

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY
INFORMATIONAL REPORT
RECOMMENDATION ON
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD OPEN MEETINGS OR PUBLIC HEARINGS
POLICY NO. 22-0008-000

JULY 18, 2022

Background Information:

The Board maintains a manual which sets forth the various policies of the Harford County Public Schools (“HCPS”). The manual contains policies which are either required by federal and state law and regulation or which are, in the Board’s judgment, necessary and appropriate in order for the school system to operate in a lawful, appropriate, and effective manner. Included among such policies is that entitled:

22-0008-000 Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings

Discussion:

The policy entitled 22-0008-000 Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings, was adopted by the Board at its September 14, 1992, Board Business Meeting. The policy was most recently amended at the January 25, 2005, Board Business Meeting. The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the conduct of official business in an open and public manner, keeping as a priority, the focus of the business meeting and its agenda.

Kimberly Neal, General Counsel for Harford County Public Schools, established small workgroups to review this policy based upon the length of time since its last amendment and due to recent changes in practice at Board of Education business meetings. In particular, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board has had to make revisions to this policy to address health and safety concerns; the need arose for flexibility and adaptation from in person public participation at Board meetings to virtual participation at Board meetings, and then to hybrid meetings with both in person and virtual public attendance and comment at Board business meetings. The workgroups for this proposed amendment examined the best practices of other school systems within Maryland as well as other, non-educational, board and council meeting best practices to ensure the creation of the most comprehensive guidelines given the revisions the pandemic has required all Boards and councils to adopt.

Superintendent’s Recommendation:

For the foregoing reasons, the Superintendent recommends that the Board review for approval at a subsequent Board meeting the proposed revisions to policy 22-0008-000 entitled Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings.

Attachments:

1. Current Board Policy 22-0008-000 Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings.
2. Proposed, revised Policy 22-0008-000 Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings.

POLICY TITLE: Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings		
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE: 9/14/1992	MOST RECENTLY AMENDED: 1/25/2005	MOST RECENTLY REAFFIRMED: 9/9/2002
POLICY/PROCEDURE MANUAL SUMMARY CATEGORY: School System Governance		

1. Public Attendance and Participation

- a) At any open session of the Board of Education of Harford County (whether a meeting or hearing) the general public is invited to attend, observe and to participate.
- b) Public participation at open meetings of the Board of Education is encouraged, welcomed, and requested under the sections of the agenda entitled "Public Participation" and "Public Comments," as well as prior to the Board of Education's discussion of any agenda item(s) for the open meeting.

2. Disruptive Conduct

- a) Members of the general public have the right to attend open sessions of public bodies. A public body may remove or cause removal of any person or persons from an open session upon a determination by the presiding officer of the public body that the person's behavior is disruptive to the session.
- b) A person attending an open session of the Board of Education of Harford County 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 to observe the session.
- c) Presiding Officer Authorities
 - (1) The presiding officer may order any person who persists in conduct prohibited by subsection A or B of this section 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.
 - (2) The presiding officer may recess the session while order is restored.

3. Public Comment at Board Business Meeting

- a) The order of business of any regular meeting shall include an opportunity for citizens to address the Board through utilization of the procedures outlined in subsections 1, 2, 3.

- (1) Any member of the community may request the placement of a matter on the formal agenda, provided the person files a written request with the Superintendent no later than ten days prior to the meetings of the Board of Education. The written request should include the name, address, and telephone number of the person or persons making the request; the name of the organization or group represented; and pertinent background information. If the request is appropriate for consideration by the Board, the Superintendent will assign the item to the agenda and will notify the person making the request of the time, date, and the place of the meeting.
 - (2) Citizens wishing to speak on any agenda item or to comment on any item not on the agenda may do so by obtaining from the Director of Information and completing a "Request to Appear Before the Board" card. This must be submitted prior to the opening of the meeting. Those wishing to speak on an agenda item will be called upon by the presiding officer after the formal presentation of the topic, but prior to Board deliberation on the item. Those wishing to speak on a non-agenda item will be called upon during the public commentary section of the Board meeting.
 - (3) Individuals or groups who wish to submit policy proposals for consideration by the Board should put these in writing to the Superintendent and the president of the Board of Education. The Superintendent will consult with the authors and make recommendations to the Board.
- b) Matters of administrative procedure or comments about the actions or statements of individual staff members are not appropriate for these meetings and should be referred to the Superintendent. Efforts toward solution of any matter of concern should first be made at the individual school or at the appropriate staff level. Defamatory or abusive remarks are out of order and the presiding officer may terminate the speaker's privilege of address if, after being called to order, he or she persists.
 - c) The Board, the Superintendent, and staff will not, as a rule, answer questions from the public during this period other than to explain a policy already in existence.
 - d) Every person who wishes to speak shall be recognized by the presiding officer, called to the table, asked to state his or her name and address, and to identify any organization he or she represents. Each speaker shall be limited to no more than three minutes and five minutes for individuals representing groups unless such time is extended by the presiding officer. When there are many speakers, the presiding officer may shorten this time.
 - e) Members of the Board, the Superintendent, and staff members may question the speaker at the conclusion of the remarks made by the speaker with the permission of the presiding officer.

