

Amend the State Priority List
(FAILED)

A motion by Dr. Greenblatt to amend the state priority list by moving Bradley Hills and Washington Grove to the second and third place failed with Dr. Greenblatt and Mrs. Peyser voting in the affirmative; Dr. Cronin, Mr. Ewing, Mrs. Praisner, and Dr. Shoenberg voting in the negative (Mr. Robertson voting in the negative).

Resolution No. 966-83 Re: An Amendment to the CIP State
Priority List

On motion of Dr. Cronin seconded by Mr. Robertson, the following resolution was adopted with Dr. Cronin, Mr. Ewing, Mrs. Peyser, Mrs. Praisner, and Dr. Shoenberg voting in the affirmative; Dr. Greenblatt voting in the negative (Mr. Robertson voting in the affirmative):

Resolved, That planning for the new Germantown Area elementary school be added as the fourth planning project.

Resolution No. 967-83 Re: FY 1985 Capital Improvements
Program (CIP) Priority Listing

On recommendation of the superintendent and on motion of Mrs. Praisner seconded by Dr. Cronin, the following resolution was adopted unanimously:

WHEREAS, On November 21 the Board of Education approved a FY 1985 Capital Budget totaling \$25,313,00 of which \$19,624,000 was requested from the state and \$5,689,000 from the county; and

WHEREAS, The Board of Education is required to approve a priority listing for state funds request; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Education approve the priority list for state eligibility projects.

Re: Announcement

Mr. Ewing announced that the Board had met with the directors of the Board of Realtors to discuss ways in which the Board of Education could work more cooperatively with realtors.

For the record, Mrs. Peyser stated that it was wrong for the Board to schedule a meeting with a group of students on the first night of Hanukkah. She felt that this was being extremely insensitive to the Jewish children who would want to observe this holiday. She asked that the meeting be rescheduled, and Mr. Ewing agreed to discuss the issue when the Board's calendar was set.

Re: Montgomery County Public Schools
Discipline Survey and

Recommendations

Dr. Johnnie Harris, chairperson of the Task Force on Student Behavior and Discipline, explained that his group tried to get a feel for the status of discipline in the school system. With the assistance of the Department of Educational Accountability, they were able to survey 27 schools. In analyzing the data, the task force felt it might serve them well to go beyond the summary data and look at individual schools to see how the staff people perceived discipline. They had three recommendations they believed reflected the needs of the schools.

Dr. Shoenberg thanked the committee for its approach to the problem. He asked whether the committee had looked into the disproportionate rate of black suspensions. Dr. Earle West explained that they had no specific discussion on this subject because nothing in their charge suggested they should look at this. Mrs. Peyser commented that she was not happy with the executive summary of the survey because the summary stated "overall, discipline is not seen as a significant problem in MCPS." It goes on to state "although scattered reports of misconduct exist, and will continue to exist, the survey findings strongly suggest that MCPS need not overly concern itself with discipline issues. Few, if any, changes appear called for, and it appears that maintenance of an already smoothly functioning system should be the system's goal." "On a survey, 80 percent of teachers responded that disruptive students were causing significant problems in their classes." She did not believe that anyone could draw these conclusions from the survey reports sent in by teachers. She cited Tables 3 and 4 as examples. She was concerned that administrators were spending so much of their time on discipline when they were also responsible for evaluating and observing teachers. She called attention to the chart on incidents and pointed out that 40 percent of teachers reported students used profanity every day. Thirteen percent reported vandalism once a week. She said that 25 percent of the teachers felt they did not have all the authority they needed to maintain a well-disciplined classroom. She cited the survey conducted two years ago and thought the questions in that survey were more helpful.

Mrs. Peyser was concerned that if they did not take these things seriously they were not going to solve the problem. Parents had indicated that discipline headed their list of concerns. She felt that they did have a serious problem and should address it.

