

PURE *TIP SHEET* Speak Out!

How to testify before the Board of Education

Why testify? The Board of Education gives the public an opportunity at every monthly meeting and at special public hearings to provide input into decision making. This is one important opportunity to affect the quality of our schools and our children's education.

Know what's going on! Issues that affect your school are discussed and decided on at every Board meeting. You may want to assign one LSC member the responsibility to keep up with Board meetings and actions.

Speak Out! When, where, and how

- **DATE:** The Board's regular monthly meeting date is the 4th Wednesday of each month. This may change due to holidays or other special circumstances. Call 773/553-1600 to verify any Board meeting date.
- **PLACE:** Most Board meetings take place at the CPS Central Office, 125 S. Clark Street, fifth floor. These are morning meetings.
- **TIME:** To sign up for public testimony, you have to get to the Central Office between 8:00-9:30 am. On days when there are especially controversial topics on the Board agenda, you may need to arrive even earlier to get a speaking slot. Public testimony runs from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm.
Prior to 2003, the Board would occasionally meet in the afternoon at a school. In 2009, the Board held one afternoon meeting. This is very rare, but you may want to double-check on the time and location by calling 773/553-1600.
- **SIGN-UP PROCEDURE:** Sign-up takes place in the lobby of 125 S. Clark. You will need a photo ID. You generally can't speak at two meetings in a row.
- **YOUR TOPIC:** You will have to fill out a form to register. To testify, you must list your topic. The Board has a policy of listening to people with similar concerns together and at the beginning of the meeting. They may also limit your group to two speakers on the same topic.
- **BOARD MEETING TIMES:** You may also stay to observe the Board business meeting which runs from about 1 pm to mid-afternoon.

© **Parents United for Responsible Education** 2006

100 S. Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607 Tel. 312/491-9101 Fax: 312/491-9404
pure@pureparents.org www.pureparents.org

Speak Out! What to say

YOUR MESSAGE - Speak out about any public school issue that is important to you, your student, and/or your school.

- **Individual concerns:** We recommend that you first try to work through personal concerns about your school with the school principal or with the appropriate Board department. If none of your attempts to resolve the problem have worked, it can help to testify about the issue (not the individuals) at a Board meeting. The Board may restrict you from mentioning specific staff people or other individuals by name.
- **Individual school issues:** The Board sometimes operates on the principle that "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." It is especially effective to bring a number of people from your school with you, and to have an LSC member as your spokesperson. Be specific about what your school needs, follow up quickly on any promises they make, and keep in touch with the person assigned to your request.
- **Citywide issues:** It is very important that issues affecting all of our schools are discussed publicly at the Board meetings. Board members need to hear from individual LSC members out in the schools about how their policies may hurt or help us.

HELP! I'M NOT USED TO PUBLIC SPEAKING! Most LSC members have some experience with public speaking. Everyone gets nervous in front of a large formal group, but after a few tries you will become more comfortable. Remember, this is for the *children*! You are their voice.

Some tips for speaking out effectively:

- Write out your comments. Even the best public speaker can get lost and confused in front of a group. Also, you can make copies of your testimony and hand them to the Board members and any reporters who are there.
- Keep to one page. You will have two minutes. Most people can read one typewritten page, double-spaced, slowly, in two minutes. If you talk fast, you can read more, but it is better to say less, say it clearly, make your point, and have a strong finish. You will be given additional time for translation, if necessary.
- Request some specific resolution or action. For your individual and school issues, make sure someone in authority is assigned to your problem, and is given specific instructions. For citywide issues, make sure that a process is laid out to address the issue.