

BEDH - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All regular and special meetings of the School Committee shall be open to the public. Executive sessions will be held only as prescribed by the Statutes of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The School Committee desires citizens of the District to attend its meetings so that they may become better acquainted with the operations and the programs of our local public schools. In addition, the Committee would like the opportunity to hear the wishes and ideas of the public.

In order that all citizens who wish to be heard before the Committee have a chance and to ensure the ability of the Committee to conduct the District's business in an orderly manner, the following rules and procedures are adopted:

1. At the start of each regularly scheduled School Committee meeting, individuals or group representatives will be invited to address the Committee. The Chairperson shall determine the length of the public participation segment.
2. Speakers will be allowed three (3) minutes to present their material. The presiding Chairperson may permit extension of this time limit.
3. Topics for discussion must be limited to those items listed on the School Committee meeting agenda for that evening.
4. Improper conduct and remarks will not be allowed. Defamatory or abusive remarks are always out of order. If a speaker persists in improper conduct or remarks, the Chairperson may terminate that individual's privilege of address.
5. All remarks will be addressed through the Chairperson of the meeting.
6. Speakers may offer such objective criticisms of the school operations and programs as concern them, but in public session the Committee will not hear personal complaints of school personnel nor against any member of the school community. Under most circumstances, administrative channels are the proper means for disposition of legitimate complaints involving staff members.
7. Written comments longer than three (3) minutes may be presented to the Committee before or after the meeting for the Committee members' review and consideration at an appropriate time.
8. School Committee members wishing to address the Committee will do so by scheduling a discussion item on the agenda.



PUBLIC MEETING GUIDANCE

The following restrictions on public comment are permissible:

- A person may not speak unless recognized by the chair; however, the chair may not refuse to recognize a person based on the anticipated content or tone of the comment
- A person must stop speaking when requested; however, officials may not ask a person to stop speaking based on the content or tone of the comment
- The public body may set time limits for comments, and may request that commenters abide by those limits
- A person may not interrupt others who are commenting in accordance with the rules, and may not otherwise disrupt the meeting; persons who persist in disruptive behavior may be removed

The public body may encourage the public to be civil and respectful and to avoid personal attacks or offensive language. However, it may not silence or remove members of the public simply for ignoring that advice so long as they are otherwise respecting the rules governing requests to speak, time limits, etc. The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office provides open meeting law guidance at www.mass.gov/the-open-meeting-law.

The following would constitute crimes:

- Physical assaults
- Threats
- Property damage

All of these actions are crimes however they are motivated; however, there are particular penalties and separate crimes where they are motivated by a person's membership in a protected class, such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national origin or gender identity.

The following are not crimes:

- Expression of opinion, however offensive
- Criticism of public officials, policies or actions