- f) It is the prerogative of the Board to determine whether actions will be taken by the Board on items brought up during the meeting. The presiding officer will inform the speaker of the future intention of the Board concerning the matter being discussed.
- g) Any written or printed material to be circulated to the Board of Education should, whenever possible, be submitted to the Superintendent one week prior to the meeting of the Board. It will be transmitted to the Board for review prior to the meeting. When this is not possible, fifteen (15) copies of the material should be brought to the meeting.

4. Public Comment at Board Public Hearings

- a) The order of business at a public hearing shall include an opportunity for citizens to address the Board through utilization of the procedures outlined in subsections 1, 2 and 3 below.
 - (1) Every person who wishes to speak shall complete a “Request to Appear Before the Board” card.
 - (2) Every person who wishes to speak shall be recognized by the presiding officer, called to the table, asked to state his or her name and address, and to identify any organization he or she represents. Each speaker shall be limited to no more than three minutes and five minutes for individuals representing groups unless such time is extended by the presiding officer. When there are many speakers, the presiding officer may shorten this time.
 - (3) Members of the Board, the Superintendent, and staff members may question the speaker at the conclusion of the remarks made by the speaker with the permission of the presiding officer.
- b) Matters of administrative procedure or comments about the actions or statements of individual staff members are not appropriate for these hearings and should be referred to the Superintendent. Efforts toward solution of any matter of concern should first be made at the individual school or at the appropriate staff level. Defamatory or abusive remarks are out of order and the presiding officer may terminate the speaker’s privilege of address if, after being called to order, he or she persists.
- c) All public comment at a Board public hearing should address only the topic which is the subject of the hearing.

5. Recording, Photographing, and Broadcasting of Open Sessions

- a) A member of the public, including any representative of the news media, may record discussions of the Board of Education of Harford County at an open

- session by means of a tape recorder or any other recording device if the device does not create an excessive noise that disturbs members of the Board of Education of Harford County or other persons attending the session.
- b) A member of the public, including any representative of the news media, may photograph or videotape the proceedings of the Board of Education of Harford County at an open session by means of any type of camera if the camera:
- (1) Is operated without excessively bright artificial light that disturbs members of the Board of Education of Harford County or other persons attending the session; and
 - (2) Does not create an excessive noise that disturbs members of the Board of Education of Harford County or other persons attending the session.
- c) A representative of the news media may broadcast or televise the proceedings of the Board of Education of Harford County at an open session if the equipment used:
- (1) Is operated without excessively bright artificial light that disturbs members of the Board of Education of Harford County or other persons attending the session; and
 - (2) Does not create an excessive noise that disturbs members of the Board of Education of Harford County or other persons attending the session.
- d) The presiding officer may restrict the movement of a person who is using a recording device, camera, or broadcasting or televising equipment if such restriction is necessary to maintain the orderly conduct of the session.
6. Recordings Not Part of Record

A recording of an open session made by a member of the public, or any transcript derived from such a recording, may not be deemed a part of the record of any proceeding of the Board of Education of Harford County.

Board Approval Acknowledged By:

Patricia L. Skebeck, Secretary and Treasurer
Board of Education of Harford County

Policy Action Dates					
ACTION	DATE	ACTION	DATE	ACTION	DATE
Adopted	9/14/1992	Amended	11/22/2004		
Amended	6/14/1993	Amended	1/25/2005		
Reaffirmed	2/12/1996				
Reaffirmed	9/9/2002				

Responsibility for Policy Maintenance & References		
LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER NAME: Unknown		JOB POSITION OF LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER: Unknown
PERSON RESPONSIBLE: Patrick Spicer		JOB POSITION OF PERSON RESPONSIBLE: General Counsel
DESIGNEE NAME: N/A		JOB POSITION OF DESIGNEE: N/A
REFERENCE 1 TYPE:	REFERENCE 1 NO.	REFERENCE 1 DESCRIPTION:
REFERENCE 2 TYPE:	REFERENCE 2 NO.	REFERENCE 2 DESCRIPTION:
REFERENCE 3 TYPE:	REFERENCE 3 NO.	REFERENCE 3 DESCRIPTION:
REFERENCE 4 TYPE:	REFERENCE 4 NO.	REFERENCE 4 DESCRIPTION:
REFERENCE 5 TYPE:	REFERENCE 5 NO.	REFERENCE 5 DESCRIPTION:
POLICY NUMBER PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 1, 2005: School System Governance .01.09		

POLICY TITLE: Public Participation at Board Open Meetings or Public Hearings		
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE: 9/14/1992	MOST RECENTLY AMENDED: 1/25/2005	MOST RECENTLY REAFFIRMED: 9/9/2002
POLICY/PROCEDURE MANUAL SUMMARY CATEGORY: School System Governance		

Purpose

The Board of Education of Harford County recognizes the need for members of the public to provide comments and opinions to the members of the Board regarding agenda items for designated meetings and on education in general. To receive such information, the Board shall allow 45 minutes for Public Comment at each regularly scheduled Board of Education meeting. In addition, the Board may grant additional time for Public Comment by groups recognized by Harford County Public Schools (i.e.- PTAs, unions, and other school system stakeholders). From time to time, the Board may also establish special purpose Public Hearings for members of the public comment separate and apart from regularly scheduled meetings of the Board.

