PUBLIC COMMENT AT BOARD MEETINGS

The Board of Education encourages public comment on school related matters at Board meetings. Board meetings are considered open. A reasonable period of time, not to exceed thirty (30) minutes (which may be waived by a majority vote of the Board), shall be set aside at each meeting of the Board for comments on matters pertaining to items on the agenda for public comment. A second public comment period will be set aside at the end of each Board meeting on matters pertaining to the district but not on the agenda. Persons wishing to speak should first be recognized by the President, then identify themselves, any organization they may be representing at the meeting and the topic they wish to discuss. Comments should be kept as brief as possible and relate to school matters. Each speaker will be permitted to speak for approximately three minutes. Speakers are asked to print their name and contact information (email and/or phone number) on the form provided at the podium in order for follow-up by the Board or administration if necessary.

The Board will not permit in public session discussion involving individual district personnel or students. Persons wishing to discuss matters involving individual district personnel or students should present their comments and/or concerns to the Superintendent during regular business hours.

All speakers and observers are to conduct themselves in a civil manner. Obscene language, defamatory statements, threats of violence, statements advocating racial, religious, or other forms of prejudice will not be tolerated.

The President is responsible for the orderly conduct of the meeting and shall rule on such matters as the time to be allowed for public discussion, the appropriateness of the subject being presented, and suitability of the time for such a presentation. Board members and the Superintendent shall have the privilege of asking questions of any person who addresses the Board, but commenters should not expect to engage in discussion with the Board. However, the Board may correct comments that are not accurate, and may refer to an existing policy when it answers a question.

In order that the Board may fairly and adequately discharge its overall responsibility, citizens who wish to raise questions or make requests, representations, or proposals to the Board are requested to direct them to the Superintendent of Schools, who will deal with them according to rules adopted by the Board. The intent of these rules is to:

1. allow everyone who wishes it, a reasonable hearing;
2. allow the Superintendent to take direct action, or to recommend action to the Board, when policies have already been established by the Board; and
3. see that the time so devoted does not interfere with the scheduled business of the Board.
4. All written statements shall be given to the District Clerk for inclusion in the records of the meeting.

The President will remind speakers whose presentations are inconsistent with this policy of the rules for public comment. For speakers that continue to violate this policy, the President or any Board member may request to discontinue the presentation or call for a brief recess of the meeting. The President may order the removal of speakers from the speakers’ area, or from the meeting in general, or may close the public comment period.

For members of the public who are unwilling or unable to speak during public comment periods, including when these periods are closed, they may submit comments to the Board in writing, to the following address: boemembers@somerschools.org.
Cross-ref: 1235, Civility
2342, Agenda Preparation and Dissemination
5300, Code of Conduct

Ref: Appeal of Kushner, 49 EDR 263 (2010) (boards not required to allow the public to speak)
Matter of Martin, 32 EDR 381 (1992) (boards need not permit nonresidents to speak)
Appeal of Wittneben, 31 EDR 375 (1992) (boards encouraged to permit citizens to speak)

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