

Montgomery County Board of Education Study on Roles and Responsibilities

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Introduction to Montgomery County Public Schools

During the 2023-2024 academic school year, there were 211 schools within Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) (136 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, 5 special schools, 2 early childhood centers, 1 program, 1 special service program and 1 technology high school). As of the statewide official date for counting student enrollment which is September 30, 2023, there were 160,554 students enrolled at MCPS, making it the largest school district in Maryland and the 14th largest school district in the country. Additionally, MCPS employed 24,907 employees during 2023. MCPS continues to enroll a diverse population of students with MCPS students speaking over 160 different languages.¹

Introduction to the Montgomery County Board of Education

The Montgomery County Board of Education (Board), pursuant to the Annotated Code of Maryland, § 3-901(b) of the Education Article, is composed of eight total members. Five are elected members who are *District members*, each of whom resides in a different board of education district within the county and two elected members who are *At Large Members* who may reside anywhere in the county, collectively these are the *publicly elected members*; and one student member of the board (SMOB), who is a junior or senior year MCPS high school student (hereinafter referred to as Board Member or, collectively, Board Members). Publicly elected Board Members serve four-year staggered terms; three (Board Members from Board Districts 2 and 4, and one at-large Board Member) are elected in presidential election years, and four (Board Members from Board Districts 1, 3, and 5, and the other at

¹ [Montgomery County Public Schools](#)

large Board Member) in gubernatorial election years.² Each publicly elected Member, whether from a district or at-large, is elected county-wide. The SMOB serves a one-year term and is elected by middle school and high school students of MCPS.

Montgomery County Board of Education Study on Roles and Responsibilities

On June 11, 2024, Board Member Shebra Evans introduced a resolution directing Board Office staff to conduct a comprehensive study of Board Members' current and projected scope of responsibilities. The resolution acknowledged the changes MCPS has experienced in the past decade, including changing demographics, increasing numbers of special education students and students eligible for free-and-reduced-price-meal service, and the provision of social-emotional and therapeutic services in schools in addition to the traditional academic program. Further, the MCPS operating budget has increased significantly in the past ten years (FY15 budget - \$2.276M; FY25 budget - \$3.322B). These substantial changes necessitated a review of the Board's role regarding oversight of an evolving system. On June 25, 2024, the Board adopted the resolution, which required Board staff to present the results of the study at the Board's July 18, 2024, business meeting, with a written report to follow.

In order to complete the task at hand, Board staff reviewed each Board Member's calendar from the 2023-2024 school year (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024); reviewed quantifiable data from that same timeframe (i.e. number of appeals decided by the Board in their quasi-judicial role; number of administrative appointments approved;

² See Md. Code Ann., Education, § 3-901(f)

number of meetings, public hearings, and work sessions held by the Board, etc.); asked Board Members to keep track of time spent on Board-related work; and interviewed Board Members to learn more about the amount of time spent on the work they do. This information was combined to develop a general view of the role of a Member of the Board of Education, as well as the amount of time devoted to the position.

Much of the information provided by Board Members regarding their duties was anecdotal, but informative. The Board's official email address receives thousands of emails each school year, and Board Members also have an individual email address where they receive communications. Board Members reported that they often spend an hour or two each day reading and responding to emails. In addition, last school year Board Members' calendars contained between 352 and 560 appointments (including Board meetings, meetings with community members, community events, etc.), with an average of 455 calendar items. This only represents the number of events/invites that are managed through their Outlook calendar, which is maintained by Board Office staff, and does not include any meetings that were arranged by the Board Member individually and maintained on a personal calendar. Last year's Student Board Member, who had to balance his studies and Board duties, had 673 calendar invites and appointments during his term from July 1, 2023 through June 03, 2024.

When asked to quantify the amount of time spent on Board-related activities, Board Members gave varying responses, but on average, reported that they spend approximately 40 hours/week on Board duties, with it not being uncommon for Board Members to spend in excess of 60 hours/week on Board work. Board Members also noted that it is common to receive phone calls and answer emails in the early morning or evening hours, as well as on weekends, and many community functions take place in the evening or on weekends. In addition to after-hours work, many Board meetings occur during the school day, and of

course school visits happen in the morning and early afternoon. To be effective in their role, Board Members must be available day and night, on weekdays and weekends. It is a demanding role that requires a significant time commitment.

