

POLICY

LACEY TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

BYLAWS

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BOARD MEETINGS

0167 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BOARD MEETINGS

The Board of Education recognizes the value of public comment and community involvement at its meetings but also affirms its responsibility to conduct all meetings in an orderly, efficient, and respectful manner. Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, members of the public are entitled to comment on any school district issue that the member of the public feels may be of concern to the residents of the municipality or school district. Significantly, Board meetings are not meetings with the public; rather, Board meetings are where the Board conducts its business, which is open for the public to attend, watch, and comment during designated public comment periods. This Policy shall be interpreted and applied consistently with the Open Public Meetings Act, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, and the Constitution of the State of New Jersey. Accordingly, public participation at Board meetings shall be strictly limited to the following terms and conditions:

A. Public Comment Periods

1. Designated Times Only: Public comment shall be permitted only during those portions of the agenda specifically designated for public comment. No comment shall be permitted at any other time.
2. Time Limits: Each speaker shall be limited to six (6) minutes. No person shall speak more than once during each public comment period. Members of the public cannot “donate” their time to other members of the public. The Board President may, at the start of the public comment period, uniformly reduce the allotted time for all speakers if the number of speakers would otherwise prevent the conclusion of public comment within the designated time frame.
3. Total Comment Period: The Board may limit the total duration of public comment to one (1) hour for each public comment period.
4. The Board Secretary or Designee shall make the following announcement prior to public comment:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are now opening the public comment portion of this meeting in accordance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act. This is an opportunity for members of the public to make comments to the Board. Please note that this period is reserved for comment only. The Board will not be responding to questions or engaging in dialogue.



The Board's role is that of a policy-making body. Operational and administrative matters should be addressed through the appropriate chain of command, beginning with the staff member or administrator most directly involved.

All speakers are expected to present their remarks in a respectful and civil manner. Rude, harassing, or defamatory comments will not be permitted. Please understand that such remarks may create personal liability for the speaker and potential legal exposure for the Board.

In addition, to protect the privacy rights of students and employees, the Board will not entertain discussion regarding specific student or personnel matters.

We thank you for your cooperation in helping us maintain an orderly and respectful meeting."

B. Manner of Addressing the Board

1. Direct Address to the Board: All remarks must be addressed to the Board President. No speaker may address or question individual Board members, staff, or other members of the public.
2. Scope of Comment: Comment shall be limited to matters of public concern directly related to the operations, policies, or governance of the school district. While the public may comment on any such matter, federal and state privacy laws prohibit the Board from discussing specific confidential student or personnel matters in public. The Board will not respond to such comments. The following types of speech are not protected by the First Amendment and are prohibited:
 - a. Speech that constitutes a true threat, incitement to imminent lawless action, or is legally obscene.
 - b. Speech that is defamatory.
 - c. Campaigning for or against political candidates or ballot measures.



3. Questions: Questions posed during public comment shall not be answered during the meeting. The Board or administration may respond as appropriate at a later time, and at their discretion.

C. Code of Conduct for Public Participants

1. All members of the public attending or participating in a Board meeting shall adhere to the following code of conduct:
 - a. All members of the public shall maintain decorum and respect for the orderly conduct of the meeting.
 - b. Irrelevant and repetitious comments and disruptive conduct are prohibited. Disruptive conduct includes, but is not limited to: shouting, making threatening gestures, speaking out of turn, refusing to yield the floor at the conclusion of allotted time, or otherwise physically impeding the orderly progression of the meeting.
 - c. No distribution of literature, materials, written statements or other items is permitted during the meeting. Any materials intended for Board consideration must be provided in advance to the Board Secretary prior to the commencement of the meeting. Materials submitted after that time shall not be distributed. No member of the public may place any item, document, material on the dais without permission of the Board President.
2. Any violation of this Code of Conduct may result in:
 - a. Immediate termination of the speaker's opportunity to address the Board.
 - b. Removal from the meeting by law enforcement or security personnel.
 - c. In cases of repeated, willful, and significant disruption that renders the orderly conduct of the meeting impossible, the Board may consider limiting an individual's right to physically attend future meetings. Such a limitation will only be imposed after providing the individual with written notice of the basis for the proposed action and a meaningful opportunity to be heard by the Board.



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- D. Authority of the Presiding Officer. The Board President or presiding officer, shall have the authority to:
1. Enforce compliance with this Policy.
 2. Interrupt, warn, or terminate a participant's statement when it in violation of this Policy, including when the statement becomes willfully disruptive as defined in Section C, is not relevant to the operations, policies, or governance of the school district, has become repetitive during the speaker's allotted time at the same meeting such that it is impeding the purpose of the public comment period, or is too lengthy. This provision shall not be used to prohibit a speaker from addressing a topic that has been raised at a prior meeting.
 3. Interrupt, warn, and/or terminate a participant's statement, question, or inquiry when it is too lengthy, is abusive, obscene, or may be defamatory;
 4. Exclude from participation any individual who engages in conduct inconsistent with the orderly and efficient conduct of the meeting.
 5. Request any person to leave the meeting when that person does not observe reasonable decorum;
 6. Request the assistance of law enforcement officers in the removal of a disorderly person when that person prevents or disrupts a meeting with an act that obstructs or interferes with a meeting;
 7. Call for a recess or an adjournment to another time when the lack of public decorum interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting; and
 8. Waive these rules when necessary for the protection of privacy or to maintain an orderly operation of the Board meeting.

Adopted: June 20, 2016

Revised: December 16, 2019

Revised: April 14, 2022

Revised:

