

Welcome to

Vermont

School Board

U ONLINE

# Introductions

Technical difficulties: 802-477-3601



Susan Holson  
Former Director of Education  
Services

Kerri Lamb  
Director of Operations



# Webinar Logistics

Technical difficulties: 802-477-3601

## Questions

- Questions and comments are always welcome
- Please use the Zoom Chat function for questions
- For anonymity, send Chat to Kerri Lamb/VSBA

## Evaluation

- End of the webinar

## Email follow-up

- Summary information
- PowerPoint slides
- Other resources

## Archived

- VSBA YouTube Channel
- VSBA website



# What ~~Can~~ Should I Say?



## Successful Communications Strategies



# Reasons for Communication

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Inform. Educate. Engage. Listen and Learn.

# Communication Outlets

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Email

Personal Conversation

- In Person
- Phone
- At Board Meeting

Social Media

Traditional Media

# Hierarchy of Effective Communications

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- Face to face
  - Small group discussion/meeting
  - Large group presentation
  - Typewritten, personal letter
  - Brochure sent out as a direct mail piece
  - Article in school or district newsletter or website
  - Article in local newspaper
  - Advertising in newspapers, radio, TV, etc.



# One Voice

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# One Voice

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- School board powers are granted by the state as outlined in VSA 16 §563.
  - School board members are not granted any individual power or authority in statute.

# Open Meeting Law

Open Meeting Law Declaration  
of Public Policy:

... public commissions, boards,  
councils and other public  
agencies in this state exist to aid  
in the **conduct of the people's  
business and are accountable to  
them** ...

1 V.S.A. § 311



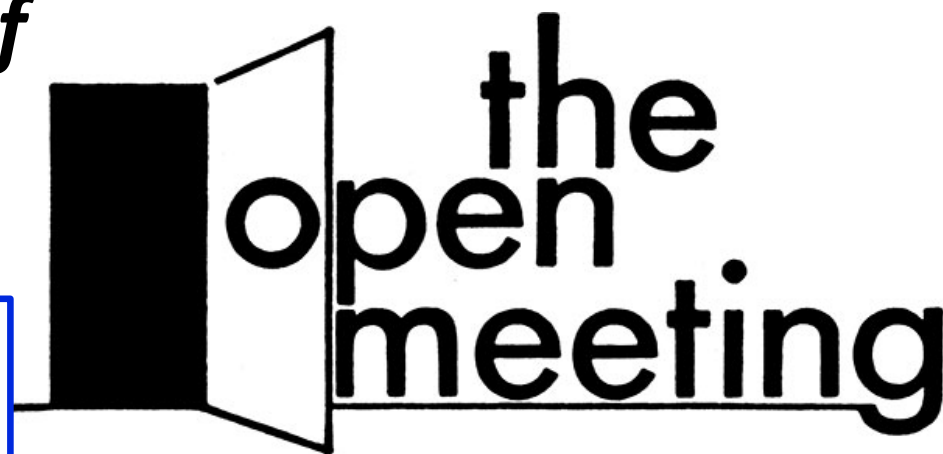
# When does the Open Meeting Law apply?

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Any time a “quorum” holds a “meeting.”

- QUORUM: a **majority** of the entire public body (including board committees)
- MEETING: a gathering of a quorum of a public body ***for the purpose of discussing business or taking action.***

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has an excellent online FAQ resource at [www.vlct.org/open-meeting-law-faqs](http://www.vlct.org/open-meeting-law-faqs).



# Electronic Communications Among Board or Board Committee Members

Open meeting law permits boards to use electronic communications to schedule a meeting, organize an agenda, or distribute materials to discuss a meeting.

- The following are not permissible:
  - **Group email** by a **quorum** of a public body that **discusses the body's business**.
  - **Collaborative editing** of an online document by a **quorum**.
  - Participation in a **Facebook group** or **Front Porch** by a **quorum** if the **body's business is discussed**.

# Electronic Communication Guidelines

- Do not text, email, blog, tweet, or post anything you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the newspaper
- Do not disclose executive session materials or protected information via email
- Take proactive steps to ensure a quorum of the board is not participating in an online "discussion" about board business
- Understand how district policies apply to electronic communications
- Protect your personal email from public records requests by **utilizing school district email.**



# Executive Session

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## When is Executive Session appropriate?

