

Hello members of the Board of Education.

My name is Jason Makstein and I am a father of 3 young children who will all be going through MCPS. I currently have a 2nd grader at MCPS. I also was a 13 year MCPS student for my entire K-12. You may also know me from my blog Moderately MOCO but I am testifying as an individual.

I am here today to testify about the lack of public notification and access to these recent Board of Education meetings as well as about boundary changes.

Open Meetings act and lack of public notice

The Maryland Open Meetings act states that local public bodies must “give the public adequate notice of those meetings.” This has not happened for the meetings dated March 7, 2023 and this one March 9, 2023.

Previously, the @mocoboe twitter account would publicize public sign up forms multiple times before meetings. Once before public sign up opened and again before it closed. The official website also states to “Follow the Board of Twitter” under the “About the Board” heading of the “Meetings” page (<https://www2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/>).

However as you can see in my written testimony screenshots, the Twitter account stopped tweeting these out after Feb 15, 2023 (for the February 23, 2023 meeting). In fact the account hasn't tweeted since then after years of being the primary vehicle of public notification of these meetings and signup. MCPS itself uses twitter, Facebook and other forms of communication to show the meetings themselves but no advanced notice and no signup forms for public communications. This means that these last two meetings had no formal public notice AT ALL.



Moco BOE

8,226 Tweets





Following

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The Montgomery County Board of Education provides leadership and oversight for the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

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Moco BOE @mocoboe · Feb 15

Public comment sign-ups for the February 23 meeting are now open! Sign-ups will close on FRIDAY, February 17, 2023, at noon. Sign up here:



March 7, 2023 - BOE Public Comments Sign-up

NOTE: The next Board of Education business meeting will be held on March 7, 2023. Meeting will be open to the public and in-person public comments will be permitted. All comments will be recorded and made available to the public on BoardDocs. Individuals who wish to provide public comments will register using the online registration form and will be directed to a meeting room.

Public comment sign-ups for the February 23 meeting will close on FRIDAY, February 17, 2023, at 4:00 p.m. Sign-ups will close on THURSDAY, March 2, 2023, at 11:59 p.m.

*For more details to participate in our meeting, visit the Board of Education website.

docs.google.com

March 7, 2023 - BOE Public Comments Sign-up

PLEASE NOTE: The next Board of Education business meeting will be held on March 7, 2023. ...

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Moco BOE @mocoboe · Feb 14

Due to the holiday, public comment sign-ups for the February 23 meeting will open on WEDNESDAY, February 15 at 9:00 a.m. Sign-ups will close on FRIDAY, February 17, 2023, at noon.

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I follow all the MCPS and BOE social media religiously, and try to follow everything going on, and even I barely caught wind of the signup for this meeting. I barely signed up in time and then didn't make the 24 business hour turnaround for providing my testimony. I hope my testimony which was submitted with the first full business day of being notified I would have a testimony slot will be included.

If even I can't keep up and know when to submit testimony and about what how can your average parents that aren't as keyed in as myself especially without public notice and such short timelines?

Short public testimony turnaround

I received notification I would have a slot to testify on Friday March 3, 2023 at 11:44am. This email stated I had until 12:00 Noon on March 6, 2023 to submit my testimony approximated 24 business hours later which is an extremely short turnaround. This all seems very irregular.

In fact, I have received screenshots from others who testified for the Board of Education previously and they had much longer turnarounds. For the February 24, 2022 meeting, written testimony was requested for 6 days after being notified of the slot and for the June 15, 2021 meeting video testimonies were due 5 days after being notified of the slot and written were due 6 days after being notified.

Boundary Studies comments

I still haven't been able to find any information about what options and decisions will be made for this meeting so I can't really even comment on that specifically yet.

However, what I would like to comment on is the results from the MCPS Districtwide Boundary Analysis (https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/publicinfo/Boundary_Analysis/BoundaryAnalysis_Final%20Report.pdf) and my personal experiences as an MCPS student.

If you look on page 107 of the boundary study can see the Priorities ranking from respondents about what is most urgent for MCPS to address when considering future boundary changes. The order ranked as follows based on respondents who answered the priority was "Extremely Important". Note these are not my own order of priorities but the results of this long term and expensive study.

- 1) Ensure students attend closest school to home (87% Extremely Important)
- 2) Minimize number of students affected by boundary changes (82% Extremely Important)
- 3) Minimize boundary changes (79% Extremely Important)
- 4) Cohort stability (75% Extremely Important)
- 5) Maximize walkers (73% Extremely Important)
- 6) Ensure schools are in the target utilization range (19% Extremely Important)
- 7) Balance diversity among nearby schools (10% Extremely Important)

My experience in MCPS

Now you may be wondering what my interest in boundary study issues are... and I can tell you – it is because poor planning on behalf of MCPS in the past regarding these issues greatly impacted my life as a kid and it is why I got into local advocacy.

When I was in MCPS in the middle late 1990s, there was a new development called Kentlands with lots of new homes and students – but they didn't have schools until many years later.

Because of this planning of building homes first and schools much later, my elementary school (Jones Lane) was zoned for a much further away new middle school (Kingsview Middle School). There was a middle school about 1.5 miles away from me and a 5 minute ride Ridgeview but it was full with new development students so we drew the short straw.

Unlike many of my peers, my parents both worked full time. This meant that the only way I could get to school was the bus. My bus ride was about 30-50 minutes each way (depending on if an additional kid in Boyds was on the bus) and then I would get home and still be home alone.

I was unable to do any extra curricular activities in middle school. My previously active in PTA parents no longer could participate and could barely even make back to school nights due to how far away it was. I previously did TV crew but because I couldn't get there before the bus arrived, I was excluded – along with other sports, activities, and clubs. My family was decently well off but because they both worked, I was basically a latch key kid that got in quite a bit of trouble at home without supervision during these times.

And I did OK in Middle School despite all this. I made a bunch of diverse friends and enjoyed meeting kids who weren't at my same elementary school branching out unlike a lot of the kids who stuck to those they already knew.

However, this would lead to my next big shock which was getting to High School and having essentially no friends – despite going to MCPS for all 13 years and not moving, all of my new friends went to our rival high school including my best friend. Everyone but the best friend completely dropped me from their lives and for him things were very difficult until I got a car and was able to go to see him myself. It was a dark time for me. I attempted to get involved in various clubs in High School but since I didn't have an Middle School experience in clubs and didn't have any friends, none really worked out. I ran for student government and didn't do well – at least in part because no one knew me.

This time period greatly impacted my life and is what made me the advocate I am today – to try and make sure future MCPS kids don't have to go through what I did due to what I see in hindsight as the mistakes of the adults of that time.

I am constantly pressuring the council and other bodies for more funding for building of schools and to make sure that schools are appropriately build to follow increases in students.

Conclusion

What I'm asking you to do is:

- 1) Make sure BOE meetings and testimony signups are shared publicly with enough time for people to find out.
 - a. Continue posting public signups on the twitter (and I would add to post signup on other locations such as Facebook or all MCPS accounts as Twitter alone is quite a restrictive audience.
- 2) Specifically involve parents at every school involved in boundary change discussion. Many have no idea this is going on and you don't want to wait until after changes are made to finally get everyone calling and emailing because they're upset they weren't involved in decision making process at all.
- 3) Consider the impacts of these decisions on the kids who will be facing them.

Thank you,

Jason Makstein