

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS

July 20, 2009

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following Board members and Board support staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Laura Berthiaume, Laura Steinberg, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Staff members: Frieda Lacey, Gwen Mason, Judy Pattik, Maureen Ryan, Lori-Christina Webb, Diane Mohr, Brian Edwards, Steve Zagami, Lauree Hemke, and Chris Richardson.

Guests: Joanne Ugolini.

## **Minutes**

The minutes from May 11, 2009, were approved as presented.

## **Alternative Programs Update**

### **Level 1 Alternative Programs**

Ms. Mohr explained that all Level 1 plans are submitted to Office of School Performance (OSP) for review and approval. Each plan describes the structures and strategies that a school will use to support students remaining in a home school including behavior interventions, data monitoring, parent outreach and consultations between the Level 1 alternative teacher and general education teachers. The plans' purpose is to provide a palate of options that can be integrated with school wide services that focus on helping Level 1 students be successful. Unlike students receiving special education services, there is no requirement to have a written plan for each Level 1 student. Staffing for Level 1 programs is determined by OSP, based on specific performance criteria and ranges from a .4 to a 1.0 staff position. Additionally, twice yearly, during community superintendent site visits, individual student level data are reviewed.

Committee members reiterated an interest in seeing the specific results of OSP's Level 1 monitoring activities. An agenda item in the near future will include a presentation of school by school disaggregated performance data. Additionally, Ms. Berthiaume is interested in exploring with the Office of Shared Accountability the feasibility of a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of Level 1 programs.

### **Level 2 and Level 3 Alternative Programs**

Mr. Zagami explained that the overarching goal of Level 2 and Level 3 programs is to return all students to their home schools. In 2009, a higher percentage of students returned to their home schools than did in 2008, though it remains less than 50 percent. Ms. Hemke added that once students meet the exit criteria, Alternative Program staff meets with the home school staff to prepare for the transition, making sure that the Level 1 teacher is involved.

Additional data were presented including enrollment by program, by schools and by clusters from which the students come, as well as attendance, suspension and HSA passing rates. The official graduation rate for Alternative Programs, which is calculated by MSDE, is skewed because of the number of students who move in and out of the programs. However, Ms. Hemke shared that in both 2008 and 2009, all grade 12 students who were enrolled in either a Level 2 or Level 3 program graduated.

Committee members asked if the existing Level 2 and 3 program capacity is too limited. Mr. Zagami said that staff is always reflecting on this concern. He added that they are very excited about the collocation of programs at the former Mark Twain site, which among other things, will allow for expanded course offerings, thereby strengthening the academic component of the programs. He said that they this will be a building year and they will carefully monitor all opportunities for improvement.

The committee agreed that a future agenda item will include an update on the program collocation and its impact on student performance. Additionally, committee members are interested in further discussing those obstacles that prevent students from returning to their home schools, in keeping with MCPS' goal, as well strategies that can ease the transition for those students returning to their home schools. Committee members also would like to focus on students who have multiple referrals to Level 2 and Level 3 programs and asked staff for additional information on their needs.

**ACTION: Schedule as a future agenda item will include an update on the program collocation and its impact on student performance.**

### **Secondary Learning Center Transition**

Ms. Mason explained that school based teams convened to support transitioning students have been expanded to ensure specific supports for individual students as well as supports for the overall school environment. Speech and language therapists have been included in the teams working to address social skills needs and to assist schools in anticipating social inclusion challenges for transitioning students. She shared that teams have been engaged in onsite as well as centralized professional development activities. In addition, several middle schools have been targeted for instructional program review to look at improved delivery of accommodations including assistive technology support, differentiation and other needs of special education students. She went on to say that supports are driven by the IEP of each student, which can account for variation among schools. She added that special education staff is working closely with school principals and counselors to ensure that they aware of the needs of each student.

Committee members asked what is being done to help educate each school's

general population to create welcoming environments for included special education students. Ms. Richardson said that schools rely on counselors to go into specific classrooms to support learning about and accepting differences among classmates. Mr. Zagami added that Collaborative Problem Solving can also pin point hot spots and help develop strategies to make the general school environment more welcoming. Ms. Mason commented that disability awareness is embedded into all general staff development. She also added that each case manager reports to her directly and if and when an issue is identified, she will be in a position to brainstorm about developing interventions and implementing supports.

**ACTION: The committee asked for an update at a future meeting.**

**Summary**

1. Provide agendas for the coming year
2. Schedule Bridge visit

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.