July 23, 2020

Board of Education Members

Dr. Martirano, Superintendent, HCPSS

Dr. Savage, Executive Director Special Education

William Barnes, Chief Academic Officer

Calvin Ball, County Executive

Kimberly Pruim, Director of Constituent Services

Regarding: Fall Planning for Students with Disabilities

Howard County SECAC (Special Education Citizen’s Advisory Committee) has heard from parents from around the county and listened to their reactions to the decision to implement virtual distance learning in the Fall 2020. We feel that our students with disabilities need to be one of the priorities for an in person teaching option. We are deeply concerned that their needs will not be met with an all virtual model at the current level of instruction that has been delivered in the spring semester. Specialized instruction and services and support still need to be delivered to our students with disabilities; a free appropriate public education that addresses those needs should still take place in order to be compliant to federal law.

We have listened and spoke to parents and advocates in the county. Parents have informed us that students are being harmed by not accessing their free appropriate public education (FAPE) and will continue to be harmed if a full FAPE is not provided in the fall. We are asking leadership to please consider these options and ideas to support our special education students and families. There needs to be creative, equitable options to teach students in special education. We are glad to hear of work groups convening on this very topic. We have had many conversations with the Department of Special Education and other community groups to assist us in our search for information. We continue to work together towards common goals that will benefit all our students with disabilities, as I know many of you also share the same passion as we do in our day to day work and advocacy. We ask that you please consider these recommendations below as an influential addition to your on-going conversations.

We have listed below some topics of importance to help inform you of considerations for the students with disabilities population. We have also provided some solutions and recommendations in the table below for both options. Both have to address fulfilling FAPE requirements, be individualized, and provide service deliverables. There is a list of questions following to consider moving forward with the plan to eventually return to brick and mortar schooling.

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| **Recommendations for an all virtual model:**   * + - IEPs need to be delivered to include goals, services, and accommodations     - Continue to provide all necessary telehealth services (speech, OT, PT, counseling, adult support) to meet FAPE     - Train all SLPs to deliver telehealth services. Look into additional platforms. Provide face shields to all providers.     - Provide alternative service delivery options. Used in inclusion classrooms that maximize supports while providing the core curriculum     - Purchase online reading intervention programs to be delivered to all those with needs (Is Wilson and SIPPS available online?)     - Teach students new lessons     - Fulfill the needs of students regarding technology (monitors, internet, headphones, printouts, manipulatives, calculators, school supplies, etc…)     - Stagger the live sessions by level to reduce the number of students accessing the internet at the same in the same household.     - Consider school system sponsored social groups to allow students the opportunity to use their social-emotional learning skills with peers.     - Group social classes delivered by School Psychologist. Expand on school sponsored mental health services (virtual lunch bunches, etc..).     - Consider parent coaching for families to better support their student’s virtual learning experience. Offer these to parents rather than expecting parents to ask for them.     - Job coaching telehealth for transition aged youth     - Creative lesson plans that address the complex needs of individual students     - More interpreters are needed for ESOL families regarding IEP meetings | **Recommendations for a brick and mortar model:**   * + - IEPs need to be delivered at 100% of goals, services, and accommodations     - Create small pods of learning communities. One suggestion is to have a 2-day hybrid model to deliver all IEP goals.     - Will the school building be up to code?     - What is the health plan for a positive Covid test in a student? A teacher?     - Record all live teaching sessions and allow them to be accessed for the entirety of the virtual learning semester.  This will allow students to access the lessons in the off hours from their parent’s work schedule.     - Consider an attendance policy that does not penalize students for not being able to attend the live sessions. Parents may not be able to help their child during live sessions. There can be an interactive delivery that is done at the student’s own pace, or with support from a peer buddy, para, etc...     - More interpreters are needed for ESOL families regarding IEP meetings     - Students are entitled to transportation services. Ensure that all students with disabilities receive transportation to and from schools |

Questions for the Board of Education and Department of Special Education

1. Equity
   * + Some parents were trained/know how to deliver specialized services. Not all parents know or are able to deliver speech, OT, PT, etc… There are communities vested in purchasing providers/tutors to deliver services and educational needs. These students will be the very few who will be progressing. Parent micro-schooling pods will be created and will prevail in educational progress as certified teachers and related service providers will step in to fill this gap. This will cause a greater divide in the haves and have nots, leaving the school system to spend years remediating and not accelerating learning for these students who do not have the equitable opportunities. This “micro schooling” solution for some is not a viable option for all. How can all parents have access to an efficient, feasible education plan via distance learning?
     + The spring semester has shown the disparities between communities of the haves and have nots. Some families have not logged on at all. The BOE reported that HCPSS was unable to reach 84 families. What happens to them? Other students have significant behaviors and disabilities which have prevented them from interacting with distance learning. Can one to one in-home supports or services be available to these students?
2. Progress monitoring and regression
   * + We are concerned about students’ regression and loss of skills. How will you assess progress when he/she returns to school? How will the results of those assessments inform instruction and placement and be communicated clearly to families?
     + Appropriate progress monitoring was a concern when students were in brick and mortar schools. What is being used for progress monitoring within the virtual realm, especially for a more rigorous curriculum in the fall?
3. Funding
   * + Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act. This bill allows about $4 million to our school district. How is our school district using the additional funds it has received through the CARES Act? How will those funds support the needs of students with disabilities?
     + The County will be receiving $2.2 million for tutoring. How will this be used?
4. Distance Learning
   * + Is there a plan for students who have extensive needs, or are in regional programs? Has a needs assessment been done with these families to determine the extent of their student’s needs?
     + How will distance learning and IEP service delivery in the Fall be different than it was in the Spring? And when will this information be shared with parents?
5. We know there is a workgroup led by Mr. Barnes discussing bringing in special populations (Special Ed, ESOL, FARMS, etc…) into brick and mortar in the fall as an option. These options include face to face or small group sessions. How and when will parents know these concerns and options are being discussed?
6. We understand the need for collaboration with other agencies for this question. For the transition aged child, how are you providing counseling and transition planning to students virtually? Will students have opportunities for workplace learning this summer or next fall, even if schools remain closed?
7. We understand there are some benefits to the 4x4 model for students with IEPs, including revisions within the master schedule to fit a student’s needs. Regarding the 4x4 model, how will you work with special education on breaking things down by semester? For example, tutorial classes which are meant to assist in yearlong learning. When will this decision be communicated to parents?

In summary, parents are concerned. Communication to our families is paramount during this time of crisis. We strongly suggest that information be shared with families as soon as possible to alleviate fears, anxiety, and worry, both for the caregiver and child. Families are experiencing trauma. It can be the schools’ responsibility to step in and fulfill the needs of all of its students. We thank you for your consideration and thoughtfulness.

Respectfully,

Mai Hall, SECAC Co Chair

Stephanie Carr, SECAC Co Chair

Wendy Balda, SECAC Vice Chair

Beth Stolte, SECAC Secretary

Lori Scott, SECAC Past Chair

Matthew Plantz, Self Advocate

Marcia Morales, SECAC Recovery Plan Representative

Daria Wise, SECAC Recovery Plan Representative