

APPROVED
23-1981

Rockville, Maryland
April 2, 1981

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on April 2, 1981

ROLL CALL Present: Mrs. Carol F. Wallace, President in the
Chair

Mr. Blair G. Ewing
Dr. Marian L. Greenblatt
Mrs. Suzanne K. Peyser
Mrs. Elizabeth W. Spencer
Miss Traci Williams

Absent: Mr. Joseph R. Barse
Mrs. Eleanor D. Zappone

Others Present: Dr. Edward Andrews, Superintendent of
Schools
Dr. Harry Pitt, Deputy Superintendent

Resolution No. 293

Re: Executive Session

On recommendation of the superintendent and on motion of Mr. Ewing seconded by Mrs. Spencer, the following resolution was adopted unanimously:

WHEREAS, The Board of Education of Montgomery County is authorized by Article 76A, Section 11(a) of the Annotated Code of Maryland to conduct certain of its meetings in executive closed session; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Education of Montgomery County hereby conduct its meeting in executive closed session beginning at 9:30 p.m., to comply with a specific constitutional, statutory or judicially imposed requirement protecting particular proceedings or matters from public disclosure as permitted under Article 76A, Section 11(a) and that such meeting shall continue in executive closed session until the completion of business.

Re: Announcements

Mrs. Wallace announced that Mr. Barse was out of town on official business and that Mrs. Zappone was attending to a personal matter.

Re: Staff Response to Minority
Relations Monitoring
Committee Annual
Report

Mrs. Wallace welcomed the members of the Minority Relations Monitoring Committee and apologized for the absence of Mr. Barse, who was out of town on official business, and Mrs. Zappone who was

attending to a personal matter. She said the purpose of the meeting was to be able to get a staff response to the concerns and recommendations that had come to the Board from the committee when they delivered their annual report.

Mrs. Gladys Young, co-chairperson of the MRMC, indicated her displeasure with the absence of two Board members. She felt very strongly about the importance of the work of the committee and was frustrated and angry that they should meet with less than the full complement. She did not feel that the Board was sensitive to the expectations of the committee. She would like to have seen at least six members present. She said the community was present and they expected to see a full Board. She wondered if the MRMC members would want to continue under the circumstances.

Mrs. Wallace said there was a commitment on the part of those present and the members not present had compelling reasons not to be. They would like to continue with the meeting and felt it was up to the committee whether they continued or not.

Mr. John Smith, Co-Chairperson of the MRMC, expressed concern regarding the importance of the report of the committee and believed it deserved the attention of the full Board. He had hoped the meeting would take place but in view of the absence of key people on the Board, he felt their dialogue would not be as effective. The matters that the committee had raised regarding their six recommendations were very serious; they were not playing and regarded the material in their report as being tremendously important to the community. Since the entire MRMC was present they certainly expected the same from the Board. He asked for the views of the other committee members.

Mrs. Spencer hoped very much that the meeting could continue since she had anticipated being out of town for an indefinite period. She wanted to be present when the committee met with the Board. Mrs. Wallace said that at no time could she guarantee the presence of the full Board and that was why they did have a quorum to do business. Contrary to County Council which needed just a majority and did not require four votes, but just a majority, she thought the Board did very well in trying to meet their obligations. All present tonight would like to hear from the committee.

Dr. Andrews believed the committee's report was the finest he had the opportunity to work on. He felt the committee had focused on a discrete number of serious areas and offered definite recommendations that he believed could be reacted to. Before he started, Dr. Andrews wished to make two points and hoped he would not be misinterpreted. Regarding academic achievement, he said he knew the system had not worked as well for black children as he would have liked. By the same token, he felt a responsibility to point out that there had been improvements which were more than cosmetic. An example of this was that much in the report referred to passing and failing rates on the Maryland Functional Reading Tests. There was a differential and the differential in Grade 9

was 15 percent which he believed was unacceptable. Three years ago the difference was 25 percent. He thought this was more than a cosmetic change and represented hard work in the school system. As stated in the task force report, staff member expectations of students was an important concept. He believed that was an area, in addition to the recommendations made by the committee, that needed their attention. He asked for the reactions of the committee to that suggestion.

Regarding Recommendation No. 1 which dealt with testing and test taking skills, the committee recommended that these skills should be emphasized beginning in middle or junior high school. Dr. Andrews said their response reflected an earlier model made by the committee some years ago. The test taking skills were developed but were out of date; they were prepared to commit themselves to revising the skills and have them available next year in the schools.

