

Attachment B: Summary of Input from Phase I

Phase I of the proposed review of MCPS special education program focused on obtaining stakeholder input regarding perceived critical issues in special education in MCPS. Accordingly, Dr. McLaughlin and/or Dr. Neubert, Dr. Moon, and Dr. Parrish have met with the following groups to provide information about the planned review and to solicit input from members of the respective stakeholder groups that can inform the targets for the review.

1. November, 1998 Dr. McLaughlin met with the superintendents' Special Education Advisory Committee. This group is composed of parents of students with various disabilities and/or advocacy groups. Subsequent to that meeting a call for parental input was placed in the various communication channels used by the various parent groups. Parents were asked to indicate issues that they believed should be included within a comprehensive review of MCPS special education programs. A total of 18 responses were received; some from individual parents and some were compilations of comments from an unknown number of parents. All comments were read and coded. The following themes emerged from parent comments:
 - **Program Variability:** Parents expressed concerns about the variability in how special education programs were organized and services delivered across clusters, individual schools, and individual teachers. Parents believe that quality is almost totally dependent on the individual teacher and individual principal.
 - **School/Family Communication:** Parents see communication with a child's teachers and principal as critical to an effective program. Some comments spoke of effective communication, while others indicated a need for better communication at the school level. Specific parent questions centered on finding examples of effective school/family communication and determining why the communication is effective. Parents also felt that they had no recourse within the system when communication broke down.
 - **Parental Input into Decisionmaking:** Some concerns were expressed about the process for obtaining parental input. In addition, issues surrounding the willingness on the part of educators to accept parental input.
 - **Access to the General Education Curriculum:** Issues surrounding the content of instruction of students with disabilities emerged. In particular, some parents questioned whether students with disabilities have access to all academic content, with appropriate accommodations. This issue was noted most often by parents of middle school students with LD and was also a specific concern for parents of LD/GT students.
 - **Class size/Case Load:** Parents questioned the appropriateness of class sizes and case loads of resource teachers and how that affects adequacy of services provided as well as access to the general education curriculum.

- Supports for LRE: Parents suggested that the quantity and quality of supports provided to special and general education teachers be investigated. The availability and qualifications of aides was singled out as an issue. Also a concern were attitudes on the part of general educators to accommodating students with disabilities in their classes.
 - Related Services: A very few parents commented on the effectiveness of providing direct vs. indirect related services.
 - Transportation: One comment was received regarding the need to provide transportation for community-based training.
2. On January 5, 1999, Drs. McLaughlin, Moon, and Neubert met with the Psychologists/Liaisons. Only one psychologist submitted issues subsequent to that meeting. Issues to be investigated included:
- Special Education Eligibility and “At-Risk” Populations: A critical issue for psychologists was the process for determining who receives special education and who does not. Of great concern was the lack of pre-referral interventions and lack of resources to support students who were at-risk of academic failure without classifying them as special education. There seemed to be a general sense that the needs for academic supports were growing and that special education placement was the only recourse for students.
 - Staffing Allocations: There is a need for more school psychologists. Current ASPA guidelines call for 1 psychologist for every 2,000 students enrolled. The ratios preclude psychologists from supporting pre-referral efforts and other supports to teachers. The MCPS ratio is 1:3,000. Psychologists feel that the burdens of triennial evaluations have increased and have exacerbated the staffing issue.
 - Paperwork/Processes: Mandated reports and paper trails are considered excessive and psychologists must manage most of the paperwork as well as processes. This significantly cuts into time that might be better used consulting with teachers or providing support to all students in a school.
 - Special Education Program Effectiveness: A number of issues were identified regarding the effectiveness of special education. These included perceived high “failure” rates among students with disabilities and the lack of evidence of improved performance in academic (and other) areas.
 - Issues of Over-Representation: Issues about over-representation related to placement/and intensity of services of students with disabilities remain a concern.

- Access to the General Education Curriculum: Special education programs need to be more connected to reading and math specialists. These curriculum supports should provide pre-referral assistance as well as assistance to special education teachers.
3. Dr. McLaughlin met with the MCAASP Special Education Committee principals January 25, 1999. Only middle school principals were in attendance; therefore, the following issues may be biased:
- Coding and Classification: There are issues surrounding how coding changes with age and how this apparently is impacting services. The principals also think that length of time in special education is an important variable to consider (in any examination of student outcomes or performance).
 - Staff Issues: A number of concerns were expressed regarding special education teaching staff including: recruitment of sufficient numbers of qualified staff; building FTE; retention; lack of permanent department heads (no one wants the job because there are too few incentives for a greatly enhanced workload); and lack of high quality professional development opportunities.
 - Transition: There are concerns that middle school students are not making good transitions from elementary to middle schools.
 - Access to the General Education Curriculum: Principals believe that there are no supports for low achieving students other than special education. There is also a lack of opportunities/programs for students in the “non-academic” track who are not passing the MFT or other required classes.
4. Dr. Moon and Dr. Neubert met with the MCEA Special Education Committee on January 28, 1999. The following issues were identified:
- Coding of students: There were concerns regarding when students are coded as special education as this occurs after much failure. Performance: There were concerns about will happen to non-special education students that do not meet the graduation requirements and are not eligible for a diploma nor a certificate of attendance. There is concern about increased referrals to special education due to new graduation requirements as well as for students in danger of being expelled.
 - There are concerns about the number of students who are coded as needing speech and language (without a full education evaluation) in elementary school who may receive Intensity III and IV special education services in self-control programs. When those students transition to middle school, they are either in need of full educational assessments or service intensity is reduced and student may flounder. (This is referred to as “compassionate coding”).

- Lack of special education materials in schools: Special education teachers perceive that they must negotiate access to materials and technology within the schools. How are dollars allocated to special education in schools? Also, school psychologists lack resources to purchase new WISC protocols.
- Student Outcomes: What are the outcomes of students in various service delivery models? Who is responsible for assigning credit for students with disabilities in general education curriculum? This is an issue in parallel classes such as special education algebra.
- Professional Development: There are concerns about the quantity and quality of professional development offered to general and special educators. In particular, the issues relate to knowledge of general education curriculum for special educators and the requirement that they be content specialists in all academic areas. An issue was raised about how teachers receive information about policies and practices. Also, what supports are available to new teachers?
- Staffing: Are case loads reasonable? What is the attrition rate of teachers of special education teachers? How are school psychologists and PPW positions determined; is there a formula?
- On February 20, 1999, Dr. McLaughlin attended a meeting of the Education Committee of the Montgomery Co. NAACP. During the meeting, individuals discussed issues with special education. It should be noted that only three individuals indicated that they had personal experience with special education programs in the county. The primary issue related to special education was the identification of African-American students as needing special education, specifically in high incidence categories. However, there were a number of comments about the overall educational experiences of African-American students in the MCPS, specifically citing the need for enforcing discipline and higher academic and behavioral standards in the schools.