



BOARD OF EDUCATION COMPENSATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes – Meeting Seven
Nov. 5, 2024

Meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Members Present:

Gretchen Blankenship
Kayon Graham
Nichole McDonald
Jaslynn Laurence

Member Absent:

Rachel Watanabe-Tate

Staff Present:

Sonia E. Mora, MPH
Assistant Chief Administrative Officer

Lindsay Bolt, Sr. Executive Administrative
Aide, Office of the County Executive

1. Call to Order

Kayon (Chair) called the meeting to order at 6:19 PM.

2. Interview of Rebecca Smondrowski, MCPS Board of Education Member

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

- 13 years ago I was prompted to run after I found the MCPS system to be challenging for families like mine dealing with and navigating the Special Education services
- I was already doing volunteer work for MCPS and when a former Board member was leaving, they suggested I run
- I looked to make a difference

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

- The Boards main role is oversight of MCPS system, technically the budget, hiring, policies, and holding the Superintendent accountable
- The role is way more than that, it is Constituent and Customer Service, when things go wrong in MCPS, it is on the Board
- On Paper, our Board position is seen as Part Time but to the general public, our Board positions are full time, we work 24/7/365 days a year to be responsive to the public
- Whether it is emails, phone calls, people stopping me while I am out with my family- we are always on
- The State view of this role is short sided

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

- A board member must have experience in the County, be aware of the diversity and complex make up of the County
- A specific education is not necessary to excel in this role, it is about having a full understanding of the County

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

- As a Board member our role and responsibility regarding the review and approval of the Annual Budget of MCPS depends on the Superintendent;
 - If the Superintendent is open and transparent with the Board, we start reviewing and engaging on the Budget a lot sooner in the year, we talk about budget priorities
 - If the Superintendent is less open and just brings us the Budget, where there is no true line items, just staffing and programs, we have a much smaller role in being able to do anything
- The Board has no insight into how the Money is actually spent

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?

- While the Board Staff has expanded I would say over the last 2-3 years, it is not enough for the individual Board members
- Currently I would say there are 7 or so Board Staff members, hired by the Board such as the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Legislative person, a Budget Issues person, and several office support staff
 - These staffers are mostly for the Board Officers, President and Vice President of the Board, the general Board Members do not have their own Staff which is desperately needed
- No one helps me (as a Board Member) with the daily emails, personal constituent responses, following up on my questions; I have from time to time had friends who have helped me in a volunteer role but that is not consistent and not what is truly needed
- I have 2 other jobs in addition to this Board Member role, I own a restaurant and consulting company.
- At a minimum I believe each Board Member should have their own Chief of Staff and a person to do Community Outreach, townhalls, newsletters – I cant do that all on my own, I would have loved to have done these things but I had to balance my time

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?

- I spend anywhere from 30-60 hrs/week on Board related work; from reading materials ahead of the meeting, actual meetings, calls, emails etc.
- My role varies day to day, we have Board meetings nearly daily (they can range from a couple hours for committee meetings to in some cases 10-12 hours for full Board meetings). As an example last night, we had a Public Hearing which ran 6-10pm
- Your role also depends on if you are an officer, some Board members get contacted by constituents and others more heavily in certain areas

- The President and Vice President talk more directly with the Superintendent; there is always something going on

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?

- I would liken the position of a Board Member to that of a Montgomery County Councilmember position, we work equally as hard and do not have the Summer or Winter recesses that the Councilmembers get
 - The time we spend, the oversight of the MCPS system and its complexities are similar to that of a Councilmember; we have a role in HHS, Housing, Transportation matters just like the Councilmembers; MCPS offers all these types of services or collaborates with these departments
- In the general Business area, or Marketplace, I would liken our Board Member role to being that of a Good CEO. MCPS is a major company with many employees (Staff/facility) and customers (students/parents/community members).
 - While the Superintendent could be seen also as a CEO to MCPS, the general public sees Board Members as the ones with the oversight and we take that role very seriously

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

- The expectation from the Public and us as Board Members is to have a role in the Safety and Security, including Mental Health and we take this role very seriously when reviewing the budget, hiring the Superintendent etc.
- The Safety and Well-being of our Students, Staff and Community are a top priority for the Board Members, I would love to get more information about the Daily issues that arise

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

- I would structure the Board Member position to be Full Time, and Compensated at the level of a County Councilmember Salary
 - Per the County Council Website – “Beginning on Dec. 5, 2022, the Council President receives a Salary of \$171,912.46 per year. The other members receive a salary of \$156,284.05.”
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/about/index.html#:~:text=Former%20Councilmembers-.About%20the%20Council,first%20Monday%20in%20December%202026.&text=Beginning%20on%20Dec.,receive%20a%20salary%20of%20\\$156%2C284.05.](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/about/index.html#:~:text=Former%20Councilmembers-.About%20the%20Council,first%20Monday%20in%20December%202026.&text=Beginning%20on%20Dec.,receive%20a%20salary%20of%20$156%2C284.05.)
- I would provide Board Members with a Chief of Staff for each individual Board Member similar to the County Councilmembers
- I would recommend the “School Board Member” names on the ballot for consideration during elections be higher on the ballot itself so folks see it and actually vote. (The

School Board Member question is typically at the very end of the ballot where folks may not end up casting a vote)

Additional Question Asked by BOECC:

You mentioned that you had previously participated in the 2019 report and noted nothing changed from 2019 to now, can you elaborate:

- The only thing that came out of the Report was that the Student Member of the Board now makes more money than I do as a Board Member
- Board Members do not receive a pension or health benefits after they leave office, when I am done my term, I will have nothing – no continuation of health benefits, no pension. Board Members essentially put their lives on hold to provide this service to the Community and are paid at a Part time level for Full time work
 - This compensation does not allow the general public, single parents, to think about applying for this role as you can not live off \$25,000/year if this was your only job. Only folks who are wealthy, retired, or have a partner able to support their family can think about applying
- I hope the State takes action!

The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 PM.

Next meeting is scheduled for Thurs., Nov. 7, 7pm-9pm

- Virtually via Microsoft Teams

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsay Bolt