

FY 2008 QUESTION NUMBER: 48

QUESTION:

What is the rationale for the closure of Kingsley and Mark Twain? What are the plans for those students?

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE:

ANSWER:

Closing the Kingsley Wilderness Project is recommended to ensure that students have a rigorous academic program that most closely resembles a comprehensive high school. It also will ensure that all core academic classes are taught by highly qualified teachers. The mission of the Alternative Programs Unit is to meet the needs of students and to help them gain the skills and behaviors necessary to work successfully in a comprehensive school setting. Alternative programs students, like all students, deserve opportunities for academic rigor.

Currently, there are 16 students attending the Kingsley Wilderness Project. Two students are scheduled to graduate at the end of this school year. One has applied for the Gateway to College program at Montgomery College, with the possibility of enrolling in September 2007. The remaining 13 students are working toward the successful completion of the exit criteria in order to transition back to a comprehensive school for the 2007–2008 school year. For any student who is not recommended to return to a comprehensive school, an Educational Management Team (EMT) meeting will be convened to review each student's strengths and needs and to consider appropriate programming options, including transition to the Emory Grove or McKenney Hills alternative high school programs.

The rationale for closing the Mark Twain program is based on poor academic performance, under enrollment, disproportionate representation of minority students, and poor attendance. The Mark Twain facility has been underutilized for more than five years. The facility's capacity is approximately 300 students. Enrollment has been significantly below capacity, with a total of 119 students in FY 2004, 94 in FY 2005, and 92 in FY 2006. Although Mark Twain was projected to have 95 students for FY 2007, on November 1, 2006, there were only 74 students in the regular Mark Twain program. Of these, nine were projected to be middle school students in the coming school year and the rest will be in high school.

Another significant factor in the decision to close the Mark Twain program is the challenge to meet state mandated achievement standards. In October 2006, the Maryland State Department of Education moved Mark Twain into Corrective Action status due to its continued inability to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards in the areas of mathematics, reading, and graduation. By failing to make AYP, Mark Twain jeopardizes the potential for its students to attain successful postsecondary outcomes. The data indicate the need for a systematic plan to increase student access to highly rigorous instruction and highly qualified teachers.

In addition to being well below capacity, enrollment at Mark Twain is significantly disproportionate with regard to race and ethnicity. Of the students noted above, 58 percent are African American, 19 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent are White, and 4 percent are Asian. Despite systematic efforts to address this issue, Mark Twain has continued to have significant disproportionality throughout its recent history.

To reduce disproportionality and increase student achievement, the superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Operating Budget proposes the elimination of the middle school program and Grade 9 in Mark Twain beginning with FY 2008. (NOTE: Any students who are currently in Grade 9 at Mark Twain who do not have enough credits for Grade 10 will continue at Mark Twain in FY 2008.)

As part of this process, the current middle school students at Mark Twain will be considered for placement in the Emotional Disabilities (ED) Cluster Model Programs within comprehensive schools. To support these students, 3.0 psychologist positions and 3.0 social worker positions have been added to the ED Cluster Model Program in the FY 2008 budget to provide increased therapeutic and mental health services. In addition, there are 5.0 positions held in reserve for the ED Cluster Model Program. Some of the students at Mark Twain may require a more intensive, highly structured self-contained environment in order to make progress on their Individualized Education Program goals and objectives. Those students will be considered for the John L. Gildner Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents through the Individualized Education Program decision-making process.