

28 August 2007
SECAC-PG Meeting
The Arc of PG County

General Introductions

Representative from Special Education Office: Carol Reed - Supervisor of Elementary Special Education Programs.

Ms. Reed spoke at length about the MEANS Initiative

MEANS = Making Education Accessible in Neighborhood Schools

As a reminder, you can read *all* about this in the minutes from the May 3rd, 2007 Board of Education meeting minutes, found at:

<<http://www.pgcps.org/~board/agendas/boardagendapack_2/boardagendapack_3/51707packet/51707packet.pdf>>. The discussion of the MEANS program is on Pages 7 - 22, which includes both the plan, and a list of "non-negotiable terms" that must be followed for the plan to work. These terms are as follows:

1. All staff (special educators, general educators, and related services) must be hired and/or reassigned as a member of a co-teaching team in the receiving schools by June 12, 2007.
2. All professional development for co-teaching teams must be completed by July 27, 2007.
3. This MEANS Initiative's staffing realignment needs to occur simultaneously with the Highly Qualified Teacher Initiative.
4. Recognize this initiative as systemic and have it supported by all departments as outlined.
5. Ensure cross-departmental ownership of the initiative, including funding (i.e., additional non-special education staff.)
6. Monitoring, on a monthly basis, by the Regional Office to ensure systemic implementation of initiative to transition identified students from CSEP to neighborhood school. Monitoring will include ensuring that the student-teacher ratio is maintained at 18:3 and that staff is utilized as intended.
7. Create a reduced class size of 18 students. The composition will include up to 9 students with disabilities and 9 students without disabilities with a general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraeducator. The co-taught classroom must be heterogeneously grouped. Each receiving school will be assigned a .5 Crisis Intervention Resource Teacher.
8. One monthly release day for professional development related to the

initiative during the 2007-2008 school year must be established.

9. If school status changes after August 21, 2007, trained teacher teams will remain in place.

10. If students transition out of the base school, realigned staffing must be maintained at the base school, and additional staffing created at the receiving school.

11. All staff (special educators, general educators, and related services) must be hired and/or reassigned as a member of a co-teaching team in the receiving schools by October 2, 2007.

12. All professional development for co-teaching teams must be completed by November 30, 2007.

13. This MEANS Initiative's staffing realignment needs to occur simultaneously with the Highly Qualified Teacher Initiative.

14. Recognize this initiative as systemic and have it supported by all departments as outlined.

15. Ensure cross-departmental ownership of the initiative, including funding (i.e., additional non-special education staff.)

16. Monitoring, on a monthly basis, by the Regional Office to ensure systemic implementation of initiative to transition identified students from CSEP to neighborhood school. Monitoring will include ensuring that the student-teacher ratio is maintained at 18:3 and that staff is utilized as intended.

17. Create a reduced class size of 18 students. The composition will include up to 9 students with disabilities and 9 students without disabilities with a general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraeducator. The co-taught classroom must be heterogeneously grouped. Each receiving school will be assigned a .5 Crisis Intervention Resource Teacher.

This is a very ambitious initiative currently being implemented in the county elementary schools. The project was initiated in March of 2006, and was well underway by April. The purpose was to look at children who were currently enrolled in CSEP (Comprehensive Special Education Programs) and transfer those kids to regular "co-taught" classrooms in their neighborhood schools if (and only if) they can handle it. The CSEP programs are currently implemented as isolated units within a school; the goal of the MEANS initiative is to include all students in regular classrooms.

A co-taught classroom is a classroom with a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and a para-educator.

The first phase of the program will integrate 2nd grade CSEP students into classrooms in their home schools with the following conditions: (a) class size must be no more than 18, (b) up to 9 kids in the classroom with IEPS, but only one or two of those may be a child transitioning from a CSEP to the neighborhood program.

