **Outputs**

- Clear communication pathways
- Shared language to support consistency across the board

### **Facilitated Synthesis**

- What consistency looks like in practice
- What clarity the board wants to strengthen moving forward

## 11:55–12:05 | Break

## 12:05–12:30 | Strategic Alignment, Guardrails Introduction, and Next Steps

### **Strategic Alignment**

- How disciplined communication supports strategic focus
- How consistent practices reduce reactive and last minute requests
- The connection between communication discipline and effective board agendas

### **Governance Guardrails Introduction**

- Overview of governance guardrails as protective structures
  - Relationship between communication practices and guardrails
  - Clear expectation that guardrails will be developed in June and refined in October
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### *Looking Ahead*

- Overview of continued governance support
- Individual executive coaching as confidential support
- How communication themes will inform future work sessions

### *Closing Reflection*

- Each board member identifies one communication practice they will commit to carrying forward

### *Post Session Deliverables*

- Facilitator summary memo capturing themes and areas of alignment
- Draft communication protocol quick reference tool
- Inputs to inform executive coaching and future sessions



# For inquiries, contact us.

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