

Best Practices for Maintaining Decorum and Order at School Board Meetings



- 1 Enforce Speaker Time Limits**

Strictly follow the public comment time limits in your board bylaws for individual speakers and comments and be prepared to enforce the limits. Ensure speakers are aware how much time they have and use a timer with an audible buzzer to track time.
- 2 Consider the Physical Space**

Arrange your meeting room so there is no space in the back for groups of “hecklers” to stand and gather behind those seated. Spread out seats to take up the entire space and place them against all walls to avoid standing crowds behind seats. Strictly enforce the room capacity.
- 3 Public Comment Instructions on Agenda**

Update the board agenda to include an introduction to public comment reminding participants to speak in a respectful and professional manner.
- 4 Consistent Message About Public Comment**

Consistently read a statement before public comment that explains the public comment period, asks people to speak respectfully and professionally, and clarifies that the views expressed by members of the community do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board.
- 5 Consider Sequence of Public Comment**

While the public may speak before each individual agenda item, moving the *general* Public Comment agenda item (for comments on non-agenda items) to the end of the meeting may prevent problematic speakers from making their comments a routine and/or convenient occurrence, allowing students and employees to leave following their agenda item and the Board to attend to important district business.
- 6 Ensure Orderly Public Comment**

Use speaker cards to conduct public comment in an orderly fashion. Consider identifying the next 2 commenters so they can be prepared and move efficiently. Use the gavel for any speaker or audience member who is speaking out of turn.
- 7 Consider Recording Meetings**

Recordings of Board meetings, as expressly permitted by the Brown Act, may assist the District in holding contentious speakers accountable for their statements.

8 Remember the Board's Jurisdiction

Challenge/stop controversial speakers if their comments are outside the Board's jurisdiction. Public comment is only for matters within the school board's jurisdiction and therefore does not include many current "hot topics" (for example, the recall election, the president, fascism, etc.) Board members may consider communicating their concern by interrupting the speaker to not stop their speech, but to ask the question, "How is this related to what a school board can do?" Then, the Board can stop the speaker if the answer is indeed unrelated to the Board's jurisdiction.

9 Ensure Appropriate Security

Have law enforcement present (or at least on standby) any time you expect controversial speakers or a potentially unruly crowd. Consider and discuss in advance what role law enforcement will play.

10 Proactively Respond to Meeting Disruptions

Be prepared to immediately stop the following conduct: (1) willfully disrupting a meeting, (2) interrupting a person who is addressing the legislative body, or (3) preventing the legislative body from attending to the purpose of a meeting. Ensure adequate training for Board president and others to intervene. Follow the Lozano Smith script for dealing with the disruption found in Appendix 7 of the Lozano Smith Brown Act Handbook:

- > Admonition to person(s) causing disruption to stop so meeting can continue;
- > Second warning that if they do not immediately cease they will be asked to leave;
- > Order the person to leave the room;
- > If person refused to leave, escort them from the room safely; summon assistance from law enforcement if necessary;
- > Board may take a short recess if helpful to allow emotions to calm down; and
- > In the case of extreme disruption or with multiple people involved who will not cease the disruption, clear the room of all members of the public. Only press may remain. Meeting may continue without the presence of the public.

DISCLAIMER: As the information contained herein is necessarily general, its application to a particular set of facts and circumstances may vary. For this reason, this document does not constitute legal advice. We recommend that you consult with your counsel prior to acting on the information contained herein.

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