There are currently 171 students in CSEP that could be placed in 87 county schools. The school system realized they couldn't return all 171 of them to the neighborhood schools at once. In addition, they wanted to get services in place in the neighborhood schools before moving the Special Education students back. Once the services are in place, THEN it will be feasible to move the students into an appropriately supportive environment.

In the initial plan, PGCPs identified 48 schools which would serve as the pilots for the program. 19 schools started in Phase I, which began in Fall of 2007. In Phase 1, there were ultimately 13 students who made the transition from the CSEP to one of these 19 schools. Not all students went - some stayed in the CSEP.

In Phase II the goal is to have all 48 schools ready by January. Five of the CSEP students have already returned to their neighborhood schools.

(Ms. Dillman raised the question of why PGCPs decided to transition some students mid-year. Ms. Reed said that some parents wanted to see what the co-teaching team would look like before moving their child.)

Preparations:

PGCPs has a contract with Johns Hopkins University to train the teachers in the co-education classrooms in all 19 of the MEANS schools in their Boundless Learning Program. (You can read more about this program at: http://cte.jhu.edu/aboutus_program2.html.)

The first round of training runs for 2 full days, and provides instructions on how to set up classrooms, teaching routines, as well as different approaches to co-teaching. They also train the teachers in data-driven instruction so that decisions regarding each child's education are based on actual data, rather than subjective impressions. There is also a special 1/2 day session for para-educators. Special Educators and Regular Educators are trained separately at first, and then as a team. This was completed in June 2007. The second round of training will take place the last week of August (Thursday at the Radisson in Largo, and Friday at Cora Rice Elementary. Both sessions started at 8 am.) There will be a third round of training Sept 11-13.

MEANS teachers are really excited and energized by this program. One new teacher from NY said she found the amount of preparation provided by PGCPs very exciting.

At Deerfield Run Elementary School, the school sent a letter to all parents of children in the co-taught classroom introducing the new model.

This model will also help general education students. Not only will there be more

teachers in the classroom, but some kids who may be identified as having an issue will have Special Education teachers and para-educators in their classroom.

The long term goal is to have at least one co-taught classroom at each level at each school in county. This will be in compliance with IDEA, and MSDE for implementing inclusive practices, and will also be the best possible placement for "least restrictive environment" requirements of IDEA.

It cost the county \$19 million to launch this program, and the plan to expand the programs in the next 2 years depends on funds being approved by School Board. Their plan will depend on the outcomes for the children including their academic achievements and whether they can make adequate yearly progress.

Mr. McLaughlin asked what will happen if the non-negotiables are not met. Ms. Reed talked about what terms were being met. She mentioned that the Special Educators and Regular Educators were hired by June 12th. She talked about the Crisis Intervention Resource Teacher (CIRT) who will be there to help children with the transition, and working on appropriate classroom social skills. This teacher will also advise MEANS team and school team re: functional behavior assessments and functional behavior plans. The CIRT teacher's biggest goal is to provide Special Educators and Paraprofessionals with all necessary support.

Another parent asked what will happen to the CSEPs. Ms. Reed said that the program is being redesigned and will serve a different profile of student.

Mr. McLaughlin mentioned that co-teaching has been shown to raise MSA scores in high school students, and then asked how the schools are training people so that the regular education students will buy in to the new co-education model. Ms. Reed responded by talking about how the number of PS4s (behavior slips) decreased after teachers got JHU Boundless learning training - so principals are excited about teachers getting training. She also talked about how PGCPs is offering mini-training at each school for ALL staff members.

Mr. McLaughlin asked if parents could see Boundless Learning training session so they can learn more! Ms. Reed told him that he was welcome to attend the sessions on August 30-31st.

Gail Voigt asked about make up of kids with IEPs who were not from CSEP program. Ms. Reed said that they are working on choosing kids who had IEPs for issues like reading recovery, emotional disturbances, English as a Second Language, etc., who would benefit from the low student/teacher ratio. She also said that the co-taught classroom can NOT be a dumping ground for the kids who are hardest to handle.

