

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION AD HOC COMMITTEE**

March 7, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. with the following Board members and support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Steve Abrams, Judy Docca, Roland Ikheloa, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff present: Carey Wright, Gwen Mason, Judy Pattik, Holli Swann, Cathy Pevey, Marylee Phelps, Peter Cahall, Shahpar Modarresi, Alison Steinfels, and Heather Wilson.

Others present: Maggie McLaughlin, Jane de Winter, Leah Fabel, Laurie Collins, and Laura Swerdlin.

MINUTES

The minutes from January 18, 2008, were approved, as amended.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUSPENSION DATA

The chair brought this topic to the attention of the committee to better understand the suspension rates and any action plan to ameliorate the high numbers of suspended special education students.

Staff explained that they had reviewed the memorandum. The committee learned that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) was on the second year of an audit based on special education procedures. An overall analysis had been done, and MCPS was compared with other Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Maryland. Under a corrective action plan, staff had reviewed and modified procedures to comply with state and federal laws. Staff development played an important role in assuring that consistent and correct procedures were followed by school personnel.

After a follow-up audit last month, the state confirmed that there had been significant improvement. One of the last areas was how the IEP teams document discussions and the decisions reached by the team with guiding questions, i.e., sequential problem-solving. Although the state was pleased with the progress, MCPS is still under the corrective action. The state will return in the summer and again in the fall for a final review. There will be a report to the Board at a meeting in June.

The committee wanted to know if the academic performance of special education students had improved with the newly implemented procedures. Staff replied that they had not looked at this aspect, but assumed there would be a correlation. Right now, staff is concentrating on reducing disproportionate suspensions.

The committee inquired about the changes targeted to reduce suspensions. Staff replied that MCPS has several interventions, including the Collaboration Action Process (CAP), Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), and

Dr. Stetson's work group. However, staff agreed that with the procedures in place, the system must move beyond compliance to commitment.

The committee asked if staff was getting to the root of the cause for special education suspensions. Staff replied that they are looking at the data to determine the predominate causes for suspensions. Furthermore, Dr. Stetson's report will inform staff and the Board more on this issue since the work group is drilling down to explore all facets of suspensions.

The committee asked about manifestation hearings and whether the behavior is related to the disability. Staff replied that regulations have changed and are more school system friendly in order to keep schools safe. Now, there has to be a direct and substantial relationship between the behavior and disability or related to non-implementation of the IEP.

The committee inquired about sharing best practices. Staff replied that Dr. Stetson's work group will be including best practices in the report.

Action: Provide a copy of the latest audit to the committee. Explore further connections between academic performance and suspensions and provide any update to the Board in June as part of its worksession on suspensions. Return in the fall with details of the audit and further discussion of special education suspensions.

REVIEW OF THE FEBRUARY 7, 2008, UPDATE ON SECONDARY LEARNING CENTER TRANSITIONPROJECT

The February 7, 2008, memorandum provided the fourth update on the transition which is designed to increase the academic achievement of students with disabilities who transitioned to their home or consortia schools and those who continue to receive special education services in secondary learning centers.

Staff reported that there have been meetings with the coordinators to determine any barriers in the transition. In high schools, scheduling still remains a slight problem. Schools have been able to provide options for co-teaching as well as self-contained options for students as needed. Overall, there has been improvement in all categories based on the state targets. Staff noted that principals must have a philosophical belief that students should have access to education in their home schools.

Staff and the committee discussed a need for MCPS to step back to look at inclusion systematically based on philosophy, leadership, and culture. The committee was concerned about grades of the transition students, and whether the apparent dip in the 2nd semester grades indicated a concern. Staff thought it would be helpful to review what happens with all special and general education students to determine if that is an overall pattern. In this review, another aspect to consider is how to compare grades given by special education teachers previously with grades now used in the general education classes. Staff is continuing to follow up with individual students.

The committee inquired about the challenges in math for transition students, and how the system is addressing this issue. Staff replied that there are interventions targeted at specific deficits. The committee wants to understand the context of what the committee or Board needs to do. Is there special support need to ensure that these students are given time to master the content? Since the special education students were moved closer to the content specialist, there should be improved rigor. What are the additional pieces that are needed to support success? Again, staff thought that professional development is critical.

Action: Provide to the committee LRE information by school to better understand how students' needs are being met at individual schools. Provide information as to whether there is inclusion in International Baccalaureate classes.

DISCUSSION OF THE SECONDARY LEARNING CENTER TRANSITION EVALUATION PROCESS

The committee was interested in what indicators will be used to determine if the transition has been successful, and how the system will know if it "got it right." Staff explained that an advisory group has been involved from the beginning including representative stakeholders who have been impacted by the initiative. Staff is still in the process of determining what the scope of the evaluation since there should be a comprehensive understanding of what those measures should be and the information to be collected. Furthermore, there will be 60 classroom observations with trained observers.

The committee wants to assure that the observations, surveys, and evaluation tools will measure factors that consider mastery and academic success in addition to LRE. At this point, there was a discussion about the rate and pace of instruction for special education students as well as the essential learnings for the curriculum. Staff thought professional development was a key to increase the teacher's capacity to differentiate instruction.

The committee was interested in measuring success. Do grades tell us what we want to know? What do special education students need to be successful in their home school?

Staff reiterated the process with parent surveys, interviews, and observations. The evaluation and its findings will be available in the fall.

Action: Provide a timeline for the evaluation. Keep the committee informed as the evaluation proceeds. Continued collaboration with Margaret McLaughlin, member and former SECIT Chair and author of the Classical Program Review, on evaluating and understanding success for special education students.

UPDATE ON SPECUALEDUCATION CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TEAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The co-chairs reported on the organizational meeting, and the next step will be to develop a work plan. The students on the committee are asking for more social skills training and programs for students who are not college bound. The SECIT is looking for a systemic topic in order to help the Board and school system.

Action: Place SECIT on agenda for updates on committee work. SECIT send their agenda and dates to the Special Education Ad Hoc Committee

REVIEW OF COMMITTEE CHARGE AND SCOPE OF WORK

This item was delayed until Mr. Abrams is available.

Action: Schedule as soon as possible.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS AND FOLLOWUPS

1. In April, schedule Dr. DeCoste to review the 6th grade UDL pilots.
2. Special Education Staffing Plan
3. In the future, schedule Dr. Kolan regarding Transition Services
4. In the future, schedule review of the committee's charge and scope of work
5. Follow up on autism data
6. Followup on ASHA Workload Recommendations
7. Review of Disproportionality Report

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.