

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 37

QUESTION:

Provide a description of services provided by the three units in the Department of Shared Accountability. What is the ability of MCPS to assess and evaluate all programs for effectiveness?

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: 5-67

ANSWER:

The mission of the Department of Shared Accountability (DSA) is to provide information through evaluation, research, and testing services to support student success. DSA assists in facilitating improvement efforts by providing information that supports policy and program decision-making processes throughout Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

Testing

The Testing Unit provides information for measurement and monitoring of student achievement. This responsibility includes a comprehensive program of student assessment, encompassing all facets of the assessment program mandated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). These mandated assessments include the Maryland School Assessments, the Alternate Maryland School Assessment, and an English language proficiency test. Additionally, MSDE requires students to take the Maryland High School Assessments in order to fulfill graduation requirements. Locally, MCPS requires students to take a standardized test in Grade 2. The Testing Unit also supports the administration of national assessments such as PSAT (given to all Grade 10 MCPS students) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (which is administered to a sample of students as part of the NCLB mandates). The testing program staff has primary responsibility for administering these tests, training of school staff on test security and test administration procedures, and reporting results to the Board of Education, schools, and MCPS program staff members. The unit also provides technical assistance to other departments within MCPS.

Applied Research

The Applied Research Unit conducts MSDE-mandated and MCPS surveys, coordinates external research requests made to MCPS, produces research reports on student outcomes and survey results, addresses ad hoc data requests and questions with rigorous research methods, and collaborates on projects with other MCPS offices and with institutions outside of MCPS. The Applied Research Unit develops and conducts MCPS parent, staff, and student surveys on the school environment and the MCPS senior exit survey. For the surveys on school environment, the unit reports school-level results to stakeholders on a web site and produces a summary research report for the Board of Education. The unit also produces research reports on the SAT, PSAT, Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate exams, MCPS senior exit survey, High School Academic Attainment, and the Maryland Adolescent Survey. In collaboration with

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stakeholders, it also develops and revises measures used for school accountability and improvement, such as High School Academic Attainment. The Applied Research Unit staff uses statistical methods to evaluate change over time and differences among groups. In collaboration with the Office of School Performance and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs, the Applied Research Unit provides data files to schools for use in encouraging rigorous course-taking, and participates in grant research on the effect of teacher practices on student achievement scores.

Program Evaluation

The Program Evaluation Unit designs and conducts comprehensive evaluations of selected MCPS programs. These evaluations focus on the Board of Education's and the superintendent's priority areas and initiatives to improve student learning and achievement; key curriculum and assessment efforts that support these priority areas and initiatives; and federal or state grants. Program Evaluation staff members also provide technical assistance and consult with other MCPS program staff in self-evaluation and monitoring. This area of responsibility supports school system efforts in monitoring performance of the systemwide strategic plan. The Program Evaluation Unit plays an integral role in programmatic decisions regarding the major educational programs (both internally funded and grant funded) in MCPS. The Program Evaluation Unit develops evaluation plans for major grant proposals sought by the school system. In addition, the unit collaborates with outside higher education institutions in the evaluation of some of the grant funded programs operating within the school system.

The mission of the Program Evaluation Unit is to provide scientific information regarding the effectiveness of program operations and outcomes that can withstand rigorous external scrutiny. Valid program evaluation requires the skillful application of scientific tools and techniques to actual programmatic operations with appropriate interpretation. Two major types of evaluative programs are currently operating in MCPS—internally funded and externally funded programs (grants). The evaluation unit conducts evaluations on both types of programs for the following purposes:

- To show the worth of a program by documenting changes in student academic performance and behavior
- To provide feedback to program stakeholders regarding program strengths and weaknesses
- To provide a basis for informed decisions about future planning of a program
- To fulfill a grant's requirement

Four of the eight full-time evaluators in the DSA are funded by grants which require evaluation of grant-funded programs. The remaining four positions respond to priorities established by the Board of Education and superintendent. Currently they are evaluating the implementation of the grading and reporting initiative at the elementary, middle, and high school levels; the implementation and effectiveness of Skillful Teaching at the elementary and secondary level; an evaluation of middle school summer programs; evaluation of the Comer Program, reading interventions at the elementary and secondary level, and an evaluation of the Administrative and Supervisory Professional Growth System.

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Because of limited resources, the Program Evaluation Unit currently is evaluating a select number of MCPS programs identified through a selection process that includes approval by the deputy superintendents. To evaluate all MCPS programs for effectiveness, additional staff and resources would be needed.