Board Business Meetings, Committee Meetings, Work Sessions and Hearings

During the 2023-2024 school year, the Board held 20 business meetings, 39 closed session meetings, 20 committee meetings, eight work sessions, and seven hearings. This number is a fair representation of the Board of Education's regular meetings during the course of the year. In addition to these standard meetings, the Board also holds an annual meeting with each of MCPS's union partners (MCAAP, MCEA, and SEIU), as well as the MCCPTA, local PTA chapters (by region), and student leaders. These meetings represent approximately an additional ten annual meetings. All told, Board Members attend approximately 100 regular/recurring meetings every year.

Business Meetings

The Board typically holds 18 business meetings every year. Business meetings begin with the Board entering closed session to discuss specific, legally permitted items outside of public view. After the conclusion of the closed session, the Board convenes in open session, which is a public meeting that is open to, and can be viewed by, the general public. The Board holds one, all day, meeting per month during the months of July and August (due to the Board's summer hiatus); November, December, and January (due to winter holidays); and either March or April (depending on when spring break occurs). The remaining months, the Board holds two meetings, typically two weeks apart. The all-day meetings generally convene at 9:00 AM and often adjourn after 8:00 PM. For the months where there are two meetings, one is scheduled to begin at 9:00 AM and will adjourn around approximately 5:00 PM and the other meeting typically begins around 11:00 AM and often

ends after 8:00 PM. So, while some meetings are classified as “all day” meetings and the others are generally accepted as being “half-day” meetings, all business meetings (including the closed session portion) typically run for at least eight hours.

While the time commitment associated with simply attending the business meetings is significant, it represents only a portion of the total time Board Members spend on meetings and associated tasks. In order to meaningfully participate in meetings, Board Members must spend time reviewing materials. Board Members typically receive meeting materials one week in advance of the meeting, giving them time to review and prepare for the discussion that will occur after the presentation. The amount of time spent preparing for meetings varies based upon the number and complexity of items being discussed, but all Board Members spend at least a few hours preparing for meetings so that they can ask relevant questions that help inform their decision-making and actions as the body that provides oversight for the school system.

Closed Sessions

Last school year, the Board held 39 closed session meetings. These meetings always occur prior to a business meeting, and others are scheduled when there is a need. Generally, public bodies must meet in open session, viewable by the general public. However, there are certain, specified topics and items that a public body can discuss behind closed doors when a public discussion is disfavored or can be harmful in

some way. The full list of items that can be discussed in closed session can be found in the General Provisions article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. As it relates to the Board of Education, the permissible closed session topics the Board most often discuss include appeals (a quasi-judicial function of the Board that is outside the purview of the Open Meetings Act), personnel matters, negotiation strategy and updates, receipt of legal advice or updates on possible or current litigation matters, and other administrative functions of the board (also outside the purview of the Open Meetings Act). All of these items are discussed in closed session for confidentiality purposes.

The Board's regularly-scheduled closed sessions typically last anywhere from two to four hours. To prepare for these meetings, Board Members must review appeal files, proposed administrative appointments, and information regarding negotiations or budget matters, among other items. While it is difficult to quantify all of the work the Board does in closed session, one datapoint that is illustrative is the number of appeals the Board adjudicated last school year. In total, the Board considered and decided 128 appeals (this year the Board is on track to exceed this number). These appeals concern a number of topics including student transfers, residency concerns, employment matters, student and employee discipline, and grade inquiries, among others. While the cases vary in complexity, they all require time and attention from Board Members, who must review the record material in advance of the meeting so they are ready to discuss and decide the appeals during closed session.

Another datapoint that provides context for the Board's closed session work is that the Board approved 66 administrative appointments last school year. Each of the proposed candidates are brought forward to the Board in closed session so that the Board Members can review the candidate's qualifications and make any inquiries they

may have. Prior to the meeting, the Board reviews the proposed candidate's resume and background information, and receives details about the candidate's interview process. The Board also spent considerable time last school year amending and improving the process whereby recommended candidates are presented for Board review and approval.

