

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

May 16, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. with the following Board members and support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Sharon Cox, Suzann King, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff present: Carey Wright, Gwen Mason, Judy Pattik, Holli Swann, Peter Cahall, and Paula Holland.

Others present: Selene Robinson, Karen Bandy, and Jeanne Taylor.

MINUTES

The minutes from April 18, 2008, were approved, as presented.

UPDATE ON RICA STAFFING AND PROGRAM

Based on public comments at the April 28, 2008, Board of Education meeting, Ms. Brandman was concerned about the staffing at RICA and the impact on education. Dr. Wright reported that there were two communications with RICA families: (1) parent meeting on May 12, 2008, and (2) a letter to the RICA community sent by Dr. Wright and Mr. Bedford that explained the staffing and MCPS' commitment to the integrity of the program. Dr. Wright reported that the principal of RICA has expressed her confidence that the staff allocated will be sufficient to deliver the educational program to the students.

The committee and staff discussed the following points:

1. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) have not appropriated approximately \$1.3 million annually to support the educational costs at RICA.
2. The students have a 100% completion rate with a diploma or certificate.
3. The changes in teacher staffing were prompted by trend data on enrollment. Staffing is closer to that used for Learning and Academic Disabilities (LAD) teachers. There are no planned reductions in paraeducator staffing.
4. The staffing guidelines are based on national standards for emotionally disturbed students. However, staffing could be adjusted based on the needs of the particular students and will be reviewed accordingly.
5. The reduction in guidance counselors will not impede the operation of RICA since DHMH provides therapy for each student at least once a week which focuses on the needs of the student. This allows time for remaining administrators to do other guidance responsibilities.
6. In response to a committee question on dialogue with the community, staff explained that RICA students have case managers who are familiar with the disability and who do outreach to families. In addition, there is parent

communication throughout the staffing process and there are monthly updates on the enrollment figures.

ACTION: The committee was interested in what affects the referrals to RICA and requested for information regarding the types of students who are being accepted at RICA and the trends over time. In addition, the committee requested an update on impact at RICA resulting from the Mark Twain School phase out.

REVIEW OF CENTRAL IEP REFERRAL PROCESS

The committee requested a briefing on the process for review of the IEP referral process by the central office. Staff explained that the central IEP process takes over when the needs of the student exceed the capability of the neighborhood school and no MCPS placements appear appropriate. The central office staff has complete knowledge of what the system has to offer and has the authority to refer a student to any public school program or non-public placement. With early intervention and local school IEP teams, the referrals to the central office have declined over the past four years.

The committee inquired about the following:

1. What accounts for the decrease in referrals and is the decreased across all disability groupings? Staff replied that referrals were down because diagnosis is changing and more students are serviced in LRE.
2. The committee asked if there were any programs that local schools could not utilize in referrals. Staff explained that referrals to special programs like RICA and Longview had to be authorized through the Central IEP process.
3. The committee inquired what in the annual review at the local school would indicate need for a more intensive placement. According to staff, if the student has not met IEP goals and objectives this would likely warrant a referral to Central IEP.

Action: In the fall, staff will provide the committee with Central IEP referral trend data by disability. Staff also will include information about the decision making process at Central IEP looking at the process for identification of types of placements and referrals, communication with parents and staff, and communication with community on schools, such as closure.

DISCUSSION OF ALT-MSA TESTING

The committee wanted an update on Alt-MSA testing and professional development for staff, especially for those schools where the special education population did not meet AYP. Staff explained that there was support for the schools, as well as intensive support for those not meeting AYP. This coming summer, training will be mandatory for teachers on Alt-MSA administration and portfolio development for all schools administering the Alt-MSA. It is a very complex and time intensive testing with an impact on administration and teachers. Some parents do not understand the purpose of the assessment.

Discussion included the following:

1. Was the concern of MCPS about administering the Alt-MSA shared with other LEAs? Staff stated that a position paper on barriers will be shared with the state and LEAs.
2. Did the state ask for feedback on the testing procedures and content? Staff stated that the state did not. The committee suggested that could be part of the position paper.
3. If there are opportunities for the Board to help, the committee asked for suggestions.

Action: Bring the position paper on Alt-MSA to the committee and share with the Board of Education in order to help the Board understand the impact on students and teachers. The Board may follow up with advocacy and efforts to coordinate with other LEAs.

DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PLAN FOR THE COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS

The committee made suggestions for how to develop the work plan of the new standing committee, which included:

1. Include unfinished items from the current year work plan going forward.
2. Review MCPS alternative education programs and how students in this population are served.
3. Meet with existing community/advocacy groups to get a sense of the issues such as the ESOL Bilingual Advisory Committee.
4. Ask staff assigned to these special populations for suggestions and proposals for work plan.
5. Develop more outreach to groups and bring concerns to the committee.
6. Discussion on the education of gifted and talented students.

Action: When all committee members are available, the committee will develop a plan and matrix for the coming year.

2007-08 WORK PLAN

1. Receive updates on Special Education Staffing Plan
2. In the future, schedule Dr. Kolan regarding Transition Services
3. Follow up on autism data in the fall
4. Follow-up on ASHA Workload Recommendations
5. Review of Disproportionality Report once the action plan is completed
6. Update on Special Education Litigation Expenses

The next meeting of the committee will be held on July 18, 2008, at 9:00 a.m. in Room 120.

The meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

