

**Staff Response to the Report of the  
Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities  
2004**

This report is the response by the Department of Special Services (DSS), Office of Special Education (OSE), to the recommendations included in the 2004 annual report to the School Board by the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD). DSS staff members express their appreciation to the members of the ACSD for their collaboration with staff to continuously improve services for students with disabilities. Their identification of the committee's most essential topics for further examination and action and their efforts toward the preparation of this report are also greatly appreciated.

Each ACSD recommendation is italicized and the staff response follows the recommendation.

***Recommendation 1: The ACSD, collaboratively with the School Board, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), and FCPS Parent Teacher Association (PTA), hold a public forum or a series of forums on special education.***

Staff members concur with the ACSD that feedback from parents is essential in helping to ensure the delivery of high-quality special education services. While staff members support the idea of obtaining feedback from broader audiences, it should be recognized that there are currently many structures already in place for parent feedback including those highlighted below:

- Staff members receive and appreciate input from parents who are members of the ACSD as well as the input provided during the public comment period of the ACSD meetings. Hearing the feedback firsthand enables staff to follow-up in an appropriate and timely manner based on the input.
- The Parent Resource Center receives feedback from parents through surveys of those who attend their parent workshops. In addition, the Parent Resource Center recently conducted an electronic survey through the Office of Community Relations' *Keep in Touch*. Approximately 600 parents responded to the survey regarding their ideas for additional parent training.
- Each school has a Parent Teacher Organization with opportunities for all parents, including those of students with disabilities, to provide input. Providing input at the school-based level is most important since students and parents are part of the school community and this is the setting where interactions related to a student's education occur.
- Parents of students with disabilities provide input during the public comment period of School Board meetings.

While there are existing opportunities for parent input, DSS staff members have been consulting with the Office of Community Relations (OCR) and the Department of Educational Accountability (DEA) regarding strategies for expanding these

opportunities. One result of these consultations has been the development of a *Special Education Parent Survey* to be disseminated during FY 2005. DSS staff members appreciate the work of DEA as well as the input of Carmen Sanchez, ACSD co-chair, selected principals, and Ann Monday, cluster director, in the development of the survey. In lieu of public forums, staff members recommend the dissemination of the survey during FY 2005 with results disaggregated by schools. Based on the survey results, cluster directors, with the support of DSS and the OCR, may convene parent focus groups to obtain further feedback. Staff members believe that focus groups led by cluster directors or their staff would result in greater geographic convenience for parents and would foster the opportunity to obtain input on areas that may be specific to a particular cluster or to individual schools.

***Recommendation 2:*** *Staff, in collaboration with the Committee, develops a survey tool for families of students who currently receive ED/PD/Autism itinerant services, teachers, and principals to determine the success of the new staffing model during the 2004-05 school year.*

The special education parent survey previously discussed in response to recommendation one will include a question related to parent satisfaction with the type of special education staff assigned to the school. It is also anticipated that if there are staffing concerns, parents will contact their child's principal who may request additional staffing support if needed. In addition, teachers may also share any staffing concerns with their principals, the Department of Human Resources, the Office of Special Education, or their professional association.

There are many different forums for principals to communicate their views regarding all of the new staffing models that affect general education, special education, and English for speakers of other languages. These forums include principal's communication with their cluster director, chief academic officer, the superintendent, and the School Board. Principals also communicate through their principal associations; DSS meets regularly with representatives of all three principal associations (elementary, middle, and high school). Given the available vehicles for communicating strengths of the new special education model as well as any concerns, the development of a separate survey related to the new staffing model is not recommended. Background information related to itinerant teacher assignments and the new staffing model follows.

- Changes in the approach to assigning itinerant teachers to support special education students who receive emotional disabilities (ED), physical disabilities (PD), and or autism services began in FY 2003. Prior to FY 2003, each itinerant teacher provided a discrete service, either ED, PD, or autism. As a result, each teacher supported a significant number of schools typically for brief periods of time. Also, there were schools that were served by all three "types" of itinerant teachers. With the support

of principals and the goal of efficient use of staff and less fragmentation for schools, students, and teachers, efforts were made to have a single teacher provide all three services (ED, PD, and autism) for a designated school. In preparation for this type of model, the itinerant teachers received a significant level of staff development and training to expand their expertise in teaching a broader range of students with disabilities. In addition, lead itinerant teachers as well as other staff were identified to provide additional ongoing support.

