Public Comments at Board Meetings

Although Board meetings are held in public, they are not meetings of the public. The board may allow public comment and questions during the meeting but is not legally required to do so.

Best Practices:

- Establish a set time for public comments; for example, the first 10 minutes of every regular meeting. Be consistent in having this on the agenda for every meeting.
- List public comment on the agenda.
- Keep a sign in sheet of speakers. Ask all speakers to sign in. The sign in list is then given to the board chair to call speakers in order of sign up.
- Remind all speakers at the beginning of the public comment period that all comments are expected to be respectful and directed to the board as a whole.
- If the speaker begins to complain about a district employee, the chair should stop the speaker and remind them that such comments are not appropriate and should be addressed through the district’s normal complaint process. If the speaker persists, the chair should end their period of comment.
- Set a time limit per speaker; perhaps 3 minutes per individual. Keep time and enforce consistently.
- Decide in advance whether speakers can concede their time to another.
- Board members should not respond to public comments. This is a time for members of the public to express their views.
- Consider posting the district’s guidelines for public comment on the district website.

Sample Public Comment Guidelines (District website or printed)

PUBLIC COMMENT SIGN UP (SAMPLE 1)

Public Comment time provides an opportunity for constituents to address the _____ Public Schools Board of Education. We encourage public comments at business meetings and ask that you respectfully follow the meeting guidelines below:

- Public Comment occurs from 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. at the beginning of monthly Board business meetings, which occur on the second Tuesday of each month.
- Each person who signs up to speak should arrive at approximately 5:20 PM.
- During the 45-minute Public Comment period, each registered speaker will have up to 3 minutes in which to address the Board.
- Up to 5 people can register to speak on a specific topic, which allows a diversity of opinions to be presented while being mindful of time.
- If a large group of people wishes to come to discuss a specific topic, please designate one person to sign up and speak.
- If you have hand-outs or materials for the Board, please present them to the Board’s Executive Assistant who will distribute them to the Board members after the meeting.
- Members of the public should not approach the dais.
- The Board Chair has full discretion over the Public Comment period, including the ability to manage speaking time to allow for additional comments.

No inappropriate comments or behavior will be tolerated. Inappropriate behavior is defined as attempting to engage individual board members in conversation, insults, obscenities or profanity, attacks against any person in their personal capacity, and/or physical violence or threat thereof.
Public Comment at Board Meetings (Sample 2)

Guidelines for communicating with the school board during public comment sessions.

The board generally meets on Monday twice a month, except for the month of July. The meeting calendar is provided to local newspapers. They are held at _________. Public comment periods are held only during the first meeting of each month. That meeting begins at 7:00 p.m.

Tips on preparing to speak to the board

Your goal for providing a comment should be to raise a specific topic or issue with the school board. Their goal is to listen and learn from the community. They will not respond to testimony that evening. If you would like to speak before the school board, please follow these guidelines:

- Try to resolve any issues with teachers, school principals, or other district personnel before bringing the issue to the board.
- Recognize that the board does not discuss personnel matters at board meetings. Do your homework and understand the basic facts of the issue before addressing the board.
- Prepare an outline of your testimony so that it is well organized and avoids repetition.
- Plan to keep your remarks to three minutes.

Process at the meeting

- Members of the community who wish to speak to the board during the public comment period should sign up before the meeting starts. A sign-up sheet is available at the front-left of the boardroom, usually by 6:45 p.m.
- Please print your name and complete address legibly on the sign-up sheet.
- Pick up an agenda to learn when the public comment period will take place. Listen for any changes in the agenda announced by the board president.
- When the board is ready, the president will refer to the sign-up sheet and call out the names in that order.
- If a number of people are signed up to speak on the same topic, the board limits the time devoted to a single topic to 30 minutes.

Addressing the board

- When your name is called, approach the podium. Speak into the microphone, giving your full name and the school attendance area where you live for the record.
- Please limit your comments to three minutes.
- Be respectful of the board when speaking.
- Be ready to respond to questions from the board if asked.
- Address your testimony to the board members, not the audience.
- Do not address questions to the board. The board’s goal for the public comment period is to hear your concerns, comments and opinions.

Questions?
Contact OSBA at 503-588-2800 or email pacepreloss@osba.org.