

# SSBA Guidelines for Public Engagement at Board Meetings



## Context

Providing opportunities for the public to engage directly with trustees and boards of education is an important part of transparency and openness. Boards from across Saskatchewan have a range of language in operational policy and varying practices which guide how they welcome the public to participate during a public meeting. Normally, delegations are educational in nature and contribute positively to the agenda of a board meeting. Disruptive behaviours at public board meetings may create challenges for boards. This guide contains examples of questions, policies and practices for boards to consider as they continue to welcome the public and hold meetings that are productive, engaging and education/learning focused.



This resource is adapted with permission from the British Columbia School Trustees Association document:  
*Guidelines for Public Engagement at Board Meetings.*

## Differences in Practice

There are different ways that boards may directly engage with members of the public during a board meeting including presentations, delegations and public remarks.

Practices vary around the province with some divisions having highly structured processes and others having more flexibility with respect to the public engaging with a board during a regular board meeting. Regardless of which structure a board chooses, there are many elements that are common across the province. Examples include:

- Some boards have comments either in policy or practice that speak directly to being respectful during any interactions.
- Presentations or delegations are normally communicated well in advance and included as part of a board's agenda.
- Items are often timed with restrictions on how long a presentation or question may take.
- Some boards require information to be submitted on a form (paper or online) with written contact information.
- Most boards do not respond to questions during the meeting, but if the board determines a response is necessary, it will be subsequent to the meeting.
- Some board policies on delegations speak to cautioning board members during the presentation not to voice opinions or commit the Board to any course of action. This may include reacting to presenters non-verbally.
- In times of disruption, some boards have language that speaks to a recess until the issue is resolved.
- Some boards have language that permits the expulsion of a person.

An appendix is provided which shows examples of policy statements from around the province. Boards are encouraged to have a deliberate discussion about the best ways to engage the public and how to respond when disruption occurs. It is important to update operational policies and procedures to include clarifying language on question period or public remarks. In reviewing policies and practice from across the province, the following information is intended to help guide and inform any revisions.

## Delegations/Presentations

Opportunities for members of the public to engage with the board are an important part of effective governance. These structures provide an opportunity for members of the community to ask questions and voice their concerns about the policies, practices and decisions of the school division. Here are some best practices for conducting presentations/delegations in a school division:

### *1. SET CLEAR GUIDELINES*

Establish clear guidelines for the item, such as the time limit for delegations and the process for submitting presentations or questions.

### *2. BE TRANSPARENT*

Provide information about the topics that will be discussed in advance so that attendees can prepare for their participation accordingly. Ensure that any answers provided to questions raised are clear and transparent.

### *3. RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT*

Create a respectful environment where attendees feel comfortable sharing concerns and asking questions. Ensure all attendees are treated with respect and it is clear how and when a response will be provided.

### *4. ACTIVE LISTENING*

Listen carefully to the questions and concerns raised by attendees.

### *5. EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT*

Evaluate the success of the public engagement segment and seek feedback from board members or members of the public to identify areas for improvement. Use this feedback to improve future interactions.

Overall, the key to a successful public engagement period is to create an environment where all attendees feel heard, respected, and supported.

## Disruption During Public Board Meetings

It can be a significant challenge to respond to disruptive behaviour during a board meeting. Even given the guidelines and considerations above, things can be hard to control when emotion gets involved. Boards will respond in a variety of ways and, at its extreme, are supported by the following sections of *The Education Act, 1995*:

### Meetings open to public

80(1) Every meeting of a board of education or the conseil scolaire shall be open to the public, **but a person may be excluded for improper conduct.**

