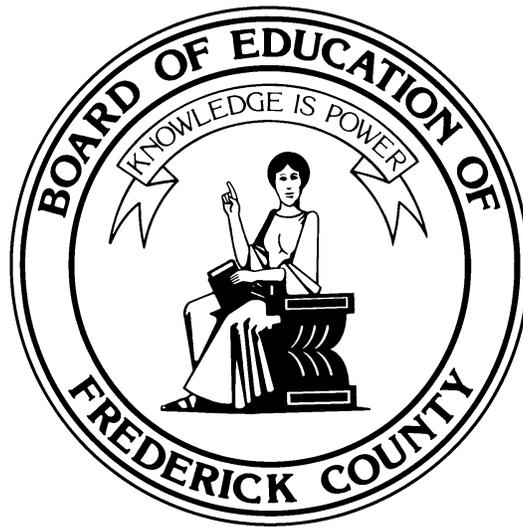


Handbook for Citizen Involvement



Board of Education of
Frederick County

6th Revision September 2012

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Board of Education of Frederick County, Maryland

Handbook for Citizen Involvement

Purpose of this Handbook

As in most states, the Constitution of the State of Maryland requires the legislature to establish a “thorough and efficient System of Free Public Schools,” and provides that the state “shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance.” (Md. Const. art. VIII, § 1 [2001].) In Maryland we have a separate school system in each county and in Baltimore City.

Some activities of the school system are controlled by the state. A Maryland State Board of Education, which consists of 12 members appointed by the Governor, creates policies and regulations that apply to all Maryland school systems. The state also provides part of the funding for the local schools, based on a formula that takes into account local wealth.

Some federal laws also apply to all school systems. For example, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* imposes specific requirements. The federal government also imposes some requirements in return for funding programs.

Other issues that are not mandated by state or federal law are ultimately determined by the local board of education. This handbook is intended to help explain how the Board of Education of Frederick County functions. To simplify things, this book will refer to the Board of Education of Frederick County as the “BOE,” and Frederick County Public Schools as “FCPS.” The goal is to provide a common understanding of some of the basic processes of the BOE. It is a lot easier to accomplish goals, whether you are a BOE member, or a citizen who wants to make a change, if you understand the process.

It is important to note that this handbook is an informal explanation of the BOE functions and processes and is subject to change. As explained later in this handbook, the BOE has created official policies that take precedence over any inadvertent conflicting provisions in this handbook. Of course, if you find such a discrepancy, let us know and we will try to fix it. To see the official BOE policies, go to www.fcps.org, click on Policies and Regulations, then click on Board of Education Policies.

Still have questions? Keep reading! Later on you will see how to contact the BOE if you want to express a concern, commend, or just have a question or comment. In addition to the numbers and addresses listed, you can always find more information at www.fcps.org.

The Role of the Board of Education

Collective, Not Individual, Authority

According to a National School Boards Association publication, many candidates for the BOE promise to do all sorts of things when they are elected. They win a seat, and then quickly find out that an individual board member has no authority to do anything. This is because all power of any board is collective, not individual. Each member can bring different perspectives to the table, and can strongly advocate for specific actions, but only the board as a whole has the power to take any official action.

The BOE consists of seven elected members and one non-voting student member. BOE policy and state law specify that four votes are required to take any action. This is different than some other boards that only require a majority of the members present.

What About BOE Officers?

Each year, the seven BOE members elect a president and a vice president. Maryland law specifies that the president is selected at the first meeting after the first Tuesday in December. In election years, this is the first meeting with the newly elected members. The president and vice president have some added responsibilities, but each only has one vote, just like the rest of the members. The president conducts the meetings in an orderly and businesslike manner using *Robert's Rules of Order* (Revised) as a guide except when such rules are superseded by BOE policy or Maryland law.

What About the Superintendent?

Both Maryland law and BOE policy govern the role of the superintendent. The superintendent is the Executive Officer of the BOE, as well as the secretary and treasurer and is required to attend all BOE meetings, except for those pertaining to the superintendent's own salary, tenure or performance. Although part of the BOE, the superintendent does not have voting rights when a Board renders a decision.

One major duty of the BOE is to hire the superintendent. Maryland law requires that a superintendent be hired for a four-year term. The BOE has to notify the superintendent of a decision to renew or not renew a contract in February prior to the expiration of the term. The term of a superintendent starts July 1. Although the BOE may elect to not renew a superintendent's contract, the Maryland Attorney General has concluded that the BOE cannot unilaterally fire a superintendent. The power to fire a superintendent lies exclusively with the state BOE and state superintendent.

The law also specifies that the superintendent manages the system. Some decisions of the superintendent are subject to appeal to the BOE.

Individual BOE members have no authority to direct the superintendent, although each BOE member may ask the superintendent for information. Only the BOE as a whole (i.e., at least four BOE Members acting collectively) can direct the superintendent to do or not do something.

Neither individual BOE members nor the BOE as a whole may direct any other FCPS staff. The BOE as a whole instead may direct the superintendent to take an action, and then the superintendent can decide how to utilize staff for such requests. The BOE evaluates the superintendent each year.

So What Does the BOE Do?

