



Empowerment, Education, Accountability

April 1, 2021

RE: Recommendations on proposed changes to *BCBI (Revision 3/16/2021) - Public Participation in GCPS Board Meetings*

Policy BCBI expressly states the board desires "...the opportunity to hear the wishes and ideas of the public" yet outlines a policy to severely limit and control the public's voice. This revised policy subverts the purported board goal of hearing from the community. The latest revision ignores the thoughtful input from the public. Ideally, the public comment portion of the Monthly Business Meeting would never be time-limited. Targeting and controlling individual speakers is detestable.

Gwinnett STOPP recommends the following changes to the proposed *BCBI - Public Participation in GCPS Board Meetings* policy:

- Prioritize student voices. All current Gwinnett students should receive priority order on the agenda.
- Extend the public comment portion of the Monthly Business Meeting to a minimum of two hours with each individual speaker allotted three minutes. Ninety minutes per month is not enough time to properly hear from the community. Additionally, an ad-hoc process for the allotment of individual speaking time does not allow speakers appropriate time to develop succinct remarks. Gwinnett County students are experiencing many challenges around digital learning, COVID- 19, and longtime structural inequities. The Board should hold the time and space for these issues to be communicated publicly.
- Remove provisions targeting and controlling individual speakers. The proposed policy change to limit the length of time, content, and number of times an individual can address the Board on a specific issue will be used against advocates. This past summer the AJC published an article on the "rash of racist incidents" taking place at GCPS. Issues like systemic racism in GCPS that continue to persist in a myriad of ways require advocates to consistently push for change. Repetition is necessary when the district does not resolve the problem.
- In the interest of accessibility and public safety during a pandemic, allow virtual sign-up for all public commentary.
- Remove language prohibiting addressing individuals working for GCPS. All GCPS employees, especially those who hold leadership positions, are accountable to the public. If specific persons are hindering equitable education for all, the community, which entrusts leaders to be fair and just, should be allowed to question them.
- Add a provision to ban hate speech as defined by the United Nations as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."
- Reinstate the public forum that takes place from 6:15 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.

Gwinnett STOPP's recommendations have the support of the community as well as align with the consensus of the public feedback received by the district. The proposed BCBI is effectively eliminating meaningful public participation. It is abhorrent. Instead of silencing the community, the Board should work to implement solutions. Public participation should not be weaponized against the people of Gwinnett County who generously fund this school system. This policy is designed to avoid public accountability and will not make GCPS inequalities disappear.