



BOARD OF EDUCATION COMPENSATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes – Meeting Four
October 21, 2019
Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street – 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland

Attendance

Members Present:

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

Guests Present

Patricia O’Neill, Vice President Board of
Education
Rebecca Smondrowski, District 2, Board of
Education

Staff Present:

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

1. Call to Order

Chair Espy called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

2. Roll Call

All members were present.

3. Adoption of Minutes

The October 7 minutes were approved with amended format. The October 14, 2019 minutes were approved with survey questions to be attached.

4. Board of Education Member Interviews

Dale Tibbitts discussed the sample notebook provided by the Board of Education typical of what Board members deal with each week, which could include public and quasi-judicial meetings. The notebook was from one Board meeting in July.

a. Patricia O’Neill, Board of Education Vice President

Chair Espy thanked Ms. O’Neill for attending and also expressed appreciation for Lana Haddad, Board of Education Administrative Services Manager, for arranging. Chair Espy described the task of the Commission to Ms. O’Neill.

Ms. O’Neill discussed her background. She has been a Board member for 21 years. She was active in the PTA for 12 years, then the PTA Whitman cluster president. She was the cluster coordinator involved in the boundary change. After the boundary change, Ana Sol Gutierrez was leaving the seat in District 3 and PTA friends talked her into running. Ms. O’Neill filled her seat.

She was first elected in 1998. When she started her youngest was in daughter 3rd grade and oldest daughter was in 12th grade. She thought if the Board met one day and one evening a month she could handle it.

Ms. O'Neill found out how much was involved in being on the Board. One issue that few people are aware of is the quasi-judicial role of the Board, sitting in closed session hearing appeals on things from student discipline to people who want to go to different schools, to more serious allegations about employees. They are the Board of Appeals, a really important responsibility. They always hold one meeting in August, generally, Wednesday or Thursday before school starts. People want to know if their kids got into kindergarten, a magnet school or some other special circumstance. So, there is not long summer break for board members.

A significant time commitment outside of board meeting that many people do not know about is that there must be a Board member at every commencement because the Board of Education confers diplomas. There are 25 high schools and some specialty schools so each board member has five or six graduations to attend, which makes for a busy June. Ms. O'Neill said, for example, Walter Johnson's graduates about 700 students and that takes a chunk of the day. But, she said, it's very rewarding. It's what you want for every child.

Ms. O'Neill said that workload is somewhat divided because the Board has a mature committee structure. An important committee is the Policy committee because the Board cannot efficiently write as a whole. They rely on staff and experts in the system. The capital improvement budget cycle starts in November. That includes six evenings of hearings and two work sessions as well as the actual presentation of the capital budget by the Superintendent. When Council is on recess in July, the Board is meeting. They must have that final evening because of appeals and appointments. Only the Board can appoint principals and senior level staff. The Board needs them in place before the start of the next school year.

Ms. O'Neill described additional responsibilities. Over 20 years she has served on several state level panels. She was president of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education. She worked her way up. The State Superintendent appointed her to a panel for high school assessments. She reviewed what other states do regarding graduation requirements. She also served on the Maryland blue ribbon task on teen pregnancy. She was appointed by the state legislature to serve on a statewide school task force in addition to other Board responsibilities.

She doesn't and didn't have a full-time job. Over the course of 20 years she could devote full time to the Board. She did have a young child but had friends, a mother and mother-in-law who allowed her to go to meetings including trips to Annapolis for work. She used to get paper copies of all documents, now she is essentially paperless using the school system's on-line documents management system.

The Superintendent's staff briefs Board members. When she started, a couple of Board members did have full time jobs, so the Board adjusted its scheduled committee meetings to the evenings and retreats on weekends to accommodate. While internally they can adjust, there is also the expectation from the community to attend community events. In 20 years that has grown exponentially. Ms. O'Neill attempts to meet with community members when they ask.

Regarding staff, she feels that she has all MCPS behind her. This summer there was an issue about exchange students. Maria Navarro, Chief Academic Officer, came with her to provide

technical support. When she met with the Dyslexic Parents Association the associate superintendent for special education and his director also attended.

