

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DATE: April 22, 2008

TO: **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

FROM: Dr. Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent

SUBJECT: **POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE – APPEAL PROCEDURES HANDBOOK**

ORIGINATOR: Frances A. S. Harris, Chairperson, Policy Review Committee

RESOURCE PERSON(S): Margaret-Ann F. Howie, Esquire

INFORMATION

The Board of Education’s Policy Review Committee adopted the attached procedures handbook at its meeting on March 3, 2008. The handbook was designed to facilitate the exchange of information with appellants and will be provided to each appellant upon filing an appeal with the Board of Education.

Attachment – Questions and Answers on Appeals and Hearings Before the Board of Education of Baltimore County

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
On
APPEALS AND HEARINGS
Before The
BOARD OF EDUCATION OF BALTIMORE COUNTY

I. *Introduction*

- A. You are receiving this document because you have requested a hearing before the Board of Education of Baltimore County and this hearing has been assigned to one of the Board's hearing examiners. This document explains, broadly, the procedure used for these hearings, and will tell you what to expect. This document is not intended to represent legal advice or counsel on the merits of your case. For legal advice about your case, you should consult with an attorney.
- B. You will receive a written notice that includes the date, time and place of the hearing. This notice will contain contact information for the hearing examiner selected to conduct your hearing.
- C. You should also have received a copy of the Board's policies on hearings, Policies 8339 and 8340. Specific procedures are addressed in these policies.
- D. ***It is strongly recommended that you read this document in order to understand the Board's hearing process.***

II. *What types of proceedings are covered by this procedure?*

- A. Appeals and hearings covered by this document include formal hearings before hearing examiners in matters arising under Sections 4-205 and 6-202 of the Education Article of the *Annotated Code of Maryland* as well as oral arguments before the Board of Education of Baltimore County.
- B. This document does not address student suspensions and expulsions, employee contract grievances or meetings about any of these matters.

III. *Who will conduct the hearing?*

- A. The Board of Education employs a panel of independent hearing examiners to conduct hearings where evidence is gathered. These persons are not employees of the Board of Education or of the Superintendent of Schools.
 - 1. As required by Board Policy, the hearing examiner must be an attorney admitted to practice before the Court of Appeals of Maryland.
 - 2. The hearing examiner assigned to hear your case determines facts, based on the evidence and argument presented at the hearing, reviews relevant law, and issues a decision on the issues in question.

3. Following the hearing, the hearing examiner will issue his/her Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Recommendation to the Board of Education.
- IV. *What will the hearing examiner know about my case?*
- A. The hearing examiner will not have any advance notice of the substance of your dispute. He/She will only have received your letter of appeal to the Board. You will be able to provide any necessary evidence during the hearing itself.
- V. *May I contact the hearing examiner to discuss my case?*
- A. No. The hearing examiner may not speak with you unless all parties are present by phone or in person.
 - B. If you have a matter that needs to be addressed by the hearing examiner prior to or after the hearing, please contact the Board's Scheduler listed on your hearing notice to schedule a conference.
- VI. *Do I need an attorney or may I represent myself?*
- A. An individual may represent him/herself in any hearing before the hearing examiner; no person is required to have an attorney. However, you have a right to appear with an attorney or someone who is not an attorney, such as a union representative.
 - B. The school system will be represented by an attorney.
 - C. If you choose to be represented by an attorney or a union representative, please notify the Board's Scheduler of the name and contact information of your attorney or representative.
- VII. *What happens at the hearing before the hearing examiner?*
- A. The hearing will be recorded by a Court Reporter. All individuals giving testimony will be required to do so under oath.
 - B. This is your opportunity to present your side of the case and your story. You should bring any documents or witnesses that you believe support your case and that you wish to be considered by the hearing examiner. If you decide to bring such documents, you will need the original and three (3) copies of any documents you wish to use; one for you, one that may be referred to by a witness, one for the hearing examiner, and one for the other party.
 - E. You may bring witnesses to the hearing before the hearing examiner. They will be required to testify under oath.
 - F. The formal rules of evidence do not apply to the proceedings before hearing examiners.
 - G. The Board of Education does not have the authority to subpoena documents or witnesses.

- H. The hearing examiner has the authority to control the examination of witnesses, rule on the admissibility of evidence, and postpone, continue, or recess the hearing.
- I. You, or your attorney or representative, may submit evidence, examine and cross-examine witnesses, and make objections and motions.
- J. In a hearing on a dismissal or suspension of certificated employees (under Section 6-202), the Superintendent shall proceed first. In an administrative appeals (under Section 4-205), the Appellant shall proceed first. The hearing examiner may vary the order of presentation.
- K. The Superintendent may appear in person or through counsel or a designated representative, and shall be afforded the same rights as a party to submit evidence, examine and cross-examine witnesses, and make objections and motions.
- L. The hearing examiner may limit or decline to admit cumulative or repetitive evidence, and may restrict redundant or duplicative testimony. The hearing examiner may encourage, but may not require, the parties to make stipulations as to matters not in dispute and to make proffers in place of cumulative evidence.
- M. The hearing examiner has no authority to compel any witness to testify.
- N. Hearings ordinarily will be limited to no more than three hours, and each of the parties will be allotted up to one and one half hours to present that party's side of the case. The hearing examiner may extend the time for the hearing, upon request of a party.

