



BOARD OF EDUCATION COMPENSATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes – Meeting Six
November 4, 2019
Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street – 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland

Attendance

Members Present:

Jaye Espy, Chair
Ting Chau
Jennifer Sawin
Mark Spradley, Vice Chair
Jason Washington

Members Absent

None

Guests Present

Matt Post, Past Student Member, Board of
Education – By Telephone

Staff Present:

Dale Tibbitts, Spec. Asst. to the County
Executive
Beth Gochrach, Office of the County Executive

1. Call to Order

Chair Espy called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

2. Roll Call

All five commissioners were present.

3. Adoption of Minutes

The October 28 minutes were approved with amendments.

All previous minutes were approved with amendments were approved.

4. Board of Education Member Interviews

a. Matt Post, Past Student Member, Board of Education – By Telephone

Chair Espy thanked Mr. Post for attending and described the task of the Commission to him.

Mr. Post was the first student member on the Board from Sherwood High School, and the 40th MCPS student member overall. He was the first student member to have full voting rights.

It was one of the most challenging and fulfilling jobs he's ever had. He was responsible for communicating with entire MCPS student body. No other adult board member has to do that.

It was a unique and interesting role. It was the normal role of the Board plus with other weekly meetings, including two to three meetings in the central office, two to three school visits, and board committee meetings. It took many hours. He also met with staff regarding specific concerns, met with the superintendent with other Board members, and had briefings with school system staff members. His time averaged about 35 hours per week including driving and meetings.

Commissioners asked Mr. Post questions.

Chair Espy asked what he thought compensation should be for the student member.

- A. It's essentially a fulltime job. The lack of compensation is a deterrent to serve on the Board. Right now, a member must be either independently wealthy, retired or have a spouse. With students it's even more exaggerated. The student doesn't get money that's usable at the time and is significantly lower than the other members. At one time \$5,000 was enough. He believes the compensation should equal other Board members' compensation through salary or scholarship. He knew a student who wanted to run and speak to the issues, but needed ongoing income so the lack of compensation made it impossible.

Vice Chair Spradley, asked if the compensation was not a scholarship but the same income as the other Board members, if that would that be interesting.

- A. Yes. Because it makes sense that the student member should be paid the same. The student does the exact same work. In terms of attracting more student members and in terms of fairness the compensation should be the same. The income could be a salary, stipend or scholarship.

Cm Sawin noted that the student Matt mentioned who was unable to run for SMOB because his family needed him to contribute to income had received a full scholarship provided by a college, and asked how much of a factor would it be if students couldn't use the Board's scholarship.

- A. Mr. Post almost got a full scholarship, so the college reimbursed him in other ways, such as paying for a laptop, but he noted that his university was generously accommodating and not all universities would do the same.

Vice Chair Spradley asked what year Mr. Post was in, and what happened after the first year.

- A. Sophomore. The college increased his aid and still covered all. But Mr. Post noted that this was by far the exception. Students at other colleges are strapped with debt.

Chair Espy asked if he calculated his hours to be 35 hours per week, then what should the compensation be for board members?

- A. He doesn't pay mortgage and feed kids, so hard for him to calculate, but he thinks \$50,000 per year. He would have contributed at home if he had gotten that compensation. He would have started saving for the future. In terms of work done, \$50,000 is fair.

Chair Espy asked if he would have been willing to offset some of the compensation for staff.

- A. For him, staffing was not an issue. He felt like there was staff support. Work for a member is different. Staff can't read materials and make recommendations or talk to community members. The core function of the board is not replaceable by staff. It is like the work of an elected official.

Cm Sawin asked about having staff to do research.

- A. He did not feel comfortable using staff. If he wanted information, he would talk with the Board's chief of staff or other contacts directly. In terms of broad research, the staff would react quickly. The real work is sifting through materials such as appeals. He thinks it's irresponsible to have staff do that and that the Board member has the final level of accountability.

Vice Chair Spradley asked if student members have ever returned to serve on the Board.

A. One student member ran for the Board and lost. But another is a principal of Westland Middle School and another is a high school teacher and football coach. They have returned to Montgomery County.

Chair Espy asked if it was possible to manage the workload and responsibilities in a 20-hour workweek.

A. To do so would be to abdicate responsibility to the community. If Board members cut down and narrowed the scope, it would be to the public's detriment. Board members need to be engaged to fill the needs of the community, get feedback and make decisions.

Cm. Chau asked if the number of Board seats should be expanded based on the growing population in the County, by region or some other way.

A. Yes, he thought that was a good idea. But even regional board members should represent the whole County.

Cm Sawin asked how it was dealing with the range of experiences on the Board, and how to serve the needs of all students with such a diverse student population.

A. It was a challenge. He kept himself grounded. He visited multiple schools per week. He met with all groups--covering diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, politics, academic interests. He talked about his role, but also listened. He went to several ESOL classes, with a translator, to hear feedback and concerns. He met people where they work. But it takes time. It's a lengthy endeavor. He had to drive all around.

Chair Espy asked if he visited every single high school and if he drove.