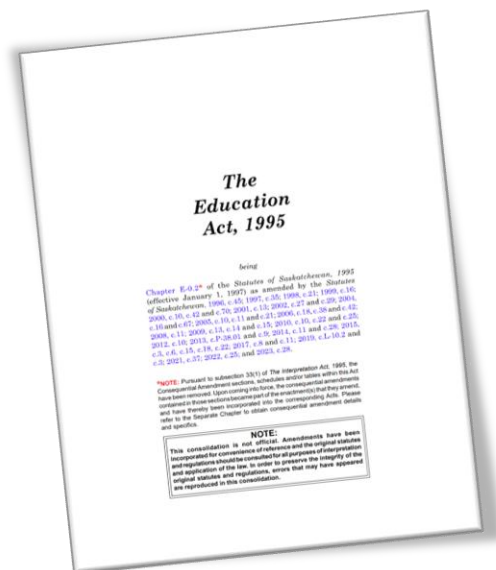
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(4) A person who is considered by the board of education or the conseil scolaire to be guilty of improper conduct at the meeting **may be excluded from the meeting.**

### Disturbing schools or meetings

367 Any person who does one of the following is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine of not more than \$1,000:

- (c) **wilfully disturbs, interrupts or disquiets the proceedings of any school meeting authorized to be held by this Act;**



## Dealing with Difficulties

When difficulties arise, being proactive and setting the stage for a response is a critical step. Through your board's policy and procedures and through *Roberts Rules of Order*, there are structures that will enable you to move forward. The following items are intended to help boards plan for any potential disruption and continue to have effective meetings.

### 1. BUSINESS MUST CONTINUE

- A board meeting is an obligation to conduct the business of the board in public. It is not a meeting of the public.
- The board has a responsibility to operate in an open and transparent manner. It is the chair's responsibility to establish and maintain a smooth flow of proceedings during a board meeting.
- The board has a responsibility to act when disruptions are keeping the board from doing their business.
- The actions that the board takes should be in response to the behaviour and actions of individuals, not on the viewpoints being expressed. If, however, the viewpoints or language used is demeaning or discriminatory, the board should respond accordingly consistent with respect for human rights.

### 2. SAFETY IS A PRIORITY

- Board members, staff and the public must feel safe and respected at all times.
- People should feel free to voice their concerns in accordance with board rules.
- Board members have an obligation to protect the safety of all in attendance. The best way to do this is to ensure that rules are clear, are followed and order is maintained.
- In extreme circumstances, boards may have to consider additional security measures to ensure the safety of all.

### 3. THE PUBLIC HAS A RIGHT TO BE HEARD

- Transparent governance and openness mean that the board is willing to listen to community members. A right to be heard does not include the right to disrupt.
- Reasonable people can, and will, disagree. Disagreement is a normal part of democracy and as long as people are following the rules and the meeting is safe, it can proceed.

### 4. PREPARING FOR, AND DEBRIEFING A DIFFICULT BOARD MEETING

- Boards should discuss, in advance, how they will deal with disruptions so that processes are clear to all prior to disruptions happening.
- Review your policies and procedures and determine if there is a need to seek legal counsel.
- Consider your rules for engagement and responses if things get disruptive, including options such as a recess (permitted through *Robert's Rules of Order*).
- Establish safe entry and exit points for the board and staff.
- A board may want to monitor social media prior to, and after a meeting.
- Consider potential communications needs subsequent to a disruptive meeting to dispel misinformation.

## Setting the Tone and Conducting the Meeting

The guidelines used to establish effective public delegations will help to set the stage for a respectful, productive meeting.

There are additional strategies or structures a board will want to consider should it be anticipated disruptions may occur:

### **1. ESTABLISH CLEAR RULES**

Make sure that there are clear rules for behavior during the meeting, including guidelines for speaking time, decorum and appropriate conduct. Make these rules visible and accessible.

### **2. SET EXPECTATIONS**

At the start of the meeting, explain the rules and expectations for behavior and remind attendees that the purpose of the meeting is to conduct division business in an orderly, respectful manner.

### **3. REMAIN CALM AND PROFESSIONAL**

If a member of the public becomes disruptive, remain calm and professional in your response. Avoid engaging in a confrontation or argument. Instead, calmly enforce the rules and ask the disruptive person to leave if necessary.

