

TO: Keokuk Community School District Board of Directors and
School Community

FROM: Emily K. Ellingson

DATE: July 8, 2026

RE: Petition under Iowa Code § 279.8B

*** This memo is intended to provide information to the Board and the broader school community and is not considered attorney-client privileged. By sharing this memo, the Board does not waive attorney-client privilege regarding any related subject matter. ***

Introduction: On June 15, 2026, a community member presented a “Petition” to the Keokuk Community School District Board of Directors during the regular Board meeting. The Board Secretary received it but did nothing further with it at that time. The Petition was titled “Petition for Leadership Change in the Keokuk Community School District” and stated the following:

In accordance with Iowa Code 279.8B, the undersigned residents and eligible voters of the Keokuk Community School District respectfully request that the Keokuk Board of Education take immediate action regarding Superintendent Dr. Kathy Dinger. Due to ongoing concerns involving leadership, transparency, staff morale, communication, financial management, and the overall direction of the district, we believe confidence in the current administration has been significantly damaged. Therefore, we respectfully request that Dr. Kathy Dinger resign or that the Keokuk Board of Education terminate her contract in order to restore trust, accountability, and stability within the district.

The community member presented a number of reprints of the Petition, each of which appeared to be signed by different individuals.

Analysis: Iowa Code Section 279.8B states as follows:

1. Upon petition signed by eligible electors of a school district equal in number to at least ten percent of the persons who voted in the last preceding election of school officials under Section 277.1, or five hundred eligible electors, whichever is less, the board of directors of the school district shall place the proposal specified in the petition on the agenda of the next regular meeting of the school board or on the agenda of a school board meeting held within thirty days of receipt of the petition filed in accordance with this subsection. If the proposal relates to curriculum, the school district may halt use of the subject

instructional materials until the school board holds the board meeting at which the proposal is presented and discussed. The meeting notice shall include a brief description of the proposal.

2. The board of directors of the school district shall provide sufficient time to receive public comment on the proposal. The board shall allow each interested member of the public to speak at the meeting regarding the proposal, but may impose a time limit on the amount of time a member of the public is allowed to speak if the time limit is the same for each speaker and necessary due to the amount of people wishing to speak.

The Iowa Department of Education published guidance regarding Section 279.8B, which states in relevant part as follows:

It is important to note that not all situations can be addressed through this petition process. The process is not to start discussions in circumstances where there are privacy rights or procedural safeguards available in state or federal law. The following examples would not be subject to public discussion under the petition process:

- A proposal to “fire a teacher” because teachers have procedural safeguards available under Iowa Code Chapter 279.
- A proposal to “remove Child X from my child’s special education class” would be inappropriate because Child X and Child X’s family have privacy rights to information in Child X’s education records and Child X’s education placement is determined by special education law.

While broader discussions of “staff quality” or “student discipline” for example, may be permissible, if the proposal relates to a specific teacher or child, the safest course of action would be for the school board to consult with local counsel.

See Iowa Department of Education Guidance, *Petition Process*, published February 15, 2022, available at <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/8101/download?inline=>.

Conclusions: When a school district’s Board of Directors receives a Section 279.8B petition, the first consideration is whether the threshold number of signatures has been met for a valid petition. As noted above, this means that the number of eligible electors who signed the petition has to be equal to 10% of the people who voted in the last preceding election of school officials *or* 500 signatures, whichever is less. If this threshold is *not met*, it is not a valid Section 279.8B petition, and the Board does not move forward with placing the petition topic on a Board meeting agenda. If this threshold *is met*, then the Board should review the subject matter of the Section 279.8B petition to determine if it a matter the Board could place on a future Board meeting agenda.

The Board of Directors must also consider whether the subject matter of the Section 279.8B petition is such that it must be placed on a Board meeting agenda. The Department of Education has stated that, when the subject matter of the petition involves privacy rights and/or other procedural safeguards under the law, the matter *cannot* be addressed through the petition process. The Department of Education has specifically recognized that a petition to terminate the employment of a District employee “would not be subject to public discussion under the petition process.”

For the reasons stated above, **it is recommended that the Board decline to place the matter outlined in the June 15 Petition on a Board meeting agenda.** Members of the public who wish to speak on the topic of the Petition may still speak at public comment or may contact Board members directly to express their opinions.