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211 Public Participation in School Board Meetings

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I. PURPOSE

The Three Rivers Montessori school board recognizes the value of participation by the public in deliberations and decisions on school matters. The school board also recognizes the importance of conducting orderly and efficient proceedings, with opportunity for expression of all participants' respective views. The purpose of this policy is to provide procedures to assure open and orderly public discussion.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

School board meetings serve as just one modality for interested parties to communicate with the school board. This formal process is intended for items requiring greater scrutiny and discussion from board members.

Advance notice is required to allow for administrative staff to gather necessary supporting documents and information and to allow for adequate notice to board members and the general public of items that will be brought before the board for discussion.

The steps for interested parties to bring topics to the school board are as follows:

A. Informal Complaints

Routine complaints about a teacher or other employee should first be directed to that teacher or employee and to the Executive Director.

If the complaint is against an employee relating to child abuse, discrimination, racial, religious, or sexual harassment, or other activities involving an intimidating atmosphere, the complaint should be directed to the Executive Director. In the absence of an Executive Director, the matter should be referred to the Board Chair.

Complaints which are unresolved at the Executive Director's level may only be brought before the school board by notifying the school board in writing, following the steps outlined under the "Open Public Comment" section.

B. Requesting Formal Board Meeting Agenda Items

It is the policy of the school board to encourage discussion by persons of subjects related to the management of the school at school board meetings. The school board may adopt reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on public expression in order to facilitate free discussion by all interested parties.

Procedures to request formal board meeting agenda items are as follows:

1. People who wish to have a subject discussed as part of the agenda at a public school board meeting must notify the Executive Director and send the request at least one week in advance of a school board meeting to the Board Chair and Executive Director. The person should provide their name, address, the name of the group represented (if any), and a description of the subject to be covered or the issue to be addressed. The request will be considered for discussion by the school board chair and Executive Director, and brought to the board for consideration as needed.
2. The school board retains the discretion to limit board discussion of any agenda item to a reasonable period of time as determined by the school board.
3. Matters proposed for placement on the agenda which may involve data privacy concerns, which may involve preliminary allegations, or which may be potentially libelous or slanderous in nature shall not be considered in public, but shall be processed as determined by the school board in accordance with governing law.
4. The school board chair shall promptly rule out of order any discussion or agenda item by any person, including school board members, that would violate the provisions of state or federal law, this policy or the statutory rights of privacy of an individual.

C. Open Public Comment

The school board shall normally provide a specified period of time when interested parties may address the school board on any topic, subject to the limitations of this policy and applicable law.

1. People who wish to address the school board on a particular agenda item should identify the subject and identify agenda item(s) to which their comments pertain.

2. The school board chair will recognize one speaker at a time, and will rule out of order other speakers who are not recognized. Only those speakers recognized by the chair will be allowed to speak. Each speaker will be given up to three minutes, with time extended up to six minutes if translation is necessary. Comments by others are out of order. Individuals who interfere with or interrupt speakers, the school board, or the proceedings may be directed to leave. These comments will occur during the public comment section of the board agenda.

III. Meeting Conduct

Matters proposed for placement on the agenda which may involve data privacy concerns, which may involve preliminary allegations, or which may be potentially libelous or slanderous in nature shall not be considered in public, but shall be processed as determined by the school board in accordance with governing law.

The school board chair shall promptly rule out of order any discussion by any person, including school board members, that would violate the provisions of state or federal law, this policy or the statutory rights of privacy of an individual.

Depending upon the number of persons in attendance seeking to be heard, the school board reserves the right to impose such other limitations and restrictions as necessary in order to provide an orderly, efficient, and fair opportunity for those present to be heard. The school board reserves the right to allocate a specific period of time for this purpose and limit time for speakers accordingly.

The school board shall, as a matter of policy, protect the legal rights to privacy and due process of employees and students.

Personal attacks by anyone addressing the school board are unacceptable. Persistence in such remarks by an individual shall terminate that person's privilege to address the school board.

Cross References:

Three Rivers Montessori School Board Policy - School Board Data Privacy Practices
Three Rivers Montessori School Board Policy - Open and Closed Meetings
Three Rivers Montessori School Board Policy - School Board Meeting Minutes
MSBA School Law Bulletin "C" (Minnesota's Open Meeting Law)
MSBA School Law Bulletin "I" (School Records – Privacy – Access to Data)