- Effective FY 2005, additional changes occurred in the assignment of selected itinerant teachers as a part of the new special education staffing model. With the new staffing model, there was an emphasis on continuing to address the goal of efficient use of staff. As a result, a number of itinerant teachers providing ED, PD, or autism services were assigned to schools as full-time members of school teams and are no longer itinerant. With an increased number of special education teachers in schools on a full-time basis, fragmentation has been further reduced and students are able to receive the benefit of experienced teachers on a regularly scheduled basis. For FY 2005, there are 46 inclusive schools resource teachers who are scheduled to provide itinerant instructional support for students as needed, particularly in situations where additional special education experience is needed and where there are no school-based staff with special education teacher licensures in the needed areas.
- The new special education staffing model resulted in changes in the assignments of itinerant teachers but this was a cost neutral model, and all positions were retained.

DSS staff will continue to provide periodic updates for the ACSD on the implementation of the new staffing model.

***Recommendation 3:*** *The Para Pro exam should be offered in Northern Virginia. A local institution such as Northern Virginia Community College may be willing to establish a partnership with FCPS to offer an affordable program for participants.*

FCPS is committed to ensuring that all paraprofessionals have the opportunity to become highly qualified and staff members concur with this recommendation. The ParaPro exam, which is the Virginia Board of Education's approved academic paraprofessional assessment, will be offered at the Annandale Campus of Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC). Arrangements have been made to begin offering this exam in fall 2004.

***Recommendation 4:*** Academy courses should count towards the 60-hour college course requirements. Training seminars could be offered at the school or cluster level.

Paraprofessionals who complete and pass FCPS Academy courses that award college credits may count these credits toward the 60-hour college course requirement for highly qualified status under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In addition, FCPS is entering a partnership with NVCC to establish a cohort for paraprofessionals to support them in earning an associate degree. Paraprofessionals who participate in this cohort will receive a 50 percent reduction in tuition and will also be eligible for FCPS tuition reimbursement.

***Recommendation 5:*** FCPS should award incentives such as monetary compensation or administrative leave to paraprofessionals participating in continuing education and staff development.

FCPS supports the committee's recommendation to provide compensation to paraprofessionals when participating in educational opportunities. Paraprofessionals are encouraged to participate in staff development opportunities throughout the school year and are afforded compensation in a variety of ways. FCPS provides substitutes for paraprofessionals who attend workshops during the school day just as it does for teachers. In addition to ongoing staff development activities offered for all staff who support special needs students, several workshops have been developed specifically for paraprofessionals to meet the unique needs of this position as identified through survey. These workshops are offered during the school year as well as during the summer. For example a *Paraprofessional Summer Institute* was held in August 2004. Paraprofessionals are paid an hourly rate for attending workshops during non-contract time. Also, as stated in the response to Recommendation 4, paraprofessionals who participate in the NVCC cohort to earn an associate degree will receive a 50 percent reduction in tuition and will also be eligible for FCPS tuition reimbursement.

***Recommendation 6:*** Participation in training seminars should be included in the job evaluation under Professional Development.

Paraprofessionals who work with students with special needs are encouraged to participate in any FCPS training program or workshop. Principals facilitate the participation of paraprofessionals in essential staff development activities that meet the needs of the students with disabilities in their buildings and those activities which support professional development for all staff. Principals may discuss staff development opportunities with paraprofessionals as part of the overall evaluation process and may include comments about specific trainings attended. However, a professional development standard is not addressed or evaluated at this position level.

