

APPROVED  
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Rockville, Maryland  
March 30, 1988

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Wednesday, March 30, 1988, at 8:10 p.m.

ROLL CALL       Present: Mrs. Sharon DiFonzo, President  
                               in the Chair  
                               Dr. James E. Cronin  
                               Mr. Blair G. Ewing  
                               Mr. Bruce A. Goldensohn  
                               Mrs. Marilyn J. Praisner  
                               Mrs. Vicki Rafel  
                               Dr. Robert E. Shoenberg

Absent: Mr. Andrew Herscowitz

Others Present: Dr. Harry Pitt, Superintendent of Schools  
                               Dr. Paul L. Vance, Deputy Superintendent  
                               Mr. Thomas S. Fess, Parliamentarian

Re:    PREKINDERGARTEN - GRADE 12 POLICIES

Mrs. DiFonzo thanked the committee for their patience and willingness to reschedule this topic which had been on a previous agenda very late in the evening.

Dr. Carl W. Smith, executive assistant to the superintendent, reported that last week the Board had received a revised draft of the PreK-12 policies which addressed issues raised at the previous Board discussion and also in comments from the community. He explained that the committee spent a great deal of time in deciding how it would attack the charge to the committee and in using the Board's policy on policy-setting as a guideline in developing these policies. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to have a dialogue with the members of the Board.

Dr. Shoenberg asked what he would find in the policies that he would not expect to find someplace else or what would give him specific guidance if he were an experienced administrator coming to Montgomery County. Dr. Smith replied they had identified the elements essential in an effective school. The policies focused on the organization of schools and the operation of those schools. They tried to identify components that would help schools to look at their organization and the kinds of things they were doing. For example, the principal could take the statement on school climate and use it in some practical ways to see what they were doing or needed to do. They were looking for a policy that would provide direction in the context of the next five to ten years.

Dr. Shoenberg inquired about discussions the committee might have had about principle. Dr. Peg Egan replied that one area was the middle school. The existing policy called for 7-8 intermediate schools, but

the committee did not feel it was the appropriate grade organization. Dr. Pat Newby added that initially this was a controversial topic because the elementary schools were not sure they wanted to give up the sixth grade.

Dr. Smith commented that the issues of full-day/half-day kindergarten and the comprehensive high school were major topics of discussion as well. Dr. Liz Glowa remarked that long-range planning and accountability were other issues because it wasn't clearly stated anywhere that schools needed to do long-range planning. Dr. Newby explained that they weren't sure how to include these topics in the document when they hadn't been included previously.

Dr. Cronin asked how they were to ascertain that the policies would have any effect on the system at all. He wanted to know how they would deal with the accountability issue.

Mrs. Praisner recalled that the Board had a collection of policies which were developed at different time periods. The charge to the committee was to streamline those policies, review the inconsistencies, and discuss those inconsistencies. She asked how they knew what they were doing under those policies was right or wrong or that they had accountability. She asked if they had lost anything in the new policies that they were concerned about and whether they had a framework for regulations which would be the next step.

Dr. Steve Seleznow commented that the policies gave him a framework in terms of what should be happening in the elementary school. The policies told others in the school system what they needed to be accountable for and what supports they needed. The policies also recognized that there were differences throughout schools and communities in Montgomery County which the previous policies did not. When they were working on drafting these policies, they were also reviewing the recommendations of the Board's Commission on Excellence. Discussions took place regarding flexibility, autonomy, and the ability of schools to make decisions to meet the needs of their students within a framework. They had tried to develop that framework to give schools the opportunity to plan and to develop programs that met the needs of their students.

Mrs. Praisner asked if they had lost anything by trying to streamline the policies. Dr. Smith replied that most of what was covered in the existing policies had been incorporated in these drafts in one way or another. There were some isolated cases where this was not the case; however, some of these issues were in other policy statements. At some point they would have to make decisions about including some issues in other policies or not continuing the policy.

Dr. Pitt pointed out that the Board's present policy was a K-6 school, a 7-8 school, and a 9-12 school with an option under structured circumstances where the community requested a 6-7-8 school. He asked if the new policy meant that all schools would be required to go to a 6-8 structure and assume the general

characteristics of a middle school. Dr. Egan replied that the proposed policy stated that midlevel schools would move toward the goal of 6-8 organization with the community and staff deciding on the organizational pattern appropriate to the individual school. Dr. Pitt asked whether this would push the interdisciplinary teams approach, and Dr. Egan explained that it would not preclude schools selecting that model. It would be the goal that schools would be 6-7-8.