Mrs. Spencer asked if the previous test booklet was effective. Dr. Lois Martin, associate superintendent for instruction and program development, said it had been widely used, but there was no formal evaluation. Mrs. Wallace thought the earlier and younger they started, such as kindergarten and first grade, they better off they were. Dr. Buckner agreed that beginning at the elementary level was most beneficial for the student. He thought every parent and educator would subscribe to such a plan. He suggested practice packets and repetitiveness to gain confidence and to be able to relax under the pressure of test taking. Dr. Buckner questioned the statement that principals, teachers and others be given in-service instruction in the use of test-taking materials. He doubted there was enough money at the elementary level and wondered what level was being referred to. Dr. Andrews said they were thinking of the secondary level for the first year and they should move down into the elementary schools after that. Dr. Buckner thought it would be clearer if that were stated in the document.

It seemed to Dr. Greenblatt that insofar as bringing test-taking skills down to the elementary level that the workbooks and ditto papers children used were samples of kinds of test-taking skills. That kind of emphasis was perhaps not as necessary as later on when different types of tests were administered. She was concerned about what could be done with regard to college board preparation, which was a different kind of test, and whether such a program could be established.

Mr. Dines said if the children are not started before they get to college there would be no need for them to sit for a college board. The attitude of low expectation of blacks and minorities has seriously affected their chances for improvement. His point was that if they did not reach these children somewhere in between there would be no black or minority children going to college. He wanted to start at the elementary level and hope the Board would exercise its prerogative to effect a change within the teaching staffs of the schools in order to ensure that these children are

getting the education they deserve.

Dr. Buckner thought ditto sheets were good; however, just because someone was writing did not necessarily mean they were developing test taking skills. There are packets available at elementary and secondary levels that address the matter of how one improves test scores, specifically dealing with following directions, the psychology of facing an examination, how one is prepared before the exam, and how a student is mentally set for the exam; these were habits and attitudes that had to be practiced. Some parts of the packets address themselves strictly to mechanical skills and some to only content. The ditto sheet does not do that. If there was data that demonstrated that starting at the secondary level was preferable, he would like to see it.

Dr. Greenblatt said she was not suggesting that but was suggesting that students are taking tests all the time and they were starting in first grade with very similar test-taking activities which required following directions.

Mr. Smith asked if there was a similarity between answering questions on elementary tests and being taught how to take tests. Mrs. Wallace thought most would agree that taking tests and the ease in doing so was very developmental and required experience gained in the early grades.

Mr. Ewing observed that the argument to begin testing early was incontrovertible and Mrs. Fairley's suggestion that it be started at kindergarten was an excellent idea, although he would not want to start only there because there were a lot of students in school now who need help. He was struck by the response and its wish to be responsive and for that he thought the superintendent deserved credit; however, the response never really said that teachers would work with students to improve their test taking skills. He wondered if that was the intent. Dr. Andrews said it was intended that they would have actual instructional activities. Mr. Ewing thought they should be specific about that.

Dr. Buckner thought it was evasive and that nowhere in the document did it say the teachers' skills would be upgraded to work directly with the students. Mrs. Wallace assumed that where it said resource teachers would work with teachers on improving skills it meant that it was to upgrade the teachers. Dr. Buckner would like to see it written.

Regarding Dr. Greenblatt's question, Dr. Pitt said there were some high schools that were doing specific work on college boards with students but there was no consistent effort in every school. There had been debate about the effectiveness of such training, but he thought it would improve skills. Dr. Buckner believed there were barriers in the county for students to find courses to help them with college boards. They were forced to go outside of the school and form as groups to prepare their children. He said if they had wanted their children in private schools they would go ahead and

bite that bullet; however, the place for their children was the public schools, and they wanted the public schools to take up the whole educational task. He did not feel they should have to provide those courses but that was what they were doing.

Mr. Robinson said that during the process of writing the report they would often hear of a test called the System of Multicultural and Pluralistic Assessment, or SOMPA. He wanted to know what that test was about and whether it was being used and how. Dr. Buckner said that not only did they want to understand what the test was about, but he wanted to know whether the school staff had reviewed the exam, had looked at the validation, had looked at all of the pretests and the data that came out of it, where it was built, how, and what the composition of the groups was. After his experience with the Maryland Functional Reading Test, when he was appalled to find that the school system was giving it because the state said to do so, right or wrong, he didn't think they should ever be put in that position again. Every test should be reviewed thoroughly.

Mrs. Wallace said that when the state said they had to give something they had to do it. Dr. Buckner wondered if the Board had asked the state if the tests were well built or if they had mistakes in them. Mrs. Wallace responded that they had brought the errors to the attention of the state. Dr. Buckner thought the case spoke for itself.

