

## **What to Expect at a School Board Meeting and Why School Boards Matter**

### School Boards Matter

Every local school board makes important decisions on behalf of the entire school district it serves. The school board controls the budget, which means that it decides how to allocate taxpayer dollars district-wide. The school board also makes policies that affect your child's school, be it elementary, middle or high school. Decisions regarding curriculum, staff training, and textbooks are all responsibilities of the school board. The board also appoints the superintendent. Policies should be in place as to the board's obligations regarding discrimination; we advise that all community members become familiar with these policies.

Typically, a school board is composed of three to seven elected representatives whose terms last four years. The election cycle for school board members is usually staggered, in which at least some school board members are up for reelection every two years. This presents an opportunity for changes to take place with your school board on a pretty regular basis. If you have ever considered running for school board (and you should, if you are displeased with the direction your school district is going), you have regular opportunities to to launch a campaign. It has been said that 100 local school board members have more direct influence on the U.S. population than 100 elected officials in Washington.

### Schools Board Meetings

When should you involve your school board on an issue of concern? It's important that you first speak with teachers and administrators in your school about your concerns. Once you have exhausted all channels of communication within the school, and you have not had a satisfactory outcome, then it is time to approach the school board.

If you take this step, get prepared and be organized. Start by researching your school board members in order to gain knowledge as to where they might stand on your issue. Look at their Facebook and other social media pages; see what they are saying on Twitter; look up news stories where they are quoted. Next, arrange a meeting with a chosen school board member. Doing this may take some persistence, particularly in a large district. Identify other parents who share your concerns and ask them to attend the meeting with you. A small group of dedicated parents can have a big impact on a school board. When you meet with the school board member, bring any material that will help your cause, including data,

research, and anecdotal examples. Be ready to clearly articulate your concerns, and bring one or more possible solutions to the problem you are identifying. Do your best to keep emotions in check, and present yourself as a partner in bettering the school district.

If you decide to attend a school board meeting and wish to address the board, you will most likely have an opportunity to comment on agenda items during the meeting (*i.e.*, textbook or course approval, equity committee presentation, contract with consultants). However, don't just show up and plan to talk about a topic that is not on the agenda, unless you follow the guidelines for introducing that topic. For that, most school boards allow time for public comments at the end of meetings, generally limited to a two or three-minute presentation, but you will probably need to sign up for the public comment period at least 30 minutes before the meeting starts. Get there early. Sometimes those public comment periods are limited, and they do get filled up. If you want an item to be formally added to the agenda of an upcoming meeting, you will need to submit a request several days in advance. District websites normally post details about this online.

Comments you make during a school board meeting may or may not automatically be added to the board minutes. If you want them added as something more than "Mary Smith then addressed the board," be sure to specifically say, "I would like this document added to the minutes" and provide a written copy of your comments.

Note that if you are a member of a **FAIR** chapter and would like to speak to your school board on behalf of **FAIR**, please first contact your chapter leader or chapter specialist, who can help guide you as you prepare and craft a statement.

No matter what, pay attention to your school board. Attend your school board meetings or watch the livestream. Read the agenda and minutes. At election time, support school board members you like and vote. Why? Because the school board makes incredibly important decisions that directly affect your kids.