

My Experiences as a Student Representative

*By Emily Meadows, Stephen Decatur High School Senior
and Student Representative to the Board of Education*

The Worcester County Board of Education consists of seven voting members and one non-voting member from each of our school system's high schools: Pocomoke, Snow Hill, and Stephen Decatur. The three non-voting members are called Student Representatives to the Board of Education. We are fortunate to have a Student Representative from each high school, since many other Maryland counties only have one.

Because our Board of Education is an advocate for students, it understands the importance of the "student voice." As a result, during Board of Education meetings, we report on the many activities taking place at our high schools, in addition to sharing our opinions on issues pertaining to students.

Each year, a Student Representative and an alternate are selected from each high school to serve as representatives to the Board of Education for one fiscal year – from July 1 to June 30. In order to qualify for consideration, a student must be a senior in good standing academically, with no significant disciplinary or attendance problems; must have attended high school in our school system for at least two years; and must have the support of administrators and staff at his/her school. This year, in addition to my service as a Student Representative for Stephen Decatur High School, the Board of Education is joined by Student Representatives Brittany Cottman of Pocomoke High School and Daniel Pilchard of Snow Hill High School.

Student Representatives attend the Board of Education's monthly meetings, as well as many special meetings and events. For example, so far this year, we have already attended seven Board of Education meetings, received on-site tours of the new Worcester Technical High School, heard presentations on various aspects of our educational system, and made classroom visitations. As Student Representatives, we have also attended a conference by the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) and been invited to the Maryland Teacher of the Year Gala and our tri-county (Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) legislative dinner. These experiences have allowed us to take a closer look into our public school system and to gain priceless knowledge about it. Each experience has touched each of us in a unique way.

It is the responsibility of our Student Representatives to acquire the information needed to make a thorough school report during a Board of Education meeting. Prior to a meeting, each representative must meet with his/her principal to discuss upcoming school activities. With this information, Student Representatives write a formal report which will be read to the Board and the public. Most monthly reports include upcoming events, news, and reports on past events, as well as announcements that are important for each individual school.

While serving as representatives in the 2007-2008 school year, we have learned about several departments and initiatives during our monthly Student Representatives' meetings, held immediately prior to Board of Education meetings. During a Student Representatives' meeting, for example, we have learned about the PowerSchool information system and how it is creating a more effective way to keep student records for grades, attendance, and scheduling. We have also learned about the policies of our Board of Education, and how they relate to state and federal regulations.

Our Student Representatives also have learned about our school system's Codes of Conduct, as well as how the school system must uphold everyone's rights. A presentation was also made to teach us about multicultural education. This presentation taught us that everyone learns differently and that biases have no place in the classroom or in the school environment. In addition, we learned about Arts Immersion by taking a tour of Pocomoke Middle School. We observed classroom lessons by art teachers Monica Forrester and Tamara Mills – who is also our 2007 Worcester County Teacher of the Year. Through all of these endeavors, we – as Student Representatives – have gained a vast amount of information that will help us in our futures.

Many may wonder what a Student Representative looks forward to at each Board of Education meeting. Some may assume it's the food or being able to miss a half-day of school. In actuality, it is the presentations made by students that we look forward to the most. This year, presentations have been made by students from Cedar Chapel Special School and Showell Elementary School, and by students who participated in a Summer Academy.

Every time a child presents to the Board, it reminds us all why education is so important. When a child shows how they can use technology efficiently to not only have fun, but to learn, it shows how important it is to purchase new computers. When a Special Olympics soccer team is recognized for its outstanding performances, it reminds us of how important extra-curricular programs are. The Board of Education provides programs that change children's lives. This is

most evident when students come and reflect on their experiences during a Board of Education meeting.

The knowledge that I have personally gained from this experience as a Student Representative will aid me in my future as I pursue a career in the education field. As I attend Salisbury University in the fall to study English and Secondary Education, I hope to one day return to teach for Worcester County Public Schools – where I know there is never-ending support from the leaders of our Board of Education.