

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

Policy Code:

1410

Watauga County Board of Education (the “board”) meetings are conducted for the purpose of carrying on the official business of the school system. The public is cordially invited to attend board meetings to observe the board as it conducts its official business.

The board of education, as an elected representative body of the school system, also wishes to provide a forum for citizens to express interests and concerns related to the school system. In order that the board may conduct an orderly meeting while providing an opportunity for input, individuals or groups may be heard by the board in accordance with this policy or subsection D.2 of policy 1400, Board Meetings, which addresses public hearings.

A. REQUESTS TO PLACE ITEM ON THE AGENDA

In order that the board may fairly and adequately discharge its overall responsibility, citizens desiring an item to be placed on the agenda for a specific board meeting should direct written requests to the superintendent at least six working days prior to the meeting.

The request should include:

1. the name and address of the person or persons making the request;
2. the organization or group, if any, represented; and
3. a brief explanation of the nature of the item. Questions and/or materials to be presented to the board are to be submitted along with the request.

The superintendent shall confer with the chairperson of the board concerning whether to approve placing the requested item on the agenda and to determine the appropriate meeting for such discussion. The superintendent, with the consent of the board chairperson, shall accept or deny a request for inclusion on the agenda for any reason determined appropriate by the superintendent and chairperson.

The superintendent shall notify the requesting party of the response to the request. If the request is denied, the superintendent shall explain any other processes available for addressing the concerns. (See Section C, Reports of Complaints, below.) At the meeting, the board may, by majority vote and notwithstanding prior denial by the superintendent, add an item to the agenda before the agenda is adopted. After the agenda has been adopted, a two-thirds vote is required to add a new item to the agenda.

The chairperson shall establish the amount of time for individual or group presentations.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT

Each month, the first part of at least one regularly scheduled board meeting will be set aside for citizens to address the board through public comment. Each speaker will receive three minutes to present comments; however, the public comment session will not exceed 30 minutes total except by majority vote of the board. A Public Comment sign-up sheet will be available 30 minutes before the meeting begins in the board room for any individual or group to indicate their desire to address the board. Any individual or group who wishes to address the board must sign the sheet and complete and submit a written Request to Make Public Comments form to the board chair or superintendent through the board assistant, prior to the start of the meeting. During the public comment period, the board chair will recognize speakers in the order in which they signed in. Substitute speakers will not be permitted, and speakers may not donate any portion of their time to another speaker. If a speaker is unable to present all of his or her information within the specified time limit, the speaker may provide the board with the additional information in written form. If an unusually large number of people requests to speak, a majority of the board may decide to reduce the time for each individual or to require the designation of a spokesperson for each group of persons supporting or opposing the same positions. At any time, the board may establish additional procedures to ensure that public comment sessions proceed in an efficient and orderly manner. Each individual or group (10 or more) is limited to three minutes to speak. In the interest of efficiency and fairness, a group (10 or more) sharing the same opinion should select one spokesperson to represent the group (10 or more) before the board. The chairperson of the board may allow up to five minutes of public comment by an individual or group if deemed necessary.

Speakers should understand that public comment is not a time for asking questions or receiving feedback from board members. Board members will not respond to individuals who address the board except to request clarification of points made by the presenter.

Issues involving individual personnel or student matters are confidential and, therefore, are not appropriate for the public comment session. Concerns related to personnel or student matters should be handled as a complaint and reported to the superintendent or designee pursuant to Section C, below.

Except in cases of emergency, information received during presentations will not be acted upon at the time it is received. It will 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.

Disruptions by any person or persons of a public meeting will be subject to action in accordance with G.S. 143-318.17.

If the board does not hold a regular meeting during a month, the board will not provide a time for public comment at any other meeting held during that month, unless a majority of the board votes to allow public comment at the meeting or unless the purpose of the meeting is a public hearing.

C. REPORTS OF COMPLAINTS

Complaints about the performance of school personnel, implementation of board policy, the quality of the educational program or school facilities should be submitted initially for a response to the school system official responsible for the program or facility or to the superintendent. The superintendent or designee shall make available this 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 4010), Responding to Complaints (policy 5060), Role of Board Members in Handling Complaints (policy 1322), Board Meetings (policy 1400), Board Meeting Agenda (policy 1430)

Adopted: November 9, 2015

Replaces: Board policy 1.04, Procedures for Board Meetings

Revised: March 15, 2018, October 14, 2019