

SECAC-PG Monthly Meeting - Minutes of February 26, 2008

The Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) was called to order by the Chair, Mike McLaughlin at 6:35 PM, February 26, 2008 at the ARC of Prince George's County.

Persons attending: Mike McLaughlin, Lillie Bond, Gail Voigt, Dr Pamela Downing-Hosten, Judith Kachinske, Scott Hammond, Lakwona Simmons, Tjameika Purnell Dasvenport, Cheryl Hoots. Welcomes and Introductions were given around the meeting table.

The January SECAC-PG meeting minutes were not available at the meeting. They should be located on SECAC-PG website. It was suggested that the SECAC-PG minutes be given a link of its own on the website.

Mike McLaughlin wanted to improve the SECAC-PG website by putting a collage of student photos on the SECAC-PG Home Page. A discussion ensued as to if permission by parents is needed to display the photos of the children. Since SECAC-PG is associated with PGCPSS, Mike McLaughlin wondered if SECAC-PG could use the PGCPSS Publicity Release form (copy furnished by Judith Kachinske) to obtain the parents' permission. Dr Pamela Downing-Hosten did not think that the PGCPSS Publicity Release form could be used by SECAC-PG as the SECAC is associated but not part of PGCPSS. She would check on the exact need and use of the PGCPSS Publicity Release form for use in the SECAC-PG website.

February 26, 2008 was also Disability Day at the Statehouse in Annapolis in which Disability Organizations gathered to influence the Maryland state legislators on disability issues and legislation for children and adults.

Scott Hammond from PGCPSS gave a synopsis of the MEANS initiative. The MEANS initiative had been slated for funding cuts. Due to publicity from the SECAC and parents, the funding situation looks much better than it did 2 weeks ago. Letters were sent out to all PGCPSS Board of Education. BOE Members, Patricia Fletcher, Ron Owens, Ray Watson, Rosalind Johnson and Donna Hathaway Beck all responded positively for MEANS funding, indicating that they were working on a funding compromise. The MEANS initiative will now be enhanced to include this incoming 3rd graders (2007-2008 school year 2nd graders) and to have room for incoming 2008-2009 2nd graders. Currently, there are 42 schools participating in the MEANS program. Each class may have up to 18 students. There will be space for 10 new 2nd graders per class. There will still be 1 MEANS class per school. Two schools participating in the 2007-2008 school year MEANS initiative declined to participate in the MEANS Initiative for the 2008-2009 school year. That indicates a total of 40 schools participating in the MEANS initiative for the next school year.

Several parents wanted to know how the general curriculum was being introduced to students in the middle and high school level. Lillie Bond wanted to know about inclusion programs in the middle and high schools since the MEANS initiative was centered in the elementary school. Andrea Thomas sent out an Email asking how language arts was introduced to students in CRI and Regional School classes. Dr Pamela Downing-Hosten responded that the Reading 180 program had been purchased about a year ago. This program introduces reading concepts to students with significant disabilities. She added that some principals may be unaware that the Reading 180 program is available. Some schools may opt out of Reading 180 due to other interventions being used for a particular school. Dr Downing-Hosten indicated that while all interventions used by schools must be scientifically-proven and approved by PGCPSS, not all approved interventions must be used by all schools. She said that Title I schools may have a selected set of interventions while a school in AYP difficulties may use another set and another set of interventions may be used by a school meeting AYP. Dr Downing-Hosten is also going to draft a memo to Middle and High schools describing what language arts and math interventions are available. However, she reminded the SECAC members that there are only so many minutes available in a day.

In addition, the MEANS budget is being prepared and nothing more can be cut. Now is the time in the school year that PGCPS is writing grants. The Annual Review period is in full swing. January – April. PGCPS is moving towards a different type of Annual Review period – a full year review period. In this way, there can be more flexibility as to when Annual Reviews can be held. PGCPS is also looking for more space to expand the Autism and CRI High School programs. Dr Darryl Mitchell is generating a list of school sites that may have extra space. In addition, the Summer Institute in July will offer professional development for special educators and general educators. The PGCPS Special Education department will hire 2 more Special Educators coordinators from grants from the Special Grant Accessible program. PGCPS Special Education department is in the midst of audits. There will be a Title I school audit and an interval audit of the Special Education non-public office.

There was a discussion about parents can handle teacher-parent relationships.

Mike McLaughlin brought up the Extraordinary Service Awards. This award is annually given to teachers, para-professionals, bus drivers, etc who have ‘gone the extra mile’ to help a student with disabilities. A draft flyer has been created and Mike asked for feedback. Dr Downing-Hosten asked which plaques are to be used for this year. Mike McLaughlin indicated that existing plaques can be used for the awards this year.

Lillie Bond asked about food for the Extraordinary Service Awards. Mike McLaughlin indicated that due to cuts in PGCPS funding, the SECAC may not ask PGCPS for food funds. It was decided that discussion about food will take place later at another meeting.

Mike also brought up that the SECAC-PG should produce a Year End Report for the Board of Education. He asked for thoughts and ideas. The State of Inclusion Report should definitely be part of it.

Mike also attended a Professional and Family Collaboration at Towson University. He was one of 2 parents speaking to approximately 20 graduate students imparting his experiences as a parent of a developmentally delayed child with teachers and administrators. Mike was pleased that he was able to reach professionals and discuss developmental delay issues that were going to be part of the professionals’ working lives.

Gail Voigt discussed the purpose of the Membership Initiative. The main purpose is to specifically reach out to PGCPS professionals (SLP, OT/PT, Parent Liaisons, School Psychologists, Guidance Counselors) and PTAs to let them know what the SECAC-PG is about and how all groups can work together. Gail will create a draft letter that will be sent to the professionals.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:50 PM.