

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS

December 6, 2010

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. with the following Board members and Board support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Laura Berthiaume, Judy Docca, Phil Kauffman, Laura Steinberg, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff members present: Chrisandra Richardson, Gwen Mason, Maureen Ryan, Lori-Christina Webb, Lauree Hemke, and Brenda Wilks.

Other attendees: Guest Alice Kirkland

Minutes

The minutes from October 10, 2010, were approved, as amended.

Follow-up Items from October 11, 2010

- Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) Special Education Enrollment
In response to a request from Mr. Kauffman, the committee was presented a comparison of MCPS and FCPS Special Education enrollment, by disability, over the past ten years. Committee members noted what seem like significant differences between MCPS and FCPS enrollment of emotionally disabled, orthopedically impaired and learning disabled students and asked staff to explore what might account for those differences.
- Hours Based Staffing
In preparation for budget discussions, Ms. Brandman had asked staff to provide data evaluating the effectiveness of hours based staffing. Gwen Mason shared that the original intent of hours based staffing was to ensure equitable staffing among schools and said that the principals report feeling that goal has been accomplished. She added that it has allowed more students to remain in home schools and that there has been continued progress among special education students in meeting AYP. Committee members asked that staff provide more specific data to support these assertions, with the understanding that the question is likely to be raised during budget deliberations this winter.
- Satisfaction Surveys
Gwen Mason shared the various methods that feedback is collected from parents of special education students, mostly indicating a high level of satisfaction with special education services in MCPS. Mr. Kauffman said that he was specifically interested in finding out if there is a way either to modify the existing climate surveys administered by the Office of Shared Accountability or if they could develop a separate survey.

- Learning Center Transition

Gwen Mason shared that 13 case managers continue to monitor 187 students and said that hours based staffing has helped effect smooth transitions. Appropriate staff development has also played a significant role in assuring success for these students. Approximately 16 students have moved into other programs primarily because they are seeking a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma. For those students who have left MCPS, Ms. Berthiaume asked if there could be a way to find out why they left and where they are now.

Level 2/3 Alternative Programs

Lauree Hemke provided an overview of each Level 2 and Level 3 Alternative Program, stressing that students are placed into Level 3 programs because of serious infractions, while students are referred to Level 2 programs by home schools after interventions associated with a Level 1 program have not been effective. She went on to say that students in these programs often have a constellation of issues (i.e. attendance, discipline, mobility, involvement with outside agencies, etc.) and that co-location has resulted in more efficient and effective service delivery, as well as the ability to provide more comprehensive course offerings.

Laura Berthiaume asked if students are presenting with more severe issues than in the past. Staff said that there has been no increase in the number of 45-day placements. They reiterated that while many of the students may be struggling with mental health issues, none rise to the level of a disability.

Shirley Brandman asked for a better understanding of the vision associated with consolidating programs. She engaged staff in a discussion on student needs noting that since these students were not able to function successfully in a traditional high school model, there would seem to be no benefit to replicating that model. Staff concurred that it is a challenge to find research based models that have shown high success rates with this population and that this needs to be addressed. Short term, a committee has been created to support daily program operations in the consolidated alternative programs. Several immediate issues have surfaced including students' desire to participate in sports teams as well as to attend Edison, given recent transportation cuts. Committee members expressed raised questions regarding Edison participation and asked for staff to follow up.

ACTION:

The committee asked that a more detailed picture of the student population be provided, perhaps some in case study format, in order to better understand the key obstacles to effective engagement and instruction. Committee members asked that staff continue to work on identifying best

practices for serving students in the alternative programs including researching models in other jurisdictions. It was agreed that the Special Populations committee structure should be used to develop a strategic vision for serving these students.

The meeting ended at 3:30 p.m.