



Speaking at a School Board Meeting

Make it count

School board meetings are one of the most powerful public accountability tools parents have.

In most districts, public comments are limited (often 3 minutes per speaker, 5 minutes if you're speaking on behalf of a group). That means the goal is not to say everything but to say the right things in a way the board can't ignore.

Before You Speak: Know the Rules

Every district has a public comment policy.

Before the meeting, check:

- Time Limit (often 3 minutes)
- Sign-Up Process (sometimes required before the meeting)
- Whether comments must be about agenda items
- Rules for mentioning specific people or employees
- Whether you can submit written comments and how far in advance a written public comment needs to be submitted

If you can't find the policy, ask the district office or board clerk.
(And if it isn't posted publicly that's a transparency issue.)

How to Address the Board (Simple and Respectful)

Start with:

"Good evening, Chair [Name] and members of the Board."

Then:

- State Your Name
- Your Town/School (Optional)
- That you are a parent/grandparent/citizen/taxpayer/ stakeholder

Keep it respectful even if you are upset. Respect gets you heard. Rage gets you dismissed.

Your Goal in Public Comment

Your comment should do at least one of these things:

- Request a clear action (vote, policy review, investigation)
- Request transparency (post curriculum/materials)

- Request accountability (why was this hidden, who approved this)
- Put a concern on record (paper trail through meeting minutes/video)
- Force a response (follow-up, agenda item, records request)
- Request clarity

Emotion Matters But Control Matters More

Emotion is your credibility when used correctly.

The board should be able to recognize and or acknowledge:

- That this matters
- That families are watching
- That you are serious
- That you will follow up

But avoid:

- Name-Calling
- Speculation
- Long backstories
- Personal attacks
- Saying anything you can't back up

Strong and calm is almost always more persuasive than loud.

The 3-Minute Comment Formula

1. **Who you are (10 seconds):** "My name is _____. I'm a parent in this district."
2. **What the issue is (30 seconds):** State it simply and clearly. "I'm here because the district is not providing transparency about _____."
3. **Why it matters (60 seconds):** Explain how it affects students and families. "This impacts parents' ability to know what is being taught, and it damages trust."
4. **What you want the board to do (30 seconds):** Be specific. "I'm asking the board to require the district to post _____ by _____."
5. **Close strong (10 seconds):** "Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response."

Tips to Make Your Comment Stronger

- **Stick to facts:** Bring screenshots, policies, specific dates and events, or written examples if possible.
- **Use one clear request:** Boards ignore vague concerns. They respond to specific action requests.
- If and when possible reference a statute or policy that the concern applies to.
- **Keep it short and sharp:** If you have more to say, submit it in writing.
- **Follow up:** After the meeting, email the Superintendent and trustees and say something like -"Thank you for hearing my public comment. Please confirm the next steps and timeline."

What If the Board Tries to Shut You Down?

Stay calm and ask:

“Can you clarify which part of the public comment policy I’m violating?”

Then:

- Sit down
- Document what happened
- Follow up in writing
- File a public records request for the meeting audio/video if needed

What If You’re Nervous?

You don’t need to be a professional speaker. You just need a plan.

Try this:

- Write it out and read it
- Practice once at home
- Speak slowly
- Don’t apologize

Remember: you’re not asking permission, you are participating in public governance!

School boards are public bodies, and public comment is one of the only times citizens can speak directly into the record. Your three minutes can change the conversation!

You have the right to reclaim your time:

If during your public comment a board member creates dialog, you as a citizen have the right for your time to be reclaimed. This will ensure your allotted time.

Bring copies of your comment or the information you have to hand out to the board members:

A lot is covered in the board meetings. To make sure your message comes across as intended, allow the board members to have a copy of your words and or information to review later.

If the board members ask questions:

Most often board members will just say thank you for your comment and move on. This is for legal protection. However, sometimes board members will engage in conversation, take this opportunity to engage but be prepared.

- Facts over feelings
- Know your talking points
- Stay on topic
- Stand firm on your stance