As noted above, the state and federal governments impose some specific guidelines on all public schools in Maryland. For example, the state mandates minimum graduation requirements and requires specific testing of all students.

Anything that is not mandated by state or federal law may be determined by the BOE. The BOE also makes sure FCPS operates within the state and federal mandates. How does the BOE actually do this? By hiring and overseeing a superintendent who administers the school system, by creating a vision for the system, setting standards, and creating policies, by making sure the superintendent implements and follows those policies, and by establishing the budget that enables this to happen.

The BOE creates the budget at the end of the process, after setting a vision and goals. The goal is not to spend money; the goal is to continuously improve public education in Frederick County, and the budget is a tool to help improve education. This section will explain the continuous improvement process, from the theory that drives the decision-making, to the actual expenditures designed to improve education.

The Mission of the Board of Education

We set the standard for public education is the official mission statement of the BOE.

The goal is to accept responsibility for the public education of our children and be a model for continuous improvement.

A Vision to Guide the Decisions

The BOE believes that long-term improvement in education first requires a clear vision of what we want the school system to look like and the role we want the school system to play in our community. Based on that vision, we can set specific goals and spend money to achieve those goals. The *Bridge to Excellence Master Plan* is the document the Board created to reflect its five-year plan for achieving its vision and goals. We continually measure whether we are

achieving those goals, and progress or lack of progress then helps us decide where to continue to spend money on something. This handbook will explain more about the budget a bit later. For now, let's focus on the vision.

Everyone in the county plays a role in education, from the students, to the teachers and other staff, to the business community, and to the citizens. That is why the BOE created the following vision statement for FCPS:

Education is the foundation of our community. The Frederick County Public Schools System educates its students to become caring, respectful, and responsible citizens and family members. Students look forward to school each day. They take full advantage of the rigorous academic curricula and strive to develop their talents. They utilize the power of technology to explore a world of new ideas and information. They acquire the knowledge and skills to achieve and the confidence to succeed, and are rewarded with a wide choice of offers from higher education and employers. FCPS graduates are exceptional 21st century citizens.

Outstanding applicants compete to join our system. Employees enjoy the respect of students and the community, opportunities for professional growth, and recognition for their contributions to our system. They value each student and create a learning climate where students can reach for their dreams.

Parents, public officials, businesses and citizens actively support our commitment to challenge all students to achieve their potential. The board of education and school system staff embrace the community's contributions and are responsible stewards of its resources.

Parents choose to send their children to our schools.

Businesses and families move to Frederick County because of our schools.

The Mission of the Frederick County Public School System

To reach our students with exceptional teaching and caring support, challenge them to achieve their potential, and prepare them for success in a global society.

Specific, Measurable Goals

The next question was how to translate the mission and vision into reality. The BOE has approved a set of specific goals based on the vision. Here are the goals:

- Goal 1 Every student will learn in an intellectually challenging environment, prepared as a life-long learner to excel in college, further study and the workplace.

- Goal 2 Every student will learn in a safe, caring and engaging environment, prepared to participate as a productive citizen and contributing member of our global society.
- Goal 3 All employees will be highly qualified for their jobs, motivated and effective at work, and valued and respected by their students and the community.
- Goal 4 Every family will have access to the programs and services needed for their children to enter school ready to learn.
- Goal 5 All sectors of the community will be engaged in the education of our children.
- Goal 6 Every division and school will have sufficient resources, and will manage those resources in a publicly accountable and cost-effective manner.

From these goals, the BOE has approved specific measures to determine whether or not we are achieving each goal. Each year FCPS publishes data showing how close it came to meeting these goals in the annual Progress Report. The reports are posted on the school system's website.

Later sections of this handbook will explain the mechanics of how the BOE makes decisions about the budget and sets policies consistent with this vision and these goals.

The Members of the Board of Education

As noted previously, the BOE consists of eight Frederick County citizens including a non-voting student member. The superintendent serves as the executive officer, secretary and treasurer of the BOE, but has no vote. A county commissioner liaison also serves on the Board of Education in a non-voting capacity.

The administrative director assists the BOE and each member, and manages and coordinates all administrative issues such as schedules, BOE budgets, and correspondence with the public. Because no BOE member is available full time at the BOE offices, the administrative director interacts directly with the public and responds to public requests made to the BOE. The administrative director is the only FCPS staff other than the superintendent who reports directly to the BOE. The executive secretary assists the administrative director and serves as recording secretary at all regular meetings and public hearings.

Until 2000, the Governor appointed all seven voting members. At that time, the BOE began to undergo a transition to become an elected board. Starting in November 2002, all seven BOE members were elected. Because the term of office is four years for each member, voters will select groups of three or four members every two years.

This section summarizes some of the major provisions of Maryland law regarding the BOE. For more complete information, refer to the “Education” Article of the *Annotated Code of Maryland*.

Legal Requirements to Be a Member of the BOE

There are not many legal requirements to hold office as a BOE member. Except for the student member, you just have to be a resident and registered voter in Frederick County. You also have to win a countywide election.

Student Member of the BOE

For many years, the BOE included a student representative. Legislation was enacted to have a non-voting student member on the Board effective July 2007. This student is not present at closed meetings of the BOE, but otherwise sits with the BOE and participates in all regularly scheduled public meetings. The student member is selected by the Frederick County Association of Student Councils. Interested students should contact their guidance counselor for more information.

