

Strategic Planning Committee Minutes
February 4, 2008
3:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m. with the following committee members and Board staff present: Dr. Judy Docca (Chair), Mr. Christopher Barclay, Mr. Roland Ikheloa (Chief of Staff), Ms. Laura Steinberg (Staff Assistant for Legislative and Inter-Governmental Relations), and Mrs. Kathy Yorro (Recorder).

The following Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff members were present: Mr. Larry Bowers, Chief Operating Officer; Mr. Steve Bedford, Chief School Performance Officer; Dr. Frank Stetson, Community Superintendent, Office of School Performance; Ms. Betty Collins, Director, Staff Development Initiatives Team, Office of Organizational Development; and Dr. Clare Von Secker, Supervisor, Applied Research Unit, Department of Shared Accountability.

Also present: Dr. Rebecca Newman, President, Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (MCAASP).

Approval of Agenda and Minutes – The committee unanimously approved the meeting agenda and the minutes for the Strategic Planning Committee meeting of December 7, 2007, as amended.

Briefing on Suspension Report – Dr. Docca thanked staff for taking time to update the committee on the progress of the suspension intervention workgroup prior to the report to the Board scheduled for April. MCPS staff (Dr. Stetson) briefed the committee on the ongoing work of the workgroup whose charge is to develop a plan to reduce the suspension rate for African American and Hispanic students by identifying preventions and interventions. The goal is to increase academic achievement, reduce suspensions, and eliminate the gap. Dr. Stetson noted that staff has moved forward and will be ready for a report at the April 28 meeting. (Later in the meeting Mr. Bowers noted that the Update on Suspensions and Interventions is scheduled for the June 23 BOE meeting.) Staff discussed the makeup of the workgroup which will include central and school-based staff, along with stakeholders including parents, representatives from the NAACP Parent Council, Latino parents, representatives from the county PTA, students, and support services employees. Teacher representatives have not been identified yet. Ms. Bonnie Cullison, president of the Montgomery County Education Association, is working to identify teachers to be on the work group.

Dr. Stetson explained that the focus of this program is to solve not make excuses. The approach is not a discipline approach but rather an approach using teaching and learning components. The goal is to get students learning to correct/eradicate their behaviors. He noted that the focus group does not anticipate any recommendations to revise BOE policy.

Dr. Stetson explained expected outcomes –

1. Expect to have a process on how discipline decisions will be made in schools.
2. Will include a monitoring process.
3. Will include an accountability process.
4. Training.

The workgroup is to develop “best practices” as a guide, looking at targets to measure success using the Call to Action targets. They are delving into research noting that this is not an issue just in Montgomery County – looking at the Indiana Report. Mr. Bedford explained the work of the Office of School Performance in focusing on reducing and eliminating practices that cause suspensions and working with schools to look at discretionary suspensions.

Dr. Stetson reviewed the slide/handout of a pyramid explaining the process for achieving the anticipated results: Academic achievement, reduce suspensions, eliminate the gap. The pyramid includes a Foundational level – instruction within the classrooms including a teaching and learning process; a Primary level – mentoring, counseling, peer mediation, study circles, parent communication important; a Focused level – differentiated types of consequences rather than suspension, reviewing discipline data, and looking at the School Improvement Plan; and an Intensive level – suspensions are occurring, use of the SHARP program, Saturday detention, required parent conferences – focus on helping a student who is suspended from school learn why he/she has been suspended and help “prevent/learn from this experience.”

Dr. Stetson further explained the Priority Concepts/essential questions:

- Children see themselves as others see them.
- What do we do if we can't suspend? (If you weren't allowed to suspend, what would you do?)
- Does MCPS have core values that are required by all employees?
- How do we teach so that students learn the values?

Dr. Docca noted that the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative is important. She encouraged the team to look at behaviors, helping students to look at their behaviors using best practices. (Dr. Docca gave an example of Quince Orchard High School - doing more contact with homes.)

Committee members expressed their concerns regarding the students who will be part of this review process. How will the workgroup ensure that students will be candid, open with their input, and share information; will the right students (students who have been suspended, those who think they are unfairly treated, African American and Hispanic, etc.) be part of this focus group, and that the workgroup should speak to parents of students who have been suspended – how are we interacting with them to determine acceptable boundaries?

Staff discussed the AP training program and that administrators in schools will need to be leaders around the development and handling of discipline/suspension issues—how an administrator will handle discipline referrals. Administrators (assistant principals) will need to “inform” staff of expectations.

Dr. Newman noted that there is a tremendous amount of good thinking going on. In 200 schools there are many different strategies. She expressed the need to back-map to review the discipline process. She noted that kids ask for and need consistency. She agreed that this is a very complicated issue and that there is the need to dig down and get to the real issues.

Major Pittman (member of the NAACP who was observing the meeting) informed the committee that they would be holding a Youth Summit at the end of February where this issue will be a major topic.

Action/Followup: Report to the Board, Update on Suspensions and Interventions, will be brought to the Board in June.

Principal Survey – The committee discussed their request for a principal survey and two primary issues of focus: 1) Assessment of environment, and 2) Supports provided to principals.

MCPS staff (Mr. Bowers) discussed the ongoing work of the Office of the Chief Operating Officer in gathering information from schools as feedback from schools. He discussed the individual department surveys and focus groups that are continually working on getting feedback from schools, as well as the work with MCAASP to build on other parts of the school system. He noted that directors of departments can contact principals at any time to get feedback on whether principals’ needs are being met. Mr. Bowers discussed the concern of inundating principals with surveys and that a number of years ago sent out a survey with poor response rate. Staff is finding that the surveys from departments are specific and get good response, more effective, and that principals get involved.

Dr. Newman discussed different avenues that are ongoing to receive feedback from principals—advisory committees, which include 14 principals, that meet periodically to focus on different perspectives (Human Resources, Office of School Performance, and secondary level staff reviewing scheduling); Professional Learning Communities—and indicated that the feedback from schools is that we are doing a great job. She noted that Mr. Bower’s offices are doing a great job of getting feedback from schools.

The committee expressed that there is a need for possibly a shorter survey and with staff discussed developing a focus group including principals to determine the need and focus of the survey/questionnaire, questions to be asked. Staff indicated that climate is a different issue and should not be commingled in this survey.

Action/Followup: Develop a focus group to work together to find out from principals what they would like to see on a questionnaire (Mr. Bowers, Dr. Newman, BOE).

Meet with appropriate people to decide OCIP and maybe HR who are willing to start on this.

Dialogue on Committee's Work Plan—The committee discussed the following items on their work plan:

- Future agenda to include Foreign Language
- Professional growth system—evaluation tool. Ms. Cox anxious to review the professional growth system for the superintendent. Invite Ms. Cox in to discuss this topic.
- Strategic Plan – Call to Action – Need two more dates on BOE calendar to review strategic plan items.
- Clarify what we are really looking for in the joint discussion with NAACP committee.
- Committee to look at academic priorities.

Followup: Joint meeting on the strategic plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.