A. Yes. The student Board members take the job extremely seriously. He said that he felt there is extra scrutiny on the SMOB and that the SMOB is perceived as legitimate because they do take the job so seriously.

Chair Espy asked how he managed his time as student and a board member.

A. It was really hard. He stopped running cross country. He had two periods in the middle of the day when he did his Board reading.

He had a car and was reimbursed for mileage, but it was a huge time drain to write down where he'd been to calculate the expenses. With mileage and wear and tear on the car, he didn't come out financially better.

Cm Sawin asked, from a student's perspective, what qualifications make good student board members.

A. He's reflected a lot about that. A member must be willing to put in the work, to listen attentively to all meetings and briefings and to not take things personally ever. Separate political and ideological policy completely. Board members should be on good terms with all their colleagues.

Cm Sawin asked what qualifications make good adult Board members.

A. Historically the most effective members work hard, do their homework and maintain good relationships. Students are under more scrutiny. They only have a year. They have to hit the ground running, and do as much as they can until they leave.

Chair Espy thanked Mr. Post for his comments and said that the Commission really enjoyed hearing his perspective, and thanked him for being a leader and sacrificing so much for Montgomery County, and that his insights had been enormously valuable.

5. New Business

Survey. The survey needs to be incorporated into the report along with other items on the project tracker. The commissioners need to decide what will be included. They will begin drafting the report at the next meeting. Going through the project tracker it was determined that many items had been completed, such as citations, interviews and compensation comparisons. All will have to be synthesized into the report. They might interview one unsuccessful candidate if there is time before December 2.

There was a discussion about sending the personalized survey to other board members to include: past, current, served then ran and lost, or just ran and lost. There was discussion about the deadline, that it should be two weeks from dissemination, the same as the public survey deadline. There was discussion of the survey being pushed out Tuesday, Nov. 5, with a deadline of Nov. 19.

There was discussion of two changes to the survey to include under education level high school – some college and ranges of hours. Staff Dale Tibbitts said the survey will publicly visible on the County's website tomorrow through various media. There was discussion about whether to give a closing date and if surveys were subject to sunshine laws. It was decided that posting a deadline or stating that the survey was available until a given date was fair and transparent. The survey must comply with the County's ADA requirements and online translation services. MCPS can translate into any language needed through a drop down menu. There was discussion of how data is easy to get from Survey Monkey. Staff Dale Tibbitts said that notice will be sent about the survey through the County's Paperless Airplane and press releases.

Draft Report and Project Tracker. Commissioners reviewed the draft report. Vice Chair Spradley added the table of contents and other items. There was a discussion of when the report will be done, of meeting dates and a timeline. If the Commission won't meet on November 25, then there could possibly be a conference call. Other than that, there are three more meetings scheduled.

There was discussion of the legal parameters of student compensation. The current law states that the student can receive a scholarship and travel expenses. There should be language in the report to change the language in the bill to make the student compensation options more flexible, not to strike the scholarship, but to add a stipend if it's legal. It's possible a student's salary could be taxed and burden the family. Students should be able to choose a scholarship, salary or stipend. Concern was expressed about choices getting lost in the system, that the scholarship could reduce a college scholarship, and that there would be a deficit in the second year of college. To alleviate that concern it was suggested the scholarship be paid out over four or five years in \$5,000 increments. Also, if a student doesn't go to college, they could be given the choice of the salary or stipend.

There was a discussion of ways to address taxes through a stipend, which arguably is not taxable. Or the student could file as self-employed and deduct the tax. If not, it could be catastrophic for a family with \$25,000 extra income. A stipend could be \$1,000 or \$2,000 per month. The Commission could compare to reimbursements, which have a cap. There should be a determination of how much travel costs are per month. The student doesn't participate in hearings but does visit schools. The ideal would be to make compensation equal to other board members but tax friendly. There was discussion about how the \$5,000 scholarship is used now and how it works with a college savings plan.

There was discussion of Board member salaries in other jurisdictions. Cm. Washington will synthesize and put in report footnotes. There was discussion of how to formulate Board member salary increases and

to identify components to justify the increases. Suggestions included basing the increase on state delegates' salaries of \$50,000 and increasing by a certain percentage. This could be justified because the Board members are responsible for 55% of the County's budget and must be constantly out in the community at events and schools. The salary increases could also be subject to the percentage of student college/career readiness or other County scorecards. But the data would be trailing, and the next group of Board members would get the increase.

There was discussion about the timing and effects of the salary change because constitutionally salaries can't change when an officer is in office. But the concern is about attracting candidates to run in the future. There was a question about when the next Board elections occur. People would be more interested in the opportunity if the salary was even \$45,000. Also, Fairfax County Board salaries should be considered. Several formulas and percentages were discussed, such as using 75% or 90% of \$50,000 with an additional 20% for the president. The formula should be standardized so that the Commission can review and increase in the future. It was suggested the Commission ask Del. Eric Luedtke to assess the comfort level of the state assembly. It was noted that Board members only get two weeks off per year, but delegates would say the same thing. There would have to be a strong argument that this is a fulltime job. Also, Board members don't have staff or pensions. There should also be consideration given to the Board president, who has extra duties, not just a title.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Gochrach