Dr. Cronin asked about the Villani committee which was working on the same issue. Dr. Glowa replied that the committee was looking at 6-7-8 including curriculum suggestions, instructional issues, articulation, and community issues. There might be an interim report from the committee in the next few weeks.

Dr. Seleznow reported that the committee felt a strong sense of responsibility to recommend what they felt was in the best interests of their students. One of the most compelling arguments was the fact that intermediate schools had only two years to work with students which wasn't enough time to make a difference.

Dr. Newby indicated that they had named this policy the middle level because they didn't want to dictate what the school should look like. If they called it a middle school policy, that had certain organizational and program implications. Mrs. DiFonzo added that in three or four places in the policy it stated that the organization was not prescriptive. She saw 6 to 8 as being a goal, but no one was being forced into going that way.

Mrs. Rafel explained that before her appointment to the Board she had been a member of this committee. She had watched the process evolve, and it was her sense that the draft policies were more student oriented than some of the earlier policies. She still had some problems with some of the wording. For example, she would like to see parent involvement given more emphasis.

Mr. Ewing felt that the committee's approach on the organizational structure of schools was a good one. He was also pleased to see the section on accountability. However, he was not sure that the statement of purpose was sufficiently expansive to convey what was intended here. They should state that they were establishing a structure for the school system and some principles under which education should proceed. They might want to add something about a process of accountability as well. It seemed to him that they could have said more about instructional practices, and they did not speak to the issue of "to what end and why." He had looked at curriculum statements, and it was his view that this issue was not sufficiently well dealt with there. For example, the curriculum emphasis was on strategies and did not include what might be worth learning.

Mr. Ewing was also concerned about accountability. While there was a section on accountability, it was not clear to whom the result of accountability assessment would go. This brought him to the issue of review and reporting. Some time ago Board policies included a

section on feedback indicators, and now most policies said that the policy would be reviewed. They did not say they were going to review the results the policy had had as it was implemented. The Board had to know at some juncture whether or not what it had approved was having any impact.

Mr. Ewing noted that there might be a contradiction in the policy. On one hand, the policy talked about encouraging students to be risk-takers, and at the same time it spoke to teaching students to be adaptable to the needs of society which might be legitimate or illegitimate. He did not want to convey the idea that they were meeting society's demands exclusively. They did need to produce educated people who were independent thinkers and good citizens. He was also concerned that some of the objectives might be in conflict. He also found a conflict between the sameness of the policies for the different levels because there were different developmental levels at stages in the lives of students. For example, there were specific characteristics of the way children learned at an early age. It seemed to Mr. Ewing that a statement of purpose could spell out what the policy was and was not. He did not expect that they should have a policy covering every aspect of every part of education, but they should be clear about what it didn't include.

Dr. Pitt stated that the critical point here was that they had other policies and needed to examine those. They had the issue of what they ought to teach children, how limiting this ought to be, how expansive it ought to be, and what the general framework of the curriculum ought to be. However, he did not think they could cover this in what was a kind of encompassing structure. The Board was looking at curriculum now and maybe those issues should be raised in the context of that discussion. In addition, he didn't know how far they should go in terms of structuring what a school should look like and how much flexibility should be given to schools. Children learned not in segregated parts but together, and for that reason the interdisciplinary team plan made sense to him and he would like to encourage that. They did say that schools should have flexibility and some options as to how they worked.

Ms. Joy Odom remarked that she was pleased that the policy referred to the PROGRAM OF STUDIES and the instructional guides that made up the curriculum. She reported on the intensive involvement of staff before curriculum was approved, and she was pleased that they would not have to reopen this policy every time new curriculum was approved.

It seemed to Dr. Shoenberg that the accountability section did not talk about how they were going to be accountable for accomplishing the basic goals of schooling--how were they going to hold themselves accountable for students' learning, maturing, attending school in a safe and supportive environment, etc. He suggested they had to go beyond what they had in the policy. Dr. Smith agreed that they would have to spell out how accountability fed back to the whole school system. They had not attempted to take accountability and define that as a term that would be operational for the entire school system

and every unit. They said schools ought to have management plans that identified the objectives for which they were responsible. Schools should report on what progress they had or had not made, and this was in the context of the central, area, and local school process. There was accountability through the PROGRAM OF STUDIES as well.