Dr. Hiawatha Fountain, associate superintendent for continuum education, said that about a year ago the psychologists in the school system attended a workshop on the use of the SOMPA test. The test was normed on children in California, mostly Hispanic, and was now in the process of being normed across the country which would include inner city blacks in the east. The psychologists felt the SOMPA was good and a new way to tabulate results of the data. He said they would provide a written report. Dr. Andrews said the test was an attempt to have a more fair and accurate test of abilities of minority children. Mr. Robinson asked if it was being used universally in the system. Dr. Fountain indicated it was not, although there may be some psychologists using parts of it. Mr. Robinson asked for a detailed report of the use of the test. Dr. Steven Frankel, director of the Department of Educational Accountability, said the SOMPA was an individual IQ test given by a psychologist and that it was not a screening instrument. Mr. Dines hoped the report would contain the types of students who were recipients of the test.

Regarding Recommendation No. 2, Dr. Andrews said that the MCPS was planning to expand the free tuition and transportation program that was started last summer in basic skills instruction with more emphasis on secondary students. Dr. Buckner said their students needed a sound program in the ten-month school year and that what was offered in summer school was not adequate. If the system wanted to add something on for the summer he thought that was fine; but what was needed was a strengthening for the students during the year, and this meant a good sound program. Dr. Andrews said they would be bringing to the Board for consideration a new elementary

reading program with new standards and new objectives. He said they would continue to monitor individual student achievement. His view was that they would regard all of these points as top priority.

Mr. Ewing thought the proposal for the expansion of summer school was a good one; however, he agreed with Dr. Buckner that more critical than that was doing more during the school year. He was concerned about cutbacks in the area office staff which did not in any sense equal the additions that were suggested in the way of supervisory staff. There would be, in fact, a net reduction next year in the availability of staff who could help teachers to help students with special needs. That would be true even if the County Council approved everything the Board had approved in its budget. He thought that should be kept in mind. He said he proposed to the Board the inclusion in the budget of a diagnostic and clinical unit to work with students in a preventive rather than remedial way during the regular school day. Remedial work was important, but it was more important to prevent. That suggestion was voted down, he said.

Mr. Smith asked about Mrs. Fairley's recommendation which suggested that teachers for the summer program be selected on the basis of criteria established by a small committee committed to raising achievement levels of the participating students. Mr. Smith said that in Recommendation No. 3 teacher effectiveness would be evaluated at the conclusion of the summer program experience. Recommendation No. 2 said you would get the best teachers to teach, and No. 3 said after it's over the teachers would be evaluated to make sure they do the job they are supposed to do.

Dr. Pitt said they were approaching it two ways. One of the things they would try to do is select two thirds of the teachers out of the schools the students came from, and one third out of the entire system to try to bring in teachers who were outstanding to work with the other two thirds. In the afternoons teachers would be evaluated. Mrs. Fairley said she was recommending that teachers be looked at very carefully so that the best and the most committed were selected. Even at that, she said, they needed to do an evaluation to see if the students had made progress and the objectives had been met.

Mr. Dines said he did not want to belabor the point, but he was concerned about pressures that might come to the Board from the majority community. He wondered if they could be assured that this Board would push to have a summer program, to make the program inclusive of the three recommendations in the report submitted by Mrs. Fairley, and where possible not let the majority community sway their thinking as had been the custom over matters which pertain to the education of minority students.

As far as Dr. Andrews was concerned the recommendations in the report would be accomplished and the Board was unanimous in their approval to add this into the budget. Mrs. Wallace agreed that the

Board had a commitment and would do everything to uphold it. Mrs. Young pointed out that information had not been made available to the committee. She thought it was the responsibility of the Board and staff to see that they got the proper budget information, among other items. She believed it revealed a lack of respect for the committee not to keep them informed and supplied with information. Dr. Andrews said he would be sure that they received whatever they needed. Mrs. Wallace suggested that all the committees be recipients of budget information.

Dr. Buckner referred to the committee's fifth recommendation which he said was an attempt to get the schools to communicate more often and better with parents concerning how their students were doing. He did not think the staff response was adequate to improve the situation. Dr. Andrews said they had had problems with the early warning system. He understood what Dr. Buckner was saying and he agreed. He said they would reexamine the situation.

Mr. Dines asked how the staff would deal with the issue of accountability because he thought until there was accountability at the area office, the office of the principal, the counselor, and the individual teacher all of this was for nothing. He asked for some indication as to how the Board and staff would address this situation. Dr. Andrews thought it would be even more difficult in a situation where there is one area superintendent dealing with 60 or 65 schools. There were some systems in place to work on it and he agreed it was a very valid point.

Mrs. Wallace fully agreed with the committee's Recommendation No. 5 and felt it was important to keep parents informed of their students progress; however, she thought they needed to know what the fiscal implications were in this regard. In writing the recommendation, Mr. Robinson said it was written with the understanding that the school administration would be so creative that it would find ways to communicate with parents. The committee was trying to encourage the Board and staff to develop new ways of communicating; they were not presuming to know all of the details of this task.

