



Book	Policy Manual
Section	900 Community
Title	Public Comment in Board Meetings
Code	903
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### **Purpose**

The Board recognizes the value of public input 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 and taxpayers 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]

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**

All individuals wishing to comment during the Board meeting shall sign in on the sheet provided at the meeting and provide the following information on the sign-in sheet:

1. Name of commenter.
2. Municipality of the commenter.
3. Topic to be addressed.
4. Group or organization affiliation, if applicable.

#### **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 name, and group affiliation, if applicable.

Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to five minutes duration unless waived by the board president or presiding officer at the meeting.

No individual may speak more than once on the same topic, 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 school directors 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 school security personnel or law enforcement 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.

### **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. [14]

### **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][19]

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]

Legal

1. 65 Pa. C.S.A. 710
2. 24 P.S. 407
3. 65 Pa. C.S.A. 709
4. 65 Pa. C.S.A. 710.1
5. Pol. 006
6. 65 Pa. C.S.A. 712.1
7. Pol. 103
8. Pol. 103.1
9. Pol. 104

10. 18 Pa. C.S.A. 5101

11. 18 Pa. C.S.A. 5508

12. 18 Pa. C.S.A. 3503

13. Pol. 805.2

14. Pol. 906

15. Pol. 113.4

16. Pol. 216

17. Pol. 800

18. Pol. 801

19. 65 Pa. C.S.A. 706

20. *Alekseev v. City Council of Philadelphia*, 8 A.3d 311 (Pa. 2010)

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

U.S. Const. Amend. I

PA Const. Art. I

65 Pa. C.S.A. 701 et seq

18 Pa. C.S.A. 1 et seq

18 Pa. C.S.A. 5903

*Counterman v. Colorado*, 600 U.S. 66, 143 S. Ct. 2106, 216 L. Ed. 2d 775 (2023)

*Hatchard v. Westinghouse Broadcasting*, 516 Pa. 184, 532 A.2d 346 (1987)