

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Regarding the Proposal to Phase Out Secondary Learning Centers

1. What is the current proposal regarding secondary learning centers?

Rising Grade 6 students currently attending elementary learning centers will receive appropriate special education and related services in their home schools, based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

All special education students who currently attend secondary learning centers may remain in the program through graduation. In addition, parents may request consideration of placement in the home school through the IEP process. This proposal phases out the secondary learning centers over a six-year period, while including more special education students in their home schools.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is committed to improving academic outcomes of those students who choose to continue receiving special education services in secondary learning centers through high school graduation. The MCPS Department of Special Education Services (DSES), Office of School Performance (OSP), Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP), and Office of Organizational Development (OOD) will collaborate and monitor the quality of instructional practices in the learning centers for teachers and paraeducators and delivery of academic instruction and supportive services.

2. Why is this proposal to phase out secondary learning centers being made now?

This proposal is being made now because data indicate that the academic performance of secondary learning center students lags far behind that of their disabled peers who are not in learning centers. In addition to the achievement gap, African American and Hispanic students are overrepresented in secondary learning centers.

3. How many students will be affected by this plan?

Approximately 45 rising Grade 6 students attending elementary learning centers will receive their special education and related services in their home or consortia schools, according to their IEP.

Professional Development

1. What kind of professional development will be provided to general and special educators and paraeducators to ensure the success of students with disabilities in their home schools?

Curriculum Related: DSES collaborates with OCIP and OOD to support school staff by providing professional development, such as mandatory, countywide, curriculum-based training.

Best Practices in Inclusion and Job-Embedded/Coaching: DSES provides specialized professional development sessions that support effective services and best instructional practices for students with disabilities. These include such topics as working with students with autism, differentiating instruction, and using technology for students with disabilities. Consistent with current practices, central office staff, including special education supervisors, instructional specialists, and itinerant resource teachers will be assigned to specific schools to provide specific professional development as determined by school and student needs. Professional development for general and special educators, administrators, and paraeducators includes job-embedded staff development for working with students with disabilities, addressing such topics as differentiating instruction, providing accommodations, and working with assistive technology.

During the summer of 2007, three days of mandatory training will be provided to general and special education teachers who will be working with Grade 6 students coming from learning centers.

2. Will there be assistance for general educators who are unfamiliar with implementing IEPs and teaching students with disabilities?

The Division of School-Based Special Education Services (DSBSES) continues to work with general educators to assist them in becoming familiar with IEPs and the provision of services to students with disabilities. General educators are included in professional development provided through DSBSES. They also are specifically invited to participate in professional development that focuses on skill building for co-teaching teams. In addition, special educators have processes in place to share the kinds of accommodations needed by students in their classrooms with general educators.

During the summer of 2007, three days of mandatory training will be provided to general and special education teachers who will be working with Grade 6 students coming from learning centers.

3. When will these professional development activities be conducted?

Professional development is offered through DSBSES throughout the school year, during the summer, and after the school day.

Prior to the 2007–2008 school year, staff from DSBSES will consult with staff at each school receiving students from learning centers to plan and provide the required professional development to support students and staff.

During the summer of 2007, three days of mandatory training will be provided to general and special education teachers who will be working with Grade 6 students coming from learning centers.

Continuum of Services

1. What is meant by a “continuum of services?”

A continuum of services means that students with disabilities will be educated in environments ranging from general education classrooms to co-taught or supported classrooms to small group or self-contained classes. A continuum of services is provided in all MCPS schools.

2. Will a continuum of services be provided in my child’s school?

A continuum of services is provided in all MCPS schools.

3. What is meant by inclusion?

Inclusion provides opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and interact with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible in general education environments.

4. How are students currently served in learning centers different from students who receive Learning and Academic Disabilities (LAD) services?

Students in both of these programs have a variety of disabilities, including specific learning disability, autism, speech and language impairment, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, or mental retardation. Students in learning centers have profiles and needs very similar to those receiving LAD services.

5. What are the similarities between LAD programs and learning centers?

LAD services are available in every middle and high school in MCPS, while learning centers are in five middle and three high schools. Every elementary, middle and high school can provide all related services (e.g., speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy).

The services that are available through the LAD program are identical to the services provided through the learning centers. Students in both LAD and learning center classes have access to a continuum of services and settings, including self-contained classes, co-taught general education classes, and supported general education classes. Students in both of these programs receive related services as required by the IEP.