Dr. Cronin noted that the report did go to a second level. The report went to the gross figures and then to the individual school-by-school level. That might give them a somewhat false sense of data because certain schools might be experiencing difficulties while others are not. Both issues got hidden in the data. He suggested they ought to walk a fine line between both sets of data. He asked about the discrepancy between administrators' perceptions and those of classroom teachers. There was a statement about alcohol and drug abuse not being a major problem. This could be a

reflection of a major problem in class as opposed to afterschool and weekend use. He asked what the system planned to do now that it had identified certain schools as "problem" schools. Mr. Joseph Hawkins, quality assurance specialist, explained that where administrators did not agree with teachers it was probably a problem with the numbers. He said they were comparing one or two administrators with the perceptions of the rest of the building.

Dr. West added that there was a limited range of possible perceptions of the respondent. For example, when a principal said they had faculty meetings on discipline and half of the faculty said they did not, they did not have an explanation for this.

Dr. Steven Frankel, director of the Department of Educational Accountability, indicated that he had written the executive summary and would stand by it. He said that they had guarded the anonymity of the 27 schools because it was a volunteer effort. When they looked at the teacher response from the 27 schools, four schools had problems. In the other schools two-thirds of the teachers did not feel there was a significant problem. He pointed out that when they looked at the MCPS data in comparison to national data, it did not appear that there were significant problems in MCPS. In response to Dr. Cronin's question, he said one thing they could do was to ask the schools with high ratings if they would be adverse to releasing this information to the area office.

Dr. Cody stated that he had received the report only today, and while he had identified with the first and the third recommendations, he would have to talk further about the second recommendation. He agreed that a staff response should be prepared and plans developed. He hoped that the confidentiality of the survey would be honored. However, he thought it might be useful to collect this information annually to have a perception of discipline problems in the MCPS. In regard to the survey, Mrs. Praisner said she would find it useful in the future if the results and the questions were printed together. It would also be useful to have an historical perspective of trends about the problem. As a former MCCPTA area vice-president, she had seen reviews of discipline policies and discussions between principals and PTAs. She had seen intensive work in schools to assess their problems and work on these. She thought they needed to provide more support so that this process could go on across the board. Dr. Amanda Winters stated that as an area office person she had served on teams going into schools where there were problems.

Dr. Shoenberg remarked that they had all been in the schools and knew there were a certain number of students engaging in low-level disruptive behavior, but it was a small number of students. He said that the kinds of items recurring were items which caused no physical harm or damage to property. He could not find any reason to get hysterical about the data. If 25 percent of the teachers said they did not have the authority they needed to maintain a well-disciplined classroom, his question to them would be "how much authority do you want?"

Mr. Robertson stated that discipline problems had always been around and would always be around. He thought it would be fruitless to strive to eliminate discipline problems because disruptive behavior would always exist in their society. He felt that the first and third recommendations were excellent. He would agree that it was not a crisis situation, but they should continue to work on this. He did have questions about the second recommendation. While he recognized the necessity of removing disruptive students from the classroom, the recommendation seemed like labelling to him. He knew that some students needed to be labelled and were, but he would have a real concern about any quickening of the identification process.

Dr. Winters explained that it took a long time to move a child through the identification process, and if a child was having problems they wanted that child in a proper placement. They were really talking about children who were emotionally impaired. Dr. Pitt thought that if there were concerns about the process used it could be improved upon. He pointed out that there were legal controls regarding labelling and identification. He said principals had expressed concern about the ACES process and perhaps they should take a look at it. He noted that it was a very costly procedure to give people support and pointed out that they had less students now than they used to have and more special education youngsters. He was looking for a happy medium. He agreed that there were times when they needed to expedite looking at a youngster, but he was concerned about labelling.

