

From: [Laurie Bowen](#)
To: [Board of Education](#)
Subject: Request for Reinstatement of Second Public Question/Comment Period
Date: Sunday, January 21, 2024 9:05:26 AM

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Dear Trustees,

At the last public board meeting, during the public question / comment period, a question was addressed to myself as the only public guest at the meeting, if I had any questions or wished to make any comments. The question was rather moot given the decision of the Board at the March 8, 2023 public Board meeting to suspend the second Public Question/Comment Period, thereby requiring that the only comments / questions that can be put forth from the public are those that are related to Action Items on the agenda, of which there were none at the last meeting.

That situation did raise some questions/comments in my mind though, namely the following:

- When will Policy 135 be reviewed? The suspension of the second Public Question/Comment Period was put into effect *“until such time as Policy 135 School Board Operation is reviewed and revised by the Policy Committee, ensuring it is in compliance with WorkSafeBC”*. It would appear that the last time Policy 135 was reviewed was June 8, 2022. According to Policy 110 – Policy Development, policies need to be reviewed “at least once every three years”, meaning that typically, Policy 135 wouldn’t have a mandatory review completion date until June 8, 2025. However, nothing prevents it from being reviewed earlier than that date given the wording of Policy 110.
- Given that the Board considered their decision on March 8, 2023 to be of significant import, based on the statements made by the Chair, Deputy Superintendent, and Secretary Treasurer/CFO at that meeting, and the Board’s perceived seriousness of the situation that called for the suspension of the second Public Question/Comment Period, I would think there would be a desire to review Policy 135 sooner than later, especially since Policy 135 still states that *“two periods (up to fifteen minutes each) shall be set aside at each regular meeting for the Board to receive comments and to respond to questions from the public”*, the first for questions/comments on Action Items, and the second for questions/comments pertaining to public education.
- I am sure it has not escaped the Board’s notice that since the suspension of the second comment period, the number of public guests attending Board meetings has declined drastically. I have heard the sentiment expressed that attending Board meetings feels like a waste of time now, given that there is now no opportunity to engage with the Board in that setting. This sentiment would seem to fly in the face of the District’s expressed desire to *“promote and support public education in Central Okanagan Public Schools and the community”* as expressed in the mandate of the Public Education Awareness Committee.

I am confident the Board can find a good balance between welcoming engagement from the public at public Board meetings while ensuring interchanges remain respectful and professional. Many people feel more “heard” when they can address someone personally rather than through text, email, letter, or phone. Public Board meetings provide the public with opportunities to address the whole Board in person on topics that are important to them but don’t fit the mold of the Action Items, and without having to go through the somewhat rigorous process of requesting and preparing for a presentation. I hope the Board will reconsider the suspension of the second comment/question period and reinstate it with reasonable and appropriate controls to ensure respectful dialogue.

Respectfully,
Laurie Bowen

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