

**Advisory Committee to the Board of Education Communication and
Community Engagement Meeting
Minutes of the Meeting
September 9, 2026**

The Advisory Committee to the Board of Education on Communication and Community Engagement ("Advisory Committee") was held on Wednesday, September 9, 2026, in person in the Board Room, 15 W. Gude Drive, Rockville, Maryland. The meeting began at 6:13 pm and adjourned at 8:13 pm. The following people were present:

Board Members and Board Staff: Natalie Zimmerman (Chairperson), Yolanda Faerber (Coordinator, Board of Education Constituent Services).

MCPS Staff: Andrea Swiawtocha (Acting Chief, Division of District Operations); Christopher Cram (Deputy Chief, Division of Communications), Catherine Malchodi (Executive Director, Division of District Operations), Elba Garcia (Deputy Chief, Division of Family and Community Engagement); and Donald J. Connelly (Director, Department of Planning and Construction).

Advisory Committee Members: Patrick Cook, Debra Fleischer, Kim Francisco, Samira Hussein, Angie Lai, Monica Lopez-Biro, Ryan Lipford, Devi Mehta, Natalia Mendoza, Elda Molida, Lisa Ray, Heather Sessa, Irene Spero, Kiel Suggs, and Monica Taliani.

Welcome and Introductions. The meeting began with introductions by all parties present. Board staff reviewed the Advisory Committee's purpose and goals.

Develop Norms and Ground Rules for Participation. Committee members then developed norms and ground rules for collaboration and participation on the Advisory Committee. These can be revisited and added to at each meeting. The norms and ground rules developed are as follows: Respect time, respect everyone's perspective, stay engaged, use plain English - no MCPS jargon, consistent involvement, provide multiple opportunities to share ideas, exercise emotional intelligence, and assume positive intent.

Review of the Informational Summary from May 14, 2026: Advisory Committee members reviewed the approved Informational Summary from the May 14, 2026 Advisory Committee meeting and had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, which were answered by Board and MCPS Staff.

Election of Advisory Committee Co-Chairperson: Two Advisory Committee members ran for Co-Chairperson. They both shared detailed information about their backgrounds with the other committee members. The Advisory Committee members present selected Monica Lopez-Biro as Co-Chairperson to serve with Board Member Natalie Zimmerman.

Presentation on the preliminary community engagement plan for MCPS' closure and consolidation study: Ms. Swiatocha and Mr. Connelly reviewed the July 16, 2026 Board presentation with the Advisory Committee. They discussed MCPS' ongoing efforts to address declining enrollment and excess school capacity, including the potential consolidation or closure of elementary and middle schools. While no specific school consolidation or closure options are being proposed at this stage, the district is beginning a community engagement process to better understand what families and community members value most in the student experience and to gather input to inform future recommendations. The lively discussion with Advisory Committee members emphasized transparent, accessible communication; proactive outreach to families, daycares, preschools, PTAs, faith-based organizations, and community partners; and the importance of clearly explaining how the district will gather and use community feedback. The superintendent is expected to present recommendations in February 2027, followed by public hearings and a Board vote in the spring, with any approved changes anticipated to take effect in the 2029–2030 school year.

Wrap-up and adjournment: Ms. Zimmerman thanked the members for their attendance and engagement during the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 pm.