

BOARD OF EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

The Board of Education Subcommittee on Research and Evaluation met in the Board conference room of the Carver Educational Services Center, on Monday, July 16, 1990, from 7 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.

Members Present: Mrs. Marilyn J. Praisner, Chair
Mrs. Sharon DiFonzo
Mrs. Catherine E. Hobbs

Others Present: Dr. Paul Vance
Dr. Joy Frechtling
Mr. Thomas S. Fess

Dr. Frechtling provided committee members with an update of 1990-91 projects for the Division of Instructional Evaluation and Testing.

Mrs. DiFonzo inquired about the delay in the Suspension Study. Dr. Frechtling replied that the contractor had not provided them with a final report which had been due two years ago. In an effort to get the report, she had withheld payments to the contractor. Mrs. Praisner asked that the committee be supplied with copies of a typical contract for an outside consultant. She suggested that it might be more appropriate for payments to be made in thirds rather than monthly to avoid the situation they were in with the Suspension Study where the contractor had been paid monthly. Dr. Frechtling agreed to provide a copy of the contract DEA used. She was still hopeful that the contractor would provide a final report and that it would be of use to MCPS.

In regard to the evaluation of a computerized instruction program at Broad Acres, Mrs. Praisner asked about whether there would be a report. Dr. Frechtling explained that she had shared information with the principal and staff, but she was not sure it was appropriate to have a report. This was to be a two-year evaluation, and the principal planned to go ahead with the project if agreement could be reached with the vendor.

Mrs. Praisner asked about next steps on the ICB Study. Dr. Frechtling hoped to share the study with Dr. Pitt and Dr. Vance next week. Mrs. Praisner said that this draft report should come to the committee and Board this summer after the superintendent's review.

Mrs. Praisner asked about the evaluation of the elementary school foreign language pilots. Dr. Frechtling stated that this year they were concentrating on the implementability of languages in elementary schools and looking at changes in the instructional program, the integration of television and live instruction, and the role of the regular teacher. She indicated that they would not be comparing programs, and she was a little uncomfortable about drawing any conclusions about the programs when they were

separate pilots in just one school. This year they were interviewing some students, and next year they would try to get some knowledge acquisition impact data. Mrs. DiFonzo said it would be interesting to see if there was impact on learning because of the very different styles of teaching in each school.

Dr. Frechtling was not sure they could get to that, but they had applied for a federal grant to get some help; however, they had only a 20 percent chance of getting federal funds.

Mrs. Praisner wondered about other school systems doing research in elementary foreign language instruction, and Dr. Frechtling replied that this was not a "hot topic" in research at the moment. Dr. Vance commented that he had asked if they could buy a package to do this. He hoped they would look at student outcomes, what was happening to the Program of Studies because this was an add-on program, and the impact on the regular teacher.

In regard to the evaluation of the new elementary science program, Dr. Frechtling said they were looking at some performance assessments in science. This was a rare opportunity to do a curriculum impact study because they were planning a new curriculum in science. There would be considerable impact on DEA because they would be working with Mrs. Gemberling's staff and teachers. Mrs. Praisner asked that Dr. Frechtling provide more information to the committee on what was going on with this study and the personnel impact of the study.

Mrs. DiFonzo asked about the study of families in transition. Dr. Frechtling replied that the Board would be receiving the grant for approval. This study had grown out of their looking at pre-school handicapped children. They would be looking at what happened to a family from the time they received services to their pre-school handicapped child to the time when a family had a child in the K-12 stream. They would do case studies of families with children with different handicaps. Mrs. DiFonzo asked what use they would make of this information. Dr. Frechtling explained that these were special families with special needs, and they came under stress when they were in a less sheltered environment. The study would help them understand what supports were needed to help families make the transition. She pointed out that they were not treating just the child; they were treating a family and the success of the siblings in that family might depend on the services to that family. Mrs. Praisner asked how they would be sure they were not building in an assumption that something was not there at the K-12 level that was there at the pre-school level. Dr. Frechtling replied that they were focusing on the transition which implied what happened at both ends, but she recognized that this was a danger to guard against. They were not designing the study to say what more should be done for these folks but to understand the stresses and strains on the family and to make the supports as effective as possible.

Mrs. DiFonzo asked what they were testing on the Maryland's Tomorrow Program. Dr. Frechtling said they were doing achievement testing and monitoring attendance and grades. This was a minimal effort responding to state requirements. It was not a full-blown evaluation study; however, she understood that the state had a sub-sample of schools where they were doing a more extensive study. Dr. Vance commented that he had concluded that people were now asking how they knew something worked. He felt that they were going to have to have more and more control groups because surveys were not hard data. The only way to get data was to have groups that were not receiving the services. Dr. Frechtling added that she would be more comfortable with some of their studies if they were able to set up these situations.

Mrs. Praisner asked what they were not doing other than the evaluation of alternative programs because of budget cuts. Dr. Frechtling replied that she did not know what her organizational structure was now and had made some proposals to the superintendent's office. She felt that she could not operate without two division directors, and she was down two positions in administrative analysis. There might have to be some siphoning of funds from research and evaluation to get the work done in administrative analysis. Right now she was very strapped with what they were being asked to do, but she was not complaining because every office had been hit with budget cuts. They did have to look at what they could do or could not do, and she needed answers about her organizational structure, division director positions, and the location of the auditors. Dr. Vance explained that part of the problem was that to have two divisions would require the creation of another A&S position and another part was that the positions would have to be advertised which did not guarantee the slots to the persons now filling those positions on an acting basis.

