

## **HUUSD Board Update —>"Public Comment" and Board Process**

The Harwood Unified Union School District board has created a new community engagement committee. Some may ask – “why this new committee when we can participate at board meetings during public comment?” The seven boards that preceded our Act 46 merged board handled public comment in a variety of ways. We recognize that the procedures adopted by the HUUSD board may constitute a significant change for some.

As a large board representing six communities and overseeing seven schools, we need to follow our meeting agendas in order to complete the business of overseeing district operations. It would be a disservice to our community to bypass or delay agenda items related to this business in order to address individual comments at board meetings. The community is usually not fully represented at board meetings and topics raised during public comment may not have been scheduled or warned. Therefore, other interested community members do not have the opportunity to be present. The board needs time to consider these issues and often chooses to warn them for future agendas.

Agendas are publicly warned so that our communities are aware of the topics the board will be discussing. During board meetings the public can get information and learn our thinking about a particular topic; during the public comment section of these meetings, the board can learn how community members are thinking. We welcome public comment at the beginning of every meeting so that people have the opportunity to speak directly to us. We likely will not respond in the moment, however we will respond in writing if requested.

When one, two, or twenty individuals speak to an issue, we take careful note. At the same time, we have a mandate from our voters to deliver on the promises of our Act 46 merger, including delivering high quality education to all of our students, preK - 12, and spending tax dollars efficiently.

The HUUSD board has discussed and debated at length the topic of public comment at board meetings. We recognize a need to balance this input with the opinions of the many constituents who are not at meetings, yet who also deserve to have their concerns and needs addressed. Our decision has been guided by input from The Vermont School Boards Association, which has indicated that this is the recommended practice and one that most Vermont school boards currently follow.

Please know that while we may not discuss or debate your specific comments at our board meetings, we carefully consider them, just as we consider other voices in our community - whether we hear from them through emails, letters, phone calls, or their votes. We are eager to engage more meaningfully on specific topics as the year progresses, and in the meantime hope each of you will use board meetings, emails, chats in the grocery store, and more to tell us what you value in our educational system.

Sincerely,

The HUUSD board of directors