

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Items: Motion by Dr. Lorna Thomas-Farquharson, Dr. Jason Chang, and Dr. Gayle Harris to Approve Revised Policy 8355—**First Reading**

Meeting Date: September 6, 2022

From: Anne McKernan, Assistant Superintendent for Administration

Through: Dr. Andy Morrow, Superintendent

Recommendation: THAT the West Hartford Board of Education accept as a First Reading the following policy which was revised by the Board Policy Subcommittee:

8355—Meeting Conduct/Public Comment

Background:

The West Hartford Board of Education has a long tradition of allowing public comment at its meetings, which provides an important opportunity for members of the public to make their voices heard on matters falling within the cognizance of the Board.

Recently, the public comment period has sometimes been consumed by comments regarding matters that are not germane to the Board's agenda, and extended public comment periods have significantly delayed the start of the business portion of some Board meetings. Concerns have been raised that such delays are not fair to persons waiting to present on agenda items, or to other members of the public interested in the Board's deliberation and action on agenda items. It can also be unfair to persons who wish to comment on agenda items prior to final action.

The proposed policy amendment seeks to strike a balance by prioritizing public comments that are germane to items on the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. If the public comment period at the beginning of the meeting goes beyond thirty minutes, public comments on subjects that are not germane to the agenda will be reserved until the end of the meeting.

In addition, like in other Towns, the Board has also experienced an increase in disruptive behavior and interruptions from the audience during meetings. The proposed amendment reinforces the power of the chairperson under state law and Robert's Rules of Order to conduct meetings in an orderly manner and free from unwarranted interference.

The Policy Committee met on August 10, August 29 and August 31 to draft policy 8355 Meeting Conduct. After careful debate and consideration, the Policy Committee members recommend adoption of draft policy 8355 to replace the existing policy 8355.

**Agenda Item:
V.A.**

Policy 8355 is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof:

8355 MEETING CONDUCT/PUBLIC COMMENT

The Board welcomes public comment, as it represents an opportunity for members of the public to express their views to the Board on matters within the Board's authority. Each member of the public wishing to speak may address the Board for three minutes at the beginning and three minutes at the end of each meeting for a total of six minutes during the Board's two public comment periods. The public comment period at the beginning of the meeting shall not exceed thirty minutes, provided that such limitation shall not apply to comments germane to items on the agenda, which shall be privileged above all other comments. A maximum of twenty one minutes shall be allowed to each subject matter.

No person shall interrupt a meeting or render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible, and the chairperson may order any individual who engages in such conduct removed.

While the Board will not respond to comments made in public session, it will consider such comments in its policy deliberations and, where appropriate, will refer comments to school department personnel for their review as part of their administrative functions.

Policy 8355 Meeting Conduct

Each member of the public wishing to speak may address the Board for three minutes at the beginning and three minutes at the end of each meeting for a total of six minutes. The public may speak on items both on and off the agenda. A maximum of twenty-one minutes shall be allowed to each subject matter.

While this policy does not limit comments members of the public wish to make, except as specially provided herein, formal charges or formal complaints against an employee of the Board of Education must be initiated in writing in accordance with Board Policy #1230.

While the Board will not respond to comments made in public session, it will consider such comments in its policy deliberations and, where appropriate, will refer comments to school department personnel for their review as part of their administrative functions.

Adopted: December 19, 1994

Reviewed: December 19, 2006

Reviewed: February 6, 2018