

**Policy Concerning Public Participation at Board Meetings**

Regular, special, and emergency meetings of the school board are open to the public. This board, as an elected representative body of the school unit, wishes to provide opportunity for citizens to express interests and concerns related to the matters under consideration by the board. The public is cordially invited to attend and participate as set forth in this policy.

Board meetings are conducted for the purpose of carrying on the official business of the school system. The meetings are not public forum meetings (as are town meetings), but are meetings which are held for the board to do its business in public. The minutes of each public meeting will record the action taken and will show how the board voted on each item presented for action. The journal of minutes is open and available to the public during normal business hours in the Office of the Superintendent of Schools.

Orderly conduct of a meeting does not permit spontaneous discussion from the audience nor among board members. Individuals or organizations desiring to make requests, presentations, or proposals on matters before the board will be provided that opportunity.

Generally, public participation shall be limited to time periods just prior to board discussion of the agenda items upon which citizens wish to make comment.

The intent of this policy is to allow a fair and adequate opportunity for the public to be heard, to provide adequate time for the board to obtain necessary information on a subject before it, and to see that time allowed for open discussion does not interfere with the fulfillment of the scheduled agenda of the board.

In order that the board may fairly and adequately discharge its overall responsibility, a member of the public wishing to address the board on a specific topic not otherwise on the agenda must submit such 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, or the Chair may waive this requirement.

An agenda shall be published in advance of each meeting in accordance with board policy. Copies are to be posted, or available for at least three week days prior to regular meetings, at the superintendent's office and in the school, town hall, the public library or other appropriate public facilities. Anyone desiring additional information about any item on the agenda should direct such inquiries to the Office of the Superintendent.

The following “ground rules” are to further guide public participation at meetings:

1. The Chair may limit the time given to comments on a particular topic as well as the time any individual may speak.
2. In the event of a sizeable audience, the Chair may require persons interested in speaking to so indicate by signing up to speak, so they may be called on in the most expedient order.
3. Citizens, employees, and others with a legitimate interest in the board’s business are welcome to participate as provided in this policy. Others may be recognized to speak at the board’s discretion. Employees or employee groups will not be permitted to discuss matters for which other, more appropriate forums are provided.
4. All speakers are to identify themselves as they begin talking. They will not be permitted to participate in gossip, make defamatory comments, or use abusive or vulgar language. The board Chair will maintain the prerogative to discontinue any presentation which violates any of the public participation guidelines.
5. All speakers are to address the board Chair and may direct questions or comments to board members or other officers of the school system only upon approval of the Chair. Members of the board and the superintendent have the privilege of asking questions of any person who addresses the board. Such questions must be addressed through the Chair.
6. Comments and suggestions will be welcomed and given consideration by the board. Speakers may offer objective comment on school operations and programs that concern them. Generally, the board may hear but not discuss or act on an item entertained in a public meeting but will be deferred to established resolution procedures. Questions and concerns will be responded to through appropriate channels.
7. No complaints or allegations will be allowed concerning any personnel or any person connected to the school system. If appropriate, concerns about an individual will be handled in a conference where the rights and interests of all parties will be appropriately regarded.
8. Generally, duplication or repetition of comments to the board should be avoided in order to make the most efficient use of the time in meetings. Groups or organizations are requested to be represented by designated spokespersons.

9. Special procedures shall be in place in case of disturbance or disorder. These procedures, which are listed below, shall be reviewed annually by the superintendent, board Chair, board attorney, and others as appropriate.
- a. The Chair should order anyone causing a disturbance to leave the room.
  - b. The Chair can declare a brief recess until order is restored.
  - c. The meeting can be adjourned and reconvened at a time and place selected by a majority vote.
  - d. The board can table the agenda item which precipitated the incident.
  - e. If physical harm is threatened, the Chair should order a recess and summon the police.
10. The board shall, at its discretion, hold special public meetings at which no formal action is to be taken. This shall be solely for the purpose of encouraging interested citizens and groups to discuss with the board any aspects of the school system operations. The times and locations of these meetings shall be at the convenience of the public, to the extent of practical. Such meetings should not be occasions for employees to discuss concerns which should be handled through other forums.

Cross Reference: 8350 Policy governing Rules and Regulations of the School Committee  
8373.1 Policy Governing the Participation of Citizens at School Committee Meetings

- 8373.1 Procedure Relating to Participation of Citizens at School Committee Meetings
- 8375 Policy Regarding Agenda of Meetings
- 8375 Agenda Format
- 8375 Procedure Regarding Agenda of Meetings
- 8376 Procedure Regarding Minutes of Meetings

Legal Reference: Title 1 MRSA Sec. 401, et seq. -- Freedom of Access (Right to Know" law)

Adopted: Blue Hill School Committee December 10, 1991  
Adopted: Penobscot School Committee July 10, 2000  
Reaffirmed: Blue Hill School Committee – January 9, 2013