

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

“HOT TOPIC” ACTION PLAN

Board Policy BEDH provides for public participation at meetings of the Board of Trustees. General guidelines for conduct at such meetings are outlined.

If a heated discussion is anticipated, review this policy and determine the specifics of how to handle the meeting. The following items are suggested:

1. At such meetings it is best to indicate at the start that there will be an interim public discussion period on the particular agenda item of concern.
2. Start the public discussion period by having the Board Chairperson outline the guidelines that will be followed, the purpose of the discussion period, and what we are going to do.
3. Ask for an indication of who will speak. Consider having cards so that people can write down comments.
4. Ask for a spokesman to represent the views of any group(s) present. Ask for a list of persons represented by the spokesman.
5. General Rules for the Board to follow:
 - a. The Board Chairperson is the spokesman. Others should seek permission from him to make comments. It may be best to hear all public comments before making any response.
 - b. Don't debate with the public. Seldom will the Board win the debate.
 - c. Don't allow shouting. Explain the purpose is to present views for Board reaction in a controlled atmosphere.
 - d. No one can be allowed to slander another person. Stop them if they do. Refer complaints about employees to the Superintendent. Indicate that the Board Chairperson will be present if they wish.
 - e. All comments should be made to the Board. Don't let groups debate among themselves.
 - f. Schedule a short meeting ahead of anticipated heated topics to review plans for the meeting and to brainstorm possible problems which might arise.
 - g. Answer fact questions only. Opinion questions are best left unanswered. The session is to solicit the public's opinion, not the Board's.
6. Call recess in public discussion if it stays heated for fifteen minutes. During the recess Board members should mingle with the crowd. Talk and listen. It should help cool things down.
7. Wrap up the meeting by:

a. Explaining what the next step will be:

- 1) Further consideration at another meeting
- 2) Development of a committee
- 3) Refer to Superintendent or staff for recommendation
- 4) Schedule a public hearing on the topic

8. Consider taping hot topic meetings.

9. Consider a media release. Visit with the press to clear up any misconceptions.

10. It is generally best to go directly home from a heated meeting. Don't go where people from the meeting might gather to hash things over.

11. Finally, remember that decisions made during heated meetings often prove to be unwise decisions. Come back sometime later and discuss alternatives in a quieter environment. Make the decision then.

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