1. Public Attendance and Participation

- a) At any open session of the Board of Education of Harford County (whether a meeting or hearing) the general public is invited to attend, observe and to participate.
- b) Public participation at open meetings of the Board of Education is encouraged and welcomed during the Public Comment section of the agenda. Public participation may be in person or virtual.

2. Disruptive Conduct

- a) Members of the general public have the right to attend open sessions of public bodies. A public body may remove or cause removal of any person or persons from an open session upon a determination by the presiding officer of the public body that the person's behavior is disruptive to the session.
- b) A person attending an open session of the Board of Education of Harford County may not bring into the meeting demonstrative items such as placards, signs, or banners. In addition, a person attending an open session of the Board may not bring any item into the meeting that may disrupt the session or interfere with the right of members of the public to attend and to observe the session.
- c) Presiding Officer Authorities
 - (1) The presiding officer may order any person who persists in conduct prohibited by subsection A or B of this section 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.

- (2) The presiding officer may recess the session while order is restored.

3. Public Comment at Board Business Meeting

- a) The order of business of any regular meeting shall include an opportunity for members of the public to address the Board through utilization of the procedures outlined in subsections 1, 2, 3.

- (1) Individuals or recognized groups wishing to speak on an agenda item or to comment on an education-related matter not on the agenda may request to do so by sending an email to publiccomment@hcps.org or calling 410-588-5347 by noon on the day of a Board of Education meeting. The request to participate in Public Comment must contain

- (i) Name of speaker and, if said speaker is a group representative, the name of the group
- (ii) Local address of the speaker
- (iii) Email address of the speaker
- (iv) Telephone number of the speaker
- (v) Agenda item or subject on which speaker wishes to offer Public Comment
- (vi) Whether the speaker seeks to provide in-person or virtual Public Comment

Failure to provide complete information as required above will void the request to provide Public Comment.

- (2) Requests for public comment will be numbered in a tracking system. In the event that more than 15 requests to provide Public Comment are received, the Board's Administrative Support Coordinator will provide priority to requests for comment on a Board agenda item and will randomly select the 15 requests to be granted using the numbered tracking system. The Board reserves the right to consider the number of requests for Public Comment received on a topic when making the random selection, in an effort to fairly and proportionately grant comment on as many topics requested as possible. The Board also reserves the right to select up to five (5) alternates who may provide Public Comment in the event that an individual or group selected for Public Comment declines the opportunity or fails to appear in person or virtually at the Board meeting.

- (3) Individuals or groups selected to provide Public Comment (or selected as an alternate) will be notified by email and phone call by 2:00 pm on the day of the Board meeting in which Public Comment will be offered. Individuals or groups selected to provide Public Comment will be provided with "Requirements for Public Comment," which may be amended from time to time by the Board of Education but shall include the maximum amount of time in which each speaker may present Public Comment, prohibited topics for Public Comment, prohibited behaviors when offering Public Comment, and other helpful guidelines for Public

Comment.

- b) Matters of administrative procedure or comments about the actions or statements of individual staff members are not appropriate for Board meetings and should be referred to the Superintendent. Efforts toward solution of any matter of concern should first be made at the individual school or at the appropriate staff level. Defamatory or abusive remarks are out of order and the presiding officer may terminate the speaker's privilege of address if, after being called to order, he or she persists.
- c) The Board, the Superintendent, and staff will not, as a rule, answer questions from the public during this period other than to explain a policy already in existence.
- d) Every person who wishes to speak shall be recognized by the presiding officer or staff delegate, called to the microphone (if in person) or admitted into the meeting from the virtual lobby (if virtual), asked to state his or her name, and, if representing a group, to identify the group that he or she represents. Each speaker shall be limited to no more than three minutes and five minutes for individuals representing groups unless such time is extended by the presiding officer.
- e) It is the prerogative of the Board to determine whether actions will be taken by the Board on items brought up during the meeting.

4. Public Comment at Board Public Hearings

- a) The order of business at a public hearing shall include an opportunity for citizens to address the Board through utilization of the procedures outlined in subsections 1, 2 and 3 below.
 - (1) Individuals or recognized groups wishing to speak on an item that is the subject of the public hearing may request to do so by sending an email to publiccomment@hcps.org or calling 410-588-5347 by noon on the day of a Board of Education meeting. The request to participate in Public Comment must contain
 - (vii) Name of speaker and, if said speaker is a group representative, the name of the group
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Harford County Public Schools

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Board of Education of Harford County

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