- Only if the business to be considered fits into one of the 14 statutory categories.
- Only if the public body votes to enter in open session and indicates its reason for doing so.
- The motion must state the nature of the business of the executive session, be supported by a majority of the board and be recorded in the minutes.
- When preparing agenda, consult with legal counsel if there is a question about whether executive session is permissible or about which provision of the executive session law applies.



# Public Comment Period

*A board meeting is a public meeting, but it is **not** a meeting of the public*

- 16 V.S.A. §554(b): a reasonable opportunity to appear and express views on any matter considered by the board shall be given to any person in the school district
- 1 V.S.A. 312(h): public comment shall be subject to reasonable rules established by the chair



Are public  
comments at  
the meeting a  
good way to  
judge the  
community's  
opinions?





# Public Forums

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# Public Forums



# Responding to Community Input 1

jane@schoolboard.org

Re: Aiden's teacher

Hi, Jane

I'm reaching out since you were just elected to the school board.  
(Congratulations, by the way! So good to have someone from our side of town representing us.)

The issue is Aiden's first grade teacher. She doesn't seem to like him very much and he's started fighting going to school in the mornings. I'm not sure what to do. Can you help?

Thanks,  
Sarah

# Handling Complaints

Receive complaint

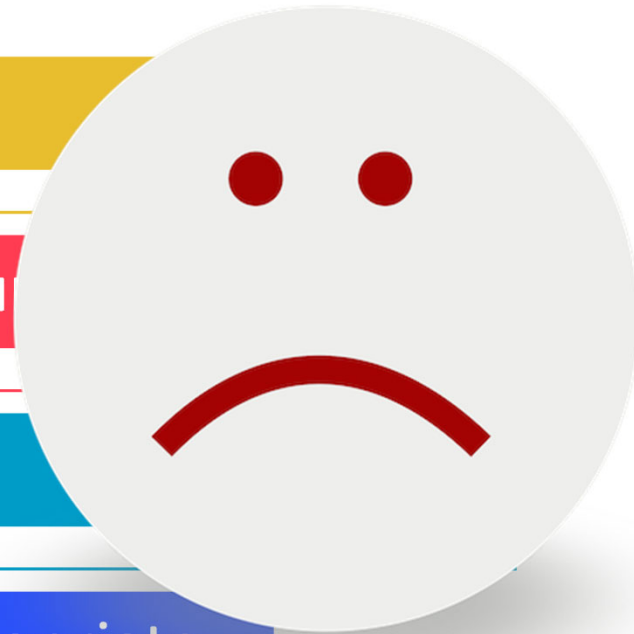
Follow district public complaints procedure

Inform chair and administrator

Follow up later with complainant, if appropriate

Board is *final* level of complaint appeal

- not the first!





# Responding to Community Input 2

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# One Voice






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- Board members support the outcome of a vote regardless of their personal opinion.
- You can publicly acknowledge that you voted against the majority (it's a matter of public record) and explain your reasons as they were presented during board discussion.
- Board members publicly and privately respect the process of the board.


# Responding to Community Input 3

 Search Facebook



 Susan





**Peacham Elementary School**  
@peachamelementaryschool · ★ 5 (2 reviews) · Elementary School

Send message

Hi! Please let us know how we can help.

[Home](#) [Reviews](#) [Photos](#) [Videos](#) [More ▼](#)

[Like](#) [Search](#) [More](#)

