

FLORENCE SCHOOL DISTRICT 14-1

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Superintendent's August School Board Meeting Update

Dear Florence School District Patrons,

The start of another school year is here, and there is a lot happening throughout the Florence School District. Our August Board meeting included updates on the beginning of school, building projects, transportation, student expectations, policies, and several other items as we prepare for the 2026–2027 school year.

Student Spotlights

One new addition to our monthly School Board meetings this year will be Student Spotlights. We plan to begin each meeting by highlighting three students—one from the elementary, one from the middle school, and one from high school.

There are so many great things happening in our classrooms, activities, and hallways that sometimes do not receive the recognition they deserve. We want our Board meetings to include opportunities to celebrate our students and share some of the positive things taking place throughout our district.

Back to School

Our Open House is Monday, August 17, from 3:00–7:00 p.m. for elementary, middle school, and high school students and families. Along with the traditional opportunity to meet teachers and get ready for the school year, we will have a vaccination clinic, several informational booths for students and parents, and an ice cream truck to help us kick off the year.

Our staff will also be back for in-service on August 17 and 18. The first day will include meetings and plenty of time for teachers to prepare their classrooms for Open House. On Tuesday, we will have a guest speaker as part of our professional development.

A special thank you to Minnwest Bank for providing breakfast on Monday, Sidetrack for donating pork loin for lunch, and Agwrx for providing burgers on Tuesday. We greatly appreciate our local businesses stepping up to support our staff.

The first day of school is Wednesday, August 19, at 8:30 a.m. It will be a full day of school.

A couple of other dates to put on your calendar are Homecoming on October 2 in Florence and Dare to Share on October 9. We have a speaker from Minnesota coming to headline Dare to Share this year and are putting together another great lineup of breakout sessions for area educators.

Buildings, Grounds & Construction

There has been no shortage of activity around our school this summer!

Progress in our two new classrooms continues to go very well. The hallway has been enclosed, and a temporary wall will provide a clean and safe hallway for students while construction continues. I have been very impressed with the

progress we have seen. We did see some issues on the HVAC side, but have moved passed those and the building should be ready to go by the first day of school.

With construction continuing into the school year, there will be some changes to our normal routines. Parking along with student traffic through the foyer are two areas we will continue to work through. We appreciate everyone's patience and flexibility while these projects are completed.

We have also had an awesome response to sponsorship opportunities at the football field and for our scoreboard. We are excited about the improvements happening at the field and are extremely thankful to the businesses and individuals who have stepped up to support these projects. Their support allows us to continue improving our facilities and creating a great environment for our students, athletes, and community.

Our geothermal system is back up and running. Once the current work is finalized, we plan to sit down with those involved and discuss the long-term future of the system. We need to determine what steps can be taken to prevent recurring issues and avoid having to continually dig into our parking lot for repairs.

Another project that grew larger than anticipated involves the old gym bleachers. Initially, we planned to replace only a few boards. After further inspection, it became clear that all of the boards needed to be replaced. It will cost more than originally anticipated, but safety has to come first, and completing the project correctly now is the right decision.

Transportation Update

Fall practices are already underway, which means our buses are busy. We are very fortunate to have a great group of drivers and substitute drivers who make it possible to transport our students to school, practices, activities, and events.

One significant change this year involves our Watertown transportation. Watertown will only approve one pickup and drop-off location for our district. After discussion, the Watertown Armory was mutually agreed upon because of its proximity to our school.

We understand that this creates an inconvenience for many families, especially those who previously utilized the Boys & Girls Club for after-school care or as a convenient central pickup location.

To help accommodate different work schedules, we will offer two afternoon drop-off times at the Armory—approximately 3:50 p.m. and 4:15 p.m. Families choosing the 4:15 drop-off should understand that their children will remain on the bus approximately 25 minutes longer. Our hope is that providing the later option will make pick up a little easier for some families.

We recognize the frustration this change may cause and appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as we work to make the best arrangements possible for our students and families.

MS/HS Handbook Changes

The Board also discussed several changes to the Middle School/High School Handbook.

One of the biggest changes involves cell phones and electronic devices. Students will only be allowed to use their phones during the lunch period. Expectations and consequences surrounding the new policy will be communicated with students as we begin the school year.

We also discussed implementing a Behavior Day at the end of each semester. Students who meet the established expectations for behavior, attendance, and academics will earn the opportunity to miss the final day of the semester.

The expectations and requirements will be clearly communicated to students on the first day of school so everyone understands what they need to accomplish to earn the day.

Our goal with these changes is to establish clear expectations while also recognizing and rewarding students who consistently do what is expected of them.

Board Policy Updates

The School Board completed the first reading of several policy updates during the August meeting. These included policies addressing:

- Executive Sessions
- Use of Artificial Intelligence Technology
- Student Conduct
- Bullying
- Agenda Preparation and Dissemination
- Basic Instructional Program
- Epinephrine Auto-Injectors and Nasal Spray

As we continue to update district policies, we encourage patrons to review them. Board policies, including policies currently under review, are available on the school website.

The Board also approved several language changes to our Sports Co-op Articles of Cooperation. These changes update the current agreement, while the overall agreement will be discussed again this spring as we prepare for a new two-year agreement.

Looking Ahead

August is always an exciting time in a school district. Teachers are getting classrooms ready, coaches and students are back at practice, construction crews are working throughout our facilities, buses are on the road, and soon our hallways will once again be full. There will certainly be a few inconveniences as we begin this year. Construction will continue, transportation looks a little different for some families, and we have several new expectations and procedures to implement. However, there is also a lot to be excited about.

We continue to invest in our facilities, improve opportunities for our students, support our staff, and find ways to make the Florence School District better. None of that happens without the tremendous support we receive from our families, businesses, community members, and patrons.

Thank you for your continued support of our students and staff. We look forward to seeing everyone at Open House on August 17 and are excited to welcome our students back on August 19.

Here's to a great 2026–2027 school year!

Mitch Reed
Superintendent
Florence School District