Elections and Appointment of Replacements

Elections are held every two years for a group of three or four members. Unlike other local elections, the BOE election is non-partisan. A candidate’s political affiliation is not disclosed on the ballot. Because the election is non-partisan, the primary and general elections are conducted differently than other county elections. For BOE elections, all candidates appear on both the Democrat and Republican ballots. For the primary election, twice the number of openings that year will move on to the general election. For example, if it is a year to elect three members, the top six candidates will advance to the general election. The general election will determine which three candidates are elected. Unlike non-partisan judge races, this is true regardless of the number of votes the top three receive in the primary. For years in which four members are elected, the numbers are eight and then four, respectively. Candidates are subject to all of the regular laws regarding registration, finances and reporting.

The law provides that if a member of the BOE is unable to complete a term of office, the County Commissioners appoint a replacement for the balance of the term.

Orientation Process for Candidates and New Members

The work of the BOE does not stop during the biannual elections of new members. The BOE has determined it is in the best interest of FCPS to make sure all candidates understand the job. It is also important that the FCPS staff have enough time to do their jobs without constant requests for information from

candidates or potential candidates. Most of the information handled by the BOE and FCPS staff is public information, but the BOE and staff need to provide fair procedures that balance the public need for information with the time required to do their jobs. For this reason, the BOE has developed procedures to make sure all candidates and new members have timely access to needed information.

Once the filing deadline for the BOE election has passed, the superintendent will notify candidates in writing at the address specified in the election filing of the orientation process. This process will include one or more meetings, as determined by the superintendent, during which appropriate staff will present information about FCPS, such as information about finances, policies, the functioning of the BOE, and other relevant issues.

Candidates will be invited to participate in these meetings. The meetings will include presentations from staff and existing BOE members who are not current candidates, and will provide time for candidates to ask questions. After the election is completed, the superintendent and BOE president will meet with the members-elect to respond to questions and provide additional information.

Compensation of BOE Members

Maryland law specifies the compensation for BOE members. Beginning with the 2006 election, newly elected members receive an annual salary of \$10,000, (\$11,000 for the BOE President). All members are eligible to receive health insurance if they elect to take the insurance coverage. Members also receive an annual expense reimbursement up to \$1,000 (or \$1,500 for the BOE President).

Responsibilities of the BOE

The Annotated Code of Maryland imposes the following duties for the BOE (see Section 4-108):

- (1) To the best of its ability carry out the applicable provisions of this article and the bylaws, rules, regulations, and policies of the State Board;
- (2) Maintain throughout its county a reasonably uniform system of public schools that is designed to provide quality education and equal educational opportunity for all children;
- (3) Subject to this article and to the applicable bylaws, rules, and regulations of the State Board, determine, with the advice of the county superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system; and
- (4) Adopt, codify, and make available to the public bylaws, rules, and regulations not inconsistent with State law, for the conduct and management of the county public schools.

As you can see, this list is open to broad interpretation. The BOE has adopted policies to provide more specificity. BOE Policy 100.1 says the BOE sets the mission, goals and policies for the school system, while the superintendent advises the BOE on these issues, administers these policies, and manages the system. As noted above, you can read all of the BOE policies and regulations at www.fcps.org.

NSBA Code of Ethics

The BOE is an affiliate of the National School Boards Association (NSBA). The NSBA provides various resources for the BOE, including a model code of ethics. The BOE has adopted this code of ethics, and each member is expected to abide by it at all times:

As a Member of my local Board of Education, I will strive to improve public education, and to that end I will:

Attend all regularly scheduled board meetings insofar as possible, and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings;

Recognize that I should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings;

Render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups;

Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members, and seek systematic communications between the board and students, staff, and all elements of the community;

Work with other board members to establish effective board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent;

Communicate to other board members and the superintendent expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs;

Inform myself about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school boards associations;

Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff, and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all staff;

Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest;

Take no private action that will compromise the board or administration, and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law; and

Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools.

Time Commitments

Serving on the BOE requires a serious commitment of time. As more fully described below, the BOE holds public meetings an average of two times a month. These meetings can last from early afternoon until late evening. Each BOE member also serves on an official BOE committee that meets once or twice a month for several hours, and serves as a liaison to one or more other FCPS committees or community organizations that meet at least once a month. The BOE also meets formally with the County Commissioners every month. Aside from the meetings, a BOE member is expected to spend time in the community working on Board-related matters, and must spend time staying current on educational issues. BOE members may attend various conferences and meetings sponsored by state and national board of education associations, and work on issues such as current legislation. The overall time commitment varies from individual to individual, but typically requires 15 to 30 hours per week.

Policies and Budgets - They Go Together

Money, Money, Money

We all know that many times there is not enough money for the amount requested in the budget. To put things in perspective, the FCPS budget is larger than the county budget, when you add up the federal, state and local resources. FCPS consumes about half of the Frederick County budget. The money that is not provided by the county is provided by the state and federal sources and through grants.

Not everyone agrees on how the BOE spends this money. While we cannot make sure everyone agrees with all expenses, we can make sure that the spending is determined by means of an open process and a consistent theory.

