

ReporterHerald.com, TSD Board of Education policy change allows action without public notice (11.14.12)

TSD Board of Education policy change allows action at work sessions, retreats without public notice

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The Thompson School District Board of Education has changed its policy to allow action at work sessions and retreats without public notice, though members said they will develop procedures for letting the public know about "hot topics" ahead of time.

A revision to the district's policy on board meetings, one of two dozen proposed policy changes, was unanimously approved by the board during Wednesday's regular meeting. It strikes the requirement under the work sessions and retreats section of the policy that "no action shall be taken during such sessions unless prior public notice so specified."

When discussed last week, board members raised concern about the deletion, but board president Sharon Olson said the omission is necessary to be in compliance with state statute, which does not differentiate between work sessions and special meetings.

"There's no such language about work sessions," Olson said. "It's not a regular meeting so it has to be a special meeting."

During a special meeting, action can be taken without public notice only if all members are present and agree to consider and transact other business.

There is no public participation requirement at work sessions, but board members said they'd like some avenue for people to provide input on hot topics that arise, such as financial issues.

A procedure for inviting community groups to speak on a topic or responding to requests from the public to comment will be developed by the board and may include more advance notice of meeting topics as well as restrictions on public input based on time constraints.

"Obviously we don't want ... 17 people speaking on the same subject," board member Leonard Sherman said.

Olson said the board generally has an idea about the hot topics in the community and will publicize when action might be taken on those items.

"I think our track record indicates that we are transparent in everything that we're doing," she said.

Also during Wednesday's meeting, the board briefly discussed the 2012 October enrollment count, which shows 306 more students this year than the district had budgeted for. Based on the increase in funded pupil count, the district could see an additional \$1.165 million from the state.

Responding to board member Janice Marchman's question of how likely the district is to receive that funding, district Chief Financial Officer Steve Towne said he was "optimistic" based on Gov. John Hickenlooper's