Dr. Shoenberg thought the section on accountability was too limited because there were other ways in which a school could adopt an accountability strategy of some kind or another. To specify that the annual management plan technique was a policy seemed to him to be rather more limiting than the rest of the policy. He thought they needed some kinds of statements that defined accountability more broadly than the annual management plan.

It was Mrs. Praisner's view that they were talking here about planning and not accountability. They planned by taking into consideration the demographics and the social changes, and they implemented planning by developing a five-year plan with annual goals. The only element of accountability was the assessment and reporting on this. Dr. Smith agreed that the committee would go back and look at that entire section.

Dr. Pitt commented that the real problem was developing a system of accountability that focused on what they were really holding people accountable for. When they had problems they could get at that, and when everything was going well they could get at that. However, they had the whole middle group of how well they were doing and whether the objectives were reasonable. Dr. Seleznow said he considered the policies as an accountability document. His associate superintendent could come to his school and use the document as a check list. The document identified a framework for how schools ought to be operating and what they ought to be doing. He thought that statement No. 5 had been written this way because they were all concerned about the development of objectives and goals in their management plans. Dr. Pitt said they could use test results and minimum competency tests, but they didn't really get at how well students did in relation to what they could do or how well they met the goals of learning the curriculum. These were still judgments.

Dr. Egan wondered if they could include something here about the Goals of Education and the Board's priorities and initiatives. She thought this might meet Dr. Shoenberg's concern and yet focus on the fact that this was a document for schools. Dr. Shoenberg observed that as Dr. Seleznow suggested it could be that the whole document was a statement of that for which they wished to be held accountable. Perhaps they needed to say something about the way in which they needed to be held accountable. He asked whether the document included assessment of student progress through the use of a variety of means. Dr. Smith replied that they had a policy on evaluating and reporting and had walked around this issue by saying there needed to be periodic reports of progress in accordance with the regulation. It appeared to Dr. Cronin that there was no bridging between the

three policies. Dr. Smith replied that they did talk about articulation and program continuity. Dr. Cronin suggested that the statement could be clearer. Mrs. Praisner suggested language such as "from grade to grade and from school level to school level."

Dr. Seleznow noted that Mr. Ewing had raised a question about responding to societal needs and rapidly changing technology. Over the past few years they had seen and would see in the next few years rapid changes in the community, society, and technology. The problem was how specific to get with this issue when they might see dramatic changes in the next few years. The question was how they built a policy that would give them the flexibility to respond to these changes and yet at the same time give them guidance on how to deal with change.

Mr. Ewing said that if they were going to say they would adapt to the changing needs of society, they had to look at any eternal verities to which they subscribed and which they would pursue whether technology changed or not. He had tried to read the documents as a parent, and it seemed to him they had to say there were some things that did not change, but there were many things that did. Therefore, they needed to build a curriculum which responded to continuing what was best and educating children well for the future. Dr. Smith explained that it was not their intention to ignore things that were permanent and true. They had used "adapting to society's needs" in terms of anticipating what students would face when they left high school so that they would be equipped to function as adults, citizens, and learners. In their thinking, THE PROGRAM OF STUDIES did spell out rather concretely the things that were permanent.

Dr. Egan saw the policy as an enabling policy because a lot of the other policies spoke to the level of specificity the Board was concerned about. The PROGRAM OF STUDIES was specific, and the Board did look at curriculum on a regular, periodic basis. Dr. Pitt advised that the problem was they did not say this clearly enough. Someone could read the documents without knowing all the other policies that were out there. He agreed that they should say what the document was and what it was not.

Mrs. DiFonzo saw the policies as a constitution for where they were going in the county in education. The civil law components would be spelled out specifically in implementation regulations or in other policies. They could not possibly cover everything here, but they had to make sure the initial framework was specific enough so that they would know what they were looking at. The question was how specific they wanted to be in the policy or whether they should leave that specificity to subsections dealing with discipline, homework, accountability, etc.

Dr. Cronin called attention to a sentence in the draft policy that stated course revision should include the consideration of replacement and elimination of content. Committee members agreed to revise the sentence.

