

## Outrage prompts agenda reversal

**Subheadline:** School board keeps public forum at start of meeting

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### Content

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This week's school board meeting began with statements from each board member regarding the uptick in community input during public forum.

The Tuesday, May 16, discussion was prompted by a Facebook post on the district safety and transportation page stating that public forum would be moved to the end of meetings, rather than the beginning.

The move sparked public discussion and outrage, until it was later disclosed that this suggestion would need be voted on at the May 16 meeting.

Board member Melvin Stroble made a motion at the beginning of the meeting to amend the agenda as emailed, to return public forum to the beginning of meetings. Board member Tyrom Faulkner seconded the motion.

"We have historically allowed the public to comment on any item on the agenda prior to taking action," Stroble said. "I think it is important that we have multiple opportunities for our community to continue to have input on topics that are being discussed by this board."

Stroble said he even had constituents ringing the doorbell at his house to express their displeasure with this proposition.

"As an elected official, it is my job to listen to everybody whether I like what they're saying or if I don't like it," Faulkner said. "But as an elected official, I was voted in to listen and to listen to all constituents of Lancaster County."

Faulkner also said that the board listens to the community when things are going well, so they should do the same when constituents bring up concerns about things not going well.

Board member Courtney Green said that while she originally saw no issue with changing public forum's time, after listening to community feedback, her stance changed.

"It was just a few months ago that I was sitting at that table (in the seats as a non-board member) and while I may be privy to certain things now, I don't believe it was any intention of any board member up here to silence the community," she said. "I do believe that had I been sitting out there, and not knowing the inner workings, that I may feel that way."

Board member Casey Cato noted how hard public criticism has been for her to hear.

"A lot of times I do sit up here and I've been told I have a blank stare, and I had my heart hurts for situations that go wrong," Cato said. "My spirit is so broke by the time the public leaves because I've been bashed for things, a lot of things. People don't understand (that) we don't have information until it's brought to the board. We don't have those ideas."

Cato also said that the only way to get things done is through kindness, something she learned after 30 years as a kindergarten teacher.

Board member Margaret Gamble said she has been in this district for over 50 years, "much longer than some of y'all been in this world."

"Let's work together instead of name calling and saying the 'group of eight,' we're using money," she said. "Can people understand we always do everything with you? It's hard to take a dollar from this district."

Board member Eddie Boykin said he came to the meeting prepared to vote to approve the new public forum placement, but saw he would clearly be outvoted.

"It is important for me that if we're gonna conduct business, that we work together, that we get it done together," Boykin said. "I love all y'all. I want to serve all y'all, do the best I can to help students, (but) we are not perfect."

"So we have got to come together come to the table," he said. "I'm not saying we all agree; it's not important that we all agree. What's important for us is that we work together for the good of the students and the families of this community."

Boykin ended his statement by urging parents to be role models to students.

"That's what gets my dogs on, is when you get here, and you act like an idiot in front of your kids, and you wonder why your kid's acting so crazy," he said.

Boykin publicly apologized Thursday with an online statement.

"I want to publicly apologize for the comment I made during the opening session of our May school board meeting Tuesday night," he said. "I am deeply sorry for making the comment and truly pray that no one was directly or indirectly offended. I love the students and families of this county and will never intentionally seek to harm or tear down any of you in any way. As I write this, I acknowledge and am deeply humbled by my own failings and commit to serve you better moving forward."

Despite Boykin's comments, the motion to move public forum back to the beginning of the meeting was unanimously approved.