

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

School Committee meetings are conducted for the purpose of carrying on the official business of the school system. All regular, special and emergency meetings of the School Committee are open to the public. The public is cordially invited to attend and participate in School Committee meetings as provided in this policy.

Although School Committee meetings are not public forums, the School Committee will provide appropriate opportunities for citizens to express opinions and concerns related to the matters under consideration by the Committee. The intent is to allow a fair and adequate opportunity for the public to be heard and to provide adequate time for the School Committee to obtain information and opinion on subjects before it, while ensuring that the time allowed for public discussion does not interfere with the fulfillment of the scheduled agenda.

During the time allotted for public comments, members of the public may speak on any subject directly related to the operations of the schools that is not on the agenda, except for personal matters or complaints concerning specific employees or students, which shall be addressed through established policies and procedures.

Public comments will also be permitted just prior to the discussion of any agenda item requiring School Committee action.

The School Committee may only address items on the agenda and is prohibited from taking action based on public comment.

Public Participation Guidelines

Members of the public may address the School Committee within the guidelines provided in this policy. The Chair shall be responsible for maintaining proper order and compliance with these guidelines.

The following guidelines shall apply to public participation at School Committee meetings.

- A. Citizens and employees of the school unit are welcome to participate as provided in this policy. Others may be recognized to speak at the Chair's discretion. Individual employees and/or employee groups will not be permitted to discuss matters for which complaint or grievance procedures are provided.
- B. The Chair may limit the time allotted for comments on a particular topic as well as the time each individual may speak.
- C. In the event of a sizeable audience, the Chair may require persons interested in speaking to sign up so they may be called on in a fair and efficient manner.
- D. During the time set aside for public participation, the Chair will be responsible for recognizing all speakers, who must identify themselves as they begin talking.
- E. Speakers are not permitted to share gossip, make defamatory comments, or use abusive or vulgar language.
- F. All speakers are to address the Chair and direct questions or comments to particular School Committee members or the Superintendent only with approval of the Chair. Requests for information or concerns that require further research may be referred to the Superintendent to be addressed at a later time.

- G. Members of the School Committee and the Superintendent may ask questions of any person who addresses the Committee but are expected to refrain from arguing or debating issues. Questions must be addressed through the Chair.
- H. No complaints or allegations will be allowed at School Committee meetings concerning any person employed by the school system or against particular students. Personal matters or complaints concerning student or staff issues will not be considered in a public meeting but will be referred through established policies and procedures.
- I. In order to make efficient use of meeting time, the School Committee discourages duplication or repetition of comments to the Committee. The School Committee requests that groups or organizations be represented by designated spokespersons.
- J. The Chair has the authority to stop any presentation that violates these guidelines or the privacy rights of others.
- K. Persons who disrupt the meeting may be asked to leave, and the Chair may request law enforcement assistance as necessary to restore order.

An agenda shall be published in advance of each meeting in accordance with the Sanford School Committee policy BEDB. Copies will be posted and/or available prior to regular meetings, at the Sanford School Department office, town libraries, Post Office, Town Hall, St. Thomas School and on the Sanford School Department website – www.sanford.org.

Anyone desiring additional information about an agenda item should direct such inquiries to the Office of the Superintendent.

Legal Reference: 1 MRSA § 401 et seq.

Cross Reference: BEC – Executive Session
BEDA – Notification of School Committee Meetings
BEDB – Agenda
BEDD – Rules of Order
KE – Public Concerns and Complaints
BEDH – E Public Participation Brochure

Adopted: May 15, 1989

Revised: November 20, 2006,
February 7, 2011