



Policy 903 — Public Comment in Board Meetings

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Public Comment in Board Meetings

Purpose

The Board recognizes the value to school governance of public input on educational issues and the importance of designating time for public comment during open Board meetings. The Board also recognizes the importance of diverse viewpoints and commentary.

This policy addresses the right for the public to comment at open Board meetings and the responsibility of the Board to conduct its business in an orderly and efficient manner. An authorized individual’s public comment will be free from interruption, except when the individual’s conduct is in violation of law or Board policy.[\[1\]](#)

Authority

An opportunity for district residents, taxpayers, employees and students to provide comment on matters of concern, official action or deliberation which are or may be before the Board, shall be provided as designated on the Board meeting agenda and in compliance with law, Board policy and district procedures.[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)[\[5\]](#)

The presiding officer may expand the opportunity to provide public comment to others when deemed necessary to inform the Board.

Copies of the agenda, which includes a listing of each matter of business that will be or may be the subject of deliberation or official action at the meeting, shall be made available to individuals in attendance at the meeting.[\[3\]](#)

The Board requires that public comment on agenda items be made at the beginning of each meeting.[\[4\]](#)

If the Board determines there is not sufficient time at a meeting for public comments, the comment period may be deferred to the next regular meeting or to a special meeting occurring before the next regular meeting.[\[4\]](#)

The Board shall provide a second public comment period, after the items for action or deliberation have been completed, to comment on items of concern or other matters involving the school district.

When items are added to the agenda after the public comment period has ended, the Board shall offer a further public comment opportunity limited to the added items.[\[4\]](#)[\[6\]](#)

An individual's public comment may be interrupted or terminated only under limited circumstances, such as when the individual's commentary is in clear violation of law or Board policy, including but not limited to the following:

1. Sexual harassment, racial, ethnic, religious or nationality intimidation towards an individual or individuals in the school community.[\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#)
2. Disclosure of confidential personal information regarding students or staff.
3. Speech that traditionally has not been protected under the First Amendment, such as obscenity, defamation and speech integral to criminal conduct.
4. Speech that is profane.
5. Speech that constitutes true threats such as inciting imminent lawless action or subjecting individuals to fear of violence.
6. Speech that does not concern matters that may come before the Board for deliberation or official action, for example, sales of commercial products or services.

Guidelines

Sign-in and Request to Comment

Prior to entering the Board meeting, all individuals shall print their full name, township they reside in and/or group affiliation before entering the meeting room. The following information should be provided on the sign-in sheet:[\[1\]](#)

1. Full name.
2. Township you reside in.
3. Group or organization affiliation, if applicable.

Statement of Presiding Officer

Prior to public comment during the meeting, the presiding officer shall make a statement providing direction and establishing expectations for the period of public comment.

Public Comment

Individuals shall wait to be recognized by the presiding officer before commenting, must direct all comments to the Board, and must preface their comments by an announcement of their full name, township of taxable property, and group affiliation, if applicable.

The public comment session at the beginning of the meeting shall be limited to one (1) hour. The second public comment period shall be limited to not more than one (1) hour.

Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three (3) minutes. Commenters may not cede their time to other individuals. No individual may speak more than once on the same topic, in either public comment session, unless all others who wish to speak on that topic have been heard and there is time remaining in the public comment period.

All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no participant may address or question Board members individually.

The presiding officer and the district solicitor have the authority to:

1. Interrupt an individual to warn the commenter that the statement is too lengthy or conduct is otherwise in violation of this policy.
2. After warning, terminate the individual's opportunity to comment when the conduct continues and is in violation of this policy.
3. Call a recess or adjourn to another time when an individual's conduct is otherwise in violation of this policy.

4. Request an individual to leave the meeting when that person's conduct is disrupting the operation of the meeting. [\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#)
5. If the individual refuses to leave the meeting, request the assistance of law enforcement officers or school police or security personnel to remove the disorderly person to enable the Board to proceed with the orderly operation of the meeting. [\[12\]](#)[\[13\]](#)
6. Waive the Board's rules regarding public comment with the approval of a majority of those present and voting.

No placards or banners will be permitted within the meeting room or on school grounds without prior approval of the Board.

The meeting agenda for each regularly scheduled meeting will be forwarded to each Board member one (1) week prior to the meeting. The agenda will also be available to the public online three (3) days prior to the Board meeting.

The meeting agenda and all pertinent documents shall be available in paper form to the following persons prior to or at the beginning of each meeting, less confidential material, if requested by noon on the day of the Board meeting to the Secretary to the Superintendent:

1. Members of the press and others.
2. President of the Pleasant Valley Education Association.
3. President of the Pleasant Valley Support Staff Personnel Association.

If an emergency makes it impossible to attend the Board meeting, the requester shall call the Superintendent's office and pick up the packet before the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. If the packet is not claimed by the next regularly scheduled Board meeting, the requester will be charged the prevailing per page duplication rate of twenty-five cents (\$0.25) per single page. No future requests will be honored until the packet in question is paid for.

Objection

Any person has the right to raise an objection at any time to a perceived violation of the Sunshine Act at any Board meeting. [\[14\]](#)

Response to Public Comment

The purpose of public comment at Board meetings is to allow the Board to learn the thoughts of the public prior to Board deliberation and official action.

Although the public comment period of the meeting is not a question and answer session between the public and the Board, the Board may direct staff to follow up and address public inquiries in a reasonably prompt manner.

Whenever public comments are subject to the Board policy regarding public complaints, the individual shall be directed to follow the process outlined in the policy for resolution of the issue.
[15]

Recording and Release of Public Comment

District recordings shall not be the official record of an open Board meeting, but may be available for public access, upon request, in accordance with the law, relevant court decisions and Board policy. Recordings of Board meetings, including the public comment portions of the meeting, shall be retained and disposed of in accordance with the district's records retention schedule.[5][16][17][18][19]

Public Comment Recorded in Board Minutes

The following information regarding public comment is required to appear in the official minutes of each open Board meeting:[5][20]

1. The names of all citizens who appeared before the Board.
2. The subject of their testimony.

Recording Devices and Cameras

Electronic recording devices and cameras, in addition to those used as official recording devices, shall be permitted at open meetings. The Board is authorized to establish reasonable rules for the use of recording devices and cameras during Board meetings.[1][21]

Footnotes

[1]

65 Pa. C.S.A. 710

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[2]

24 P.S. 407

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[3]

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[4]

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[5]

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[6]

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[7]

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[21] 65 Pa. C.S.A. 711
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