Four Different Budgets

The BOE operates with four separate budgets. By far, the biggest is the annual Operating Budget which includes the money used to run the schools. This money pays teachers, administrators and other staff, utility bills and other items to operate and maintain buildings, the costs of transporting students, and books and other supplies. Most of the money is spent on teacher salaries. Another way of looking at it is that for Fiscal Year 2013, 85% of the operating budget is spent on services in the schools themselves, 9% covers physical plant, 4% covers student transportation, and the remaining 2% for central office administration. Some people mistakenly believe FCPS spends a lot of money on administration, but figures show that FCPS spends close to the lowest amount per pupil on administration in the state. The BOE reviews these statistics every year to make sure expenses do not exceed peer counties.

The second budget is the Capital Budget. This money pays for building new schools and renovating existing schools, major school maintenance items, and other major costs to provide an appropriate environment for learning to occur.

The third budget is the Self-Insurance Budget. This budget provides medical, vision, prescription, dental and wellness services to active employees, their dependents, retirees and retiree dependents; and it is funded through the BOE, employees, and retirees. Recommendations that affect this budget are made by an insurance council comprised of staff and representatives from the employees' unions.

The fourth budget is the Food and Nutrition Services Budget. Students are offered a daily breakfast and lunch which meet dietary guidelines established by the federal USDA National School Lunch Program. The budget pays for the salaries of the school-based cafeteria staff, food purchases, consumable supplies, contracted services such as equipment repairs and a central office operation which ensures compliance with all local, state and federal regulations and laws. Over half of the revenues in this budget come from cash sales to students and staff. Federal and State National School Meals Grants provide the balance of the Food Service revenues.

The Operating Budget Process

It takes a lot of money to yearly educate over 40,000 students. The BOE knows this money, whether it comes from the state, federal, or local government, really comes out of the pocket of every taxpayer. The goal is to spend this money carefully, by constantly evaluating results and directing the money to the best uses. Earlier in this handbook we discussed the vision, goals, and indicators for FCPS. The ongoing results of the continuous improvement process drive the budget. Every year, staff members propose how to prioritize spending to better achieve the system goals. Early in the fall, staff members and the superintendent meet to estimate budget needs for increased student enrollments, opening additional schools, meeting new legal requirements, paying expected price increases for materials and supplies, increases in contractual agreements as well as a list of proposals for advances in continuous improvement results. By January, the Superintendent's proposal is refined and presented to the BOE. The BOE then meets with the superintendent and staff several times to further refine this proposal. Sometime in February, the BOE presents a list of possible budget items to the public. The BOE invites the public to respond to the proposal. In prior years, such feedback has included a voice poll conducted by telephone,

listening to the public at BOE meetings, discussing the items at PTA events and other meetings, and reading letters and email directed to the BOE.

At the same time the BOE is evaluating budget needs, the County Commissioners are preparing county budget proposals, including allocations for FCPS. In November or December, the Commissioners usually present a suggested budget target based on current revenue estimates. The BOE examines this proposal as one source of revenue. The BOE also reviews projections about anticipated state and federal allocations, including grants, and money that is restricted for specific uses by the state or federal government.

An important part of the Board's responsibilities is evaluating available cost savings to spend as efficiently as possible. During the year we monitor expenses for running the schools. For example, the BOE has worked with private vendors to determine whether custodial and cafeteria services are being run properly, and whether there are benefits from outsourcing. These studies led to some new efficiencies. Of course, not everyone agrees we are efficient. For every dollar that is spent, there are usually citizens who think the money is going to the right places, and other citizens who would rather spend the money someplace else. In the end, it comes down to prioritizing based on a determination of which expenses will best help the system achieve the six goals and the vision.

Putting this all together, in January and February the BOE must develop a budget proposal, taking into account that we only have preliminary estimates of revenue and are in the process of negotiating salaries (salaries and benefits account for over 80% of the operating budget, see below for more on the topic of salaries). The BOE holds a public hearing so that citizens can weigh in on the proposal. The BOE also listens to public comment at other meetings and reviews letters and emails about the proposal. The BOE then finalizes a proposed budget and submits it to the County Commissioners by March 1.

The BOE meets with the Commissioners throughout this process to respond to any questions and to try to avoid any surprises on either side. The County Commissioners hold a public hearing on their operating budget in May. This hearing includes the chance for the public to speak for or against the requested school system allocation. The Commissioners then adopt an allocation for FCPS, and the BOE then adopts a final budget based on this allocation.

Salaries

To make matters even more challenging, at the same time the BOE is considering needs, and weighing expected revenue, the BOE enters into annual negotiations with the professional associations that represent a majority of FCPS employees - the Frederick County Teachers Association (FCTA), the Frederick County Administrative and Supervisory Association (FCASA), and the Frederick Association of School Support Employees (FASSE). FCPS has contracts with these organizations that address all matters related to salaries, benefits, and working conditions.

The BOE has a goal of paying competitive salaries for all employees. The goal is to be competitive with counties of similar wealth. Based on Frederick County's wealth, the current stated goal is for salaries to be in the top quarter in the state. Research shows some of the most important factors in educational achievement are the quality and stability of the teachers and principal in each school. The BOE recognizes we have to do many other things to help FCPS recruit and retain employees (remember the Vision statement discussed earlier?), but without competitive pay, we lose before we even get out of the gate.

