

West Bend Joint School District #1 Policy Manual

Chapter: Board Operations
Section: Operating Procedures
Title: Public Participation at Board Meetings
Number: 187
Date Revised: 08/09/2021

The School Board and administration of the District recognize the value and importance of public input in Board meetings. This policy establishes procedures for public participation at all regular Board meetings and at special Board meetings for which such participation is on the agenda. In addition, the public is invited to attend and observe open sessions of the Board and its committees.

For purposes of this policy, qualified participants include residents of the District, employees of the District and parents/guardians of children enrolled in the District.

Procedures for Public Participation in Board Meetings

1. There is a Public Participation time of up to 30 total minutes for resident comments early in the meeting. This time period may be extended by a simple majority vote of the Board.
2. Each participant called on by the Board President (or presiding officer) will approach the microphone and identify him/herself by name, address, his/her relationship to the District, and the nature of his/her remarks. He/she will then have the balance of up to three minutes to address the Board.
3. Based on the participant's identifying information and his/her actual comments, the Board Clerk or his/her designee will include each participant's name, address, his/her relationship to the District, and the comment/subject provided on the Participant Comment Card described below in the official Board minutes.
4. Public Participation is not for the purposes of engaging others in a debate. Wisconsin open meetings law makes it inadvisable for the Board to discuss or act on issues not on the agenda. Employees or members of the public with complaints should reference and follow specific policies for complaints (Policy 520, Employee Concerns or Complaints, and Policy 872, Citizen Complaints), as these procedures guarantee that complaints will be handled in a fair and responsive manner. These policies are available on the District website and on request.

Participant Responsibilities

1. Qualified participants (residents, employees, and parents of the District) desiring to address the Board should obtain and complete a Participant Comment Card or form in the room where the meeting is being held. Completed comment cards are to be turned in to the Board President prior to the start of the meeting. If it is determined that a participant is not qualified, that person will not be allowed to address the Board.
2. Comments may involve agenda items or matters not on the agenda, but relevant to the authority of the Board. Priority will be given to requests to speak to agenda items. Cards will be accepted until the official opening of the meeting. Participants submitting

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comment cards will be called upon to speak in the order the cards were submitted. The Board President will determine if residents who turn in cards after the start of the meeting will be allowed to speak.

3. Each participant is expected to be respectful of Board members, District employees, the meeting audience, and the views of others.
4. If a participant makes inappropriate remarks regarding members of the Board or any District employee or anyone whomsoever, the President is empowered to ask, though not compel, the participant to stop and utilize appropriate complaint procedures.
5. Participants should respect the time of all meeting attendees by not simply repeating the comments of a previous participant.

Board President Responsibilities

1. The Board President will be responsible for maintaining proper order and adhering to time limits.
2. The Board President will recognize participants using the completed and submitted Participant Comment Cards and convey participant responsibilities with the announcement provided below.
3. The Board President will be aware that First Amendment rights, as recognized by courts of law, provide wide latitude for allowing participant remarks unhindered.
4. The Board President may terminate the remarks of any individual who does not adhere to established rules and procedures for public participation, who speaks in a threatening or profane manner, or whose conduct is disruptive and impedes the Board's ability to conduct its business in an orderly and timely fashion.

Responding to Participants' Comments

1. Board members will listen respectfully to all participants' comments and will not engage in debate concerning a participant's remarks and cannot legally take immediate action on any issue participants may raise, though issues pertinent to an agenda item could be discussed when the agenda item is before the Board. Questions or comments regarding individual personnel issues are not to be discussed in open session, and are not appropriate for Public Participation.
2. In response to resident's comments, the Board may, with unanimous consent or approval by a majority of the Board present:
 - a. Request that the resident submit his/her concerns in writing for distribution to all Board members.
 - b. Refer the matter to the Superintendent and/or Board President.
 - c. Refer the matter to a committee of the Board or a future meeting of the Board.

Board President's Announcement

"We've come to the Public Participation portion of our agenda. Board Policy 187 prescribes the nature and procedures for this segment. I summarize the policy at this time, but copies of the policy are available in the back of the room, and I urge you to familiarize yourself with the policy in its entirety.

"Residents of the district, parents of children in district schools and employees of the district may participate. Participants desiring to address the Board should obtain and complete a Participant Comment Card near the entry and turn it over to the President

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prior to the meeting or when allowed by the President. Participants may comment concerning an agenda item or a non-agenda item.

“Each participant will be called to the podium and given three minutes to speak. The participant must state his/her name, address and relation to the district. This information will appear in the minutes of the meeting.

“The Board will not engage in debate concerning the remarks or take immediate action. The Board may refer the matter to the Superintendent, a committee, or take the remarks into consideration in future action.

“Board Policy 872 provides a formal process for citizen complaints, and Board Policy 520 provides a formal process for employee complaints. The Board recommends use of these procedures, as they guarantee a fair and timely response.”

The President then invites participants forward.

Legal References:

Wis. Stat. 19.81 – 19.98, Wisconsin Open Meetings of Governmental Bodies

Wis. Dept. of Justice’s Open Meetings Law Compliance Guide

Policy Cross References:

Policy 520, Employee Concerns or Complaints

Policy 872, Citizen Complaints

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