In regard to generality versus specificity, Mr. Ewing was content with the policies being general. However, he wanted to know what the limits were and what they were dealing with. He also wanted to know what they were not dealing with. If the policy were to last, it was imperative that it communicate clearly to the Board and to others. He had a lot of questions about meaning which he would write down for the committee.

Dr. Shoenberg asked if there were anything coming out of the committee on flexibility that might cause them to want to change the policies. Dr. Seleznow replied that it would alter what some thinking was about specificity versus generality. That committee was dealing with Recommendation 22 of the Commission on Excellence report that teachers and principals be given increased responsibility, authority, and accountability for determining the structure of their school and how they would achieve the goals for learning established by the Board. The committee on flexibility looked at how to change the way things were done so that schools would be empowered to make decisions that best meet the needs of their populations. There might be some policies, regulations, and contracts needing waivers because a school had to determine that there was a better way to meet the needs of the students in that school and community. If policies were very specific they would have to continue with all the things the Commission said they must change.

Mrs. DiFonzo asked if the PreK-12 policies were so general that they could not be used from an accountability point of view. Dr. Seleznow did not think the policies were so general, but he didn't know whether they had come to a definition of accountability that would really permit them to answer that question. He saw the possibility that with some flexibility they would have more accountability because if they felt a sense of responsibility they would be willing to be held more accountable for what they were doing.

Dr. Shoenberg remarked that the policies were so flexible that they never said who was in charge, and Mrs. DiFonzo asked who was responsible for establishing standards for each of these general statements. Dr. Smith replied that he would go back to Dr. Seleznow's illustration of the associate superintendent coming to visit. He could hold the principal accountable for statements in the policy such as attendance. They had tried to establish a framework to give the principal the responsibility and accountability for the implementation of the policy and any regulations accompanying it.

Mrs. DiFonzo asked what would happen if the associate superintendent came into a school and it looked like "Camp Runamuck," but the principal said they were developing study and organizational skills. Dr. Seleznow replied that he would have to show the associate superintendent why they had an excellent organization. If he was unable to convince the associate superintendent with data, the associate would have him develop a better plan. If he as the principal was still unresponsive, he would find out when it came time for his evaluation.

Mr. Goldensohn indicated that he would like to know where individual

items were backed up by other policies. It would be helpful to show that the paragraph on homework, for example, was backed up by a policy on homework. In regard to accountability, he said that after an initial acceptance of the statement, he was coming around to the point where he didn't like the paragraph. It did not tell him what they were accountable for. It did not tell him that they had a program for teaching children study skills. It simply referred to the paragraph on planning, and it did not tell him what the school's problems were at the moment. He felt that the accountability label was not appropriate for the paragraph as constituted. If they eliminated the paragraph on accountability, the document had no other references to accountability, only implications.

Mr. Ewing remarked that the document was not inconsistent with the Commission on Excellence's recommendations. When the Board had discussed the Commission's report, they had stated that the price of flexibility was more accountability and more responsibility. It seemed to him the Board was saying that they wanted to know more than just reports on progress. They wanted to know to whom, for what, when, and whether it was progress or results. He thought that the section on accountability had to be pretty tough and it was not at the moment.

Mrs. Rafel commented that if they tried to incorporate all the elements of to whom, for what, etc. in the policy they might end up with something overly specific. They need to say they expected to be able to hold people accountable for their actions and be sure that they were all doing the best job they could. Mr. Ewing thought they could do that by making the assessment part of this more specific. Another way was to say that reports of progress went from the school to the area to the superintendent and to the Board. They could say they were looking for an assessment not just of progress but also of results achieved. There were ways of making the language more specific so that it would answer people who had questions about for what, to whom, and when. Mr. Goldensohn suggested including something about progress toward achieving the Goals of Education and Board priorities and initiatives.

Dr. Cronin inquired about policies that would be rescinded when these policies were adopted, and Dr. Smith agreed to provide a list showing what would be retained in other policies and what would be lost when the present policies were rescinded.

Mr. Ewing suggested that the Board be given another opportunity to communicate what else they might want the committee to consider. Mrs. DiFonzo agreed that they would allow until April 12 for written Board comments. Then they would schedule this for another Board discussion at the evening Board meeting in April with adoption at a later time when the committee had had time to react to Board comments.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 10 p.m.



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PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY

HP:mlw