The Capital Budget

FCPS must also compete annually for funding to construct and renovate schools as well as for major maintenance projects. This funding flows through a capital budget. Although this budget is adopted annually, it is based on a six-year capital improvement plan (CIP), and a longer-term construction plan, entitled "Educational Facilities Master Plan."

Growing, Growing, Gone

The Educational Facilities Master Plan is revised each September based on a current projection of needs. The plan establishes goals and objectives and includes projections of growth in student populations, as well as a survey of renovation and maintenance needs.

The County Commissioners have adopted rules that restrict, but do not always eliminate, growth in areas of school overcrowding. New approvals for lots and subdivisions must pass an adequate public facilities ordinance (APFO) test that considers the availability of schools and other services. A few of the municipalities in the county have also adopted such rules. The BOE advises the county and all municipalities of the potential impact on schools from all major subdivisions and development projects.

What About the Old Timers?

While we need to build the new seats for the growing population, we also need to make sure all students, whether in old or new schools, have the same educational opportunities. For this reason FCPS maintains an inventory of renovation and maintenance needs at every school and administrative building in the system. The buildings are evaluated on how well they can deliver an environment that meets the educational mission. Sometimes an old school is fine. The goal is not to renovate simply because something is old, it is to renovate where needed to provide an environment that supports the educational mission of FCPS. The priority list of schools in need of renovation is included in the Educational Facilities Master Plan.

The Capital Improvement Plan Process

Of course, the main limitation on fixing overcrowding and renovation problems is money. We have taken steps to minimize the cost of constructing and renovating schools. For example, FCPS uses standardized designs for all new schools, resulting in more predictable and manageable construction costs. There is also a focus on the long-term building costs. Sometimes the cheapest initial cost can lead to higher costs down the road, so every project is reviewed for long-term maintenance requirements. A good example of this is the choice of floor coverings. Some less expensive materials cost more in the long run because they wear out sooner or require more maintenance. As a result of the cost control practices, school maintenance costs for FCPS are among the lowest in the State of Maryland.

We know we cannot meet all the new construction and renovation needs at once, which is why we maintain a long-term plan. As noted above, the BOE regularly meets with the County Commissioners to build a shared vision for this long-term plan. Because of this consensus building effort, there is general agreement between the BOE and County Commissioners over the need for major projects in the Capital Improvements Program.

The State of Maryland theoretically pays 68% of school construction and site costs in Frederick County. However, in practice, the state has historically participated in only about 40-60% of the total construction/site costs. The state does not participate in funding land acquisition costs, design costs or furniture and equipment costs. Contrary to popular opinion, the federal government does not pay any school construction costs.

The quest for state and county money follows an annual cycle similar to the development of the operating budget. For state funding, each year the Board updates the Educational Facilities Master Plan and submits its long-term plan as well as a request for funding to the Maryland State Public School Construction Program (PSCP). PSCP staff review the projects to determine whether they are justified under their program guidelines. This review would include a consideration of the current and projected student population, and the age and functionality of the school.

The PSCP staff makes recommendations to the State Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC). The IAC is chaired by the state superintendent of schools. Also on the committee are the Secretary of the Department of State Planning, Secretary of the Department of General Services, and a representative appointed by the House of Delegates and State Senate. Under state law, the IAC has authority to allocate up to 75 percent of the funds budgeted for school construction in the next fiscal year. The IAC's decisions concerning these allocations are made in December of each year, prior to the beginning of the legislative session.

Following the end of the legislative session, the Board of Public Works (BPW) will make decisions on the allocation of the remaining 25 percent of funds not allocated by the IAC. The BPW is a three-member committee composed of the Governor, State Comptroller, and State Treasurer. Final decisions regarding what projects will be approved for funding is announced in late April or early May.

School Construction Philosophy

People often ask why FCPS waits until a school is severely overcrowded before building a new school, and how a school can open and be overcrowded from the first day. The answer is that the current philosophy of the PSCP is that school construction lags after need. Rather than build a school ahead of the growth, funding is only provided once the need has been documented.

The county could choose to build schools ahead of the school enrollment curve. The county could choose to go ahead and construct a school and hope for future state funding. The County Commissioners have done this in the recent past by agreeing to fund construction a year or two in advance. State money usually flows if the project obtains the first step in the approval process, planning approval, but funding is not assured.

The Board does consider projected population growth in locating and building schools. Many schools are built with additions expected. The core facilities of the schools are oversized to accommodate future expansion, even if the addition cannot be built at the present time because of lack of money or student population in that area.

Steps in School Design and Construction

The first step in moving ahead with a project is planning approval by the state. If funding is approved by the County Commissioners, FCPS proceeds with design of the project. Money for construction follows in future years. If the state or county approves construction funding, the money is available for construction at the start of a fiscal year (July 1). Once construction funding is available, an elementary or a middle school might take 18 months to construct, and a high school 24 months.

In recent years, state funding for a project has come in multiple years. Since a construction bid cannot be awarded until all funds have been allocated, the County Commissioners have “forward funded” the state’s share of funding so that project can move forward in a timely manner.