The Board of Education office responds to all email that goes to the BOE inbox email. Members don't reply individually. Board members have their own email to which they reply. When things go to her she directly, she replies on her own. Sometimes if a complex answer is required, staff will draft a response.

Questions were asked of Ms. O'Neill:

Vice Chair Spradley asked how many hours it takes to hire a new superintendent.

A. The Board's number one role is to hire the superintendent. The Board hires a search firm. It takes a fair number of hours just to select the firm. Six firms submitted requests for proposals. They then had a one hour interview with each firm over two days. Then comes the actual hiring of the superintendent. In the past these interviews have happened at the National School Board Association meeting because most superintendents attend. They ultimately narrow it to three finalists. A community panel then interviewed the three finalists. It was a huge amount of work. She wasn't sure if she could quantify. It would be two days hiring the search firm, then meeting and planning what are priorities. Then two full days of interviews, and then a full day of interviewing finalists. Maryland has a very tight timeline. Must hire by July 1.

CM Washington asked what characteristics and expertise are needed to be a Board member.

A. Ms. O'Neill said she always found PTA experience very valuable. The first four years went by quickly. The Board rotated through all the clusters. They were on a three-year cycle according to each cluster but now have 25 high schools and special programs. Between the hearings and other responsibilities, they now are every four years. She visits schools. Last year the Montgomery County Education Association asked Board members to go to three schools and meet with teachers.

She said she is always learning. The system is always evolving. The Board has five seats that are districts and two at large. She represents Bethesda/Chevy Chase/Potomac, but all Board members are elected by all voters as if they are at large. She makes decisions that impact children that affect all parts of the County. Learning about education is important. MSBA runs programs and conferences and two day retreats and training. The MABE does a two day retreat and training for new Board members. Also, there is the quasi-judicial responsibility. Learning that process and the legal ramifications is very important.

CM Chau asked if there any responsibility to the Montgomery County Education Association.

A. Right now, the Board is in labor contract negotiations. There are three organizations bargaining with the Board now. This summer there were two days of training for Board members to learn about contracts. They've had a session with the superintendent and his bargaining team. They use an interspace approach, not adversarial for bargaining. They are collaborative. In their contract there's a preamble about collaboration.

In terms of compensation, it was \$12,500 when she came on Board. They are not eligible for health insurance. Then it was raised to \$18,500. That's also when the \$5000 student

scholarship came to be. Usually students can't work if on the Board because they're too busy. They are usually seniors. Then there was legislation that raised the salary to \$25,000, \$29,000 for Board President. Ms. O'Neill noted that she's been an officer 10 times.

In Maryland, most appointed Boards are transitioning to elected Boards. They have seven adults and a student. State code dictates size of the Board.

Cm Sawin asked if Ms. O'Neill could quantify how much time it takes to go through the reading material, and how much 20 years of experience cuts down on that time.

A. Experience does cut down on the time, especially with appeals. She looks at the findings of fact first. Generally, 20 appeals equals 3-4 hours of reading. Certain appeals are much easier. Sometimes there are videos for viewing such things as a fight in a school. On Monday evening there were two briefings, which equaled two hours of reading.

Chair Espy asked if the student member participated in every aspect.

A. Absolutely. Before they didn't have a vote on the capital or operating budgets. About three years ago that changed. Now they vote on everything except negative personnel matters. They are now voting on things like boundary change. With that responsibility, the student members have risen to the task and spend the required time preparing for meetings because the student vote really does count.

Vice Chair Spradley asked what she would recommend as a student stipend.

A. Students put in a lot of time. They now come to hearings for the budget and vote. The stipend should be the same as for adults. It may be hard to swallow, but it should be increased. Prince Georges County has a similar arrangement for students. Baltimore provides daily expenses.

She thinks Board members should be paid like legislators. They have an increased amount of time and expectations.

Cm Sawin asked if there is anyone whom Ms. O'Neill believes should be on the Board?

A. Parents and principals. Parents are grounded in reality and decisions. They are connected with other parents with children in school.

Cm Spradley asked if there was a former Board member to talk to.