### **4. USE SECURITY**

If necessary, consider having security present at the meeting to help maintain order and address disruptive behavior.

### **5. PROVIDE A SPACE FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

Provide a designated time for public comment and limit the amount of time each person is allowed to speak to prevent any one person from monopolizing the meeting.

### **6. FOCUS ON THE AGENDA**

Stick to the agenda and avoid engaging in off-topic discussions or responding to disruptive comments or behavior. This will help keep the meeting focused and on-track.

### **7. FOLLOW UP AFTER THE MEETING**

If a disruptive member of the public raises legitimate concerns or issues, follow up with them after the meeting to address their concerns in a more appropriate setting. While meetings can be difficult, establishing clear rules and expectations, remaining calm and professional and prioritizing the business at hand can keep a meeting orderly. By thinking about responses and processes in advance, disruptive behavior can be minimized, and the meeting can proceed in a productive, respectful manner.

## Using Established Procedures

Most boards in Saskatchewan outline these procedures in a Board Operations policy supported by *Robert's Rules of Order*. It is important that chairs know how to exercise their parliamentary procedures as supported by their policies. If meetings get disruptive and a break needs to be taken, the following steps are suggested as a guide:

### 1. RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A BREAK

Chairs should monitor the meeting and recognize when a break is necessary to restore order and allow everyone to calm down.

### 2. ANNOUNCE THE BREAK

Using *Robert's Rules of Order*, announce a recess by saying "The chair will declare a recess of X minutes." This statement should be made in a way that is clear to everyone in attendance.

### 3. SET THE LENGTH OF THE BREAK

Specify the length of the break, such as 10 or 15 minutes, so that everyone knows when to return to the meeting.

### 4. LEAVE THE MEETING

Chairs should leave the meeting room during the break, allowing members to disperse and take a breather.

### 5. RESUME THE MEETING

Once the specified time has passed, reconvene the meeting and continue with the agenda.

Remember that the goal of taking a break is to restore order and allow everyone to calm down, so it's important to use this tool judiciously and with the goal of keeping the meeting productive and respectful.

## Appendix: Policies from Around Saskatchewan

### Prairie Valley:

#### Background

The Board provides a means for delegations to make application for presentations at Board meetings in the interest of improving education. The purpose of hosting a delegation is to allow individuals or groups to express problems, make suggestions and requests, and/or give information to the Board.

#### Policy

1. Delegations Requesting Opportunity to Present at Board Meetings
  - a. Individuals or organizations may request an opportunity to form a delegation to the Board in accordance with Board Policy Appendix-2.10 (1).
  - b. Delegations wishing to appear before the Board shall submit their Application for Delegations to Board Meetings at least 14 days before the intended meeting date.
  - c. The Board Chair and Vice-Chair will review the application and determine if the subject matter pertains to Board business as part of establishing the agenda for the Board meeting.
  - d. The Board may limit the number of delegations scheduled for any meeting. Ordinarily, delegations will be limited to a maximum of three per meeting.
  - e. Once a decision has been made regarding a delegation request, the Director of Education/CEO or designate shall notify the individual or organization in writing.
  - f. Individuals or groups who appear at a meeting of the Board and wish to speak, without having made arrangements in accordance with 2(a) through 2(e) may do so at the discretion of the Board.
  - g. Delegations of more than one person shall declare one individual as their designated spokesperson.
  - h. Individuals who are representing an organization must state the name of the organization and their position in their delegation request. Individuals who are representing an informal group or community must provide verification that they are authorized to speak on behalf of the group.
2. Delegations Approved to Present at a Board Meeting

Where delegations are approved to present at Board meetings, the following processes and considerations apply:

  - a. The delegation is added to an upcoming agenda of a regular meeting.
  - b. The delegation is notified of the time and place of the meeting and provided a copy of this Board policy.
  - c. The Director of Education/CEO or designate shall include delegation application information in the Board package, as background for Board members.<sup>1</sup>