Renovations

As we discussed earlier, Frederick County does not just need new seats. We also have many older buildings that require renovation. FCPS maintains an inventory of all buildings and rates each building on how well it suits the educational needs. Safety issues are always fixed right away, but many other needs have to wait for funding. The BOE goal is to weave the renovation projects into the long-term capital plan, though this is easier said than done. We need to build new schools, but we cannot neglect the existing schools either.

Renovations are more complicated than new construction. Current building codes differ from the codes in effect when many older buildings were constructed. Before building the new parts, substantial demolition is often required. It is also necessary to put the students somewhere during the renovation. Because of the widespread overcrowding, there is no space to move the students to other schools. Renovations are therefore slowed down by a need to work around students as they are moved to other parts of the building or portables.

Small Schools

Some people have asked why schools are so large in Frederick County. It is true that Maryland schools are built for more students compared to the national averages. BOE policy 202.2 says that an elementary school will be built to hold no more than 700 students. The policy is 900 students for a middle school, and 1600 students for a high school. There are many schools smaller and a few schools larger than the policy targets. These schools were built under different policies, and often grew over time by means of additions.

A lot of data supports the idea that smaller schools are better learning environments. The problem at the present time is that we cannot afford to build smaller schools given the ever increasing need for new seats due to the continuing population growth in Frederick County. The larger schools are a tradeoff between optimum educational environment and affordability.

Operations of the Board of Education - The Mechanics

How does the BOE actually go about doing its work? The preceding sections explained some of the major policy considerations and resource issues. This section will explain how the BOE actually conducts business.

BoardDocs

In 2003, the Board of Education made the transition from paper agenda packets to paperless meetings. All meeting information is made available to the Board on BoardDocs as soon as it is posted. Additionally, in order to facilitate and enhance communication with the community, all information except agendas and backup information for closed sessions and administrative functions are available to the public prior to the meeting. To access meeting information, go to www.fcps.org, Board of Education tab and click on "Agendas and Minutes."

The majority of the information received from staff is posted to BoardDocs. Notification is sent via FindOutFirst to its subscribers. Many community members also communicate with the Board through email.

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

By law, the BOE can only take action in official meetings. Meetings of the BOE must follow strict legal requirements for advance notice whenever a quorum (four members) is present. The idea is to make sure the BOE (or any other public body in Maryland) does not take action behind closed doors. Advance notice of meetings is posted by the BOE and sent to the local media. Meetings are open to the public and media, except for certain specified matters that are legally allowed to be discussed in a closed session because they involve confidential information. Examples of items that may be discussed in closed session include personnel matters, consultation with counsel, and the acquisition of land or facilities. The BOE must vote to go into a closed session, and must announce the reason for the closed meeting.

Regular meetings of the BOE generally occur on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, although some months only have one meeting. Since meetings may last for over eight hours, the meetings consist of several parts. These meetings are open to the public, and public comment is taken in the afternoon and evening sessions regarding topics on the agenda. These meetings are held in the official BOE Board Room located at 191 South East Street, Frederick. The BOE members sit in assigned seats behind microphones and nameplates. Following the afternoon session, the Board recesses for dinner and reconvenes at 6 p.m.

In addition to the regular meeting, the BOE may meet in a closed session during the day for the purposes listed above. These meetings are not open to the public. All such meetings are conducted in accordance with Section 10-508 of the *Maryland Open Meetings Act*.

All regular meetings and public hearings of the Board are televised on cable, Channel 18.

Code of Conduct

The Committee for Frederick County presented a Code of Conduct to various governmental agencies and organizations throughout the county. In April 2001, the BOE unanimously adopted this Code of Conduct as a standard to guide the members in interactions with each other and with the community:

Be Respectful—

- Through words and actions, demonstrate respect for the diverse views of all citizens in our increasingly multicultural society.
- When advocating for a belief or position, ensure that criticism of opposing viewpoints is expressed as criticism of a position, not a person.
- Be a positive role model for public discourse – practice courtesy, politeness, and consideration.
- Engage in respectful, non-judgmental listening.

Be Responsible—

- Demonstrate Fairness. Ensure that all sides have a fair opportunity to present their respective positions.
- Exercise your rights and responsibilities as a citizen. Encourage others to become informed and involved.
- While working toward the will of the majority, respect the rights of the minority.
- Clearly distinguish opinions from facts. Ensure all statements of fact are accurate and verifiable.
- Recognize the importance of achieving consensus as an important tool in community-building.

An Agenda for Every Meeting

The agenda for these meetings follows a prescribed pattern. First, the President calls the meeting to order. The Board welcomes and encourages public comment and provides an opportunity for public comment during the afternoon session at the discretion of the Board. After the agenda is approved and an announcement is made about any closed session held prior to the meeting (such an announcement is required by Maryland law), the BOE listens to public comment. The public can speak about anything related to FCPS, except for comments about specific personnel, or anything else slanderous or unlawful. Each person may speak for three minutes. One individual representing an organization may speak for up to five minutes. People may also submit written comments to be reviewed later by the BOE. Some discussion and/or action items may be heard during this time.

After public comment in the evening meeting (the Board allows up to one-half hour), the student member, County Commissioner liaison, and the superintendent are given an opportunity to provide comment.

