

SHOULD I SPEAK DURING PUBLIC COMMENT?

Choosing to represent your local association during public comment is a decision that should be made in conjunction with your local association leadership and your NJEA UniServ Field Representative. Many districts will retain a recording of comments made during a board meeting, so your words should be chosen carefully and deliberately.

Lately, we have noted an increase in victims of political disinformation attending board meetings to speak during public comment, often sharing false information and conspiracy theories about what goes on in our public schools. These speakers are often not even part of your school community and occasionally do not even live in your town!

In this climate, it can be valuable to help establish a baseline of normalcy at these meetings by speaking about the successes our schools find when we all work together. Below are some talking points you can use to craft a speech tailored for your specific situation.

Our public schools are the heart of our communities. They bring out the best in our children, and when that happens, they bring out the best in all of us.

And, here in New Jersey, our public schools are among the best in the nation, year after year.

That didn't happen by accident...it happens because educators, other school professionals and parents understand the value of public education and are committed to its success.

But it's no secret that public education has been the target of dangerous and divisive rhetoric by a vocal minority over the last year.

That serves no purpose except to weaken our schools, which—in turn—weakens our communities.

Instead of allowing this to continue, we must stand together and denounce such behavior.

We must make clear that our community rejects any attempt to erode its heart.

Regardless of our respective personal beliefs and political affiliations, the one thing we can and should agree upon is that it's our collective responsibility to educate ALL children, regardless of their race, gender or cultural background.

And, in order to prepare them for the diverse, complex world we live in, we must educate them honestly without compunction.

That's not to say we won't or shouldn't disagree on issues affecting our schools.

However, we must pledge to approach matters with constructive conversation and collective benefit.

So, tonight, we appeal to this Board to partner with us on this effort.

Let's make 2023 the year we reject any behavior that seeks to divide us, and instead, model behaviors that demonstrate the power of a strong, unified community.

Our children deserve nothing less.

Creating a Local **HONESTY IN EDUCATION TEAM**



WHAT IS IT?

A local **Honesty in Education Team** is a group of local association members who volunteer to attend local Board of Education meetings to promote and protect honesty in education. Team members are a visible, in-person presence at Board of Education meetings. Their role is to monitor the board agenda, identify areas of interest for the association, stay informed about issues community members are bringing to the board and build partnerships with the education community in the district.

WHO SHOULD JOIN?

Every local association should have an **Honesty in Education Team**. Ideally, members who live in district where they work are strong candidates to join or lead the team, but any member who can help grow the association's presence in the community should consider participating.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Local leadership should recruit a member to lead this effort and assist that member by helping find more volunteers to join the team. The team leader should establish a rotation for attending BOE meetings in person, taking notes and reporting out to association leadership.

Before each meeting:

- Read the posted agenda carefully and flag any questions or concerns to local association leadership;
- Publicize the date, time and location of the meeting to members of the association, in case they would like to attend; and
- Identify any items of interest that the local association might want to address during public comment, prepare brief remarks (public comment is usually limited to three minutes) and select someone to present those remarks.



During each meeting:

- Be a visible presence. Introduce yourself to community participants, including school district officials as well as community members in attendance.
- Take good notes throughout the entire meeting. Be sure to note the outcome of board agenda items, including whether motions are tabled, held out or voted down. Take note of the speakers during public comment portions, including their names, whether they live in the district and what their concerns are.
- Monitor changes in policy/regulation, including any new job descriptions. Remember that even seemingly small changes can have a large impact and may indicate a shift in future district operation.
- Monitor the budget development process—typically in the winter months—particularly if your local is heading into negotiations.
- Monitor annual re-approvals (shared service agreements, provider contracts, educator evaluation rubrics, etc.) and follow up with district and local association leadership about any changes.
- Track long-term projects and initiatives, such as long-range facilities planning or strategic plan development. Look for opportunities for your union to have a voice.

After each meeting:

- Share your notes, along with any concerns, with your local leadership for potential follow-up.
- Ensure your local membership chair is aware of staffing changes (new hires, resignations, transfers, role changes, leaves, retirements) to ensure proper procedures are being followed.
- Inform your local association leadership of the need to organize against threats to the union as they emerge, as well as prepare to counter disinformation and hate speech—which is an increasing problem at board meetings across the state.
- Follow up with community members whom you meet at the meeting. Connect on social media and keep in touch. If there is a local community group of parents, join them. If not, work together to identify ways to bring people together around shared interests.

WHERE CAN THE TEAM GO FOR SUPPORT?

For additional resources and support, contact your UniServ Field Representative, who will connect with the Center for Honesty in Education team as needed. You can also contact the center directly at edhonesty@njea.org or by visiting our website, www.centerforhonesty.org.