

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

April 23, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. with the following Board members and support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Steve Abrams, Sharon Cox, Roland Ikheloa, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff present: Carey Wright, Frieda Lacey, Gwen Mason, Vickie Strange-Moscoso, Mary Lee Phelps, Steve Bedford, Don Kress, Alison Steinfelds, Sharon Gooding, Ellen Schaefer, and Kathy Kolan.

Others present: Anne Turner.

The minutes for the March 20, 2007, meeting were approved by consensus.

Special Education Realignment Plan

Staff reported that an additional 12 students have been identified who are not currently in an elementary school learning center but who might have been assigned to middle school learning centers. Gwen Mason reported that this number was consistent with prior years= experience. These students will also have a central office case manager assigned to assist their transition.

The committee was concerned about the ability of every middle school to accommodate the full spectrum of special education need, especially for the children who would have been designated for a secondary learning center. There is a sense in the community that the school system is not capable of making a change to least restrictive environment and providing the needed resources. The question is: How does the school system support a continuum of services at every school and have buy in from the principal and staff? Staff responded that principals want to provide educational services to all of their students. The same strategies need to be used to educate all children, whether special education or regular education.

The committee asked if, for example, there are three children with similar coding and profiles each needing to be provided extensive self-contained instruction but each at a different home school, might MCPS choose to assign them to a single school rather than having each local school provide a separate program. Staff stated that every middle school will have the capacity to serve and support their own children. No plans for combined location exist currently.

The committee wanted to know how the ability of each school to provide a full continuum will be monitored, and if there will be a plan to make mid-course corrections if warranted. The committee also specifically asked how MCPS is monitoring middle schools= need for

additional resources to accommodate incoming students who might otherwise have been referred to secondary learning centers. Staff replied that they are working with middle schools now and will provide more information as they work with schools to adjust their schedules and staff assignments. Staff also indicated that there will be an evaluation in the spring to determine the success of the continuum and whether training has increased capacity and changed staff behaviors.

The committee inquired about class size and how staff is allocated to assure success for special education students. Staff replied that there is a collaboration with special education staff and the Office of School Performance since funding comes from both offices. Staff will continue to report on the special education inclusion realignment plan, especially the staffing needs in both special and regular education.

Transition Services

Staff reported on the overview of transition services (copy attached). The committee engaged in a discussion about the profile of students served including the ages of the students, college offerings, and transportation training.

Staff explained that transition services start when students are 14 years old. A transition teacher becomes part of the IEP team, and the transition goals are based on the interests of the child in consultation with the parents.

At the present time, there are 24 students at Montgomery College taught by MCPS teachers. Transen, Inc. has a grant to follow up on special education students in post-secondary education. It is a five-year grant to review three different models and to ascertain how connected these students are with the college campus.

Staff reported that transition students have extensive training in using public transportation. This training is accomplished at the local school level and often in conjunction with job placements. With additional staff next year, there will be more opportunities to facilitate finding the right employment to match the skill sets of the student.

The committee noted the language in the documents provided to students and parents and Ms. Cox suggested that a focus group review the publication in order to ensure sensitivity to the messages communicated.

Ms. Brandman asked for a written summary on dropout prevention. What are the triggers and issues? Staff indicated that attention is being focused on students in middle school. The committee requested follow up information on this issue.

Ms. Brandman asked if there was a way to track students beyond age 21 to inform MCPS on the viability of its transition program. What are the implications of cost and feasibility? The committee indicated an interest in following up on this issue as well.

Litigation

Staff reported on the use of in-house and outside attorneys (handout attached). Dr. Lacey gave a chronology on the use of counsel that included information on implementation of the dispute resolution committee, mediation with the parties, and RFPs for hiring outside attorneys.

Staff explained that the in-house attorneys conduct research in order to provide legal counsel and advice to administration and staff on a daily basis and represent the school system at IEP meetings where the parents have an attorney. They also do administrative review of the files in preparation for the dispute resolution committee. Decisions regarding mediation and litigation are made through the dispute resolution committee. When there is a due process hearing, and parents are represented by an attorney, outside counsel is assigned. According to staff, the decision to use outside counsel results from the short timeline and the need for expertise and administrative support beyond the resources of MCPS. MCPS employs only two full-time in-house attorneys and one part-time attorney. Staff had reached a consensus several years ago that this model best served the school system.

Ms. Cox wanted information on the yearly number of non-public placements that went through litigation, and those that were not litigated. Committee members indicated that they would follow up with additional questions.

Strategic Plan

Staff will work on a data point for the Strategic Plan for information on diploma bound special education students and the attainment of a diploma. The purpose of this additional data point will be to look at students across disability categories and determine how effectively we are meeting the goal of helping them attain a diploma. This could include also looking at students taking the alternate MSA, when in the course of their education students opt for a certificate, as well as dropout rate. If there is a problem developing this data point, staff will come back to the committee.

Next Steps and Future Meeting Dates

The committee will meet every month on the third Tuesday (May 15, 2007).

The meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.