Meg Dillman asked what kind of oversight would insure that this wouldn't happen. Ms. Reed talked about how they are working with the principals to insure this. They've created a list of "look fors" to make sure schools aren't doing this, and hired a reading specialist and a special educator to go to each school to go through checklist. There are also 10 people in Carol Reed's office looking over the make-up of each co-taught classroom.

Sarah Wayland asked what the county was doing to deal with bullying. Carol Reed said the PGCPs Special Education Psychological Services office was coordinating with the counseling services at each school to address this. She also said that most schools have programs already in place.

Another parent asked about getting kids out of non-public placements and into the MEANS program. Ms. Reed said that PGCPs has identified 50 kids in this situation who would be eligible for the program, though it also turns out that the way the MSDE funds these students is a disincentive for returning these students to their neighborhood schools.

With Ms. Reed's presentation complete, the meeting then shifted to announcements and regular SECAC business.

Mr. McLaughlin had several announcements:

(1) His focus this year is on outreach to the general population as well as to educators. He feels strongly the need to explain that initiatives like MEANS help everyone. To this end, he wants to set up a Public Relations Committee. Prior to the meeting, he had spoken with Bridget (??) who had agreed to chair the committee.

As part of the outreach, he would like to have a Membership Committee to look into meeting in a bigger room. Meg Dillman volunteered to chair this committee.

Another part of the outreach is a SECAC website. Sarah Wayland has agreed to chair this committee, and any volunteers would be gratefully put straight to work.

Las, but not least, Mr. McLaughlin is looking for partnerships with people who are outside of the public school system. He mentioned that 80% of the general population do not have kids in school, and we have to reach them, as these programs reflect their tax dollars at work. It's important that they feel the money is well-spent.

(2) Lillie Bond (SECAC - Vice Chair) has rewritten the By-Laws to address issues regarding the positions of treasurer, assistant secretary, and membership voting rights. The Board is reviewing the current draft; when we are ready, we will pass them to the general membership for approval, which should be at next meeting.

(3) Information Sharing:

(a) The resource fair in June at The Arc was a big hit. Over 200 people came.

(b) The SECAC and The Arc are teaming up to get better services for our students. Last spring, they co-hosted a Community Inclusion Forum to discuss the advantages & challenges of inclusion. The testimony from this forum is being written up for presentation to Dr. Deasy.

(c) TIES - Melonee Clark needs volunteers for the September 15th event. She needs people to be there at 8 am to help with (i) SECAC table, (ii) set-up (before 8), (iii) clean up, (iv) room moderators, (v) the registration table. Send her e-mail or call her if you want to volunteer. Ms. Dillman agreed that she would send a note to the SECAC Listserve to recruit volunteers.

(d) Mr. McLaughlin distributed a flier about The Facilitated IEP Team Meeting Pilot Project - where a trained mediator acts as a facilitator and provides an agenda. He said that PGCPs is one of 6 counties in Maryland piloting the program, and more will be joining in this fall.

(e) Ms. Dillman distributed a questionnaire requesting suggestions for topics for future meetings. Ms. Bond said that we will discuss Procedural Safeguards in September.

(f) Carol Reed mentioned that she wants to do more outreach to community groups and agencies with the PGCPs - Partners for Success Parent's Center. She wanted to know whether the group's coordinator could come to a SECAC meeting to talk about their upcoming schedule. She talked about some of the programs they've sponsored, including a several week course on ASL for parents of kids who are deaf taught in 2006-2007, and a short course for teachers to work on conversational Spanish skills this school year. Ms. Reed thought it would be helpful to get feedback from the parents of students with Autism regarding helpful training courses. Ms. Dillman said that she would contact Beth Diaite (jayatay) regarding this outreach effort. (I've sent e-mail to Carol Reed asking for Ms. Diaite's contact information.)