

Policy Code: 2310 Public Participation at Board Meetings

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education, being the governing body of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Administrative School Unit, a political subdivision of the state, exists solely to conduct the people's business. It is the public policy of the State of North Carolina and of this Board that the hearings, deliberations, and actions of this body be conducted openly.

A. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Board encourages public comment about educational issues. Every regular meeting agenda will include opportunities for public comment. Any person or group may sign up to speak before the meeting or by notifying the superintendent's office by 3 p.m. on the day of the meeting. The Board may limit the length of presentations.

B. PROVISIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

It is the intent of the Board to ensure that the participation of individuals with disabilities is as effective as the participation of others. All meeting facilities will be accessible to the handicapped.

Individuals with hearing, vision or speech impairments will be given an equal opportunity to participate in Board meetings. Requests for accommodation may be made to the office of the superintendent. Accommodations could include providing for someone to read written comments provided by a person with a disability or providing copies of written minutes or audio/video tapes of a meeting to a person with a disability.

Auxiliary aids and services for persons with disabilities will be available at no charge to the individual. All auxiliary aids and/or service requests must be made with appropriate advance notice. Primary consideration will be given to the requests of individuals with disabilities in selecting appropriate auxiliary aids and services. Should the Board demonstrate that such requests would result in a fundamental alteration in the service, program or activity or in undue financial and administrative burden an alternative means of communication will be used.

C. PROCEDURES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The Board recognizes the vital importance of listening to varied points of view on programs and issues facing the Board of Education or the school system. The time for public comment is intended for individuals and groups to address comments to the Board. Comments should relate to the education and safety of students or to the operation of the school system. The public comment time is for discussion of educational issues or the operation of the Chapel-Hill Carrboro City Schools. Public comment is not intended for extended comment or disruptive behavior.

1. Recognized Speakers

Any person who is recognized by the chair to speak to the Board during a meeting should state his/her name and address and, if speaking for an organization, the name and identity of the organization. A spokesperson should be designated to represent a group with a common purpose. A person speaking during the initial public comment period may address school-related topics that are not on the published agenda. The Board, at its discretion, may request that a proposal, inquiry, or request be submitted in writing. Board members may ask clarifying questions, but will not engage in dialogue with the public.

Persons in the audience who have not received permission to address the Board will not be allowed to speak; to make any deliberate effort or sound to interrupt proceedings; to harass any person speaking before the Board; or to interfere with the deliberations of the Board itself.

2. Time Limits for Presentations

In general, speakers will be asked to present their comments in a specified time (usually three

minutes) announced by the Board chair. If speakers have information which exceeds the specified time, then they can provide the additional information in written form. Speakers cannot waive or donate their time in order to provide more than the specified time for another speaker. If an unusually large number of people request to speak, the time for individuals may be reduced or a majority of the Board may set a limit to the time allotted for public comment at the meeting.

3. Appropriate Manner of Speech

If controversies about education and politics are to reflect the highest wisdom and advance the best interests of the disputants and the community, then how we debate, and not only what we debate, is critical. Speakers may offer criticism of school operations and programs, as well as criticism of Board members and administrators in their official capacity; however, the Board will not allow personal attacks. Complaints about named non-administrative staff, students or parents should not be voiced in open session. The chair will direct the visitor to the appropriate means for Board consideration and disposition of complaints involving an individual. Obscene, abusive, or defamatory language will not be tolerated.

4. Public Comment on Work Session Agenda Items

In addition to public comment at the beginning of each regular meeting, limited time for public comment will follow each work session item. Comment will be restricted to the topic of each work session item. Board members may ask clarifying questions, but will not engage in dialogue with the public on work session items. The Board will designate special public hearings to allow time for public comment on major issues facing the Board, e.g. proposed budgets, recommendations for major changes in the curriculum or school system operations. In addition, the Board may schedule additional public hearings when the community indicates sufficient interest.

5. Board Response to Public Comment

Board members may ask clarifying questions of speakers but there will be no general discussion of items presented. A board member or the superintendent may correct factually incorrect information in order to provide an accurate picture for the public. The Board will accept hand-outs only during public comment.

The Board chair should be alert to see that all visitors have been acknowledged and thanked for their presence and especially for any contributed comments on agenda issues. Similar courtesy should be extended to members of the staff who have been in attendance.

Except in cases of unusual emergency, presentations shall not be acted upon at the time that they are presented, but shall be received by the Board, and shall be disposed of in one of the following ways:

- a. accepted as an opinion
- b. referred to the administration for investigation
- c. placed on a future agenda

It shall take unanimous vote of the Board members present to take action on a presentation considered to be of an unusual or emergency nature at the time it is presented.

D. WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public also may convey opinions and concerns through written correspondence. Those who wish to address the Board by letter can send the correspondence to: Board of Education, Lincoln Center, Merritt Mill Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Individual home or business addresses of Board of Education members are available from the Superintendent's office.

E. REPORTS OF COMPLAINTS

Persons with complaints about the performance of school personnel, implementation of board policy, the quality of the educational program or school facilities are encouraged to initially seek a response from the school district official responsible for the program or facility or to the superintendent. The superintendent or designee will make available this board policy and other relevant grievance procedures to any individual or group submitting a complaint.

Legal References: [G.S. 143-318.10](#) and [-318.17](#); [115C-36](#), [-51](#)

Cross References: Student and Parent Grievance Procedure (policy 1740/4010), Responding to Complaints (policy 1742/5060), Role of Board Members in Handling Complaints (policy 2122), Board Meetings (policy 2300), Board Meeting Agenda (policy 2330)

Adopted: 4/23/98

Revised: July 15, 2005, 12/1/16

Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools
