

SECAC Meeting: February 25, 2014

The following people attended the February 25, 2014 meeting:

Sarah Wayland, Jeniece Weddington, Mike McLaughlin, Sharon Laufer, Liz Burley, Beth Ann Hancock, Karen Sweeney, Stacey Travers, Trenensha Foltemimms, Amani Kharma, Meg Dillman, Kathy Walcott, Enid Smith, Joan Rothgeb, Pamela Talley, Scott Geist and Kay Kane.

The meeting was opened by welcome and introductions of attendees.

Ms. Joan Rothgeb, Director of Special Education for Prince Georges County Public Schools (PGCPS), provided an update on special education. She noted that she met with staff to discuss staffing needs at all schools so that she could send information to the budget office. She told us that Dr. Arbogast, Chief Academic Officer for PGCPS resigned in January. He had been great at facilitating collaboration and will be missed. Dr. Maxwell has now hired two people to the position of Deputy Superintendent - Dr. Monique Davis (in charge of operations) and Mr. Shawn Joseph (in charge of academics). Joan Rothgeb has now met twice with Dr. Davis, to discuss the results of the MSDE indicator data for children with disabilities.

Ms. Rothgeb also met with Mr. George Margolies, the new Chief of Staff of Prince George's County Public Schools.

Ms. Rothgeb also mentioned that PGCPS is seeking community input via a survey posted on the main PGCPS.org webpage as Kevin Maxwell formulates his transition plan.

Ms. Rothgeb also mentioned that her department has been conducting an in-depth evaluation of the special education services provided at three schools (one each in the upper, middle and lower tiers of the county). These schools were selected because they have large populations of students receiving special education services, and their principals requested the evaluation. The focus was on support for students whose reading skills were lagging, and students with challenging behaviors. The evaluation included an in-depth data review to help identify missing supports for principals and teachers.

Ms. Rothgeb recommended that the following people should be called in when dealing with a child who has challenging behavior: Pupil Personnel Workers (there are only 30 in the entire county now), School Counselor, and/or Chair of Special Education. Last year it was optional to get a guidance counselor - however, it is no longer optional because the counselor's input on the IEP is invaluable.

Ms. Rothgeb discussed the issue on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC). She said that the Maryland State Department of Education sent out a Technical Assistance Bulletin and the PARCC is currently in the "field testing" phase. One class at every school will be participating in the pilot program. She told us that Dr. Beverley Pish is the new head of Testing in Prince Georges County Public Schools and she will be working with the Department of Special Education on implementing appropriate accommodations for the PARCC and NCSC assessments. The IEP team will make decision if accommodation is needed. Full operation of the PARCC assessments will be administered in March 2015.

One parent asked about the use of TTS (text-to-speech) readers for students who have "verbatim reader" listed in their IEPs as a testing accommodation. Ms. Rothgeb said that while the PARCC assessments allow all students to choose from a standard set of accommodations, regardless of disability (of which TTS is not currently allowed), the determination regarding accommodations allowed on the assessments will be made by the IEP team.

Scott Geist presented on the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). It is a project led by five centers and twenty-four states to build an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards for students with significant cognitive delays. NCSC's goal is to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for post-secondary options. NCSC is developing a digital library (wiki site for teachers) to support teachers, which will include formative assessments that will assist teachers to monitor progress throughout the year, instructional strategies, sample lesson plans, etc. Mr. Geist told us that the system is not a curriculum, but will have tons of resources for teachers and it's aligned to the common core. The NSCS assessment will be implemented in Maryland in 2015-2016.

NCSC assessment delivery will be technology based. It will have flexibility for presentation on devices/platform, universal design for learning (UDL) and accommodations will be built in.

He mentioned that there will be up to thirty test items such as multiple choice, short constructed response and performance tasks. Also, there will be guidance for the IEP team to determine whether a student will participate in the NCSC or PARCC.

Mr. Geist also talked about the administration of the NSCS assessment. He told us that students will have approximately two months testing window. Expected testing time will be approximately 1.5 to 2 hours for each assessment and they will have the flexibility to stop and resume. Some students will qualify to take a shorter assessment based on evidence collected before and during the assessment. A trained educator (student's teacher) who is familiar with the student will administer testing. PGCPS Information Technology Department is now assessing each school for availability of technology for assessments.

Mr. Geist also discussed the Maryland's Community of Practice (CoP). He told us that there are up to 23 CoP teams such as General Educators, Speech Pathologists, Special Educators, etc. who helped implement the model and provided feedback prior to the system being rolled out. He noted that Trunelle Bowman at Duckworth and Karen Brown-Andrews (Special Educator) have been very instrumental and contributed to NCSC.

Last, he noted the NCSC will allow students who are not communicating to have some type of a communication device or system in place before they enter kindergarten.

If parents would like to learn more about NCSC, they can access NCSC's website at www.ncscpartners.org.

Information sharing - A suggestion box has been placed in the back for parents to note topics that they will be interested to talk about.