

Effective: May 11, 2023

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I. Policy Value Statement

Recognizing the importance of public comments and suggestions on matters of educational interest, the Board of Education of Howard County (Board) confirms its commitment to community participation by scheduling public hearings and public forums during regular meetings. It is the intent of the Board to provide opportunities for individuals, groups, and organizations to express their views as well as to provide opportunities for individuals to hear the views of others.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to preserve the orderly transaction of business of the Board and to provide guidelines for effective, efficient, and responsible community input on educational issues during regular meetings of the Board.

III. Standards

A. Public Attendance

- 1. The Board will comply with the Open Meetings Act of Maryland.
- 2. Individuals, groups, and organizations are invited to attend and observe any open session of the Board, including work sessions, subject to space limitations.

3. Interpreters will be provided for meetings of the Board upon request for those who are hearing impaired or speakers of languages other than English. Requests should be submitted no later than fourteen (14) calendar days prior to the meeting date.
4. No individual, group, or organization attending an open session may participate in the session except in instances when the presiding officer expressly invites public testimony, questions, comments, or other forms of public participation, or when public participation is otherwise authorized by law.

B. Rules for Public Conduct at Public Meetings

1. An individual, group, or organization attending an open session of the Board may not engage in any conduct, including visual demonstrations such as the waving of placards, signs, or banners, that disrupts the session or that interferes with the right of others to attend and observe the session.
2. Individuals, groups, and organizations are expected to exhibit civil behavior in accordance with Policy 1000 Civility. The Board encourages participants of public forum to refrain from using language, imagery, or symbols that are indecent, profane, or threatening in nature. Comments should be appropriate for all potential audience members.
3. Individuals, groups, and organizations, including any representative of the news media, may record, photograph, or videotape the proceedings of an open session of the Board as long as it is not disruptive. The presiding officer may restrict the movement of an individual who is using the recording device, camera, or broadcasting/television equipment to maintain the orderly conduct of the session.
4. A recording of an open session made by an individual, group, or organization, or any transcript derived from such a recording, is not deemed a part of the record of any proceeding of the Board.
5. The presiding officer may order any individual who persists in conduct prohibited under Section B.1. or who violates any other HCPSS policy and/or law concerning the conduct of the open session to be removed from the session and may request police and/or security assistance to restore order. The presiding officer may recess the session while order is restored.

C. Public Forums

1. Time will be set aside during regular Board meetings for up to five (5) individuals, groups, or organizations to provide public comment at each session.
2. Individuals, groups, and organizations may pre-register to speak at a public forum by contacting the Board Office by telephone, email, or in person:

- a. Individuals, groups, and organizations may pre-register during HCPSS business hours listed on the HCPSS website during the three (3) weeks prior to the regularly scheduled Board meeting up to the close of business on the last working day prior to the meeting.
 - b. Individuals, groups, and organizations may only register to speak at one (1) public forum per meeting day.
3. A sign-up for registration will be available at the Board meeting for individuals who do not pre-register, but wish to speak at public forum. Space permitting, individuals who register at the time of the Board meeting will speak in the order in which they registered after those who pre-registered have testified. Substitute speakers are not permitted, except with the expressed permission of the presiding officer.
 4. Comments during public forums, including any visual or audio presentations, will be limited to three (3) minutes. The Board expects that any visual or audio presentations be delivered with the decorum and respect appropriate to the conduct of the public's business.
 5. The public forum may not be used to address:
 - a. Individual personnel issues,
 - b. Complaints identifying individual students,
 - c. Matters that are on appeal,
 - d. Topics for which a formal public hearing is currently scheduled, or
 - e. Advertising or solicitation for products and/or services.

The Board expects that individuals speaking deliver their comments with the decorum and respect appropriate to the conduct of the public's business.

6. As part of the public record, documents submitted by individuals, group, and organizations are maintained by the Board Office and will be posted to the appropriate part of the online agenda following the meeting.
7. Board members do not respond to comments during the public forum due to time constraints. Board members may take follow-up action within the scope of the Board's authority and jurisdiction and/or may make referrals to appropriate staff.

D. Public Hearings

1. The Board will schedule public hearings in accordance with Board policy and reserves the right to schedule additional public hearings on issues of concern and interest.