6. What provisions will be made for students who need small classes or other appropriate services?

Each school receiving students from learning centers will be able to provide a continuum of services and settings as required to implement the IEP. This continuum may include classes for both students with and without disabilities, co-taught by general and special educators; general education classrooms with special education support for students with disabilities; and small group instruction for students with disabilities. Special education supervisors are working with receiving schools to ensure that the master schedule is developed in a way that

allows for this continuum of small group, self-contained environments, as well as co-taught classes for students with disabilities.

7. What is meant by “co-taught” classes?

“Co-taught” classes are general education classes that are taught collaboratively by a general educator and a special educator. Each teacher provides instruction to the class in order to provide expertise in both content and instructional strategies to address a variety of learning styles. The two professionals plan collaboratively, assess student needs, and develop lesson plans accordingly. In the classroom, teachers may divide their responsibilities in a number of ways, including but not limited to each teacher working with small groups within the classroom.

8. What is meant by “supported classes?”

Supported classes are general education classes taught by a general education teacher with the assistance of a trained special education paraeducator. The paraeducator provides assistance to students under the direction of the special education teacher.

9. Does inclusion change how IEP teams decide on the hours of service on the IEP?

No. Special education services are provided in inclusive as well as more restrictive settings; the IEP team will recommend the number of hours of special education service required to implement the student’s goals and objectives on the IEP.

10. What is hours-based staffing?

Hours-based staffing refers to a method for allocating staff to a school based on the hours of special education service for all students with disabilities enrolled in the school. The traditional MCPS model for allocating staff is based upon counting the number of students with disabilities who receive more than 15 hours of special education services.

11. How will the home school be affected by this change and will additional supports be provided?

Since students who attend secondary learning centers come from quad clusters, the impact at individual schools within a cluster will be minimal. Provisions have been made for staffing allocations, professional development, and related services as needed.

Communication

1. When will I know my child’s placement for the next school year?

For rising Grade 6 students, decisions about next year’s placement will be made during the annual review meeting this spring. If the annual review already has occurred, a periodic review meeting will be scheduled.

2. When will principals be notified about staffing allocations for their schools?

Principals will receive their special education staffing allocation along with the other staffing allocations for their schools during Spring 2007. Staffing allocations may be changed throughout the spring and summer if enrollment changes.

3. What is the plan for sharing information on the proposal to phase out the secondary learning centers?

Informational meetings have been held for parents as well as other stakeholders. Questions and concerns generated from those meetings have been addressed on an individual basis by central office staff. A *Frequently Asked Questions* document is now posted on the MCPS Web site and will be updated regularly as additional questions are received. Meetings also have been held with groups of principals, teachers, and representatives from advocacy groups in order to provide information and respond to questions.

Monitoring and Evaluation

1. How will the MCPS monitor the academic achievement of students with disabilities in all settings?

Monitoring and evaluation are important aspects of the proposed realignment. Special education supervisors and instructional specialists will participate in school-based committees that monitor the performance and achievement of transitioning students in their home and consortia schools. Central office staff will observe students in their new educational environments, facilitate periodic and annual reviews to discuss students' instructional programming needs and progress, and monitor instructional practices and strategies provided through professional development. Findings from this analysis will be used to modify how services are delivered, if necessary.

2. How do schools monitor the IEPs of students with disabilities?

Each student with a disability is assigned a school-based special education case manager. The case manager is responsible for monitoring the IEP and ensuring that all of the mandated services are provided.

Additionally, individual rising Grade 6 students with disabilities who will attend their home school or choice in the consortia will be monitored by designated central office staff. Each student will also have a 30-day periodic IEP review.

Human Resources

1. What is MCPS doing to address teacher vacancies?

DSES is working with the Department of Recruitment and Staffing to offer open contracts to qualified teachers in a timely manner. The annual special education job fair that typically attracts approximately 100 applicants will be held on February 24, 2007, a week earlier than in previous years. *The Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget and Personnel*

Complement FY 2008 includes increased salaries and benefits for teachers and supporting services staff.

Plans for the Future

2. Is there a plan to phase out elementary learning centers?

There is no plan to eliminate elementary learning centers.

3. Will LAD programs be eliminated?

There is no plan to eliminate LAD services.