

PUBLIC COMMENT & PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

A. General Meeting Policy.

Meetings of the Board shall be open to the press and public.

The Board encourages residents to attend Board meetings so that they may become acquainted with the operation and programs of the schools. Additionally, the Board will provide opportunity for members of the public to provide input and comment at Board meetings consistent with the meeting and participation rules as described below.

This policy sets forth the standards and meeting rules that apply to the public in attendance at Board meetings, and to the opportunity for the public to provide comment at Board meetings.

B. Opportunity for Public Comment.

Consistent with RSA 189:74, the Board will provide the opportunity for members of the public to comment on school district matters at all Board meetings with the exception of emergency meetings called under RSA 91-A:2, II, or at meetings for which the sole purpose is to address one or more issues in non-public session under RSA 91-A:3.

The Board will provide a minimum of thirty minutes in total to hear all public comments under RSA 189:74.

An individual may offer comments on agenda items or any other District matters (e.g., operations, budget, and other issues directly relating to the District's school policies, programs and operations.) However, consistent with RSA 189:74, I, and in the interest of protecting personally identifiable information ("PII") as well as other confidential information, comments (including complaints) regarding individual students, volunteers, or employees (other than the Superintendent) should be directed to the Superintendent or otherwise as provided under the complaint/grievance resolution processes set forth in School Board policies KE.

Persons appearing before the Board are reminded that the public comment period is an opportunity for members of the public to provide their input to the Board but is not a question and answer session. Board members are without authority to answer spontaneously on behalf of the Board. Thus, in most instances, Board response, if any, will be deferred pending consideration by the full Board.

In order to ensure that persons who wish to appear before the Board may be heard and, at the same time, ensure that the Board may conduct its business and meetings properly and efficiently, the Board adopts as policy the following procedures and rules pertaining to public participation at Board meetings.

1. Members of the public shall not speak unless recognized by the Board Chair or other person presiding over the meeting ("Chair" shall apply to either in this policy).
2. The Board will generally schedule the first public comment period under General Business. During this public comment period, meeting attendees are invited to make a public comment about topics which are not listed on the agenda.
3. This time may be extended by a majority vote of the Board. The Board may also include public comment periods for specific agenda items. The Board Chair will close the public

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comment period after there is no response to the Board Chair's vocal invitation to the audience to make a public comment during the specified comment period.

4. When the public comment period has been open for 30 minutes and there are audience members who have not received a turn to speak during the specified public comment period, the Board Chair may request a voice vote of the Board to extend the public comment period for a length of time at the Board Chair's discretion.
5. After closing public comment, the Board Chair will open "Board Discussion Regarding Citizens Comments." The Board may have no responses, ask clarifying questions, or request that the Administration gather more information and provide a response in the next regularly scheduled public meeting.
6. Speakers will each be allotted 3 minutes to speak. Speakers may not relinquish allotted time to another speaker. The Board may at the outset of the public comment period increase or decrease the individual time limit for all speakers (but may not decrease the aggregate time below 30 minutes). Speakers may be allotted another 3 minutes, for a total of 6 minutes per person, on agenda items following Board discussion on said agenda item. Speakers may have additional time to answer any clarifying questions, if asked, by the Board or Administration. Speakers are encouraged to speak concisely and to provide new comments or perspectives not already presented to the Board, though a speaker may agree or disagree with prior comments or positions.
7. While the Board makes public School Board meetings accessible online in real time, with meeting links included on the meeting notice, attendance in-person to offer public comment is highly encouraged.
8. The Board will provide opportunity for written public comment for persons unable to attend the meeting. Written comments that meet the requirements of this paragraph and other provisions of this policy, will either (a) be included in the materials publicly available at the meeting, (b) briefly described in the minutes (in the same manner as comments made in person), or (c) attached to the minutes. In the event that the full thirty minutes for public comment have not been exhausted, the Board may read the written comments aloud at the meeting on a first received basis until the comment period has expired. Written comments must be submitted at least 24 hours prior to a Board meeting, and shall be limited to 300 words. Anonymous written comments will not be accepted as part of public comment as RSA 91-A:2, II requires that meeting minutes include the names of persons appearing at public meetings. Only one written comment is permitted per individual for each meeting. Written comments including PII or other confidential information will only be disclosed/made public as required under RSA 91-A:4 and 5, and Board policy EH. This paragraph is not intended to limit other correspondence to the school district, but only pertains to writings intended to be included as public comment at a school board meeting.
9. A speaker may send comments they wish entered into the minutes verbatim to the Chair within 24 hours of the applicable meeting, shall be limited to 300 words, and state the wish to be entered into the minutes verbatim. In the absence of submitted written comments, a description of subject matter discussed, as per RSA91-A:2,II, will be included in the minutes.
10. In order to comply with the official minutes requirements of RSA 91-A:2, II, speakers shall identify themselves clearly for the record. The public is defined as any of the following: residents of Claremont; employees of the Claremont school district; Claremont school district, parents/guardians or students; and representatives of the news media. Others may

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speak at the discretion of the Chair or by a majority vote of the Board. If they are speaking on behalf of a group, they must state the name of the group.

11. Defamatory statements, comments threatening bodily harm, or other unprotected speech will not be tolerated.
12. Comments which do not adhere to the above provisions, may be ruled out of order by the Chair. Repeated violations may result in the Chair terminating the speaker's privilege of address, and possibly deeming the violations a disruption to be treated as discussed in section B below.
13. In addition to the opportunity to offer input during the public comment period of a Board meeting, members of the public may also request initiatives or other such items to be placed on the Board's agenda. The determination whether or not to include the matter on a Board meeting agenda will be made consistent with Board Policy BEDB. Requests to have a matter placed on an agenda should be presented in writing to the Superintendent no less than fourteen days prior to the next Board meeting and must set forth the specifics of the subject to be addressed.

C. Meeting Disruptions.

The primary purpose of School Board meetings is to conduct the business of the Board as it relates to school policies, programs and operations. While members of the public have the right to attend and offer input during the public comment period of meetings, they do not have the right to disrupt the meetings. Impermissible disruptions include, but are not limited to:

- Shouting at any time, or speaking while someone else has been recognized by the Chair;
- Obstructing the view of others with posters or otherwise;
- Refusing to terminate public comment after that speaker's time has expired;
- Any other sustained or intentionally loud noises after the Chair has called for order; or
- Any other conduct intended to disrupt the meeting or person speaking.

If, after at least two warnings from the Chair, an individual continues to disrupt the meeting by words or actions, the Chair may direct the person to leave the meeting. Upon refusal, the Chair may request assistance from law enforcement officials to have the individual removed, with the potential for criminal charges. Interruptions may result in a recess, or, provided the thirty minutes for public comment has expired, and adjournment of the meeting.

District Policy History:

First reading: May 17, 2023

Second reading/adopted: September 6, 2023

Legal References:

U.S. Const., 1st Amendment

RSA 91-A:2, Meetings Open to the Public

RSA 91-A:3, Non-Public Sessions

RSA 189:65, VII & VII-a - Definitions (Student and Teacher personally identifiable information)

RSA 189:74, School Board Public Comment Period

RSA 644:2, Disturbing the Peace