Mrs. Spencer said that parents were intimidated when they had dealings with a school. Until that was overcome communication did not exist. It was something she thought had to be worked on jointly. It was her opinion that this was an area that required creativity.

Mr. Ewing said that Recommendation No. 5 was so fundamental to the whole process of education that the school system could not refuse to respond in a way that agreed with this fundamental obligation to every child; that they had to communicate with the parents whenever the child was not doing well. It didn't matter how they communicated so long as it was effective. He thought the answer given was equivocal and did not say they would do that, regardless of how much money it would cost. Dr. Andrews said it was not intended to be equivocal but was intended to say the area office

was going to see that every school has ways of informing parents.

Regarding Recommendation No. 6, Dr. Andrews said the State Department did use a form of the functional reading test which had not been validated properly. They objected to that and the state did invalidate those results. The concern over the tests was a valid one. If he thought the test was doing a disservice to the students, he would not take the position he was taking. He said it was their job to eliminate the differential and to use it as an instructional diagnostic device.

Dr. Buckner said there was no law that required that the test be given. There was a mandate, he said, which ended up a requirement. He had no problem with that, but the assumption was that the test was valid and well developed, and it was at this point that he had a problem. Mrs. Wallace asked what would happen at the state level if they did not give the test. Dr. Andrews indicated the state said a student had to pass it to get a state diploma. He believed if they said they would not give it, students from 1982 on could not get a diploma.

Mr. Smith noted that the Annual Test Report for 1978-1979 revealed that at least 88 percent of the students who scored at each stanine from four to nine on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills passed the MFRT. He was disturbed about the sentence that stated that a high percentage of students scoring as low as the twenty-third percentile on the ITBS Reading Comprehension passed the MFRT. He wondered if the reading test scores were inflated. Dr. Andrews said the test was a state-required minimum level one. Dr. Frankel indicated that the MFRT was designed to be a floor and the student at the twenty-third percentile still did better than one-quarter of the students in the whole national sample. The performance may be unacceptable but it was not grounds to deny a diploma. Mr. Smith wondered if perhaps they were giving the MFRT credit that it probably should not have.

Dr. Andrews said the committee was recommending a review of the regulations and data with the sense that there was something wrong regarding student suspensions. He said that three representatives from the Office of Civil Rights were looking at their student suspension data. He believed that that kind of outside, independent review would be helpful to them, and he would share it with the committee.

Mr. Lon Dring appreciated the analysis by the committee of suspension as a two-sided situation which included the teacher and the attempt to make the two-sided situation a positive benefit. He wondered if the Board could respond to that and whether there was staff capability to follow up such an intention. Dr. Andrews was not optimistic about doing anything soon; he wanted to see what the report said. Mr. Dring asked how much data there was as to the reasons for suspensions and how adequate it was for knowing what was going on. Dr. Pitt indicated the data was limited. Dr. Andrews said that regardless of what the OCR investigation revealed

they needed more descriptive data and a systematic review of student suspensions.

Mrs. Fairley thought some in-service training could deal with classroom management which would help minimize the numbers of suspensions.

Mr. Robinson was concerned about waiting for the OCR report. He thought it was a serious problem. He was hoping that the system itself would work out a strategy for dealing with the issue. To wait for the OCR bothered him because it was such a critical issue. He hoped the system would find a way to review and analyze the problem. Dr. Andrews said if the report was not received within 30 or 45 days he would set up an alternative approach and perhaps work with members of the committee.

Mr. Dines said it was important to weave Mrs. Fairley's report into the proceedings. He felt that unless principals were held accountable they could never hope to lower the suspension rate or improve the discipline of black or minority students in the system. He thought the prevailing attitude was that it was a racist system. Until they have accountability the same attitudes will continue.

Mr. Ewing thought the committee should know that the superintendent is making progress under circumstances in which one of the major constraints was the attitude of a majority of the Board. He said that he had just received a copy of a letter to the President of the United States and the Secretary of Education, typed on Board stationery, by their staff, and signed by four Board members, characterizing the OCR investigation as overzealous, a fishing expedition, and as an attempt on the part of the Office of Civil Rights to intrude in local school matters where they have no business.

Mrs. Wallace said it was not an official Board action. Mr. Dines said that since it was on Board stationery it was therefore an official document of this Board.

Mr. Smith said the committee was upset and it was difficult for members to remain at the meeting when they believed the Board had misused their official position by conducting personal business. In view of the departure of committee members, he felt he would be remiss if he remained.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 10 p. m.

President

Secretary

EA: kn