

APPROVED
58-1991

Rockville, Maryland
November 13, 1991

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Wednesday, November 13, 1991, at 7 p.m.

ROLL CALL Present: Mr. Blair G. Ewing, President
 in the Chair
 Mrs. Frances Brenneman
 Mrs. Sharon DiFonzo
 Mrs. Carol Fanconi
 Ms. Ana Sol Gutierrez
 Mrs. Catherine E. Hobbs

Absent: Dr. Alan Cheung
 Mr. Shervin Pishevar

Others Present: Dr. H. Philip Rohr, Deputy Superintendent

#indicates student vote does not count. Four votes are needed for adoption.

Re: MEETING WITH TITLE IX GENDER EQUITY COMMITTEE

Board members viewed a video tape produced by the American Association of University Women on educational equity for girls and women. After viewing the video, Board members asked for the suggestions from the committee on how the issues discussed in the video could be translated into policy and practice for the MCPS. Board members discussed the potential effects of the fiscal crisis on gender equity issues and other Board initiatives. Committee members pointed out their frustrations about getting gender equity issues seen as major efforts in in-service and human relations training. Board, staff, and committee members discussed the potential of SIMS for reporting on gender issues and talked about ways to make the system more gender conscious in its publications and recruitment for programs.

The committee expressed its hope that the Board could get together with the committee to continue these informal discussions.

Re: EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board met in executive session from 8:10 to 8:15 to discuss student security issues.

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Re: ANNUAL MEETING WITH MCCPTA

Mr. Ewing explained that Dr. Vance had had a previous commitment and had sent his regrets. Dr. Cheung and Mr. Pishevar had also sent their apologies.

Mrs. Sharon Friedman, president of MCCPTA, stated that given the budget crisis, the focus of their initiatives was informing parents as to how they could best advocate for their children. They had established committees at the county level and used the cluster system to inform and teach the local PTAs. This year MCCPTA had focused on parent involvement outreach because they wanted to reach out to individuals who had not normally been active in the PTA. They also wanted to explain to parents how to be involved in the education of their children in ways that didn't necessarily mean volunteering in the school everyday.

Mrs. Charlotte Joseph commented that about a year ago Dr. Gordon had submitted his final report on minority student achievement in which he stated that parental participation in the processes of schooling could reduce the dissonance between what the home supported and what happened in school. He went on to say that in many instances there were no real conflicts between the home and the school but only reciprocal ignorance. MCCPTA saw parent involvement as improving student achievement and as eliminating this reciprocal ignorance. If the focus of involvement was the child, then the education of that child was a shared responsibility between the home and the school with each having a crucial role to play if children were to succeed in school. Since 1897 national PTA had worked to bring the home and the school closer together to cooperate in the training of the child. Despite the adoption of national goals two years ago, a survey of parents showed that 76 percent of them were unaware of these goals and few believed they could be reached. The first goal of national PTA was to seek the establishment of a comprehensive parent involvement program in every school. The state PTA had adopted a resolution on parental involvement, and MCPS now had a policy on parental involvement. This fall MCCPTA had shared the policy and regulations with its membership. They now had a new standing committee on parental involvement, and they were improving efforts to include parents at every level of PTA. They had sent 21 suggestions to the local PTAs to increase parental involvement. The parent involvement committee had been meeting and sharing information about what was working in the various PTAs, and this Saturday they would be sponsoring a parenting conference with MCPS.

Mrs. Friedman was concerned about implementation of the parent involvement regulations and whether or not they would be carried out in positive ways. They endorsed having a joint MCPS/MCCPTA committee to collect a catalogue of successful strategies and

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practices so that each school would not have to reinvent the wheel. They also hoped that principals would receive some in-service training on these regulations.

Mrs. Nancy Rea reported that there was a real concern about human relations in the schools and PTA. This year they were making a push to get every local unit involved in human relations efforts. They had developed guidelines and had received help from the MCPS Department of Human Relations. The human relations school liaisons were working closely with PTA human relations chairs. At the county level, Dr. Lancaster's office was working closely with MCCPTA. This had to be a cooperative effort because human relations attitudes developed in the home. PTA as an organization had developed some real problems because it was no longer representative of the broad range of parents. Therefore, PTA was trying to include all types of parents, cultures, and gender in PTA.