The rest of the agenda consists of various action items and reports. Some items are not controversial, and do not require much, if any, discussion. Some recommendations from the standing BOE Curriculum and Instruction Committee or the Facilities and Finance Committee will thus be presented on a “consent agenda.” A BOE committee has discussed consent agenda items, and all BOE members receive both the recommendation from the committee and the backup material. If there are no objections, the consent agenda items are passed without discussion. If a BOE member objects to an item, it will be pulled from the consent agenda and scheduled for discussion and a vote. BOE members need to let the administrative director of the BOE or the president know about any objections prior to the day of the meeting, because any discussion may require the presence of staff to explain the item.

The agenda for each upcoming meeting is determined at the end of the regular meeting. The agenda items are based on recommendations from the superintendent as well as a longer-term list of issues developed by the BOE. An issue will be added to the list for discussion if at least three BOE Members would like to schedule meeting time to discuss the matter. The meeting ends with Board member comments.

Open Discussion

An agenda is important to make sure all the required business is completed, but there is a danger of over-orchestrating meetings and not leaving enough time for creative discussion. For this reason the BOE has set aside time for unstructured discussion of current issues and legislative items in the afternoon.

At the end of each BOE meeting, any BOE member may raise an issue for discussion or make a public statement. If at least three BOE members agree, an item raised in open discussion will then be added to a future agenda for additional consideration.

A Master Calendar

The BOE has many issues to deal with. Some issues recur every year. For example, the budget process, as previously described, must follow a specific calendar sequence every year. Other items are raised by staff or BOE members, as discussed above. To help provide perspective and facilitate long-term planning, the BOE maintains a master calendar of these events.

Other Meetings - Committees

To operate more efficiently, the BOE has divided some work between two standing committees. One committee deals with Curriculum and Instruction issues, and another committee deals with Facilities and Finance issues. Each committee consists of three BOE members. Because this group would not constitute a quorum of the BOE, a committee cannot take official action, but can only recommend action to the full BOE. The BOE president appoints each member to one of these committees.

The committees serve two general functions. Some of the issues the BOE must approve are non-controversial but still require adequate examination by the BOE. The committee can take the time to perform such examination, and then make a recommendation to the full BOE. An example of such an issue may be a contract for the delivery of frozen pizza to school cafeterias. These types of issues would then appear on the consent agenda, as discussed above.

A second type of issue might be something controversial for which it is useful to have a committee perform some in-depth background discussion and research, so that the matter might then be more fully discussed by the whole BOE.

Meetings with the County Commissioners

As discussed in more detail earlier in this handbook, a large portion of the funding for FCPS comes from the taxpayers via an annual allocation from the County Commissioners. The BOE believes it is vital to maintain ongoing open communications with the County Commissioners. For this reason, the BOE and the County Commissioners generally meet every month to discuss issues raised by either body of joint concern. These meetings are generally scheduled for the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00 p.m. The location rotates between Winchester Hall and the Board of Education's Board Room.

Meetings with Frederick Community College

The BOE has also focused on coordinating educational programs with the local community college. The BOE meets annually with the Board of Trustees of Frederick Community College to discuss such issues.

BOE Liaisons

Each BOE member also serves as a liaison for advisory committees or organizations. Current relationships include the following groups: Career and Technology Advisory Council, Family Life Advisory Committee, Endowment Fund Committee, Food Service Advisory Committee, Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee, PTA Council of Frederick County, Interagency Internal Audit Authority, and the Parks and Recreation Commission. BOE members are also active and hold leadership positions in the Maryland Association of Boards of Education, and a BOE member serves as the legislative representative. The president appoints BOE members to these roles after his or her election in December, after soliciting interest from the BOE members.

Public Involvement – Who Sets the Standards?

Often, the BOE must make decisions on controversial issues. Remember the vision statement for FCPS we discussed earlier? It begins: *Education is the foundation of the community*. The vision comes from the concept that effective schools need the involvement of parents, students, staff, businesses, and other citizens. Each of those groups of people has a vital interest in what goes on in our schools. The parents care about how well their children are taught and what they learn. They want safe schools. The students need to learn, and have individual learning styles and many differing interests and needs. FCPS is the largest single employer in the county. Staff members deserve competitive pay and benefits, and the system wants to employ the most qualified people. Businesses rely on both interactions with the schools and the quality of the graduates who go on to work here. The rest of the community also depends on how well we teach our students who may grow up and become citizens, parents, local business people or staff for our schools. Finally, public education requires a large chunk of community resources, so we should all be concerned about how the BOE spends our money.

This is where the conflict comes in. Sometimes each of those groups has needs or desires that conflict with the other groups. Even within each group we can discern some broad differences of opinion about the best way to do things. Sometimes there are disagreements over the goals, sometimes there are disagreements over the methods, and sometimes there are disagreements over the underlying facts.

That is why we have a board of education. Remember earlier when we talked about the mission statement of the BOE, which is *We set the standard for public education*. This often involves making choices among the competing priorities. In the United States, we do not rely on the professional educators to set these standards. The educators advise how to get there, and carry out the mission, but the BOE sets the policies that drive it all by articulating the standards of the community, and the BOE allocates the resources and oversees implementation and results.

