

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 39

QUESTION:

Provide an update on the closing of Grafton School.

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: N/A

ANSWER:

Grafton School–Maryland is a 12-month facility serving both male and female students with moderate to severe disabilities, ages 6 to 21, in day school and residential placements. Grafton School–Maryland opened in 1996 with the support of the Montgomery County government, community advocates, and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). It is approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Nonpublic Schools Branch to serve students with mental retardation, multiple disabilities, and autism. Grafton School–Maryland is part of the larger Grafton School, Inc., which has its corporate headquarters and several other facilities in Virginia. Since it opened in 1996, Grafton School–Maryland has provided a needed resource to students in Montgomery County and surrounding jurisdictions. Residential students live in community-based group homes and attend the school program located on Academy Way in Rockville. Other students live at home and attend the Grafton nonpublic day school.

On October 17, 2005, MSDE placed the Grafton School–Maryland on intensive monitoring and notified all local education agencies that the State of Maryland’s share of public funds would not be provided for any students placed there after October 19, 2005. MCPS has not placed any students at Grafton School–Maryland since receiving this notice from MSDE. On December 2, 2005, the Board of Directors of Grafton School, Inc., notified MCPS of the decision to cease operations at its Montgomery County residences and day school within the next 90 days. On January 11, 2006, Grafton School, Inc., notified members of the Montgomery County Collaboration Council that Grafton School–Maryland would close at the end of business on February 17, 2006.

Currently, there are 16 students placed by MCPS at Grafton, 13 day students and 3 residential students. Of the 13 day students, two live in group homes supported through the Interim Case Fund, a non-educational funding stream designated solely for services provided in Maryland. These funds cannot be moved out-of-state and state providers who are eligible for this funding are limited. MCPS asked that MSDE support a request for Interim Case Funds to follow the two students in residence through to Grafton-Virginia. The State Coordinating Council (SCC) is unable to support this request since they are prohibited from using Interim Case Funds for out-of-state placements. MCPS will work with other members of the county’s Collaboration Council to appeal this decision, but it is unlikely that it will be overturned.

The Placement and Assessment Services Unit (PASU) contacted the parents of all 16 MCPS students currently attending Grafton and sent referrals to alternative schools for placement. Families also were informed that MCPS would provide funding for students eligible for direct transition to adult services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) if a

provider could be found. Unfortunately, the DDA has not been able to find an adult provider who can take the students prior to July 1, 2006. MCPS has identified short-term placements for these students through June 30, 2006.

As of January 23, 2006, a placement has been offered for all affected students. The three students in residential placements have been placed at Grafton–Virginia, one student has been placed in an in-state residential placement, 11 students have confirmed nonpublic day placements, one student will return to an MCPS program with support, and one student from Frederick County, who was case managed by MCPS, has been placed in a nonpublic school in Baltimore. Other Collaboration Council agencies continue to try and obtain in-state residential placements for the students who have been in residence through noneducational funding sources.

Grafton shares space with the Lourie Center, another nonpublic provider, through a loan agreement with Montgomery County and a lease agreement with MCPS. On January 6, 2006, MCPS special education and facilities staff met with other members of the Collaboration Council and the county attorney to discuss the complexities of the loan and lease agreements. On January 11, 2006, MCPS met with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to obtain additional information regarding Grafton's plans for meeting the needs of students and families during the closing process as well as their intent with regard to financial obligations. Grafton–Maryland has solicited offers from other providers to assume the lease and loan obligations and open a program to serve the same population. It was agreed that it was Grafton's responsibility to present the county with a viable offer. Grafton, Inc., will provide the county with an offer by January 27, 2006.

On January 18, 2006, MCPS staff, other Collaboration Council members, and Grafton, Inc., met with parents and members of the community to discuss the closing of Grafton School–Maryland and the process for identifying a provider to assume the program. The Office of Special Education and Student Services will establish a Web site linked to the MCPS Web site, to answer questions and keep the community apprised of updated information. The County Council Health and Human Services and Education committees have tentatively scheduled a briefing regarding the status of the Grafton School–Maryland for January 31, 2006, pending the outcome of the business proposal from Grafton, Inc.

MCPS staff continues to work collaboratively with parents, the MSDE, other members of the Collaboration Council, the administration of the Grafton School, Inc., and local nonpublic education providers to ensure the best possible outcome for students and families.