Committee Meetings

In addition to business meetings, all Board Members, with the exception of the Board President, attend committee meetings for the committees to which the Member is assigned. The Board of Education has five standing committees: Communication and Stakeholder Engagement, Fiscal Management, Policy Management, Committee on Special Populations, and Strategic Planning. Each committee has three adult Members and the Student Member can choose the committee(s) on which they would like to serve.

Committees generally meet four times per year and the meetings are usually scheduled for two- to three-hour blocks. Committee meetings provide an opportunity for the Committee to either take a deeper dive into a topic that will be presented in a more general manner to the entire Board, or, narrow the focus of the ultimate Board presentation on the topic. Some committees also facilitate compliance with annual reporting requirements for the Board.

The amount of preparation time required by Board Members in advance of a committee meeting depends on the committee assignment. The Policy Management Committee, for example, is one of the more document-heavy committees as it is charged with reviewing and updating Board of Education policies, a process that involves receiving input from administration regarding the changes that are necessary or being proposed, facilitating the policy update in conformity with those recommended changes,

receiving public feedback on proposed changes, and, where appropriate, incorporating that feedback into the final updated draft that is presented to the full Board for review and approval. While other committees may not require as much document review time, all committees require Board Members to review materials to be prepared to engage in important discussions during committee meetings.

Each committee also has a chairperson. The committee chair is responsible for setting the committee's agenda for the school year, determining what presentations will be given during each meeting, ensuring that the materials provided by the administration adequately cover the topic being discussed, and any post-meeting follow-up that is required. Committee chairs receive assistance from Board Office staff in completing these tasks, but these responsibilities still require an additional time commitment on the part of the Board Member who is the chair of a board committee.

Public Hearings and Work Sessions

Each year the Board of Education schedules eight work sessions and seven public hearings to receive input, both from the administration and the public, on the operating budget and the capital improvement plan (CIP). Work sessions and hearings can be added or canceled as the need dictates. Work sessions and hearings are generally scheduled for four hours each, but sometimes run longer.

Hearings provide an opportunity for Board Members to receive public feedback on the proposed operating budget and CIP. Therefore, much of the Board's work around hearings comes *after* the hearing when the public's input is considered and used to adjust or amend the proposed plan. While there isn't much Board Member preparation needed for hearings, the same is not true for work sessions. Work sessions are used to take a closer look at the proposed operating budget and CIP. As a result, while the administration is responsible for the presentation, Board Members must spend considerable time prior to

each work session reviewing the proposed budget and information that will be presented at the work session in order to engage in meaningful discussions about these proposals. The Board's work around the preparation and adoption of the operating budget and the CIP require a considerable time commitment, whether it be attending public meetings, work sessions, and hearings; advocacy efforts; or time spent reviewing the budget documents and analysis provided by Board staff and members of the administration.

Stakeholder Engagement

Another important part of the Board's role is stakeholder engagement. While the Board's oversight role is undeniably important, stakeholder engagement is the avenue through which Board Members directly impact individuals in the community they serve. Throughout the school year, Board Members conduct school visits to observe students and teachers in classrooms, meet with students, teaching staff, crucial operations staff members as well as administration. Specifically, one Board Member engaged in 30 school visits during the 2023-2024 school year where she spent a full day with a student at various schools shadowing a student until the school day concluded. Other Board Members engage differently during school visits by meeting with multiple students and staff members. These school visits occur at the elementary, middle and high school level allowing Board Members to engage directly and indirectly with students and school based staff. At any given time throughout the year (including summers), Board Members are engaged with parents and students to address their individual concerns - these touch points can occur via email, telephone or in-person meetings throughout the community. Board Members are also engaging administration

and central office-based staff via email exchanges, phone calls, and meetings. The nature of these interactions (school visits, meeting with parents and students, meetings with staff and administration) range from following up regarding various issues or concerns; receiving information regarding a parent or student's concerns and then researching said concern(s) and following up to ensure that a solution has been reached.

