

## **Community Relations**

### **Public Participation at Board of Education Meetings**

#### **Purpose**

The Thomaston Board of Education (“The Board”) affirms that public participation is a vital component of a free society and values the opportunity to hear from members of the community. This policy is intended to encourage robust public expression, enhance transparency, and ensure that Board meetings are conducted in an orderly, lawful, and efficient manner consistent with constitutional principles and applicable law.

#### **Nature of the Public Comment Period**

When the Board provides an opportunity for public comment, it does so as a designated public forum.

Accordingly the Board may enforce reasonable, content-neutral time, place, and manner regulations to ensure the orderly conduct of meetings.

#### **Public Participation Guidelines**

**1. Eligibility:**

Any member of the public may address the Board during designated public comment periods on matters related to the operation, policies, programs, or actions of the Thomaston Public Schools. Each speaker must state his/her name and address.

**2. Time Limits:**

Individual speakers shall be limited to five (5) minutes, unless modified by the Chairperson to ensure fairness, efficiency, or to accommodate significant public interest. A speaker will not be recognized for a second time unless time remains after all have been heard.

**3. Order and Decorum:**

Speakers shall conduct themselves in a manner that does not materially disrupt the orderly conduct of the meeting. The Chairperson may interrupt or terminate public participation that materially disrupts the meeting, threatens safety, or prevents the orderly conduct of Board business.

**4. Viewpoint Neutrality and Statement Liability:**

Speech shall not be restricted because it is critical, controversial, unpopular, or directed at the Board, its policies, or its decisions. Speakers remain legally responsible for their own statements. Nothing in this policy shall be construed as prior restraint or as a determination by the Board regarding the legality of any comment.

## **Privacy, Confidentiality, and Due Process**

### **1. Students and Personnel**

Comments that involve identifiable students or confidential personnel matters may be redirected to appropriate administrative channels in order to protect privacy rights, due process, and legal obligations, including but not limited to FERPA and collective bargaining agreements.

### **2. Neutral Application**

This provision shall be applied without regard to the viewpoint or substance of the comment, and solely for the purpose of protecting legally recognized interests.

## **Limited Board Response**

### **1. Chair-Only Response**

The Board Chairperson may, at their discretion, provide a brief and limited response following public comment.

### **2. Permitted Scope of Response**

Any response shall be limited to one or more of the following purposes:

- Acknowledging the speaker's comments.
- Clarifying Board policy or procedure.
- Correcting clear factual inaccuracies related to publicly available information.
- Explaining the appropriate process for addressing a concern.
- Indicating that a matter may be considered for inclusion on a future agenda.

### **3. Informational Nature**

Responses are informational only and shall not constitute debate, deliberation, or Board action.

### **4. No Dialogue**

Public participation shall not be used as a forum for dialogue. Speakers shall not engage in rebuttal or follow-up during the public comment period.

### **5. Discretion Not to Respond**

The Board Chairperson is not required to respond to every comment at the meeting. The absence of a response shall not be construed as agreement or disagreement.

## **Alternative Channels for Expression**

Nothing in this policy limits the public's ability to:

- Submit written comments to the Board.
- Address concerns through administrative procedures.
- Otherwise petition the Board through any other lawful channels

### **Statement of Commitment**

The Thomaston Board of Education affirms its commitment to free expression, transparency, and accountability, and seeks to ensure that public participation is meaningful, respectful, and consistent with constitutional governance.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

1-225 Meetings of government agents to be public. Recording of votes. Schedule and agenda of meetings to be filed. Notice of special meetings. Executive sessions.

### **1120(b)**

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Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes (continued)

1-226 Broadcasting or photographing meetings.

19a-342 Smoking in public meetings in rooms of public building prohibited. 1-227 Mailing of notice of meetings to persons filing written request. Fees.

1-230 Regular meetings to be held pursuant to regulation, ordinance or resolution.

1-232 Conduct of meetings.

1-206 Denial of access to public records or meetings.

10-238 Petition for hearing by board of education.

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THOMASTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Thomaston, Connecticut