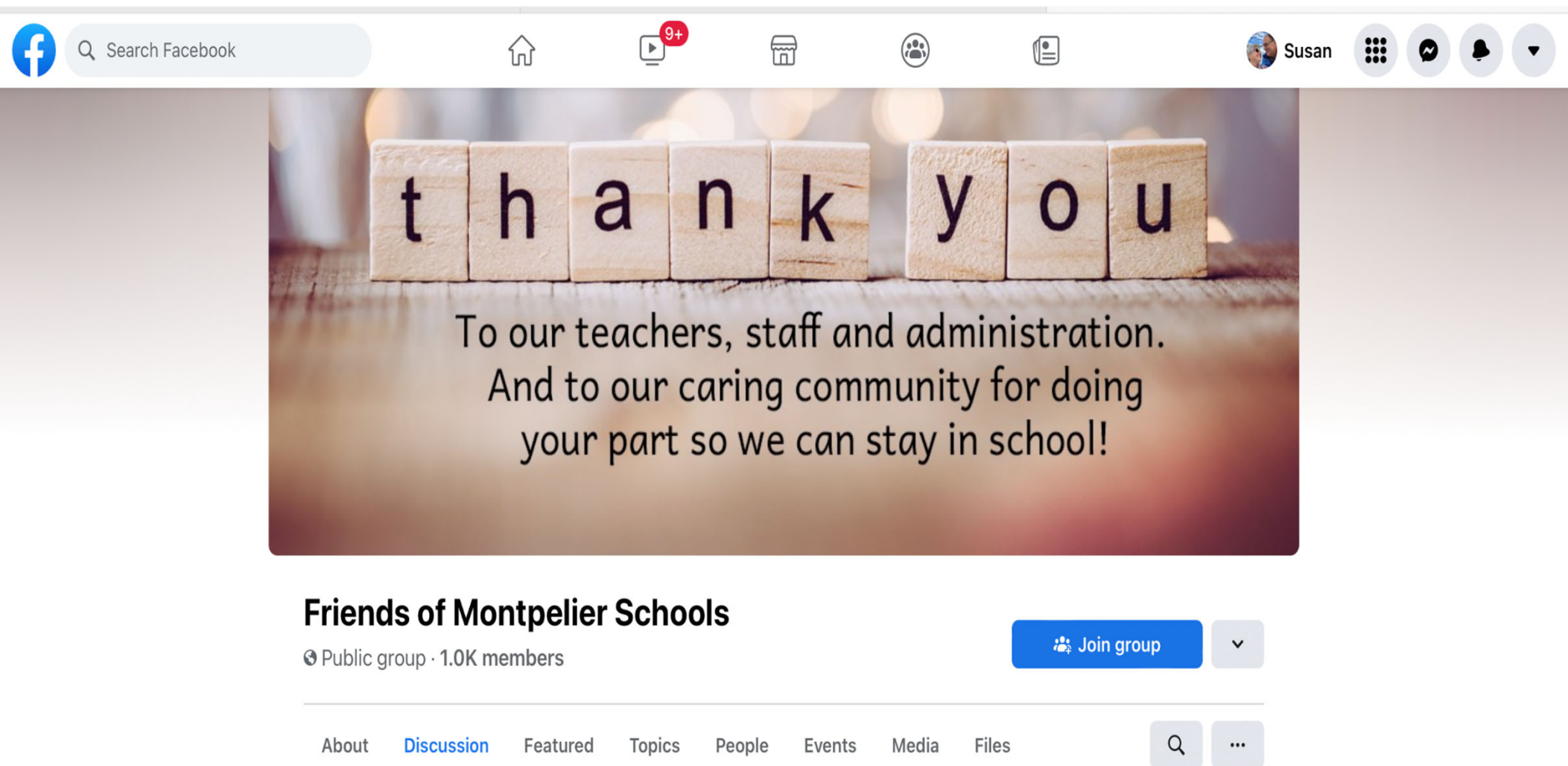


# “Official” Social Media

- Board members should refrain from engaging in online discussions about school business.
- Staffing and staffing levels are administrative decisions. The board is included as a matter of resource allocation/budgeting.
- It's okay to monitor the discussion (without contributing) to develop a sense of one group of stakeholders' opinions.
- Assume that administration is monitoring the official school page(s) and account(s).
- If a board response is indicated, it should only come from the official board spokesperson.



# Responding to Community Input 4



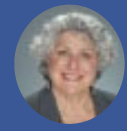
# “Unofficial” Social Media

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- Board members should refrain from engaging in online discussions about school issues.
- Unsanctioned social media groups do not represent “community.” They are often closed groups and/or exist to further specific agendas.
- Boards and board members should refrain from engaging in the discussion within these groups. (It’s okay to monitor.)



Search



Home

Create



Friends



Sue Ceglowski



Sandra Cameron



Kerri Lamb



Susan



**Eastlake School and Community Watch** Covid-19 is out of control around here! Why is it safe for our kids to be in school when the Governor just said everyone who can work remotely should? Schools should be dismissed like they were last spring to ensure the safety of our children!