**Prairie Valley (continued):**

3. Delegations Not Approved to Present at a Board Meeting  
Where delegations are not approved to present at Board meetings, the following considerations apply:
  - a. The individual or organization may appeal in writing to the Board as a whole.
  - b. If a majority of Board members approves the appeal, the delegation is placed on the agenda of the next regular meeting.<sup>2</sup>
4. Board Meeting Protocol for Delegate Presentations
  - a. Matters deemed to be of a sensitive or confidential nature shall be heard at a closed session of the Board.
  - b. Ordinarily, ten minutes are allowed for delegation presentation followed by five minutes for questions.
  - c. The Board Chair introduces the individual(s) or group(s) and reserves the right to control discussion.
  - d. During the presentation, delegations shall confine comments to purposes stated in the initial application.

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<sup>1</sup> Delegations are asked to submit their complete presentation in writing at least seven days before the meeting.

<sup>2</sup> If a delegation is approved to present in accordance with Section 3(b), all other conditions of this policy remain in force.

- e. Delegations may be asked to leave the meeting if they do not abide by procedures set out in Board policy.
- f. In discussing matters with a delegation, the Board Chair acts as sole spokesperson for the Board.
- g. Notwithstanding the opportunity for Board members to seek clarification of items presented by a delegation, at no time during the presentation shall any Board member voice his/her opinions or commit the Board to any course of action.
- h. Ordinarily, the Board refers potential actions or outcomes arising from the presentation of a delegation to the next regular Board meeting, in order to give Board members sufficient time to consider matters as presented before making a decision.
- i. If the time between the delegation presentation and the next regular Board meeting is deemed insufficient for the Board members to acquire necessary information to make an informed decision, the Board may delay potential actions or outcomes to another specified time.
- j. Upon completion of the presentation, the Board Chair shall inform the delegation when, if applicable, the decision will be made. When a decision is reached, it will be communicated in writing to the delegation spokesperson.

**Prairie Valley (continued):**

**Board Policy Appendix (BPA-2.10(1))  
Information Required from Delegations to the Board**

**Preface**

The following information shall be collected from individuals or groups wishing to form a delegation to a Board meeting. An application form for delegations wishing to present to the Board is available online or through the School Division Education Centre.

1. Delegation Contact and Spokesperson:
  - Name
  - Phone Number
  - Mailing Address
  - E-mail
2. Date Requested for Presentation to the Board  
The Board holds regular meetings on the second Wednesday of every month.
3. Delegation Participants
  - Name
  - Organization Represented (if applicable) and position in organization.
  - Community or group represented (if applicable) is asked to provide verification that you have authority to speak on behalf of the community or group.
4. Purpose of Presentation
  - Is the delegation requesting a Board decision? If so, please state the decision that is being requested.OR
  - Is the delegation presenting information to the Board?
5. Summary of Presentation
  - Describe the information to be presented to the Board.
  - State the recommended action by the Board.
6. Directions for Submission  
Please fax, mail or email your complete form at least fourteen (14) days before the requested meeting date to:

Secretary to the Board  
Prairie Valley School Division No. 208  
3080 Albert St N  
RM of Sherwood SK S4K 0A8  
Fax: 306.543.1771  
Email: [reception@pvsd.ca](mailto:reception@pvsd.ca)

If approved, individuals or groups appearing before the Board are asked to submit their complete presentation, in writing, at least seven days prior to the meeting.

**Prairie South:**

**11. Delegations to Board Meetings**

The Board may make provision for delegations to make a presentation at a Board meeting in the interest of improving the education provided in Division schools. Individuals or organizations may make requests for audiences with the Board.

