

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS

September 14, 2009

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. with the following Board members and Board support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Laura Berthiaume, Phil Kauffman, Laura Steinberg, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff members: Chris Richardson, Gwen Mason, Judy Pattik, Maureen Ryan, Lori-Christina Webb.

Minutes

The minutes from July 20, 2009, were approved as presented.

Special Education Continuous Improvement Team Draft Annual Report

Ms. Laurie Collins, co-chair of the Special Education Continuous Improvement Team, summarized last year's work of the committee in advance of a written report being submitted to the Special Populations Committee. Consistent with national interests and priorities, the committee focused its work during the 2008-2009 school year on transition services and post school outcomes (PSO) for special education students. Maryland requires that transition planning for all students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) begin at no later than age 14. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has recently shifted from monitoring transition planning processes to identifying measurable PSOs and will eventually be setting targets. The committee wanted to look at and make recommendations about what the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) will need to do to meet those targets.

The committee met several times with Ms. Kathy Kolan, supervisor, Transition Services Unit, and reviewed pertinent information provided by Ms. Mason. The report will provide several findings, including the following: challenges that students will face as an adult need to be identified; meaningful transient planning should begin as early as possible; transition planning should be student focused; and students should leave MCPS with skills needed to succeed in a post secondary academic environment. The report will also present recommendations within several broad areas including student focused planning, career preparation, family involvement, and interagency planning.

Committee members suggested that the report include examples of best practices that could be modeled and expanded, as well as advocacy opportunities for Board members.

ACTION: The SECIT will finalize the recommendations for presentation to the Board of Education at a future Board meeting.

Middle School Institute

Ms. Mason updated the committee on the status of plans for an Institute of Middle School Professional Development for Special Education, introduced to the Board as part of the April 28, 2009, update on the secondary learning center transition. The Institute, which will be located at Tilden Middle School, will be dedicated to ongoing professional development

and will model best practices for instructing secondary students with disabilities. The Institute's job-embedded professional development for general and special education teachers and paraeducators will focus on co-teaching models, differentiated instruction, the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the use of instructional technology.

Staff explained that the closure of the secondary learning centers highlighted the need for rigorous staff development and the recognition that building staff capacity is key to educating students in their home schools. The Institute is envisioned to provide an authentic environment in which a continuum of services can be witnessed, observed, and learned about by staff from other schools. Additionally, there will be partnerships with experts who can study what is being done and identify opportunities for improvement.

Committee members expressed concern that planning for the Institute might be detracting from and competing with serving the students right now. Staff explained that the Institute is essentially a vehicle for disseminating and sharing strategies that have already been or are being developed. Ms. Richardson clarified that there are two project teams, one focusing on developing and implementing strategies to serve students now and that the other team is planning for the Institute, including applying for a \$250,000 Federal Stimulus grant. The Institute is not dependent on receiving the grant but it would allow it to operate on a larger scale.

Committee members expressed concerns that there may be inconsistency between schools with regard to hours-based staffing. Staff shared that there has been extensive training and opportunities for continued guidance.

ACTION: Provide the committee members with a list of middle schools with hours-based staffing.

Autism Program

Ms. Mason reported that the Cabin John and Gaithersburg middle schools autism programs have been expanded. A high school program opened at Walter Johnson High School with a class of six Grade 9 students. The system is serving approximately 1300 students ages Pre-K to age 21 who have a diagnosis of autism. Ms. Pattik said that the Pre-K numbers are growing and the hope is that, with early interventions, most will ultimately be able to attend their home school.

Committee members voiced concern about training of and supports for teachers of students diagnosed with autism. Staff shared that specialists spend time observing in classrooms and working with teachers to develop specific and systematic interventions. Committee members also asked if a student is ever turned away from a program because it is "full". Staff said that if growth happens, staff can be added and they are not aware of a student ever being turned away.

ACTION: Provide data on the growth of autism enrollment in MCPS. How does it compare to national statistics? What is the anticipated growth? Schedule Bridge Program visits in October.

Disproportionality Report Update

Ms. Richardson provided a status report on the 24 recommendations in the *Report on Disproportionality in MCPS*. She shared that a steering committee has been formed and that project teams, including central office and school based staff, will be monitoring the progress of each recommendation. Seven of the recommendations have been implemented and the remaining 17 are in process.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.