Dr. Greenblatt thought they were moving toward a whitewash of the situation, and to deny they had problems in many of the schools was a whitewash. The Board knew there were problems because of what they had heard in executive session and from calls. She said they had to take action to improve discipline where it was needed. The critical question was whether the classroom was a place where learning could take place without disruption. If learning could not take place, they were depriving 28 other children of the opportunity to learn. She suggested the Board had to approach this on a school by school basis and then area by area to get to the problem. One of the issues was the different perceptions of teachers and administrators. The teacher might ask if the administrator was going to provide support in discipline matters. If teachers felt they would not be backed up by the principal, they were impotent in discipline matters. However, if a teacher had problems in all of his or her classes, this might be a weak teacher. She reported that in some schools students did review the discipline policy at the beginning of the year, but the question was whether the policy was enforced. She pointed out that in the report it was stated their objective was not to punish, it was to change behavior. However, sometimes punishment was a good thing because it showed students what was not proper. She restated that they should not whitewash the issue. Rather they should support teachers and principals who wanted well-disciplined schools.

Mr. Ewing stated that no one was saying there were no problems. He

did not read that in the report or hear this from the discussion. There were problems; however, the questions had to do with the nature and extent of the problems. It seemed to him the survey was the beginning of their understanding and not the conclusion of it. He agreed that what constituted disruptive behavior was a matter of perception. Obviously there were extremes on which everyone could agree, but these did shade off into things people would disagree over. For this reason, it was important to revisit the discipline policy and get the views of individual parents so that the policy reflected a common perception of what was disruptive and a recognition that this would often vary from school to school. Finally they had to look at how much discipline problem was too much discipline problem. He said that clearly the task force and Dr. Frankel had concluded that the level and nature of the disruption was not a serious problem. Given the status of national data, it was not possible to them to say they had too much, too little, or just right. They had to stop blaming one another and recognize that everyone had a responsibility here - students, the home, teachers, the principals, the administrators, and the Board of Education. They had to focus on mutual responsibility. He agreed that everyone wanted an orderly environment and punishment could be helpful, but could not guarantee the environment they wanted could be present. They had to assure that the environment in the classroom was sufficiently motivating, rewarding, and positive for every student so that the tendency to make trouble was reduced. He thought they were not in a mode where they had to regard this as some kind of terrible crisis. They needed to think carefully about the issue, and he felt that the recommendations of the task force were considered and sensible.

Mrs. Peyser asked whether this topic would come back to the Board for discussion and action, and Mr. Ewing agreed that it would. Dr. Cody added that he could not specify a time because he had to talk with staff, but it would not be as late as the spring.

Mrs. Peyser stated that Dr. Pitt had spoken about the costs of working with these youngsters. Dr. Pitt explained that he was talking about a student who was emotionally disturbed and needed a special school. Dr. Winters said they were talking about students who were not handicapped. Dr. West added that occasionally there was a student whose behavior was disruptive, and teachers were saying that they could not get rid of the student. Mrs. Peyser said she was pleased to see the second recommendation because there was a limit to the time and money they spent on youngsters who chose to misbehave. If all of the adults in a school spent so much time focusing on these few youngsters, the others in the school did not get the attention they deserved. She requested information on the cost per pupil of the alternative schools.

Dr. Cronin pointed out that the Board had before it budget, facilities, and minority student concerns which would take them through April. There were concerns in the report about class cutting, tardiness, and truancy which seemed to be major issues. He thought the next stage was for the areas with the principals and

teachers to get their houses straightened out. He did not want to see this as a campaign issue, and he did not see this report as a crisis situation which required more Board discussion. He suggested that the superintendent pick it up from here and provide the Board with an item of information on steps he had taken. Dr. Shoenberg agreed. If the superintendent thought there were any policy changes required, he could inform the Board. Mrs. Praisner saw this as a need for the superintendent to respond and react, and then provide an item of information to the Board. If there were recommendations for Board action, these would come from the superintendent.

Dr. Harris reported that the task force's purpose was to take a stab at assessing the status of discipline and determine if policy implications existed. It was their conclusion that while there were problems, there did not seem to exist a need for any major policy changes. Mr. Ewing thanked the task force members and staff for their help.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 11 p.m.

President

Secretary

WSC:mlw