

# Workshop 2022

Oct. 24-26

Co-sponsored by NJSBA • NJASBO • NJASA

## Responding to the Public: Presiding in Challenging Times

Wednesday, Oct. 26 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Room 407

### *Presentation Highlights*

#### Advance Preparation is the Key to Success

- Adequate space- welcoming, but safe
- Security arranged if necessary
- Agenda reviewed for potential issues/concerns
- Keep the board informed if expecting a difficult meeting with the public

#### As the Presiding Officer—Communications Policy on Public Input

- Shared with community and uniformly applied
- Time Limit- for individual and public comment as a whole (can be limited)
- Protocols for addressing the board- the chair
- Clear on agenda items only or any district concern
- Expectations of conduct (prohibiting obscene language, defamatory statement, threats of violence)
- Identification of non-permissible discussion topics (matters unrelated to the district, or to the agenda)
- Consequences of failure to follow established policy for public comment
- Consider a mechanism for submitting written comments and methodology for administrative follow up

#### Policy on Public Input

No requirement to permit “ceding” time from one individual to another

May not discriminate between residents and non-residents

The board president is responsible for imposing consequences for failure to follow established policy for public comment

Attendees may wear clothing and signs bearing messages. Can prohibit either if they contain speech not protected by First Amendment (obscenities, defamatory statements, threats of violence)

May request speakers to sign in and provide name and address prior to meeting (has never been adjudicated)

#### Options When a Meeting Goes Awry

- Using your gavel- for disruptive audience behavior
- Restating the time limits; cutting off the microphone
- Use a visible timing device- for speaker and presider
- Calling a brief recess
- Removing unruly individual(s)
- Adjourning and rescheduling

## When to Respond:

1. Point of fact clarification- correcting misinformation
2. When the inquiry can be answered by existing policy. "Please refer to our (name of policy) for more information.
3. When the topic warrants placement on a future agenda. "the board will consider adding your request to the agenda of a future board meeting"
4. ONLY THE BOARD PRESIDENT SHOULD RESPOND TO SPEAKERS

## De-Escalation and Conflict Resolution

### Common Causes of Conflict

- People feel weak or powerless
- Their concerns are disregarded or ignored
- People are injured or feel threatened
- Their basic beliefs are attacked

### Common Organizational Responses

- Rebuttal-providing counter information
- Stonewall-say nothing
- Whitewash-downplay the public's concerns
- Block and Blame: distance yourself and blame others

## Some Approaches to Conflict Resolution and Citizen Participation

- Create a shared sense of responsibility before decisions have been made by holding consensus-building forums, community conversations early and often
- Compile data using objective sources and draw joint conclusions
- Provide multiple avenues for your community to be heard and to keep your community abreast of where you are in any process
- Predict the impact of each possible solution on all stakeholders
- Work to stress shared values and uncover areas of agreement, no matter how small.

## Provide Opportunities Beyond Your Meetings for Parents and Community Members

- Board meetings are meetings of the board in public, but not meetings with the public.
- Create multiple opportunities to encourage input on district concerns and challenges in settings that support dialogue rather than diatribe.
- Community Forums
- Coffee with the Superintendent
- Parent Meetings on Curriculum

## After the Board Meeting: Suggested Actions...

- If necessary, follow up with a prompt press release with key messages for both internal and external stakeholders
- Encourage your Superintendent to follow up with individuals by sending emails or phone calls to build and maintain trust
- Debrief as an administrative team and board to determine ways to improve meetings in the future
- Tend to any potential trauma for members if necessary

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