

# Anne Arundel school board makes amendments, hears public comment on proposal to ban certain flags in the classroom

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About an hour before the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County sat down Monday night to discuss a policy proposal to curtail the display of flags that are not government sponsored in county public school classrooms, about a hundred community members gathered along the sidewalk outside the administration building.

On one side of Riva Road, protesters carried American flags – large and small – in support of the flag proposal. On the other side, activists waved rainbow LGBTQ pride flags and transgender rights banners with the fist that represents the Black Lives Matter movement.

The school board heard [extensive community testimony](#) on May 24 on the proposal, including from educators and parents both for and against the policy. Community organizations such as Annapolis Pride and the Anne Arundel County NAACP also testified.

The proposal states that “[e]xcept for flags that promote national, state, and local government pride, the display of flags on Board property and in [Anne Arundel County Public schools] shall be limited to those with a bona fide educational purpose.”

A final vote on the proposal is set for the school board’s July 12 meeting.

Board member Corine Frank, of District 3, proposed the policy “not for any reason other than constituents coming to [her] with concerns,” she said during the meeting in May.

Flag concerns date to before she entered office in 2020 as the District 3 representative and have [persisted into the school year just ended](#), according to Frank.

As drafted, her proposal designates the school principals or “the principal’s designee” as the main party who will determine what constitutes a bona fide— or genuine – educational purpose for the display of a flag. The policy does not list any specific flags that would be subjected to this new evaluation standard; rather it exempts the American, Maryland, Anne Arundel County and Annapolis city flags from review.

Only about a dozen community members showed up for the meeting in May, while about a hundred were at Monday night’s meeting hoping to either speak to the policy or support a speaker. About 1,600 written comments both for and against the policy were received, as well, according to Bob Mosier, spokesperson for the school system.

Dana Schallheim, the school board member from District 5, who [opposes the proposal](#) , introduced two amendments aimed at providing clarity. One of those amendments tried to define the word “decoration” as part of the policy’s authority, explicitly excluding student artwork as part of the definition of “decoration.” It also would have prohibited the policy from covering symbols students, staff, volunteers and visitors might apply to personal items.

Both of Schallheim’s amendments failed Monday night.

“I never thought this policy was worth the time in committee nor the paper it’s printed on but [I] might as well make it an enabling policy and not a restrictive one, and that was what I’m aiming to do,” Schallheim said. “It doesn’t restrict the display of the Maryland flag and Anne Arundel County flag or Annapolis city flag but basically continues with the status quo.”

Frank also introduced myriad amendments to the policy, including one that passed that coincides with Schallheim’s personal-item concern. The amendment would enshrine the right for county public school employees, students, volunteers and visitors to adorn themselves with personal items such as buttons, pins, clothing, designs or jewelry that

may include a flag or “flag-like design” as long as those items do not violate state law or board policy.

That amendment came in response to many public commenters speaking on the concern that this policy would deter items that promote self-expression, including personal items such as clothing, stickers, buttons or jewelry.

“This policy does not interfere with personal freedom of speech,” Frank said.

The amendment passed 5 to 3; Schallheim was among those opposed along with board president and District 6 representative Joanna Bache Tobin and vice president and District 2 representative Robert Silkworth.

Many parents and community members who showed support of the policy, like Tareque Farruk, from Cape St. Claire, argued that including flags such as the rainbow LGBTQ flag and the Black Lives Matter would only further divide their children, as it does not represent everyone in the community.

“We call for AACPS to unite our children under one flag that we are all represented in – the American [flag],” he said. “Individual beliefs and ideologies are reserved for people’s individual homes. It should start and end with one unifying flag, and that is the American flag.”

Conversely, many teachers and students who showed up in opposition did so to share their personal stories as members of the queer community.



Audience members reacting June 26 during county school board discussion of a policy proposal to ban the display of certain types of flags on county school grounds except for the American, state, county and city flags.

Zie Goodman, a recent graduate from Chesapeake High School, shared stories of feeling ostracized by both peers and teachers. About one month after Goodman’s high school career started, a student told them that “people like them don’t belong at this school.” Goodman described feeling welcome when they walked into classrooms with the rainbow pride or Black Lives Matter flags, knowing they had a trusted adult to go to should they face that again.

“Flags show me that I don’t need to shrink myself down,” Goodman said. “I don’t have to repress parts of myself so as to not be noticed and not be targeted.”

Many board members also expressed their personal thoughts on the policy.

"I do not feel that this is a policy that is needed," Tobin said. "I think we're covered when it comes to the display of the flags that we were legally required to display on the one hand by the policy that covers that, and we're covered on the other in the policy that prevents us from displaying signs of hate."

Other members like District 1's Gloria Dent offered thoughts on how the school system can promote diversity and inclusion for all students.

She said that, as a combat veteran, she sees the American flag representing everyone. She acknowledged the significance of the rainbow and the Black Lives Matter flags to those in the board room, but she also said that some may feel underrepresented who want to fly flags like "Make America Great Again."

"The policy needs to be inclusive, and I don't know if there's a way," she said. "I mean this wholeheartedly, we have to find a way to work together to be here together, so that all students feel included. If this policy is divisive, I not only think that the policy needs to be reevaluated, but the policy is not a policy that needs to stand in Anne Arundel County."

Student board member Zach McGrath will leave his role before the board votes on the proposed policy. Eric Lin, [the newly elected student member of the board](#) from Severna Park High School, will be sworn in June 29.