***Recommendation 7:*** *Establish a unified pay scale for all general and special education instructional assistants with gradated steps.*

FCPS employs instructional assistants (IAs) for both special and general education programs. All IAs are compensated at the same level; there are provisions for step increases in pay based on experience. A recommendation to reclassify the current Public Health Training Assistant (PHTA) to the IA position on the IA scale was previously considered. This recommendation has been deferred based on a review of the Code of Virginia. Please reference § 22.1-274. School health services that follows:

“D. With the exception of school administrative personnel and persons employed by school boards who have the specific duty to deliver health-related services, no licensed instructional employee, instructional aide, or clerical employee shall be disciplined, placed on probation or dismissed on the basis of such employee's refusal to (i) perform nonemergency health-related services for students or (ii) obtain training in the administration of insulin and glucagon. However, instructional aides and clerical employees may not refuse to dispense oral medications.

For the purposes of this subsection, "health-related services" means those activities which, when performed in a health care facility, must be delivered by or under the supervision of a licensed or certified professional.”

Implementing the ACSD recommendation would potentially result in combining the job responsibilities of PHTAs and IAs; as a result, some IAs would need to perform the nonemergency health-related services for students that are currently performed by PHTAs. As indicated in the Code of Virginia, instructional assistants may refuse to implement these procedures. DSS and Department of Human Resources' staff will continue to collaborate to determine the best course of action in addressing the ACSD recommendation

***Recommendation 8:*** *The ACSD Secondary Issues subcommittee recommends the development of a standard for notification to parents and students indicating who the student's case manager will be as well as verifying that appropriate staff has seen or received a copy of pertinent IEP information.*

Staff members are committed to ongoing communication with parents. Members of the Office of Special Education (OSE) secondary team, with input from the ACSD, developed two letters intended to improve communication among school-based staff and parents. A *teacher* letter was developed that identifies a student's case manager and may be distributed to all the teachers who work with the student. A parent letter was developed that schools may use to inform parents who their student's case

managers are and to outline the case managers' responsibilities. These letters are available to all schools for their use.

***Recommendation 9:*** *The subcommittee recommends the creation of a "Resource Inventory" Web page.*

Parents and teachers may access numerous resources on the DSS and Instructional Services (IS) internet site. Examples of these resources include: graduation requirements, Integrated Technology Services, Career and Transition Services, Programs of Studies, and Student Accountability. Parents and teachers may find information (e.g., Project Graduation, Resources for Educators, and released Standards of Learning (SOL) tests) on the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) web page. Parents and teachers may access the VDOE webpage through the FCPS internet site or by directly logging onto the VDOE webpage. The Parent Resource Center (PRC) website contains a wealth of information available to all parents and teachers, some of which includes: newsletters; support and parent group information; community events and resources; local, state, and federal legal updates with links to sites; special education forms; FCPS regulations and manuals; links to FCPS sites and departments; and direct links to outside instructional resources, organizations, and community resources. The PRC resource bank undergoes continuous updates and expansion.

Teachers may access *Educator Resources* through the OSE intranet site. This site was initially created by OSE for elementary special education teachers as a vehicle to assist them in accessing instructional resources and materials applicable to the different grade levels and to provide ideas for differentiating instruction particularly in the area of social studies. Seventy lessons with an elementary math focus were written by teachers for the Educator Resources site during a 2004 summer curriculum project. In addition to lessons that provide ideas for differentiating instruction for learners with varying needs, additional folders were created to share games, vocabulary strategies, ways to practice skills, and math related literature. OSE is in the process of updating its internet and intranet web pages. In addition, the secondary team is developing a web page on the OSE intranet site that will have a variety of resources for staff members (e.g., lists of approved supplemental materials, descriptions of approved reading programs for use with students with disabilities).

A new Gateway website will be launched in the fall of 2004 by Instructional Services and will provide teachers with FCPS resources 24/7 posted in one location. Both general education and special education teachers will be able to link to the Educator Resources site through Gateway. In addition, a link to Gateway will be added on the Educator Resources site.

While there are many resources currently available for parents through the internet, the previously referenced parent survey will be used by staff to seek additional parent input

regarding the usefulness and accessibility of these resources. The feasibility of developing a *Resource Inventory* web page accessible for both parents and teachers that includes resources currently only available on the FCPS intranet will be explored. County regulations and contracts/licenses with outside vendors will need to be considered to determine those materials, documents, and publications that can be made available to the public through the internet.

