

DRAFT Notes
Supporting Facilities for Inclusive Schools 2/25/09
21st Century School Fund and The Arc of DC

Attendees:

Nancy Huvendick- 21st Century School Fund
Mary Filardo- 21st Century School Fund
Rachel Burton- The Arc of DC
Shawn Ullman- University Legal Services
Mat McCollough- DC Office of Disability Rights
Matt Bachand- DCPS Office of Special Education
Alexa Kuuskraa, - Special Ed Coordinator, Bridges PCS
Lenore Jones - Special Education Teacher, Hyde Elementary
Ron Howard – LSRT, Roosevelt HS
Karla Reid-Witt- Parent and Parent Resource Center

- Special Ed reform is part of school reform. The goal is a system where ALL students 1) receive early help when needed 2) receive appropriate differentiated instruction 3) take part in building-wide behavioral supports that ensure students are cheerful and respectful of themselves and others.

- DCPS Office of Special Education overarching goals:
 - Competent and quality programs
 - Restore stakeholder confidence
 - Control costs

- DCPS believes: “The right school for every child is their neighborhood school.” Ultimately, the aim is to have students with disabilities in the general education classroom as much as possible: inclusion. Reports were that this seems to have been largely achieved in other countries.

- DCPS would like to be able to identify inclusion programs with:
 - Model classrooms
 - Model teachers
 - Model student work

- School-Wide Application Model (SAM) is currently being piloted in 8 elementary schools (Beers, Hendley, Moten-Wilkinson, Murch, Noyes, Raymond, Simon, Stanton). At SAM schools, *all* students are integrated into the least restrictive environment possible. Staff development includes team-building for general and special education teachers who work together to support each student in every classroom. The goal is to have the program in about half of the elementary schools (40 elementary schools). It is one of a number of school reform models, not a solution for every school.

- In FY '09- several millions were budgeted for SAM and Full Service Schools (8 middle schools). The money is being used for:
 - Training and evaluation
 - Consultant fees
 - How are facilities in these schools functioning to help provide services? Can we look to Noyes as a model SAM facility since it is a new school?
- The Office of Disability Rights (ODR) requires that all District agencies have ADA compliance plans. In terms of schools, this means that the path of the child from when he/she walks into the building must be accessible.
 - Follow-up: ODR review the Master Facilities Plan with respect to ADA compliance.
 - What about choice for families who prefer stand-alone special education facilities, especially for medically fragile students. Opening stand-alone special ed charter schools seems incongruous at the same time that DCPS plans to close stand-alone facilities. Would families be better served if those DCPS facilities converted to charter status?
 - Has there been much attention to the idea of bringing private providers into the District to share under-utilized school buildings. This would save long bus rides as well as save on transportation costs. There would also be benefits to serving students closer to their homes.
 - DCPS has been focused on inclusion in elementary schools. But there is also a push to move programs into middle and high schools that do not necessarily have the additional resources to support inclusion in an effort to grow inclusion as the student progresses, grade by grade.
 - Budgeting to provide the appropriate services to students with disabilities has been a huge and on-going problem for the District.
 - Related service providers may need to be on staff rather than contracted out so that service providers are best able to support the needs of the students.
 - Several schools have plans to equip sensory rooms for students on the autism spectrum
 - The current average student to special education teacher ratio is 10.3 to1, but the ratio can be as high as one teacher and two aides for 6 students.
 - DCPS is looking to hire teachers with multiple degrees that include core subject training as well as training in disability services.
 - Ultimately, the goal is to have increased principal ownership over special education-- stressing that special education is a more a service than a classroom.
 - The Office of Portfolio Development at DCPS is in charge of new programs and activities; there is also an administrative office that focuses on partnerships.
 - Every school should be designed to address the unknown- - any child should have a reasonable expectation of being served well at nearly every District school.

Follow up- - how parents, teachers, advocates and community members can help DCPS:

1. Identify community partners for transition support
2. Help to identify what schools can do at the present time to best support students with disabilities
3. Highlight models and best practices -- who is doing a good job with inclusion programs and facilities?

Next steps:

Plan the next meeting with representation from DCPS, OPEFM, and OSSE to further discuss DCPS inclusion programs and how facilities can support these efforts.