VIII. *What happens after the hearing before the hearing examiner?*

- A. The hearing examiner may ask you to provide additional information or legal memoranda to support your case. The hearing examiner will provide you with the necessary deadlines for providing this information.
- B. A transcript of the hearing will be provided at the expense of the Board. Either party may request a copy of the transcript at no charge to that party.
- C. Once all information, including the transcript and legal memoranda, has been received, the hearing examiner has **thirty (30) days** to issue his/her Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Recommendation to the Board of Education. A copy of the hearing examiner's recommendation will be sent to you by certified mail.
- D. Failure by the hearing examiner to submit the decision within the stated time does not mean that any party has become the prevailing party in the dispute.

- IX. *What may I do if I disagree with the hearing examiner's recommendation?*
- A. If you do not agree with the hearing examiner's recommendation, you may request oral argument before the Board of Education at one of its regularly scheduled meetings.
 - B. If you request oral argument, you will have **fifteen (15) days** from the date of the hearing examiner's decision to make your request. This request must be in writing; electronic communications will not be accepted.
 - C. Your request for oral argument shall be deemed timely filed within the 15 days if, before the expiration of time, it has been (a) delivered to the Board of Education Office; or (b) deposited in the United States mail, as certified mail.
- X. *What will happen at the oral argument before the Board?*
- A. You will receive a written notice of the date, time and place of the oral argument from the Administrative Assistant to the Board of Education.
 - B. Prior to the hearing, each Board member will be provided with a copy of the hearing examiner's recommendation and the official record of the proceedings.
 - C. Generally, the hearing will be scheduled during one of the Board of Education's regularly scheduled meetings.
 - D. Hearings, arguments and other proceedings before the Board of Education shall be held in closed session except as provided by law or otherwise approved by the Board.
 - E. No additional evidence will be considered by the Board.
 - F. The hearing examiner's recommendations may be adopted, rejected, or modified by the Board.
- XI. *What will happen if I am unable to attend the hearing before the hearing examiner?*
- A. If you cannot attend your hearing, you must send a written request as soon as you know of the problem. Your request must be received no later than **fifteen (15) days** before the scheduled date of the hearing. You should send a copy of your request for postponement to the Board's scheduler and to the hearing examiner at the same time. The request must establish good cause for your inability to attend the hearing. You must provide supporting documentation. For example, if there is a health-related reason why you are unable to attend the hearing, you must provide a doctor's note confirming the reason. Similarly, if you have vacation or travel plans, you must provide proof of your plans. The hearing examiner will decide whether the hearing will be postponed.
 - B. If you file your written request for a postponement **less than five (5) days** before the scheduled date of the hearing, you must provide proof that you had an emergency reason for being unable to appear. You should send a

copy of your request for postponement to the Board's scheduler and to the hearing examiner at the same time. The hearing examiner will decide whether the hearing will be postponed. If your request is denied, you must attend the hearing as scheduled. *Do not assume that your request has been granted.* You should call the Board's scheduler listed on your hearing notice to confirm your attendance. Generally, a hearing will not be rescheduled, postponed or continued if the postponement request is received within five days of the scheduled date, unless the parties agree or the hearing examiner approves the request.

- C. If your request for postponement is not granted and you fail to appear, your case will be dismissed.
- D. If you request additional postponements, your case will be dismissed.

XII. *What will happen if I am unable to attend the oral argument before the Board?*

- A. If you cannot attend oral argument, you must send a written request to reschedule your hearing as soon as you know of the problem.
- B. You should direct your request to the Board of Education. Depending upon the time involved, the Superintendent, through his counsel, may object to your request.
- C. If you do not attend the oral argument and if you have failed to contact the Board about your attendance, your case will be dismissed.

XIII. *Will the Board members speak to me about my hearing?*

- A. No. While a matter is under consideration by the Board or by a hearing examiner, no Board member may discuss the case with any party outside of the presence of all other parties, or consider communications in writing without supplying copies to all other parties and providing an opportunity for a response. Information concerning a pending matter may not be released publicly by the Board, a Board member, a hearing examiner, or a staff member unless it is a matter of public record.

XIV. *Will the hearings be postponed due to inclement weather?*

- A. The hearings will only be cancelled if Baltimore County Public Schools **and administrative offices** are closed. Any delayed school openings will not affect the time of the hearing.
- B. Weather-related announcements concerning Baltimore County Public Schools will be broadcast on the following radio station: WBAL AM 1090. You may also call 410-887-5555 to hear the latest school system closings.

XV. *How will I contact the Board's Scheduler or the Board of Education Offices?*

A. Board's Scheduler:
Mrs. Patricia Saul
Office of Law
6901 Charles Street
Towson, MD 21204
410-887-4060

B. Board of Education Office:
Board of Education of Baltimore County
6901 Charles Street
Towson, MD 21204
410-887-4126
Attention: Mrs. Brenda Stiffler

Legal Advice - The staff of the Board of Education offices cannot give legal advice to you on the subject of your appeal. You should consult a lawyer if you wish to determine your rights in your appeal.