***Recommendation 10:*** *The subcommittee recommends that FCPS offer a copy of the Transition Resource Guide yearly to students aged 14 and older.*

The *Transition Resource Guide* is a comprehensive and detailed resource of over 100 pages. Revisions have been completed and it contains the most updated information and strategies for students, teachers, and families, as they prepare for their final transition from high school to post-school opportunities.

Due to the length of the *Transition Resource Guide*, OSE staff members, with the input of ACSD representatives, have developed a shorter “user friendly” version, specifically for families to help them with their son’s and daughter’s transitions. The 28-page *Transition Tool Kit* includes definitions of transition planning according to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97)*, as well as a variety of “tools” students and families can use to prepare for the transition planning part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The *Transition Tool Kit* will be provided at each student’s initial transition IEP meeting in grade eight.

Hard copies of both the *Transition Resource Guide* and the *Transition Tool Kit* will be available at the Parent Resource Center (PRC) and at all secondary schools and centers. Both resources will be located on the FCPS internet site under Career and Transition (CTS) information and may be downloaded for printing. Copies will be accessible at all CTS trainings, information sessions, and resource fairs as well. In addition, the parent survey, previously referenced, will include a question related to parent awareness of career and transition services and satisfaction with services.

***Recommendation 11:*** *The subcommittee recommends that each secondary school’s Web site contain a section that includes the following data for that school in the aggregate and disaggregated by disability category: graduation rate/type of diploma or certificate; dropout rate; inclusion rate (percent in base school and percent of time spent in general education classroom; retention rate; post graduation plans/achievements; suspension/expulsion rates; SOL scores; and SOL participation rates.*

Parents may access information on each school through the FCPS internet site. Student confidentiality issues preclude posting individual school data that is disaggregated by disability, particularly when there are a small number of students with a particular disability. School profiles for every middle school, high school, and center

can be found in the “*About FCPS*” section. Every school is required to link to its school profile. Statistics on FCPS can also be accessed in the “*About Fairfax*” section.

The FCPS web page links to the VDOE web page. The VDOE web page contains a NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for every Virginia school. The information is reported by subgroups, including students with disabilities.

***Recommendation 12:*** *The subcommittee recommends that the IEP Agenda (both the 2-page IEP Meeting Agenda for Parents [SS/SE-139], and the 1-page IEP Meeting Agenda [IEP-9]), be expanded to include an explanation of what resources are available when a “student’s behavior impedes his/her learning or that of others,” as well as when a “student requires assistive technology devices and services”.*

Special education staff and ACSD representatives met in late spring 2004 to discuss adding more specific information about behavior and assistive technology on both the staff IEP agenda and parent IEP agenda forms. IEP page 9, agenda item IV, has been revised with the addition of yes and no check boxes for consideration of each special factor. The addition of the check boxes will help to ensure that the IEP team discusses the impact of each factor for that student. A simple description of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and a behavior intervention plan (BIP) will be included on the parent IEP agenda. Staff and ACSD representatives will meet again in the fall to further clarify and discuss assistive technology information needs.

***Recommendation 13:*** *The subcommittee recommends that a formal process be put into place to ensure that countywide Content Instruction Trainings include strategies for teaching students with diverse learning needs.*

OSE secondary team members continue to work collaboratively with staff from the offices of middle school and high school instruction. Over the past year, staff development opportunities have provided training for both general education and special education teachers on a variety of topics (e.g., using graphic organizers, making appropriate accommodations, and differentiating instruction)

In addition, staff members from the special education secondary team have partnered with IS staff in the training for all teachers on designated staff development days during the school year. Team members have also conducted training on resources and strategies for content area department chairs at both the middle school high school levels. As discussed in response to recommendation nine, both general education and special education teachers will be able to access information related to differentiated instruction via Gateway. Collaboration between Instruction Services Department and the OSE will continue to occur and updates will be provided for the ACSD.