

# BEDH - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

Regular, special and emergency meetings of the Board are open to the public. The Board wishes to provide opportunities for citizens to express their interests, concerns and suggestions related to matters under consideration by the Board. The public is encouraged to attend and participate in these meetings as set forth in this policy so that they may become acquainted with the operations and programs of the schools. The Board also recognizes the value of public comments on school and educational matters. The Board has established procedures to permit fair and orderly expression of public comments at Board meetings while allowing the Board to conduct its business efficiently,

In order that the Board may fairly and adequately discharge its overall responsibilities, citizens or groups wishing to address the Board on a topic not otherwise on the agenda must submit a request in writing to the Superintendent at least one full week in advance of the scheduled meeting. The Superintendent and/or Board Chair may add the item to the agenda at their discretion.

As the elected representative body of the school department, the primary purpose of School Board meetings is to carry out the official business of the Board related to Board policies, programs and operations. These meetings are not public forums, but are meetings at which the Board does its business in public. An agenda is prepared and published in advance of each meeting in accordance with Board policy. Anyone desiring additional information about any item on the agenda should direct inquiries to the Superintendent's Office.

Generally, opportunities for the public to speak on agenda items will take place at the beginning of the Board meeting, prior to the Board's votes on those items. Public comment is not intended to be a time of discussion between the public and Board members. The Board Chairperson has the prerogative to limit the time allotted for comments on a particular topic as well as the time each individual may speak.

The Board Chairperson is responsible for ensuring the orderly conduct of Board meetings. The following ground rules shall guide public participation at Board meetings:

- I. Citizens, employees, students and others are welcome to participate as provided in this policy.
- II. Orderly conduct of a meeting does not permit spontaneous discussion from the audience. Speakers are to identify themselves by name and address before they begin speaking and to direct their comments and questions to the Board Chairperson. If Board members require clarification about a comment during public session, they are to direct their comments through the Board Chairperson.
- III. The Board will include a public comment period, not to exceed 20 minutes, on the agenda of its regular business meetings. Comments by individuals are limited to a maximum of three (3) minutes at a meeting. Individuals may not relinquish a portion of their allotted time to another speaker. The time limits in this paragraph may be modified at a particular meeting at the discretion of the Board, including extending the time period for public comment.
- IV. The Board will hear public comments from residents of the Town of Cape Elizabeth first. If there is time remaining in the public comment period once all residents have had the opportunity to speak, the Board will permit comments from non-residents. Each individual will be required to state their name and town/city of residence before beginning their remarks as well as to review a copy of this policy.
- V. In order to make the most efficient use of meeting time, groups or organizations are asked to designate spokespersons to present their comments. Speakers are also requested to avoid duplication or repetition of

remarks made by others.

- VI. Gossip, defamatory comments, and abusive, vulgar, or threatening language are not permitted.
- VII. Complaints concerning individual students or employees will not be aired in public at Board meetings. Any concerns about personnel matters and/or student matters should be directed to the Superintendent or another appropriate administrator outside of Board meetings so that they can be addressed through an appropriate process and in a manner consistent with privacy, confidentiality, and due process rights of the individuals involved.
- VIII. Employees and employee groups may not discuss matters at Board meetings for which other, more appropriate forums are provided by law or contract.
- IX. The Board Chair will stop any public comment that is contrary to this policy.
- X. The Chair has the authority to stop any speaker who violates these guidelines or the privacy rights of others. The Chair also has the authority to call a recess of the Board and/or to adjourn the meeting.
- XI. Persons who disrupt the Board meeting may be asked to leave in order for the Board to conduct its business in an orderly manner. The Board Chair may request the assistance of law enforcement as necessary to address disruptions and/or safety concerns, and to restore order.

The Board Chairperson and the Superintendent will develop procedures for remote public participation when remote participation is offered.

#### Legal Reference:

- 1 M.R.S.A. Section 405
- 20-A M.R.S.A. Section 1001(20)
- 20-A M.R.S.A. Section 6101

#### Cross Reference:

- BE - School Board Meetings
- BED - Remote Participation in School Board
- BEDB - Agenda  
BEDB-R - Agenda Format Meetings
- BEC - Executive Sessions
- KE - Public Concerns and Complaints

#### ADOPTED:

- March 8, 2005 (Replaced original BEDH)

#### Revised:

- June 14, 2011
- April 9, 2013
- December 14, 2021
- October 10, 2023

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