

BCBI Public Participation in Board Meetings

1/20/22

A. GENERAL PROVISION:

1. Meetings of the Cobb County Board of Education (Board) are held to conduct the affairs and business of the school system. The public is invited to attend all meetings, with the exception of executive sessions, and citizens are invited to address the Board at appropriate times and in accordance with this policy.
2. Public comment opportunities are available for the Board to hear from interested members of the community. Board members do not provide responses or engage in direct conversation during public comment. If speakers wish to receive an answer to a specific question, inquiries should be directed to the appropriate district office.
3. Before addressing the Board, individuals are urged to seek a solution to their concerns through the proper staff and administrative channels.

B. SPEAKER ELIGIBILITY:

The Board will hear public commentary from any interested resident of Cobb County outside the City of Marietta; Cobb County School District (District) student or parent/guardian of a District student; non-resident owner of property within the geographic boundaries of the District; and/or employee of the District pursuant to the guidelines outlined in this Policy. Students under the age of 18 must be accompanied by the student's parent/guardian.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Board provides a 30-minute public comment session at each work session and voting session of monthly Board meetings to allow individuals, as identified in Section B of this Policy, an opportunity to address the Board.

D. SCHEDULING:

1. Speakers will have an allotted time of two minutes with the Chair having the discretion to limit the number of speakers speaking for or against an individual matter, with a maximum of 15 speakers.
2. Individuals desiring to appear before the Board must first complete a sign-in sheet which should be available 30 minutes prior to the convening of the Board meeting.
3. To allow the Board to receive input from as many stakeholders as possible, individuals may only address the board at either the work session or voting session of the monthly Board meeting.
4. Speaker information must contain:
 - a. Name;
 - b. Full physical address and no Post Office boxes. Cobb County property owners not residing in Cobb County must provide both their Cobb County property address as well as their mailing address;
 - c. Telephone number;
 - d. E-Mail address;
 - e. Discussion topic and which, if any, Board agenda item is related to their topic;
 - f. Whether they are a resident of Cobb County outside the City of Marietta; a District student or parent/guardian of a District student; a non-resident owner of property within the geographic boundaries of the District; and/or an employee of the District; and
 - g. Whether or not they have materials to submit to the Board.
5. Speakers must present any materials brought for the Board, i.e., letters, photos, petitions, written comments, or other documentation, etc., to the designated District representative. Speakers are asked to provide ten (10) copies of these materials. The District representative shall provide a copy of these materials to each of the following:

- a. Each Board Member;
- b. Superintendent;
- c. Board attorney; and
- d. The District's records representative.

E. SPEAKING:

1. Speakers will be scheduled on a first come, first served basis. However, the Chair may give priority to those discussing Board agenda items being considered during the Board meeting.
2. Speakers may not gain an additional opportunity to speak by reserving or dividing their allotted time for another speaking occasion and may not pass their allotted time to other speakers.
3. An organization may sign up to speak by designating a duly authorized spokesperson and one alternate, who may speak only if the primary spokesperson is unable to attend. By signing up and by addressing the Board on behalf of an organization, a speaker is representing that he or she has been duly authorized by that organization to make the comments presented.

F. CONTENT:

1. Speakers must:
 - a. State their name to the Board prior to beginning public commentary;
 - b. End their remarks when their allotted time expires; and
 - c. Direct public commentary to the Board as a body and not to an individual Board Member.
2. Individuals will not be denied the opportunity to address the Board on the basis of their viewpoint.
3. Speakers should be courteous and professional. The Board will not allow abusive language, threats, comments, jeers, applause, or shouts from the floor. Disruptive persons will be asked to leave the meeting room. The presiding Board officer may terminate public comments that are obscene, threatening, slanderous, profane, vulgar, or defamatory.
4. Speakers may comment on issues scheduled for consideration at the Board meeting or other concerns pertinent to the operation of a school or the District. In addition to the guidelines in this Policy, public commentary will not be permitted if:
 - a. The topic is excluded by the Open Meetings Act (O.C.G.A. §§ 50-14-1 et seq.). (This includes, but may not be limited to, certain land, legal or personnel items);
 - b. The speaker makes obscene, profane, vulgar, defamatory, slanderous, or threatening gestures/remarks during his/her public commentary;
 - c. The speaker discusses a student by name, or shares other information that could lead to the personal identification of a student (See, for example, Family and Educational Rights Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g);
 - d. The speaker makes untrue, slanderous, or defamatory comments or other unsubstantiated claims about an identified or identifiable employee (While general comments are appropriate for the public comment session, concerns about specific individuals should be addressed privately with the appropriate District administrator.);
 - or
 - e. The speaker disrupts or attempts to disrupt the Board meeting (see, for example, O.C.G.A. § 16-11-34).

G. BROADCAST:

Speakers should be aware that their public commentary may be broadcast live, filmed, photographed, or recorded by the District or other non-District media sources. The District may rebroadcast public commentary on COBB edTV or on the District or school websites. Any portion of the public commentary that is not in compliance with this Policy (such as prohibited in Section F. above) and/or applicable broadcast authority may be edited prior to broadcast.

H. LIMITATIONS:

Any person who willfully violates these guidelines may forfeit the remainder of their speaking time and the Board may, in consultation with the Board Attorney, issue a written notice prohibiting the speaker from appearing before the Board for up to sixty (60) days.

Approved: 10/11/78
Revised: 1/26/84; 8/8/84; 1/24/85; 4/28/88; 7/12/89; 7/8/92; 2/25/93; 9/13/95; 05/23/96; 8/22/96; 11/12/03
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Revised: 2/15/18; 6/10/21; 1/20/22

Legal Reference

O.C.G.A. 16-11-34	Preventing or disrupting a meeting of General Assembly or other meetings of members
O.C.G.A. 16-11-35	Removal from campus or facility of unit of university system or school; failure to leave
O.C.G.A. 20-2-58	Public Comment Period
O.C.G.A. 50-14-1	Open Meetings Law