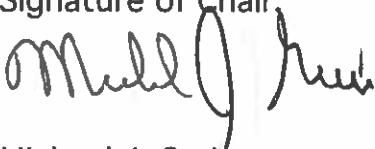


Policy for: PUBLIC PARTICPATION IN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS		Revision
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In accordance with state law, all meetings of the School Committee, its subcommittees, and its advisory committees shall be open to the public, except for Executive Sessions properly convened under applicable statute. While the law grants the public the right only to observe public meetings, the Committee recognizes that meetings may provide an important opportunity for the Committee to hear the viewpoints of citizens.

Public Comment Period

The School Committee will provide a period during each meeting, generally not to exceed ten minutes, for public statements or comments on matters within the scope of the School Committee’s authority. These matters primarily include the budget for the Needham Public Schools, the educational goals and policies of the Needham Public Schools, and the performance of the Superintendent.

Members of the public planning to speak during the Public Comment Period should inform the Chair of the Committee in advance, either by e-mail or in person prior to the start of the meeting. Such advance notice is not required but is helpful. During the period allotted to public comments, the Chair of the meeting will recognize first those who have communicated in advance their desire to speak. If time allows, other individuals wishing to speak will be recognized at the discretion of the Chair.

To facilitate timely completion of the business of the meeting, public comments will not be allowed during other portions of the meeting.

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Guidelines for Public Comments

1. Public comments should be addressed to the Chair.
2. Persons making public comments must identify themselves by name and city or town of residence and any affiliation relevant to the comments to be made.
3. Comments may be either oral or written; if written, copies should be provided for the School Committee if possible.
4. Speakers will have three minutes to present their material.
5. Comments must be limited to matters that are within the scope of the School Committee’s authority. Comments involving staff members or students must concern the educational goals, policies, or budget of the Needham Public Schools or the performance of the Superintendent.
6. As the time allotted to public comments is limited, large groups addressing the same topic are encouraged to consolidate their remarks and/or select a spokesperson to comment. The Chair may limit multiple statements that reiterate similar viewpoints.
7. The Chair will not interrupt speakers who have been recognized to speak, except that the Chair reserves the right to terminate speech that is not Constitutionally protected because it constitutes true threats, incitement to imminent lawless conduct, comments that were found by a court of law to be defamatory, and/or sexually explicit comments made to appeal to prurient interests. Verbal comments may also be curtailed once they exceed the three-minute time limit set forth in the policy and/or to the extent they exceed the scope of the School Committee’s authority.

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The School Committee's Role in Public Comment Period

The Public Comment Period is not a time for debate or response by the School Committee. Comments made during the Public Comment Period do not necessarily reflect the views or the positions of the School Committee. Because of Constitutional principles of free speech, the School Committee does not have the authority to prevent all speech that may be upsetting and/or offensive during the Public Comment Period.

Communications to and from School Committee Members

Speaking during the Public Comment Period is only one means of communicating with the Committee. Members of the Public are encouraged to ask questions of or express opinions to the Committee by U.S. mail, e-mail, or by phone. An e-mail address is available for that purpose. Whether received through the Public Comment Period or other methods, the Chair of the Committee may summarize questions and answers of general interest at the start of a future School Committee meeting and/or may include some matters on the agenda of a future Committee meeting. Other matters may be referred to the Superintendent for administrative response.