

**I. Policy Statement**

Recognizing the importance of public comments and suggestions on matters of educational interest, the Board of Education 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 and groups 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. Definitions**

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

- A. Presiding Officer – Chairman or Board member designated by the Chairman to carry out duties of the Chairman of the Board.
- B. Public Forum – A portion of a regular Board meeting where up to a maximum of five (5) citizens 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 the Board schedules formal public hearings, or
  - 5. Advertising or solicitation for products and/or services.
- C. Public Hearing – Time within the Board agenda for community members to provide oral testimony on topics scheduled by the Board.

**IV. Standards**

- A. Public Attendance
  - 1. The Board will comply with the Open Meetings Act of Maryland.

2. The general public is invited to attend and observe any open session of the Board, including work sessions.
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 member of the public 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. Public Forums

1. Two separate times will be set aside during regular Board meetings for up to five (5) community members to provide public comment.
2. Community members may pre-register to speak at a public forum by contacting the Board Office by telephone or in person:
  - a. Persons may pre-register during business hours 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. Community members 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 provide comments. 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.
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 the Board schedules formal public hearings, or
  - e. Advertising or solicitation for products and/or services.

The Board expects that speakers 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 speakers are maintained by the Board Office, and will be posted to the appropriate part of the online agenda following the meeting.
7. Board members usually 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.

#### C. 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 a 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. Community members may pre-register to speak at a public hearing by contacting the Board Office by telephone, electronically, or in person. Persons may pre-register during business hours during the three (3) weeks prior to the public hearing up to the close of business on the last working day before the hearing. Speakers will be asked to provide their name, address, and telephone number, and email address if available.
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. Individuals who register at the time of the public hearing will testify in the order in which they registered after those who pre-registered have testified.
7. Individuals may only register themselves to speak. An officer of an organization may register up to five (5) individuals to provide testimony on behalf of the organization. Substitute speakers are not permitted, except with the expressed permission of the presiding officer.

8. Speakers 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.
11. Speakers are requested to provide fifteen (15) copies of their testimony for distribution to Board members and staff. Written testimony will be posted to the appropriate part of the online agenda following the meeting.
12. All registered speakers will be given an opportunity to be heard by the Board. An additional public hearing may be scheduled if necessary.
13. Community members may provide written testimony in addition to, or in lieu of, public 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.

D. Rules for Public Conduct at Public Meetings

1. A person 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 members of the public to attend and observe the session.
2. Persons are expected to exhibit civil behavior in accordance with Policy 1000 Civility.
3. A member of the public, 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 a person 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 a member of the public, 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 person who persists in conduct prohibited under D.1 or who violates any other regulation concerning the conduct of the open session to be removed from the session and may request police assistance to restore order. The presiding officer may recess the session while order is restored.

## **V. 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 Administrator to the Board will pre-register speakers for 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 meetings.

## **VI. Delegation of Authority**

Implementation of this policy resides with the Board.

## **VII. References**

- A. Legal
  - The Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C., Section 12101, *et seq.*
  - The Annotated Code of Maryland, General Provisions Article, Section 3-101, *et seq.*  
(Open Meetings Act)
  - The Annotated Code of Maryland, General Provisions Article, Section 4-101, *et seq.*  
(Public Information Act)
- B. Other Board Policies
  - Policy 1000 Civility
  - Policy 2000 School Board Governance
  - Policy 2020 Policy Development and Adoption
  - Policy 6010 School Attendance Areas
  - Policy 6070 Discontinuation of School Use
  - Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology and Social Media
  - Policy 10000 Parent, Family, and Community Involvement
- C. Relevant Data Sources
- D. Other
  - Board Handbook

**VIII. History**

ADOPTED: January 25, 1990

REVIEWED:

MODIFIED:

REVISED: February 8, 2007

March 10, 2016

EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2016