A. Shirley Brandman.

Chair Espy mentioned that she will get a survey to complete, and asked that she return it as soon as possible.

b. Rebecca Smondrowski, Board member District 2

Chair Espy introduced Ms. Smondrowski and thanked her for coming. Dale Tibbitts mentioned the sample Board of Education notebook.

Ms. Smondrowski said that there is a weekly transmittal. She spends additional time at home reading and preparing. She said it would be nice to be independently wealthy or have someone else to share responsibilities. The Board is a part-time job, with full-time hours and ¼ time pay.

Questions were asked of Ms. Smondrowski:

CM Spradley asked what she recommend the pay be.

A. Board members are very conscientious and frugal with taxpayer dollars. Looking at the Council, the Board has similar obligations. It's important to go to people where they are. They have to be out in the community. Looking at Broward County, Florida, they get paid \$78,000 per year, with one staff each. She thinks that's fair. Or roughly \$90,000-\$100,000 without staff. Montgomery County Board members are responsible for all community outreach, social media and budget analysis. They are now getting help with briefings. The Board just hired a financial advisor.

Chair Espy asked, if members could do the job more efficiently or leaner with less hours as a part time job with current salary.

A. Yes, but they wouldn't be good at it. For example, the next day they are meeting with the superintendent, then a CIP briefing, then items study, then policy management Committee. The rest of the week they meet with various organizations, and visit a charter school. There are a lot of 12 hour days, and that doesn't include going home and reading.

Vice Chair Spradley asked what the student member should be paid.

A. That's a hard question. If it's a scholarship, then \$10,000. If it's salary only and because they are now full voting members, at least \$10,000. They work hard and miss a lot of their senior year.

Cm Washington asked if there were any types of characteristics or qualification a Board member should have.

A. It helps having students in the system at some point because you see what is going on the kid's school. But it's not a requirement. It's challenging if you have another job because there are so many daytime obligations. They oversee a large budget and 165,000 students. If you can't make it to community events, it reflects poorly on the position.

CM Chau asked if the workload was similar to the Council.

A. Yes similar. As much if not more. And there is no recess. They are supposed to have most of August off, but students are back in school. They essentially only get two weeks off. They are invited to a lot of things. She thinks it reflects poorly if Board members don't attend.

Cm Chau asked if job responsibilities and pay are higher, what she thought about term limits?

A. She is mixed on term limits. She thinks elections dictate term limits, but also nice to get a fresh perspective. She doesn't plan on serving more than three terms. But it's hard to walk away on an unfinished project.

Cm Washington asked why she decided to run for the Board.

A. She never had a good educational experience. She found school unwelcoming and challenging. Then her son also had challenges, so she got him in a program. Then she got involved with the school. Then she got involved in advocacy in the County and with the state legislature She also worked for Del. Roger Manno. She believes students should feel invested and have people invested in them. She considered it long and hard but gave up her higher paying job. She doesn't have the educational level as others and not a teacher but cares about kids. She takes it very seriously. She is on several committees.

Chair Espy asked if everyone is on multiple committees.

A. Board members serve on at least two committees.

Cm Ting asked how she could allot time spent on the Board when considering salaries.

A. 50% time in meetings with stakeholders, 30% time spent reading, 20% on constituent services. There are some 60-hour weeks. She is often out every night for weeks. People want Board members to be representatives and to attend community events.

You can't make a living on \$25,000. You must be flexible.

CM Chau asked if single parents were excluded. A. Yes.

Vice Chair Spradley asked if there was a former Board member to talk to.

A. Jill Ortman-Fouse.

Chair Espy mentioned that she will get a survey to complete, and asked that she return it as soon as possible.

5. New business – There was discussion of determining a point person to write the draft report, and updating the report headers and the tracker headers, and having a mandate in the report. There was also discussion of interviewing a student member (not on a Monday), interviewing current members by conference call on October 29, and interviewing past Board members. It was decided to defer further discussion of new business to the October 28 meeting.

- a. Discuss progress contained in project tracker
- b. Discuss pending dates and details not provided in the project tracker
- c. Determine point person/people to begin writing draft report
 - i. Mandate
 - ii. Demographics
 - iii. BOE

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Gochrach