And who sets the standards for the BOE? Since the citizens elect the BOE, ultimately the standards are set by the citizens. Of course, our citizens espouse a very broad variety of opinions. It is impossible for the BOE to simply "do what the people want." The BOE cannot possibly know what everyone wants, much less serve all the conflicting opinions. In the end, the BOE has to make an informed decision that is in the best interest of the students and the community at large. Some people will approve of the decisions, and some people will disagree, but everyone has a say in the process.

It is easy to say that the job of the BOE is to set these standards. The tougher question is how the public fits into this equation. The question then becomes what is the BOE's role vis-à-vis the public? At a most basic level, the public chooses the BOE. As we discussed earlier, in Frederick County, this is now done by means of an election. In other places, and previously in Frederick, it

was done indirectly when the elected officials appointed the BOE members. Either way, the BOE members serve the public. No one disagrees with that concept. There are often disagreements, however, over how the BOE members are expected to respond to “public opinion.”

What is a better model of accountability? No BOE can please everyone all the time, nor can any BOE member. The BOE can, however, make sure information about the system is open and available to all citizens. The BOE can listen to all sides. The BOE can make sure all issues are discussed openly and fairly, and that all points of view are considered. Each BOE member can listen, and become informed. There is nothing wrong with a BOE member strongly advocating a position. Quite often there are no easy or singularly correct answers. But at the end of the day, when the BOE counts the votes and makes a decision, the BOE members must put aside the differences and support the collective decision of the BOE.

So What Can YOU Do?

This section will wrap up the handbook by explaining how the system is open to every citizen. Every citizen can become involved, and make his or her choices known. The end result may not be something every individual likes, but it is not because there is “no accountability.”

There are many ways every person can become involved, and can make sure his or her ideas are represented and considered. The key is knowing how to access the system and be heard. Anyone who follows these simple steps outlined here will be heard. Ideas will be considered.

First, if you want to change something, you need to know what is actually happening in the system right now. There are many misconceptions about what is going on in the schools. The first step, then, is to get the facts. Citizens can do this two ways. Firsthand knowledge is always reliable. If you have a child in the school, attend school events, talk to teachers and staff, and know what is happening. FCPS has email and voicemail systems to make it easier to communicate with teachers and other staff.

To stay informed you can also review data collected and disseminated by the system. Remember the goals and measures? Every year FCPS publishes the results in its annual progress report. This data is available online. The data is not always positive, but it is available, and the BOE tries to present an accurate picture. As we discussed earlier, the BOE only takes actions at meetings, and in most cases the meetings are open to all comers. In addition to the data, you are welcome to attend a meeting and see what is happening. All of the regular meetings are televised on local cable, Channel 18.

After you know what is really going on, you can advocate for change, or voice your support of current decisions. All you have to do is attend a meeting, as

discussed above, and comment. If you don't want to comment in person, or cannot attend a meeting, you can write a letter or send an email to the BOE. You can also contact any member of the BOE. Most of us are in the phone book. If you simply want to know a BOE position on a matter, contact the administrative director of the BOE or the BOE president to find out whether the BOE has taken an official position on a matter.

What happens after you contact the BOE or BOE members? It depends on the issue. If you just have an issue about how something is being done in a school or the system, or if you need information, it is always best to try to talk to someone at the school. The BOE can help you get in touch with the right person, and in many cases that resolves the matter.

If you just need information about the system, or about a BOE policy, you can also contact the BOE and we will get you the information. The administrative director of the BOE is a good place to start for such requests.

It is important to note that individual BOE members cannot direct staff members to do something or not do something, but can help you get in touch with the right person in the system. Individual BOE members cannot even tell the superintendent what to do - that can only be done by a majority of the BOE. The BOE also cannot tell the superintendent to do something about an individual staff member, or direct a staff member to do something. The BOE instead relies on the professional judgment of the superintendent to administer the BOE policies. Problems with the actions or inactions of the superintendent are handled through an ongoing review process and a more formal annual review.

Suppose you instead have an issue about a BOE policy, rather than something specific happening in a school. In that case, you need to let the BOE know of your concerns through the means mentioned above. The BOE can only take action to change a policy at a meeting. If you want something changed, you need to get it on the BOE agenda. As we discussed above, any BOE member has the ability to suggest an item for an agenda. The BOE has agreed that if three BOE members are interested, an item will be placed on the agenda and discussed. Any actual policy change, however, requires four affirmative votes out of the seven voting BOE members, regardless of how many members are present at a meeting.

The bottom line is: if you don't like something, get four BOE members to agree to change it. Can't get four BOE members to change it? Work on getting four BOE members who agree with your point of view. BOE elections are non-partisan. The BOE's job ultimately consists of setting standards and allocating scarce resources. (Please note that this does not mean *partisan politics*.) All BOE members generally try to do what is best for the students).

Still Have Questions?

Call the BOE or BOE members and discuss them.

The official FCPS web site can be found at www.fcps.org. At this site, you can find a complete listing of BOE policies, regulations administered by the superintendent, and information on how to contact the BOE, other staff, and individual BOE members. If you do not have internet access and want more information, call the BOE at 301-696-6850.

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