

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

April 6, 2022

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Monifa B. McKnight, Interim Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Operating Budget Hearing #3 Follow-up (02-22-2022-01-C, -D, -E)

During the Operating Budget Hearing, Board members requested the following:

Question C

Ms. Harris requested additional information regarding the possibility of expanding the Enriched Literacy Curriculum (ELC) to more than 25 elementary schools, as well as the expansion of advanced course offerings in the Virtual Academy as noted in Ms. Chung's testimony.

Question C Response

The Enriched Literacy Curriculum (ELC) began in ten schools during the 2017–2018 school year, and expanded in 2019 and 2020, before the interruptions associated with the pandemic. Currently, forty schools implement the ELC. To continue to address the needs of academically advanced students, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is planning to expand the ELC to an additional cohort of approximately 20–30 elementary schools in 2022–2023, based on budget, professional development capacity, and overall bandwidth of schools to implement new initiatives coming out of the pandemic. The goal is to identify schools that have readiness for successful implementation in 2022–2023. Primary factors include demographic, socioeconomic, and regional diversity, school buy-in, and other conditions that lead to successful implementation. ELC expansion will continue during the 2023–2024 school year.

In addition, an ELC option also will be offered through the Virtual Academy in 2022–2023, particularly for students in schools that do not have sufficient peer cohorts to offer the ELC. In all schools, students centrally will be recommended for literacy enrichment and will be served through the Benchmark Advance Curriculum, with additional resources specific for students needing enrichment. Professional learning for Benchmark Advanced with Enrichment and the ELC will take place during summer 2022.

Question D

Ms. Silvestre requested data on the percentage of students that have been identified as needing tutoring but they have yet to access it. What steps are being taken to address their hesitancy?

Question D Response

As a result of staffing shortages, some schools did not have sufficient MCPS staffing capacity to serve every student who was identified for tutoring in the schools. These students were added to MCPS tutoring as staffing allowed, or referred directly to the external tutoring partners, FEV Tutor or Tutor Me Education, when the services began in late January 2022. Every identified student was contacted by MCPS staff and/or the external vendor to begin tutoring services. If referred to the vendor, the vendor continues to contact the family to schedule tutoring sessions and sends reminders, including repeated email messages and direct phone calls. In addition, teacher leaders in each school directly access the vendor platforms to monitor student participation and follow-up with families as needed.

It is important to note that some students were not identified or referred for tutoring by their school, but are interested in participating in tutoring sessions. These students are being referred to the external partners for “on demand” or “Homework Help” tutoring that is available on a flexible schedule.

Sometimes, students schedule tutoring sessions with MCPS tutors or the external partners, but do not attend the tutoring sessions, even after multiple reminders and outreach. Anecdotal feedback indicates that some students/families forget to attend scheduled sessions, have conflicts with extracurricular activities, are not interested in tutoring with an outside company, or do not respond to multiple communication attempts.

As of March 28, 2022, of approximately 3,000 students referred for high dosage tutoring with the external partners, approximately 1,390 students still are in the process of scheduling or attending their first tutoring session. Many of these students were referred in March 2022, and the number decreases daily as sessions are confirmed. Tutoring providers and school staff will continue to aggressively communicate with families to schedule and confirm the first tutoring sessions and as students are added.

Question E

Ms. O’Looney requested information regarding the possibility of testing out different services for the proposed telehealth counseling service before selecting a vendor: Can it be tested with students from all grade levels, not just with CESC staff? Please make certain that this is not a hotline but actual face-to-face mental health counseling with well-training professionals.

Question E Response

The selection of mental health providers (whether in-person or telehealth), is a complex process that requires an intensive vetting. It requires gathering information from other agencies that work with the vendor to determine their business practices and determine if their mental health providers have the appropriate licensure or certification to provide mental health services. It also requires that a company follows *The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996*, compliant procedures to maintain confidentiality and can bill for insurance and Medicaid.

The selection of mental health providers should not be “tested”, to ensure that the designated mental health provider can deliver and complete the therapeutic support to students once they begin offering services. It takes time to build rapport with a new client and having someone temporarily, to be replaced by a new person in the future can have damaging effects on students. In addition, all vendors are required to be approved by the Board of Education for any contract that exceeding \$25,000. This requires working with the Procurement Unit to ensure a fair Response for Proposal (RFP) bidding process. This process takes time to ensure that a vendor is for example not selected due to favoritism or not selected due to implicit bias. The RFP process can include getting feedback from critical stakeholders (i.e. students, families, staff, community agencies, etc.) around how the services can be delivered in schools and the types of services that are needed. This feedback is included in the RFP document, as requirements for the vendors to demonstrate to win the bid for services.

If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Niki T. Hazel, associate superintendent of curriculum and instructional programs, or Mr. Everett Davis, acting associate superintendent of student and family support and engagement, Office of Teaching, Learning, and Schools, via email.

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Copy to:
Executive Staff
Ms. Webb