Mrs. Friedman said that this year they had had an active curriculum committee chaired by David Schindel who was not with them this evening. He had studied the graduation requirements and math and science initiatives to make recommendations to MCCPTA delegates and presidents. Mrs. Linda Lang remarked that MCCPTA had testified before the state Board of Education, and Mr. Schindel's testimony had been well received. Mrs. Friedman explained that in the case of the graduation requirements the process worked for them because they had been able to give and get input from their locals. She asked that the Board inform MCCPTA as quickly as possible about issues so that they would have time to comment. Mr. Ewing agreed, but he pointed out that they did not always have the leadtime themselves. For example, they had very little time with the budget situation because the Council would not make its decisions until November 21, and the Board had to act on November 26. They would try to have a document out to everyone on November 22, but this did not allow people much time to react.

Mrs. Lang suggested that they might want to look at the downtime on MCPS Cable to inform people about upcoming events and news about the budget situation. They could think about a bulletin board of activities and notices about upcoming meetings and events.

Mrs. Lang explained that the greater community outreach committee evolved because they wanted to provide a positive flow of information about the schools to the greater community. They felt that if MCCPTA had a positive, on-going relationship with the press through a breakfast meeting, they would be able to get information to the community on a more regular basis. They were attempting to build an advocacy base with people who did not have children in the public schools.

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In terms of the budget, Mrs. Friedman said that never before had things happened so quickly and never before had the issues been so complex. Usually they educated PTAs about looking at the budget for the following school year, but this year they had to look at the possibility of midyear reductions. It was also the first time they had to explain about what was happening at the school, county, and state level. To communicate they used the president's letter which was sent out every month as well as a series of budget alerts. They had provided suggestions to PTAs as to what they could do about the budget crisis. One suggestion was each person find two people in Montgomery County not affiliated with the school system and give them reasons why they should support education.

Mr. Ewing reported that the likelihood was strong that there would be another big round of budget cuts this year in the amount of \$150 million for the state. The governor was not going to recommend increased taxes, but he did expect to make a recommendation to cut the APEX increase for education. Mr. Ewing did not think that next year would be very much different. This created a lot of stress, and he hoped that they could talk about things the school system could do in meeting that kind of stress. Mrs. Friedman stated that it was important for the Board to send signals to parents that they were being supported. When the PTA was testifying or had an organized rally, they would like to see Board members there to show support.

Mrs. Carol Jarvis commented that she had moved into the area about three years ago and did not come with any baggage. After watching the Board meeting yesterday, she felt that while Board members had tried to prioritize, some of the minutia had gotten in the way. She asked whether the Board was considering working in smaller committees which would require Board members to develop a trust among themselves. She had heard that 20 years ago the Board made policy and did not get into as many building specification problems as she had heard yesterday. She was concerned that the Board would continue to try to make every decision for the school system. She asked whether the Board was considering any management changes.

Mr. Ewing replied that there was discomfort with the notion of committees although the Board had two subcommittees. He had made the motions to create the committees, but there had been bitter fights over the establishment of the committees. He would like to see the Board create more committees, but they had not had a happy experience with the committee on minority education because the Board did not have confidence in the work of the committee. He remarked that it was getting harder to be a Board member because the system was larger and more complex. The public was very demanding. It would be difficult for the Board to delegate some of its authority because of the state laws. In the past Boards had looked more into detail, not less on what she might be

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referring to as minutiae. When Dr. Elseroad had left in 1975, the Board had assumed greater authority for decision-making. The community demanded that the Board make a lot of these decisions. Typically the Board reviewed how it was functioning at its annual retreats. In his experience this had been one of the toughest years for staff, Board, and PTA.