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [See Friendship](#)



**Eastlake School Board Member (YOU)** The whole state is trying to make sure it's safe for kids to be in school. As the Governor said, public school is a "need." We can forego the "wants" like public gatherings so students and school personnel can be safe.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [See Friendship](#)



**Angry Taxpayer** That's ridiculous! The schools are just trying to take the easy way out.

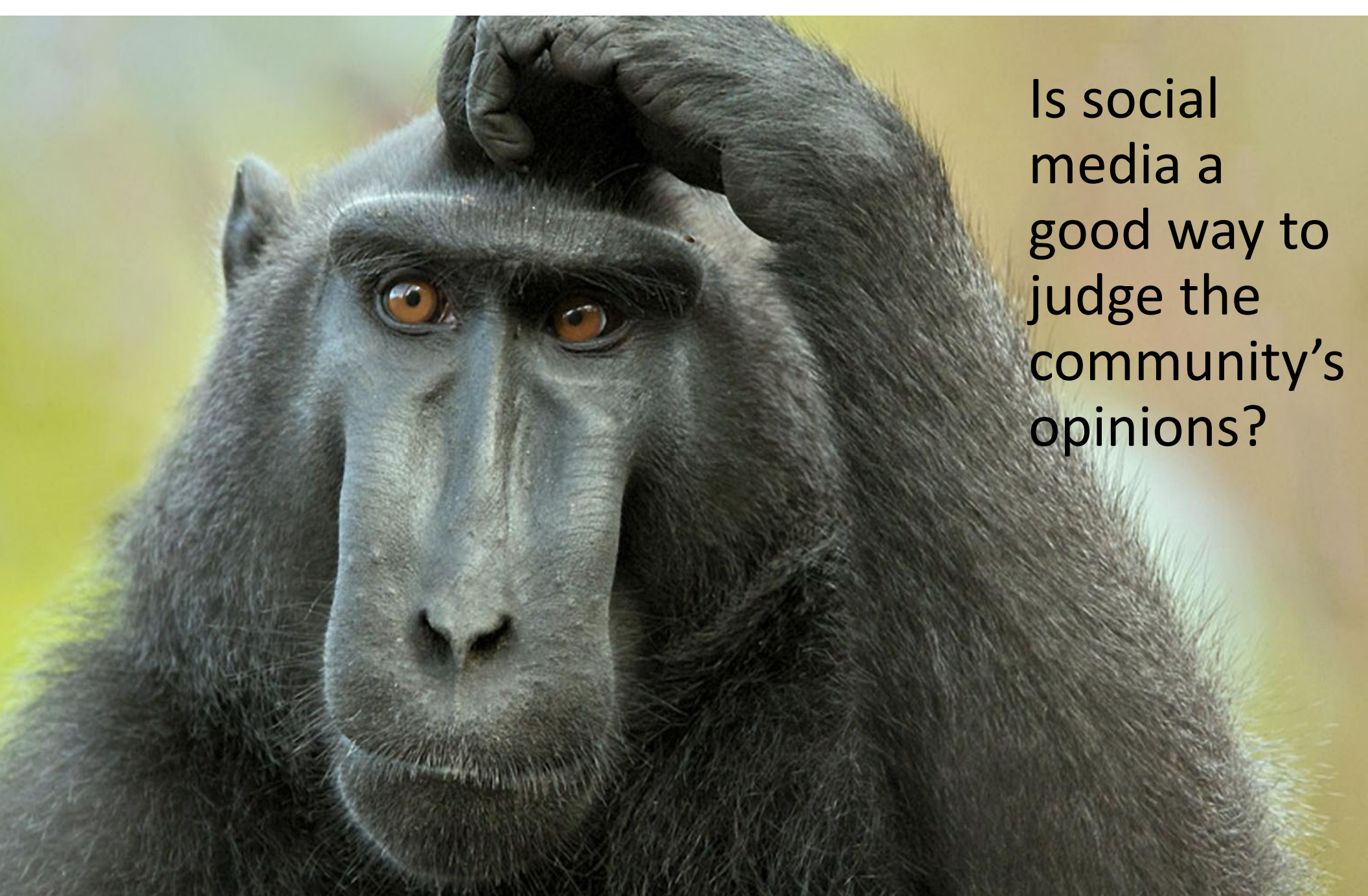
[people like this](#) · [Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [See Friendship](#)

The school board member's comment is a public record

This subsequent comment is a public record

**Note: If a quorum of school board members are members of the "Eastlake School and Community Watch" group and discussing board business, this is likely an unwarned meeting.**





Is social  
media a  
good way to  
judge the  
community's  
opinions?





# Vermont School Boards Association Staff



Sue Ceglowski  
Executive Director

sceglowski@vtsba.org



Sandra Cameron  
Director of Public  
Policy

scameron@vtsba.org



Kerri Lamb  
Director of Operations

klamb@vtsba.org



Phil Gore  
Director of Board  
Support  
**COMING  
SOON!**

pgore@vtsba.org

802-223-3580  
[www.vtsba.org](http://www.vtsba.org)