2. In general, public hearings will be held approximately thirty (30) calendar days after the meeting at which an issue is initially introduced. However, the Board reserves the right to schedule any such public hearing on an earlier date and time deemed appropriate by the Board.
3. The Board will make every effort to not schedule any public hearing on a day that conflicts with a major religious or cultural event on the calendar.
4. The subject and date of public hearings will be publicized through customary communications channels and be released to the news media.
5. Individuals, students, groups, and organizations, and State and County elected officials may pre-register to speak at a public hearing by contacting the Board Office by telephone or in person during HCPSS business hours listed on the HCPSS website, or they may pre-register online. All registrations are to occur during the three (3) weeks prior to the public hearing up to the close of business on the last working day before the hearing. If the Board determines a public hearing is to be scheduled with less than three (3) weeks notice, the Board will set a schedule for pre-registration. Individuals registered to speak will be asked to provide their pronoun, name, address, telephone number, and email address if available, and identify if they will speak in person or virtually.
6. A sign-up for registration will be available at the public hearings for individuals who do not pre-register but wish to provide testimony. If the allotted public testimony slots are filled during pre-registration, individuals may not have the opportunity to speak at their preferred public hearing.
7. Individuals may only register themselves to speak. An officer of an organization may register up to two (2) individuals to provide testimony on behalf of the organization. Substitute speakers are not permitted, except with the expressed permission of the presiding officer.
8. Individuals speaking at a public hearing will testify in the order in which they registered, except that students will be permitted to testify at the beginning of the public hearing, and elected officials will be given the courtesy of being placed at the time of their choice on the agenda.
9. During a public hearing, testimony is limited to the issue under consideration.
10. Testimony during the public hearing, including any visual or audio presentations, will be limited to three (3) minutes. The Board expects that any testimony, including visual or audio presentations, be delivered with the decorum and respect appropriate to the conduct of the public's business. If testimony cannot be completed within the allotted (3) minutes, individuals may provide written testimony, in addition to their oral testimony and both will be posted online and accessible to the public.

11. Individuals are requested to provide an electronic version of their oral testimony to be posted online and accessible by the public. Oral testimony will be posted to the appropriate part of the online agenda following the meeting.
12. All individuals, groups, and organizations registered to speak will be given an opportunity to be heard by the Board. Given the scheduled length of the public hearing, the Board will schedule no more than 18 individuals to speak for each hour of scheduled public hearing testimony. Based on the interest and the number of registrants, the Board reserves the right to schedule additional public hearings, if necessary.
13. Individuals, groups, and organizations may provide written testimony in addition to, or in lieu of, oral testimony after a formal Board Report is presented to the Board. Equal consideration will be given to written and oral testimony. Written testimony will be accepted via letter or email up to 48 hours prior to the meeting at which the Board is scheduled to take action.
14. Written testimony documents submitted to the Board are maintained by the Board Office as part of the public record and will be posted to the appropriate part of the online agenda following the meeting.

IV. Responsibilities

- A. The presiding officer presides at all meetings and hearings and officially convenes and closes the public hearing and public forum portions of the meetings.
- B. The Board of Education Office will pre-register individuals, groups, and organizations to speak at public hearings and public forums.
- C. The Superintendent will ensure that an environment is available to provide efficient and fair public participation at all public hearings and regular Board meetings.

V. Delegation of Authority

Implementation of this policy resides with the Board.

VI. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Presiding Officer – Board Chair or Board member designated by the Chair to carry out duties of the Board Chair.
- B. Public Forum – Portions of regular Board meetings where up to a maximum of ten (10) individuals, groups, and organizations can make comments on educational issues that do not pertain to:

1. Individual personnel issues,
 2. Complaints identifying individual students,
 3. Matters that are on appeal,
 4. Topics for which a formal public hearing is currently scheduled, or
 5. Advertising or solicitation for products and/or services.
- C. Public Hearing – Time within the Board agenda for individuals, groups, and organizations to provide oral testimony on topics scheduled by the Board.

VII. References

- A. Legal
The Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C., Section 12101, *et seq.*
Md. Ann. Code, General Provisions Article, Section 3-101, *et seq.* (Open Meetings Act)
Md. Ann. Code, General Provisions Article, Section 4-101, *et seq.* (Public Information Act)
- B. Board Policies
Policy 1000 Civility
Policy 2000 Board of Education Governance
Policy 2020 Policy Development and Adoption
Policy 6010 School Attendance Areas
Policy 6070 Discontinuation of School Use
Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media
Policy 10000 Student, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement
- C. Relevant Data Sources
(none)
- D. Other
The Board of Education of Howard County Handbook (Board Handbook)

VIII. History¹

ADOPTED: January 25, 1990
REVIEWED: February 24, 2022
MODIFIED: December 5, 2022
February 9, 2023
May 11, 2023
REVISED: February 8, 2007
March 10, 2016
EFFECTIVE: May 11, 2023

¹ Key: ***Adopted***-Original date the Board took action to approve a policy; ***Reviewed***-The date the status of a policy was assessed by the Superintendent's Standing Policy Group; ***Modified***-The date the Board took action to alter a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee did not require a comprehensive examination; ***Revised***-The date the Board took action on a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee needed a comprehensive examination; ***Effective***-The date a policy is implemented throughout the HCPSS, typically July 1 following Board action.