



The School District of
PALM BEACH COUNTY

Watching our School Board

Palm Beach County School Board Moves to Silence Parents at Public Meetings

In response to the [Palm Beach Post article](#) by Andrew Mara on December 13th, 2021, I would like to offer my remarks regarding the policy proposal from the PBC school board to limit public engagement at board meetings.

On December 8, 2021, the Palm Beach County School Board members discussed removing public input from their meetings in a number of ways. They proposed decreasing the time each member of the public gets to speak, which could be as short as one minute. Also, they proposed allowing a total of just sixty minutes for all public comments, which could mean that some members of the public won't be permitted to speak if the sixty minutes expires before it's their turn to address the board. Finally, they proposed turning off the audio and video coverage of the public speakers so that those watching the meeting remotely would not be able to see nor hear speakers. Instead, those watching remotely would see the board members' discussion but during the public speaking portion of the meeting, they would only see a blank blue screen. There was a robust conversation lasting an hour and a half on this topic with the board's general council weighing in to help guide these decisions into reality. The majority of the board voted for these changes to be added to board policy 1.03 (School Board Meetings). This policy is slated to be finalized at upcoming meetings.

Could it be that the reason that more and more parents are attending school board meetings because emails and phone calls are not being answered or returned? Could it be that parents' concerns are being ignored and there is no representation of the people? The board members should be investigating the reasons why parents and community members are showing up by the dozens at board meetings instead of attempting to find ways to limit the public speakers.

It's important to have a school board focused on the betterment of our children's education and not on silencing parents' voices. However, we don't have that kind of board. This latest move by the school board exposes their intentional effort to silence the very people that have placed them into office.

Have board members forgotten that they work for the people? They were elected by the people to represent the people. To represent the people, they must listen to the people.

School Board Member Alexandria Ayala stated, "We have real business to attend to," in defense of the proposed policy. School Board Member Erica Whitfield remarked, "It's very difficult for us to get the job done," as she spoke in favor of removing public comment from being broadcast. These comments show that this board has forgotten that their "real business" is to listen to the concerns of the people and carry out the will of the people they represent.

What a paradox that board members are opposed to hearing from their constituents, yet those very people are the sole purpose of each board member's job.

This board has forgotten the most basic founding principles of our country: Our founding fathers wanted a system of government that has very limited power. Thomas Jefferson said, "Government exists for the interest of the governed, not for the governors." Our system of government, as laid out by the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, gives the power of government to the people. With these proposed policy changes, our school board is actually pushing aside the very people from which they derive their power!

Our school board members need a reminder that our school system is not governed by Ms. Ayala, Mrs. Whitfield, nor any other school board member. Our schools are governed by the people!

Instead of shutting out parents' involvement, our board should consider ways to encourage parent input. They could hold town halls or hold local meetings with their constituents. They could put together a community forum or a satisfaction survey to hear parents' concerns. If they took the time to meet with the public about the current concerns, they likely would have more time at their formal board meetings

As a community, we need to find ways to get involved in local matters which affect our daily lives. Parents could start a local chapter of concerned parents in each district. Parents also could join a variety of school committees, such as their school's School Advisory Council. There are plenty of ways to create change locally. Many will choose to help with local candidates in their campaigns and even some community leaders will step up to run in local politics. Together, we can make our community a better place.

By Angelique Contreras,
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