

# Parent Chats

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## **1.0 PURPOSE**

The purpose of a Parent Chat is to provide the public a forum facilitating dialogue between townspeople and the Tornillo ISD Trustees and Superintendent. Not all school issues fall in the realm of public information. Therefore, the Chat is not a “free-for-all,” but has guidelines so that healthy communication can take place. Due to the limitations imposed upon the Board by the Texas Open Meetings act, a Parent Chat is a better forum for allowing conversations to take place between the public and elected officials regarding education in the district. Two primary goals of the Parent Chat are to inform the public and to increase the public’s confidence in the Board of Trustees/Administration by providing transparent windows on decision-making, state regulations, district goals, district policies/practices and Board activities. By having an active, informed public, the TISD Board of Trustees believes that the performance and achievements of our district will show improvement. It should be noted that the Parent Chat is not intended to be a substitute for the district’s complaint process; but rather a forum designed to bring stakeholders together for the purpose of jointly moving the district to ever-greater heights.

## **2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 2.1 Location and logistics: Except in unusual circumstances, all Chats are held at the High School Cafeteria to take advantage of the existing sound/video infrastructure; regardless of which school is the featured campus. Chat dates are selected in advance by the campus principals and coordinated with the Community Outreach Director. It is the responsibility of the featured campus principal to ensure the readiness of the building, food, sound system, etc. The food service will begin at 5:00 p.m. and the student performance(s) will commence at approximately 5:30 p.m.
- 2.2 Student showcase: A performance/demonstration by students of the featured campus is expected at every Chat. In addition to the performance, student work products may be displayed as available and time will be given to showcase campus students at the discretion of the principal. Campus principals shall be contacted a month in advance regarding preparation for the student showcase.

- 2.3 Seating: Unless the expected audience is greater than 250, the custodians shall set up round tables with chairs for a more “friendly” environment.
- 2.4 Technology support: The principal of the featured campus should arrange two weeks in advance for laptops, media screens, microphones etc. Ensure that enough microphones are available for dialogue and interaction.
- 2.5 Communication / promotion: The principal of the featured campus should arrange two weeks in advance, with the Community Outreach Director, to pre-record a Connect-Ed message and to pick up door prizes.
- 2.6 Prepare for presentation: Featured Trustees should prepare for their presentation; drawing from subject matter experts employed by the district if the topic warrants. Board members are responsible for producing/obtaining the necessary handouts, PowerPoint Presentations, video features, etc.
- 2.7 Welcoming at the Chat: Community members will be personally greeted as they arrive. There will be sign-in sheets available and name tags for anyone who wishes to use them. Young children, who are not part of the program, will be intercepted at the doorway and directed to the day care rooms to keep distractions to a minimum during the discussions.

### **3.0 COMPLAINT POLICY ADHERANCE**

Tornillo ISD Board Members will not address complaints concerning individual students, employees, or staff, while interacting with the public during Parent Chats.

### **4.0 PROCESS / PROCEDURE – BOARD & SUPERINTENDENT**

- 4.1 Deliver Information – Communicate from TISD to Community
  - a. Start the dialogue: Introduce those board members who will speak during the evening. Give out appropriate “Thank You” messages; including the student performers, their teachers, the cooks, etc. Include a brief introduction of the evening’s topics and any staff in attendance who may participate in providing information during the session. Explain the purpose of that night’s Parent Chat, what will be the presentation team’s roles and expectations, and preview the format for the evening.
  - b. Presentation topic: Share a brief synopsis of the topic and begin the presentation. It is important to keep within the time allotted, to stay on topic and to have the facts readily available. It is crucial that a Parent Chat retain the flavor of a dialogue; so lectures should be kept to 10 minutes or less. Failing to meet this guideline puts the public in the position of “receivers” rather than “participants” which squelches their enthusiasm and desire to participate. The majority of the information given should be related to the questions asked. The community may

be interested in the presentation topic but may also have other concerns or needs for information.

- c. The presenters should share the leadership team's vision of the topic presented.
- d. It is desirable to expand on the district's plans in regard to the presented material.
- e. Presenters must share the board's rationale for decisions along with any pertinent information not necessarily available to the general public.
- f. When closing it is effective to announce any upcoming district events, board meetings and the next Parent Chat.

#### 4.2 Communication from Community to TISD

- g. Audience Participation Questionnaire: A survey can be utilized. Common questions include such items as: suggestions, concerns, wants/needs. Have the public drop their survey responses in a box.
- h. Set ground rules for survey responses: Explain the governance clock, chain of command for grievances and the board's role; the board can not address questions concerning individual students, employees, or staff.
- i. Pull first questionnaire: Draw a response to read (if the response is appropriate) and begin the discussion explaining the district's perspective. Make sure to allow time for audience feedback. The presenters may group similar questions for response. Give a prize to the individual whose question was drawn; if it was appropriate enough to be read aloud.
- j. Options: To provide meaningful yet fun activities, the presenters may utilize actual tests, such as those containing TAKS questions. These forums are a great opportunity to review the chain of command, remind the public of the Open Meeting Act, etc.
- k. Identify tertiary issues: Topics that may affect the district's operations such as zoning, growth plans, student programs, and community needs are good items to identify and discuss during these forums.

#### 4.3 Candidate Forums

- l. In order to keep members of our community informed about candidates, issues and measures that may impact our community and our schools, the District will set aside a period of at least 15 minutes at the beginning of every Parent Chat meeting for candidates for public office, public office holders, and those who oppose or support a ballot measure to address the public.

- m. Time will be allocated equally between those wishing to speak during the Candidate Forum portion of the meeting, and in the event there are multiple candidates wishing to address the public, the time period for the Candidate Forum may be extended to accommodate all speakers.
- n. Individuals wishing to speak during the Candidate Forum shall notify the office of the superintendent of schools by telephone at least one day prior to the scheduled Parent Chat so that appropriate accommodations can be made.
- o. Prior to every school board election, at least one Parent Chat meeting will allow an equal opportunity for every candidate in a school board election to appear and speak. Notice of the availability of the Candidate Forum portion of the Parent Chat meeting will be posted on the District's public website. Prior to the Candidate Forum, the superintendent or responsible school official shall make an announcement clarifying that the District is offering the Candidate Forum as a public service, and does not endorse any candidate or measure by making the forum available.

## **5.0 REPORTING**

Using a notebook one of the presenters should list issues as they are discussed to determine, at the end of the forum, if there are any remaining unresolved issues. These issues are noted to either be taken into consideration at future board deliberations or to have proper grievance channels identified for the requestor.