Mrs. Praisner asked that they turn to the evaluations of the recommendations of the Commission on Excellence in Teaching and the state testing program issues. Dr. Frechtling replied that they were writing up a final report on the staff induction/LSST training pilot. They were looking at the satisfaction of new teachers and looking at the project from the point of view of the veteran teachers. Mrs. Praisner pointed out that everything in this study was anecdotal, and Dr. Frechtling agreed that it was all perceptual. They did not sit in on the sessions themselves to see if the sessions were any different. They always came back to the question of whether youngsters were learning more, and they were going to have a rough time looking at this because of changes in the testing program. Mrs. Praisner pointed out that they had previous evaluations and might be able to do some minimal testing next year for their own use. Dr. Frechtling indicated that staff training projects were always very difficult to evaluate regarding the impact on students and achievement. Mrs. Praisner said that even if they were looking at this from

the point of view of teachers feeling good about themselves, she would want to know this longitudinally. She felt that in the first year the enthusiasm of teachers would be heightened, but the question was whether there would be a long term change. Three years from now they should go back and look at this. Dr. Frechtling reported that they had looked at schools with the greatest number of new teachers regardless of whether they were in the LSST training pilot. They had found that principals in these schools had created their own support groups for new teachers. The question was whether people in these schools would be willing to continue to give up their own time to help new teachers.

Mrs. Praisner stated that PSAC recognized that in the flexibility pilots they were dealing with attitudes and wanting an expansion of the commitment. Dr. Frechtling felt that the flexibility pilots had to prove they were doing something more than creating happy people. She didn't know at what point they should begin to collect achievement outputs, but in her research around the country she had found that most projects had their summative evaluations postponed as the pilots became more complex. Mrs. Praisner asked how they would know when they got where they wanted to go. Dr. Frechtling explained that this was what she was asking. For example, what was a successful project? Was it that the teachers were happy? Her staff had interacted with the committees involved in staff development and flexibility, but there was a backing off from a willingness to be judged regarding the impact of the pilots on students. She would negotiate the timing of this, but at some point they had to look at knowledge and learning. Mrs. Praisner agreed that it was important that they continue to reaffirm this was something they had to know, especially as they moved away from the initial experiences. Dr. Frechtling commented that there was nothing wrong with taking the measure and saying that they had not yet achieved their goals.

Mrs. Hobbs asked if there would be an opportunity in FY1991 to do an evaluation of alternative programs. Dr. Frechtling replied that there would not be that opportunity because as staff completed projects they would be rolled over to other existing projects. Mrs. Hobbs asked about staff time spent in assisting Dr. Gordon. Dr. Frechtling replied that the time demands had not been great because Dr. Gordon and his group had been able to use existing analyses and his demands had been reasonable.

Mrs. Praisner requested an update on state testing requirements and the involvement of DEA staff. Dr. Frechtling replied that she had been heavily involved because she was on the state assessment committee. The state and their contractor were moving ahead in good faith and hoped to have three tests in three subject areas ready for next May. They had already developed a mathematics prototype. However, there had been a slight shift regarding reporting requirements for next May. Originally this

was not to be a field test, and now there was the possibility that results would not be reported publicly. The state felt they would not be ready for annual reporting in November, and they were not planning to have a public report until they had a more stabilized test. She pointed out that most places attempting this had phased in programs over three to five years. She would guess that in May they would have the test items, but she did not know whether they would be performance assessments and provide true base line. While the MSDE staff had been trying to carry out the direction they had been given, it was an almost impossible task to get this ready.

Because the state would not be using the CAT in October, Mrs. Hobbs inquired about the possibility of MCPS continuing to give the CAT. She pointed out that the state could have a failure on its hands, and two or three years from now they would not have continuity in testing. Dr. Frechtling replied that the state would be doing a sampling of 250 students per grade in the spring, and Chapter I would be using the comprehensive test of basic skills. She felt that MCPS should not use the CAT because it was old and outdated. Mrs. Praisner reported that the state was supposed to be validating the comprehensive test against the old California test, and Dr. Frechtling agreed that they were trying to establish the links. She said that the new assessment program would require nine hours of testing, and the comprehensive test of basic skills required four to five hours of testing in the same time frame which was much too much testing. She had seen a real rebellion against the CAT from the minority community and the PTAs.

Mrs. DiFonzo recalled that when the state went from the ITBS to the CAT the argument was that it would be better for the youngsters in Baltimore City. She asked what they could expect in Montgomery County or in the state as a result of going to the comprehensive test of basic skills. Dr. Frechtling predicted that the scores would drop, but she did not know how significant a drop there might be in MCPS. The equalization study would help them to understand these scores.

Mr. Fess reported that at the state Board they had raised the issue of system by system results. Dr. Frechtling replied that each November there would be a report, and the state planned to phase in different elements of that report. This fall they would have four or five systemwide measures, and in 1992 they hoped to include the achievement tests, school by school data, and data on gender and race.

Mrs. Praisner thanked staff and committee members for their participation in the meeting.

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