- 11.1 Delegations wishing to appear before the Board are required to give notice, in writing, to the Board Chair at least seven full days before the meeting at which they are to be heard. The Director of Education and Chair have the authority to waive the time requirement.
- 11.2 When scheduling an appointment, delegations should:
  - 11.2.1 State the nature of the subject that they intend to bring before the Board,
  - 11.2.2 Provide a written submission prior to the presentation,
  - 11.2.3 Identify the spokesperson for the group,
  - 11.2.4 Provide an estimate of the number of people who will be in attendance,
  - 11.2.5 Be prepared to speak to, as opposed to reading, the submission.
- 11.3 Matters deemed to be of a sensitive and/or confidential nature shall be heard at a closed session of the Board.
- 11.4 The Board reserves the right to invite delegations to appear before the Board.
- 11.5 At the time of presentation, the delegation shall confine its discussion to the purpose stated in the notice.
- 11.6 Normally delegations will be given a maximum of 10 minutes to make their presentation. Additional time determined at the discretion of the Chair will be provided for the Board to ask questions and/or seek clarification.
- 11.7 In discussing matters with a delegation, the Board Chair shall act as spokesperson for the Board. It must be remembered that delegations come to express problems, make suggestions and requests, and give information thereon. For this reason, individual trustees may seek only clarification of items presented by the delegation. At no time during the presentation shall any trustee voice her/his opinion thereon; nor shall s/he, by any statement, commit the Board to any specific course of action.
- 11.8 Except in an emergency, the Board shall refer any action relative to the delegation's presentation until the next regular Board meeting. Such tabling shall be used to give individual trustees sufficient time to consider the information supplied by the delegation. If the time between the delegation's presentation and the next Board meeting is deemed insufficient for the trustees to gain the necessary information to make an informed decision, the Board may respond by delaying the decision until another specified, appropriate time.
- 11.9 Upon completion of the presentation, the Board Chair shall inform the delegation when the decision will be made. When a decision is reached, it will be communicated in writing to the spokesperson.

**Regina Catholic:**

**11. Delegations to Board Meetings**

The Board may make provision for delegations to make a presentation at a Board meeting in the interest of improving the education provided in Division schools. Individuals or organizations may make requests for audiences with the Board. Representation and delegations from any individual or group may be received on any subject pertinent to the business of the Board. The Board reserves the right to refuse a request from a representative or delegation.

- 11.1. Delegations wishing to appear before the Board are required to give notice, in writing, to the Board Chair at least ten working (10) days in advance of the scheduled meeting at which they are to be heard. The Board Chair has the authority to waive the time requirement. Such notice shall be delivered to the Catholic Education Centre of the Regina Catholic School Division to the Senior Executive Assistant to the Director/Board of Trustees.
- 11.2. Delegations are required to state the nature of the subject that they intend to bring before the Board. The names of the presenters must be identified in the notice.
- 11.3. Matters deemed to be of a sensitive and/or confidential nature shall be heard at a Closed session of the Board.
- 11.4. At the time of presentation, the delegation shall confine its discussion to the purpose stated in the notice. Normally, the delegation will be given twenty (20) minutes.
- 11.5. When a delegation appears before the Board:
  - 11.5.1. Delegations must clearly present information, make suggestions or requests, provide information or state a problem.
  - 11.5.2. Only the Board Chair shall act as spokesperson for the Board.
  - 11.5.3. Individual Trustees may only seek clarification on items presented by the delegation.
  - 11.5.4. At no time during the presentation shall any Trustee voice their opinion thereon; nor shall they, by any statement, commit the Board to any specific course of action.
- 11.6. Except in an emergency, the Board shall refer any action relative to the delegation's presentation until the next regular Board meeting. Such tabling shall be used to give individual Trustees sufficient time to consider the information supplied by the delegation. If the time between the delegation's presentation and the next Board meeting is deemed insufficient for the Trustees to gain the necessary information to make an informed decision, the Board may respond by delaying the decision until another specified and appropriate time.
- 11.7. Upon completion of the presentation, the Board Chair shall inform the delegation when the decision will be made. When a decision is reached, it will be communicated in writing to the spokesperson.
- 11.8. The Board reserves the right to invite delegations to appear before the Board.

**Saskatchewan Rivers:**

**10. Delegations to Board Meetings**

The Board may make provision for delegations to make a presentation at a Board meeting in the interest of improving the education provided in Division schools. Individuals or organizations may make requests for audiences with the Board.