Mrs. Fanconi used to think that the Board wasted a lot of time on consent items until she got on the Board and realized that state law governed this. They took their responsibilities seriously, and in times when money was tight they had to scrutinize these items to be as efficient as they could.

Ms. Gutierrez commented that she was frustrated with the information-gathering part of Board business. She had hoped that additional subcommittees would enable them to study issues in depth and make recommendations to the total Board. She would continue to recommend that the Board consider subcommittees. She pointed out that under Total Quality Management there were models for schools that were vertical committees. They would consist of a Board member sitting with a vertical team from central to area to schools on a particular issue. A Board member could sit in on an advisory committee meeting on a regular basis. The issue was how they could facilitate an exchange of ideas and keep up with their need to know.

Mr. Ewing explained that the Board's business had to be conducted in public because of the strong "sunshine" law in Maryland. Ten years ago a lot of the Board's business was done in private. The law required that the superintendent or his designee be present for every subcommittee meeting which imposed an extra burden on staff. He thought that if they could be more efficient through the use of subcommittees, the Board business meetings might be fewer or shorter. However, it was his experience that when subcommittees reported, every Board member wanted to reexamine the whole issue from top to bottom.

Mr. Walter Lange reported that he had attended yesterday's discussion of middle schools. They were pleased that the Board was looking at a consistent policy on middle schools. In a letter he had sent to the Board, he had requested a commitment to student/teacher ratios tied to teaming, provision for planning time for the teachers, and appropriate facilities. If they were going to have a policy, it was important to include these issues as well as budgetary issues. Mr. Ewing thought that some people had come away from that meeting feeling that the Board had not reached any conclusion. He did not think this was true because they had requested the superintendent to bring the Board a draft policy which would be a middle school policy including teaming, nurturing, facilities issues, etc. Mr. Rick Wood recalled that some Council members had made a point of rejecting facilities for the middle school because the Board had never taken an action to

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require middle schools. He hoped that the Board would adopt a policy as soon as possible, preferably before the CIP was before the Council in January.

Mrs. Fanconi commented that this Board had been very proactive. They were moving through the Action Areas and sending out policies for citizen reaction. In regard to middle schools, this was the first time this Board had discussed it and had directed the superintendent to bring a policy to the Board. She asked how long MCCPTA needed to prepare a response. Mrs. Friedman replied that to get grass root reactions they needed at least two months. Mrs. Fanconi suggested that it would be helpful if MCCPTA could give them a sample timeline for policy review.

Mrs. Tookie Gentilcore remarked that the Board invited citizens to participate in task forces and committees, but there was less enthusiasm for this participation. Parents put in many, many hours on facilities issues and developed a feeling of ownership; however, the Board adopted alternatives which left them with the feeling that the work of the committee had been undermined. She asked about the possibility of adding a step to the process so that advisory groups could respond to minority opinions and the alternatives. Mr. Ewing replied that they could testify on the alternatives. The problem with the facilities process was that it was tied in with the capital budget process which imposed a time constraint. The Board had to adopt a budget by December 1 because it had to be submitted to the county executive, Council, and the state. He agreed that they did need to keep examining the process. He understood how people felt if they had ownership, but the Board had to exercise its responsibility. He asked MCCPTA to submit any suggested changes to the process.

Mrs. Mary Ann Bowen indicated that parents were telling her that they spent a lot of time on advisory groups, but when their recommendations came to the Board at the alternatives worksession all the alternatives the citizens considered and did not support were now back on the table. The message going to these volunteers was that the work they were doing was a waste of time. She suggested that the Board should discuss how they incorporated the alternatives with the work of the task force.

Mrs. Fanconi thought they might consider some way the committee could make a presentation on its work and the options they considered. For example, the Blair group had shown the steps and what they had looked at and discarded. At the alternatives meeting, she had acknowledged the hard work that went into the recommendations. Mr. Ed Silverstein assumed that all the reports contained the options that had been discussed and discarded as they had done in the Blair report. Mr. Ewing agreed that it was worth looking at this issue. He thought that if they looked at Board decisions over the past three or four years they would find a 90 percent correlation between the committee recommendations

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and Board decisions. The Board rarely adopted the alternatives, but they put the alternatives on the table to look at all sides of the issue. He explained that the Board had the final responsibility and the legal responsibility for making these decisions. The Board was frequently sued, and it might be the case that the public did not understand that they were not being asked to make decisions but to make recommendations.

