

Notes: Supporting Facilities for Inclusive Schools 5/18/09 21st Century School Fund and The Arc of DC

Attendees:

Matt Bachand- DCPS Office of Special Education
Brenda Brown- Parent and State Advisory Panel on Special Education
Rachel Burton- The Arc of DC - rburton@arcadc.net
Dorothy Egbufor- Washington Teachers' Union
Anthony de Guzman- DCPS
Ron Hampton – LSRT, Roosevelt HS
Nancy Huvendick- 21st Century School Fund – nhuvendick@21csf.org
Eric Lerum- Deputy Mayor for Education
Anwar Mahmood- DC Office of Disability Rights
Mat McCollough- DC Office of Disability Rights
Matt Moeller- DCPS Office of Special Education
Leila Peterson- School Talk
Karla Reid-Witt- Parent and Parent Resource Center
Shawn Ullman- University Legal Services
Karen Wills-Henry- Parent and State Advisory Panel on Special Education

Overview of Meeting

- Vision for the Master Facilities Plan (MFP) for special education/inclusion, system-wide planning, individual school planning
- Office of Disability Rights' (ODR) role in helping to support inclusion and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance
- District of Columbia Public Schools' (DCPS) vision for special education and inclusion

Notes

Facilities Planning

- MFP (Master Facilities Plan) envisioned as a higher level implementation document; system-wide sequence is set in MFP which is reviewed periodically. Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) is in charge of execution and implementation
 - Phase 1: Classrooms – reaching all within 5 years; trying to move faster
 - Phase 2 :Support space such as cafeterias, assembly space, bathrooms
 - Phase 3: Major systems such as heating, cooling, wiring, plumbing, etc.
- ADA accommodations are a priority, but elevators and bathrooms, wider doorways, etc. might not be reached until Phase 2 or 3; however, OPEFM makes an effort to get to ADA alterations within Phase 1 as is practical.
- High Schools are the exception; all Phases will be reached on a faster schedule; (note: inclusion review needed with inaccessible Roosevelt pool)
- Phase 1 addresses standard classroom components including acoustics, air quality, temperature, lighting, etc. at the school level and then more specific components will be addressed. For inclusion, attention to good classroom visibility, sight lines, acoustics, etc.

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- SIT Teams
 - Facilities planning on the individual school level done by the SIT teams (School Improvement Teams made up of principals, teachers, parents and DCPS and OPEFM staff), looking at both the academic piece and the facility piece, when specific needs arise
 - SIT Teams are organized and meet starting usually in the year a school is listed for Phase I work; new staff will soon be on board to better manage the SIT process for future projects
 - Some stepping back has developed from SIT meetings, i.e., reviewed relationship of Sharpe and MacFarland with development of new Lincoln Hill Cluster (Powell, Barnard and MacFarland) as the old modernization plans for MacFarland have been superseded.
- Health centers: will not be included in every comprehensive high school but in as many as possible. Also looking at utilizing a single health center to serve a multi-school campus where possible; consideration on-going on serving medically fragile students at neighborhood schools
- Educational specifications
 - Developed by contractors to OPEFM but there needs to be more interaction around the issue of facilities for inclusion-especially early childhood education
 - There are many different versions of ed. specs in use; these are currently under review along with the design guidelines;
 - Standards for ed specs and guidelines are currently LEA driven, not a state function
- In terms of space standards, there is not always the ideal square footage available because DCPS is re-using school buildings rather than building new ones
- DCPS' excess space is an advantage in adapting old buildings for inclusion where larger classroom space is generally necessary
- Storage space
 - Increasing teaching materials have become standard without attendant changes in classrooms for storing materials
 - Additional storage space in and outside of classrooms would free up some of the increased floor space required for inclusion classrooms
 - Investigate whether or not schools have space for storage
- DCPS is buying sleeker furniture to maximize space

Role of Office of Disability Rights

- ODR's role: need the community to identify accessibility needs and bring them to their attention. They cannot be proactive in looking at a particular school with respect to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance
- ODR could be better utilized to review ADA renovations and concerns at the beginning of modernization rather than at the end because it will be more cost effective. To achieve this, there needs to be more collaboration between ODR and OPEFM

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- ADA is being considered at each phase but all parties should have a general agreement of what ADA compliance means
- Contractors and architects often do not have the ADA expertise available at ODR

DCPS Sp. Ed. and Inclusion

- DCPS vision for special education: default is the neighborhood school; neighborhood school is the school of choice
 - Locate programs throughout the city to address the needs of students with disabilities at nearby schools
 - Pushing hard on inclusion and looking at every school
 - Goal is to bring back all students except possibly 2-3% who do best in private placements; getting pilot programs right now enables faster ramp-up later
 - Looking at partnerships for nonpublic schools within DC facilities; Kennedy-Krieger Inst. helped with sensory room specs
- Early childhood education and developmentally appropriate classrooms
 - DCPS is beginning to invest more in early intervention and early childhood development
 - Streamlining administration in early childhood to make it run more efficiently
- Data is still fragmented; major effort in place to assemble and manage data
- Working to change adult behaviors and attitudes through training, professional development; PD training or guidelines for teachers setting up classrooms needed system-wide and/or with just-in-time training; more accurate local school understanding of laws and policy; administrators moving positively to serve disabled students;
- Wide spread “marketing” directed at changing parents’ attitudes is needed, especially with parent leaders
- Goal for eventual shift of inclusion from Sp. Ed to General Ed as professionals take ownership of inclusion and how it can benefit all students, not just those with disabilities; will also be helped by education of the public about inclusion and how it’s working in the District;

Follow up- - how parents, teachers, advocates and community members can help DCPS, OPEFM, and the Deputy Mayor for Education:

1. Find thought partners and leaders to help develop good questions for review of educational specifications
2. Develop creative approaches to fixing ADA compliance issues and brainstorm ways to promote inclusion within schools as they currently exist
3. Facilitate the working relationship between OPEFM and ODR

Next steps:

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1. Hyde/Addison Elementary, has offered a tour of their inclusion program which has a new facility for a portion of the school Wednesday June 3, 9:30-10:30. The school is in Georgetown, not far from Wisconsin Avenue at 3219 O St., NW; parking is a challenge so allow time; metro bus lines nearby run nearby on Wisconsin Ave. and P St. For more information please RSVP to nhuwendick@21csf.org.

2. Compile working list of elements of an inclusive classroom

Additional Resource: Here is a link to the website of the United Kingdom Department of Children, Schools and Families that includes a really useful list of design issues for specific disabilities.
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/13210/BB102.pdf>.