

Montgomery County Board of Education Compensation Commission
Interview Questions for the MCPS Board of Education Members

For the Interview Panel:

MCPS Board Member: _____ Brenda Wolff _____ Date: 11/14/24 _____

The interview began at 6:01 PM

MCPS Board of Education Member will have 45 minutes to answer the questions.

1. What prompted you to run for election for a MCPS School Board Member seat?

She was a civil rights attorney for the U.S. Dept. of Education for 34 years. Her focus was always on education. She retired in 2012 and began working in a mentoring program. She was interested in a report on student discipline and how it affected black students in disparate ways. The problem wasn't fixed even after the report was published.

2. What is the role of the MCPS School Board?

There are three major functions: hiring the superintendent, policy, budget. Also oversight, and governance.

They also communicate with constituents. They are continuously evaluating the curriculum, policies, and programs, and determining which things are worth continued investment/

3. What characteristics, education, and experience are required to be a board member?

- Passion for education and educating all students. Striving for excellence.
- Not everyone needs to be a teacher. There's an inherent conflict because teachers must ask the Board to provide what they want.
- But it is good to have a teacher on the Board. They bring "boots on ground" experience.
- Ms. Wolff is a lawyer, which she believes is important to have on the Board.
- Board members need to have time for this kind of work.
- There should be equity on the Board.

4. Describe your role in the review/approval of the annual budget of MCPS.

The Board reaches out to the community, which has a role in the budget. What constituents think is important is considered along with the Board's responsibilities.

The Board goes over the budget line by line. They consider what they'd like the budget to include and then come up with priorities for the superintendent. They also meet with the public to discuss budget priorities.

It's a very lengthy project because it's a capital and operational budget. It involves public hearings, work sessions, 13-14 for every budget cycle.

The Board asks a lot of questions to understand what's in the budget. Is it necessary, does it work, is it effective, should they continue with it? Money needs to go to schools itself, not the Board.

5. How large is the team that directly supports the Board of Education (and are not MCPS employees), and do you believe it is adequate?

There is a team of about 10 people that support the Board. She feels that's adequate. Other board members don't. The only staff she would add is a budget person. They have one and could use two or three. She would like the Board to have budget numbers and not have to get them from MCPS.

The don't need more social media people. They do need more communications staff. They have one person doing communications. It's extremely important to reach out to the community. People want to be heard. Not social media, but to get their message out. They have been looking at California for structure.

6. What is your role in the day-to-day operations of the School Board; How many hours per week do you spend on Board of Education work?

Role: Depends on what day it is. Committee meetings – each Board member is a chair and then on another committee. The Board provides oversight and governance. Members are ambassadors for the Board. They hear constituents concerns and then follow up with MCPS. They facilitate interactions with the school system.

Hours per week: 25 – 40 hours per week. They were there all day today, last night and Monday night. There is a lot of night work because people want to meet the board. They also go PTA meeting and school meetings.

7. Thinking about the work a board member does, how would it relate to other management positions both within the school system and in the marketplace?

Not a lot of relation to other positions directly. They report to the superintendent. They don't have direct oversight. They have influence in choosing principals.

MCPS is like a corporation because they have a Board and a fiduciary responsibility.

The Board does have a lot of interaction with the County Council who fund them. It's mostly through the president directly but they also attend Council sessions.

They interact regularly with the superintendent, sharing community problems and finding solutions. They get daily updates on every school with any kind of issue.

The Board has one employee – the superintendent, though they have 10 staff.

The Board is like the CEO. The Council is not like a CEO, but the Board has sessions like the Council.

8. Describe the school board's role in the safety and well-being of the students, staff and community they serve.

Safety is the highest priority. If students don't feel safe, then MCPS can't deliver education. Their role is educating students, but students must be mentally and physically safe. Their primary function is to educate but the Board needs to protect the students and deliver on promise of safety. They have a strategic plan and policies on wellness (3 components – one is wellbeing). They have 50 social workers and psychologists.

9. If you could use your superpowers to change the MCPS School Board, what would that be and why?

Compensation. Look at the budget and see what's important. How much do you pay people to oversee it?

Do Board members work for compensation? No, but it would expand on who is able to work on the Board. People can't raise a family on what they're paid, so it excludes a lot of people.

The Board should get paid like the County Council, approximately \$120,000.

The school system budget is 50% of the County budget, so Board members should be paid comparably. The same thing with teachers. They're not paid for the professionalism required of them.

Brenda Wolff additional comments/questions:

Q from Ms. Wolff. How do these questions relate to compensation?

A from Commission member. It's getting at the overall big picture of the role of the Board. Fleshing out the bones of what is going on. It helps to actually talk to Board members. The Commission is trying to get fresh perspectives.

Comment from Ms. Wolff: She thinks that questions should ask how many hours are spent on various activities. Even if the salaries increased, they wouldn't apply to sitting members. The increase would apply to new or re-elected Board members.

It's a labor of love. The school system needs to catch up. Students learn differently these days.

Commission members' comments/questions:

Q from Commission member. Who negotiates with the union?

A from Ms. Wolff. The Superintendent not the Board.

Q from Commission member. What changes have you seen?

A from Ms. Wolff. The CREA Program for Latino students. Students go to career technology training. She believes there are a number of students who don't read or perform well, and that their home life keeps them from succeeding.

Chinese, Muslim, Latino centers should wrap their arms around the family, and train the child (who won't graduate) through the career and technical education program. That would make a big difference.

Also, the Board is working with Montgomery College to get students their GED and career training opportunities.

It's a complicated project. All health initiative providers must agree to participate: doctors, Dept. of Health and Human Services, housing providers, have all agreed to help.

The next big thing Ms. Wolff is pushing is to deliver programming all over the County with virtual options. East County doesn't have the same opportunities as Bethesda or Poolesville for example. Classes could meet virtually and kids in every single high school could take them. Students could take classes at night. It would help with attendance and allow students getting credits to graduate. There should be optional hours for schooling. MCPS needs a virtual night school.

(Commissioners mentioned University of Maryland Global Campus as an example and resource, and District of Columbia's night school.)

Discussion After the Interview:

The Board can hire additional staff even if they can't raise their own salaries. But if there are budget analysts for the superintendent's staff, why does the Board need budget analysts? There was discussion of multiple considerations regarding salary.

Adjourned at 6:53 pm