

AFT Presentation to the LSCS Board of Trustees, November 7, 2013

Good evening, I am John Burghduff representing the American Federation of Teachers.

At each of the last two meetings of this Board I have presented the union's concerns about a new compensation and job classification system that was inaugurated in August. A reported 450 employees filed for review of their classifications and or pay; college administrators have been reporting decisions on these appeals to these employees last week and this week. In addition, we understand that specific changes have been made in the overall plan. The union is monitoring progress carefully and may comment further as these outcomes become clearer.

This month, however, we would like to follow up on two issues from this summer that relate to how Board of Trustee meetings are conducted, particularly regarding this public comment period. To give some background, in section I.B.1.05, The LSCS policy manual states that "[Board members] are responsible for balancing and integrating the wide variety of [public] interests and needs into policies that benefit the common good and the future of the System. Board members should learn as much as they can about the communities they serve." This section goes on to say that one of the methods board members should use is "being aware of issues facing the community."

Perhaps the most direct way that members of this Board can become aware of community issues is through the direct report of citizens, including employees, in these Board meetings. We trust that you see that this input is useful to your decision making process rather than an inconvenience and that you would welcome giving citizens the opportunity to develop their thoughts as fully as possible. Some of these citizens may have insights that you truly need to hear before you cast your votes on agenda items.

At the July meeting, the chairman of the Board appointed an internal committee to address the length of time citizens are allowed to speak to the board in the public comment period. In section I.E.1.47 on public participation in Board meetings the LSCS policy manual states that "No presentation shall exceed five minutes." Although Board policy should guide all matters of procedure, the practice at these meetings has been to limit public comment to three minutes. Although five minutes is a short time for the listener, it can give citizens valuable time to develop their thoughts more fully. We have not yet heard a report from the special committee but the union encourages them to align the time limit to the maximum allowed by Board policy.

Also, beginning with the August board meeting, the position of the public comment period was moved in the agenda. Formerly, public comments were heard before votes were taken on the consent agenda. Beginning in August, public comments have been moved to the last item on the agenda. This change at least gives the impression that public input is undervalued in the decision making process. Therefore we encourage the Board to move the public comment period back to its former spot in the agenda.

Thank you for your consideration.

Referenced Excerpts from the Lone Star College System Policy Manual

I.B.1.05 - Represent the Common Good

The Board exists to represent a balance between the System and the general public. They are responsible for balancing and integrating the wide variety of interests and needs into policies that benefit the common good and the future of the System. Board members should learn as much as they can about the communities they serve. They gain this knowledge by studying demographic, economic and social trends, by being aware of issues facing the community. They use what they learn in acting as a unit, with one voice in making decisions that respond to System and community interests, needs and values.

I.E.1.47 - Limit on Participation

Public participation is limited to those individuals who are on the agenda, and to that portion of the meeting designated for communications not on the agenda. At all other times during Board meetings, the audience shall not enter into discussion or debate on matters being considered by the Board. No presentation shall exceed five (5) minutes. Delegations of more than five (5) persons shall appoint one person to present their views before the Board.

If the Board chair determines that a person has not attempted to resolve a matter administratively, the person shall be directed to the appropriate policy for attempted resolution before bringing the matter to the Board.