

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

November 9, 2020

Board of Directors
Salem-Keizer Schools
2450 Lancaster Drive NE
Salem, Oregon 97305

Chair Chandragiri, Members of the Board:

I have been informed of your intention to change public participation rules in your formal meeting procedures. If true, I strongly urge you to reconsider this action. At this moment, our country, state, and community institutions should be seeking out more participation, not less. We just finished the most controversial, divisive, and lengthy US Presidential election in our history – and we are a nation in desperate need of spaces for us to gather in common cause. We share thousands of constituents, and you know it is time for greater tolerance and understanding in the shadow of the past four years.

Much of the conversation surrounding the potential change to your rules appear to be focused upon the feeling of at least some members of your board that public bodies have control over the content of public comment; that negative content is somehow an assault upon the body as a whole. Frankly, you should welcome public comment that provides insight into the community's feelings: especially the feelings of people of color and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged people during this time of global contagion and seismic shifts in global economic realities. The fact that people still want to engage you – even in negative terms – suggests you still have relevance in their lives.

We are a nation built upon compromise born from conflict: few people choose compromise, but grown-ups know it is the true American Way. We are the only super-power that even attempts governance that values the individual as well as the community; we are the sole remaining power that seeks a more perfect – more just – more equitable – Union. Your organization is both instrument as well as ornament. Your function matters in the governance of the business of managing our schools, but your more significant impact is that of a public body that serves as the gateway for public input into the larger statewide educational enterprise.

Your decision on this matter will send important signals to the state, community, and your direct as well as indirect constituencies. You have a choice to stand up for expanding the opportunities of the voiceless or shutting them down because of a few critical comments. Real leaders do not run from challenges. They seize them. Please remember your charge as stewards of the public trust – expand, rather than limit, public participation opportunities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul L. Evans".