A suggestion was made that the Board needed to inform the public about its Action Areas as well as how the Board operated. It might be worthwhile for the Board to send out a package describing its responsibilities. Mr. Ewing said they had a brief brochure describing the work of the Board, and it might be well to send it out to local PTAs. He pointed out that there had been a rapid turnover in PTA leadership, and some people were not familiar with the work of the Board. The Board had adopted 12 Action Areas in February, and these had been distributed widely.

Ms. Gutierrez commented that she and Mrs. Brenneman had discussed changes in the facilities process. Adopting alternatives at the last minute did not permit the community to come to closure. She had lived in a community that had faced a lot of divisive issues around boundaries, and it took years for the healing. She asked for MCCPTA's suggestions on how the facilities process could be changed and how the alternatives could be considered at an earlier stage.

In response to a question about cluster testimony, Mr. Ewing explained that the Board was looking for a cluster to make a fair presentation of its view if it had a single view and to allow the fair presentation of other views. This did not mean they had to give extensive coverage to every single person who wanted to speak. The Board was happy to have written comments submitted. The cluster was responsible for ensuring that the views of the people living in the cluster were reflected in the testimony. This did put tremendous pressure on cluster coordinators, and he asked whether they had suggestions on improving this process.

A question was raised about the best way to correspond with the Board. Mr. Ewing replied that if he got letters from cluster coordinators or PTA presidents, he read those. Critical for him was the identification of the writer as that kind of official. As Board president, he had to read all letters because he had to sign the letters of response. Mrs. Fanconi added that it helped her if people put the main point in their first paragraph. She instructed them not to fax anything to the Board the day of the meeting because they did not have time to read these letters. The Board had to receive correspondence the weekend before a meeting because this was when they did their studying. She commented that for her, form letters were not effective at all. One handwritten letter was worth 1,000 form letters.

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Mrs. DiFonzo remarked that the fastest way to turn her off was to bombard her with phone calls. She would rather have one person representing an organization call her to state the issue. She urged PTAs not to send out flyers telling people to call the Board. If she could spend 45 minutes with one person talking through an issue, it was worth it. She was not swayed by being asked to return 35 or 45 phone calls. She was not swayed by receiving 5,000 form letters. She would rather receive one well articulated letter from the PTA on an issue which stated that the Board would not be bombarded with petitions or 1,000 letters.

Ms. Gutierrez said that by the time she got her telephone messages it was midnight, and obviously she could not return calls at midnight. She would appreciate receiving one complete and articulate message on her answering machine, but she did not have the time to respond to calls with just a name and a number because her time to return phone calls was very limited. Her first preference was to have their views in writing.

Mr. Ewing reported that people did not understand that Board members were employed eight-hours a day earning a living and that being a Board member was not a full-time job. This did limit their time for communication.

Mrs. Fanconi said that Tom Fess was the ombudsman and staff assistant to the Board. If people had problems in their schools and would like the Board to know about it, it was much better to contact Mr. Fess than read it on the front page of the newspaper. Mrs. DiFonzo explained that some people thought the only way they could solve a problem was to go to a Board member. She would explain to people that appeals ended up at the Board level; therefore, Board members had to protect due process rights and not get involved. She usually gave people the phone number of the ombudsman or some telephone numbers of MCPS staff.

Mrs. Holly Joseph said that before they ended the meeting, she would like to put in a plug for the Blair and B-CC magnet schools. Even though this was a tight budget year, she hoped that they would not let the magnets die. Mrs. Friedman thanked the Board members for the exchange of views.

Mr. Ewing commented that the Board looked forward to working with MCCPTA.

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Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 10:05 p.m.

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

HPR:mlw