



**INDIANA SCHOOL BOARDS
ASSOCIATION**

**MAKING THE MOST OUT OF PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION IN YOUR MEETINGS**

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Steve Horton
Director of Board Services
Julie Slavens
Senior Counsel/Director of Policy Services

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AGENDA

- 1. Review of the new law**
- 2. New rules for public participation
at board meetings**
- 3. Best practices for managing
public comments**

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OPEN DOOR LAW –
IC 5-14-1.5-3 (d) [HEA 1130/SEA 83]



(d) This subsection applies only to the governing body of a school corporation. The governing body:

- (1) shall allow a member of the public who is physically present at the meeting location, including a meeting conducted under section 3.5 of this chapter, to provide oral public comment;**

...

A governing body may adopt reasonable rules to govern the taking of oral public comment at a meeting. However, the taking of oral public comment on a topic must occur before the governing body takes final action on the topic. The governing body may set a limit on the total amount of time for receiving oral public comment on a topic.

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OPEN DOOR LAW –
IC 5-14-1.5-3 (e) [HEA 1130/SEA 83]



(e) Nothing in this section prohibits a governing body from taking reasonable steps to maintain order in a meeting, including removal of any person who is willfully disruptive of the meeting.

OPEN DOOR LAW – IC 5-14-1.5-3.2 [SEA 83]

(a) This section applies only to the governing body of a:

- (1) school corporation; or**
(2) charter school.

(b) The governing body shall allow oral public comment at a meeting as set forth in section 3 of this chapter.

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So, what is different now?

- ✓ Must provide for public comment at every board meeting when public is physically present.
(This may include work sessions!)
- ✓ Must provide public comment before the board takes final action on an item.
 - ✓ This does not mean public comment must be at the meeting during which the Board takes the final action.
(i.e., policy, work session)

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Time Limits

- Can limit amount of time for each speaker
- Can set time limit for public comments on a specific topic

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Reasonable Rules

- Board can set reasonable rules to manage public comments in order to run an efficient meeting.
- Sign up before meeting, state agenda item, name and address, in support or opposition, etc.

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Is a policy required?

- No, but it is a best practice to have a policy broadly addressing public comment at meetings.
- New law may require different rules for public comment at each meeting – flexibility will be needed depending upon the number of people wanting to speak/topics.

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Rules for Engagement

- Clearly state the rules
- How should you use a sign up before the meeting begins?
- The law and public comment in your agenda
 - What about consent agendas?

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Consent Agenda

- ***Under new law patrons have the right to give public comment on Consent Agenda items.***
- *This may include personnel matters – especially those on which the Board will be taking action. [Think Personnel Reports.]*

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Board Packet Information

- **Disclosable public records in the Board Packet may need to be made public prior to the meeting for the public to have adequate time to prepare public comments.**
 - Posting on website or when agenda is posted**

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Free Speech

- **You cannot deny public comment because you disagree with what the person is saying.**
- **Only deny if speech is disruptive or obscene.**

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Best Practices

**1. Remember this. . . Public speaking is the number one fear among adults.
(It ranks above death)**

Respect your public's right to speak.

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Best Practices

2. Listen to understand

Seek to go beyond the perfunctory duty of allowing public comment.

You may learn something!

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Best Practices

3. Consider how you receive the public



Eye rolling, texting, talking to your neighbor, passing notes, looking or facing away from the speaker are all signs of disrespect.

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Best Practices

4. Acknowledgment does not equal agreement

“Thank you”

“We appreciate your input”

“You’ve given us something to think about”

“We’ll take that into consideration”

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Contentious meetings

Be prepared and Remain calm!



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A framework for contentious meetings

The **CLARA** method

C – Center to suspend judgments and regulate emotions

- Recognize triggers and avoid fight or flight
- Use breathing techniques to calm yourself
- Use neutral body language and tone

L – Listen to understand their concern(s)

- Focus on the speaker to connect and convey interest
- Listen for feelings, experiences, values, etc.
- Don't discount or argue against emotional beliefs

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A – Acknowledge emotions, concerns, or point of view

- Acknowledge and validate speaker's emotions and concerns
- You are confirming that they have been listened to
- Affirm their feelings, dignity, and beliefs

R – Respond with facts and/or statements about the corporation

- Avoid engaging with the speaker
- Politely correct inaccurate or non-factual information
- Sincerely thank the person for their comments

A – Add sources of information or follow-up

- Recommend sources of information – district policy, state mandates, learning standards, etc.
- Ensure follow-up or any next steps if necessary
- **Do what you say you will do**

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Key Thought



Connect and find common ground, even when you disagree with the person's point of view

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Some questions to think about. . .

Do we have contentious items on the agenda?

How much time will we need to allow for public comment?

How will we handle sign-up and individual time limits?

Have we clearly stated the rules and expectations for public comment?

Do we know what to do when it becomes contentious?

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QUESTIONS?

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Remember this!

ISBA is here to help you.

Contact:

Steve Horton

shorton@isba-ind.org

Julie Slavens

jslavens@isba-ind.org