- 10.1 Delegations wishing to appear before the Board are required to give notice, in writing, to the Board Chair at least seven full days before the meeting at which they are to be heard. The Director or Board Chair has the authority to waive the time requirement.
- 10.2 Individuals or organizations who appear at a Board meeting without making prior arrangements and who wish to act as a delegation will not be allowed to do so, unless the reason for the delegation is deemed by the Board Chair, in consultation with the Director, to be either an emergency or in the best interests of the Board to be heard.
- 10.3 When scheduling an appointment, delegations should:
  - 10.3.1 State the nature of the subject that they intend to bring before the Board,
  - 10.3.2 Provide a written submission prior to the presentation,
  - 10.3.3 Identify the spokesperson for the group,
  - 10.3.4 Provide an estimate of the number of people who will be in attendance,
  - 10.3.5 Be prepared to speak to, as opposed to reading, the submission.
- 10.4 Matters deemed to be of a sensitive and/or confidential nature shall be heard at a closed session of the Board.
- 10.5 The Board reserves the right to invite delegations to appear before the Board.
- 10.6 At the time of presentation, the delegation shall confine its discussion to the purpose stated in the notice.
- 10.7 Normally delegations will be given a maximum of 15 minutes to make their presentation. Additional time determined at the discretion of the Chair will be provided for the Board to ask questions and/or seek clarification.
- 10.8 In discussing matters with a delegation, the Board Chair shall act as spokesperson for the Board. It must be remembered that delegations come to express problems, make suggestions and requests, and give information thereon. For this reason, individual trustees may seek only clarification of items presented by the delegation. At no time during the presentation shall any trustee voice her/his opinion thereon; nor shall they, by any statement, commit the Board to any specific course of action.
- 10.9 Except in an emergency, the Board shall refer any action relative to the delegation's presentation until the next regular Board meeting. Such tabling shall be used to give individual trustees sufficient time to consider the information supplied by the delegation. If the time between the delegation's presentation and the next Board meeting is deemed insufficient for the trustees to gain the necessary information to make an informed decision, the Board may respond by delaying the decision until another specified, appropriate time.
- 10.10 Upon completion of the presentation, the Board Chair shall inform the delegation when the decision will be made. When a decision is reached, it will be communicated in writing to the spokesperson.

**Saskatoon Public:**

**8. Delegations**

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- 8.1 The board believes it has the responsibility to encourage residents of the division to bring matters of concern regarding the education of students and the operation of the division to regular meetings of the board. Representation and delegations from any individual or group may be received on any subject pertinent to the business of the board not including personnel matters and other criteria for refusal. The board reserves the right to refuse a request from a representative or delegation.
- 8.2 All delegations wishing to appear before the board shall be required to give notice thereof, in writing, to the director of education at least seven full business days before the meeting at which they are to be heard; and further, in giving such notice, the delegations will state the nature of the subject matter they intend to bring before the board.
- 8.3 Matters deemed to be of a sensitive and/or confidential nature shall be heard at a closed session of the board.
- 8.4 All delegations are required to submit their presentation in writing for inclusion in the board agenda package. As the submission will be read by board members, delegations are to provide an overview of the key points in their written submission during their verbal presentation as there is only 15 minutes allocated for the presentation and trustee questions for clarification.
- 8.5 Trustees may ask questions for clarification of the delegation if there is time remaining in the 15 minutes allocated to the delegation. The chair of the board will ensure that the delegation's presentation and trustee questions for clarification cease at the 15-minute limit; any unfinished business shall be submitted in writing to the appropriate party.
- 8.6 Should follow-up be required because of the delegation's presentation; the board will provide direction to the appropriate party.
- 8.7 In an emergency, the director of education, with the approval of the chair of the board, have authority to waive the requirement of seven days' notice, provided there is time before the meeting to acquaint the board members with the purpose of the delegation.