

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION AD HOC COMMITTEE

January 16, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. with the following Board members and staff present: Shirley Brandman (chair), Steve Abrams, Sharon Cox, Roland Ikheloa, and Glenda Rose (recorder).

Other staff present: Gwen Mason, Vickie Strange-Moscoco, Denise DeCoste, Felicia Piacente, Marisa Stemple, Ellen Schaefer, and Betsy Brown.

Universal Design Learning

Staff explained that Universal Design Learning (UDL) is the practice of embedding flexible strategies into the curriculum during the planning process, so that all students can access a variety of learning solutions. UDL is commensurate with the philosophy of differentiated instruction, but places more emphasis on readily available technology to meet the needs of diverse learners. What makes UDL different from instruction accommodations is that UDL strategies for instruction are front loaded. They are integrated into the overall design of instruction.

Universal Design (UD) began as an architectural philosophy, e.g., curb cuts, ramps, and automatic doors. The concept of UD also has been applied to web page designs, which enables users who are blind or deaf to access the Internet. In the mid-1990s, the concepts of UD were applied to education. Widely accessible technology makes UDL possible and allows a paradigm shift in education.

UDL allows students with disabilities to fall among a continuum of learner differences rather than constituting a separate category. Teacher adjustments for learner differences should occur for all students, not just those with disabilities. Instead of remediating students so that they can learn from a set curriculum, curriculum should be made flexible to accommodate learner differences. UDL provides multiple means of representation, expression and control, and engagement.

Using the UDL frame of reference, High Incidence Accessible Technology (HIAT) provides support to school teams on behalf of any struggling learner with or without an IEP; provides training on UDL; and has developed a website containing downloadable strategies and links to educational websites.

The committee learned that MCPS is engaged in UDL, but teachers self-select to participate and all curriculum does not have the embedded strategies. Therefore, adoption of UDL is sketchy and not systemic.

The chair requested that the staff come to the committee with an action plan and recommendations to the Board of Education. What is the "as is" state? What are the hardware limitations? What is the cost? Who is responsible?

Committee's Work Plan for 2006—07

The committee discussed the work and missions of the Special Education Continuous Improvement Team (SECIT), Special Education Advisory Committee, and the Staffing Plan Work Group.

The committee agreed that there should be further discussion of whether to create a standing committee. One suggestion was to broaden the committee's scope to support multiple populations. Ongoing issues of training, compliance, and a continuum of educational options for special education students were suggested as reasons for creation of a standing committee.

There was a discussion on the training for teachers to be aware of a student's IEP. Staff assured the committee that there was training for both general and special education teachers.

A discussion on the GT/LD referral process revealed that there is no single indicator that was being used as a marker for educational impact or need of services. The whole child must be considered. Performance must be weighed against expected performance given the child's cognitive ability.

Action

The work plan for the remainder of this year will include the following topics

- Review of CAP process and it's effectiveness
- Review of how MCPS is providing a Continuum of services to special education students -- how and when are special services provided. This will include specific focus on transition services and possible tracking of students as well as progress with inclusion

It was also agreed that the SECIT final report prepared last spring should be presented to the full Board when the Board has its update on inclusion so that the SECIT's recommendations can be discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.