Advocacy Efforts

A large component of the Board's role is to advocate on behalf of the school system. These efforts largely center around the MCPS budget and legislative proposals. The Board President has monthly meetings with the County Council Education and Culture Committee Chair to discuss issues affecting the system and thus affecting the community at large. Recently, the Board President has also added monthly meetings with the County Executive and the County Council President to continue to foster the relationship between these entities, which all share a common goal of ensuring that Montgomery County has a top-tier public education system. Although only the Board President has standing monthly meetings, all Board Members are actively engaged in regular meetings with elected county officials in order to advocate on behalf of the system. Board Members also make an effort to attend County Council meetings and have a presence at meetings held by the County Council's Education and Culture Committee, particularly the meetings where MCPS's proposed budget may be discussed and input may be required.

Board Members' advocacy efforts with local elected officials are not limited to the adoption of MCPS's proposed budget. Every year, the Board adopts a legislative platform and takes positions on a number of proposed bills that would impact MCPS - either positively or negatively - if passed. Some of these bills are covered by the Board's

platform, in which case the Board's position (support, oppose, etc.) is assumed. For bills that fall outside of the platform, the board is asked to adopt a position on the bill after receiving information regarding the possible impact, cost of implementation, etc. This occurs at a business meeting. Outside of the adoption of the Board's position on proposed legislation, Board Members may engage in advocacy around the bills by either discussing the impact with individual members of the delegation or offering public testimony at a bill hearing. The legislative session in Maryland is only 90 days long, but takes a considerable amount of work on the part of Board Members, both publicly and behind-the-scenes, to ensure that MCPS's interests are being represented in Annapolis.

Additionally, individual Board Members serve as both members and officers of other boards. One example of this is the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) where Board Member Shebra Evans is a member and currently serves as an officer (Treasurer). Among other things, MABE membership and participation affords MCPS Board Members an opportunity to create and encourage collaborative relationships with other school boards to continue facilitating student achievement. In addition, participation, whether as a member or in a leadership role, in other community organizations allow Board Members to remain present in the community and afford an opportunity for the school system's interests to remain front-and-center in the community and with our community partners.

Community Presence

Finally, Board Members are very active in the community. It is through these efforts that the Board connects with the community it serves and highlights both the successes of the school system, and the areas where MCPS continues to need support from community partners. In addition to being members of various community organizations such as Big Learning, Inc., all Board Members regularly participate at various Montgomery County

events such as National Night Out with some Board Members attending upwards of 100 community events during the course of the year. Community presence is not simply showing up, it often entails having informal conversations with community members that may result in a Board Member following up with administration to help get an issue resolved and scheduling follow-up calls/meetings with community members that approach them during community events/meetings.

Final Thoughts

Every Board Member shared that there were additional items they wanted to be able to address or work on in their capacity as a Board Member but simply do not have time to complete. Those items mainly included being more involved in advocacy at the state level, follow-up with administrative staff regarding ongoing issues and inquiries, and more time in the community. With MCPS being the largest school district in Maryland, Board Members would like to dedicate more time to ensuring education related legislation positively impacts MCPS students, MCPS, and other school districts as a whole. Board Members also recognize that they provide oversight for the school system. As a result, they would like to be able to spend additional time on progress monitoring and determining how far along we are in achieving stated goals. Finally, Board members want to spend even more time out in the community through more informal scheduled meetings for the sole purpose of meeting community members in their neighborhoods to get feedback on newly proposed ideas and to be able to hear directly from parents and students on what they believe is working well and getting their suggestions on items within MCPS that may need improvement. Board Members also want to spend more time with teachers to hear from them as individual school community members on what they think will help improve their experience at MCPS as well as various ideas teachers may have that can improve the overall student experience at MCPS and involve them in implementing solutions. Board Members

expressed concern about the Board not having enough of a voice or presence in the community so that its position on various issues is clearly stated and known.

Given the time and effort required of Board Members, coupled with the monetary stipend, those who can actually run for election as a Board Member are narrowly limited which in term can limit how accurately the Board of Education reflects the diversity of the school district it serves.