

Date: October 27, 2017

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X

Board Agenda: Yes _____

No X

FROM: Jennifer Whitson, Ed.D., Evaluation & Assessment Analyst
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THROUGH: Lois Berlin, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Ramee A. Gentry, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Update on the Evaluation of Services to Students with Disabilities

BACKGROUND:

The FY2017 budget included \$125,000 for a Specialized Instruction (Special Education) evaluation/program review which was presented during the Add/Delete process. The commentary included with the preliminary addition indicated that the audit was necessary to “build more confidence in the changes being set” in the coming years. Additionally, the commentary included the express desire to have the evaluation conducted by a third party. The enclosed information provides an update on the status of the project and the expected timeline for the deliverables.

SCOPE DEVELOPMENT:

In order to inform a scope of work that was representative of the varied perceptions and experiences of stakeholders, several efforts were undertaken to receive feedback from parents, SEAC members, staff and students. In the fall of 2016, ACPS utilized consultants from Hanover Research to conduct focus groups with parents of students receiving special education services to inform the research questions, methodology, and scope of the project. All SEAC members responding to the invitation for the focus groups were invited to attend a session with the remaining participants being randomly selected by Hanover Research.

In addition to parent and SEAC member feedback, Hanover Research conducted a survey of all staff to help identify perceptions around priority areas of focus for an evaluation of services to students with disabilities. Results were analyzed by school level, role, length of service to ACPS and in their role with group differences identified.

The student voice was also captured during scope development through focus groups at the middle and high schools with 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students conducted by ACPS instructional specialists. Students were provided open ended prompts to respond to from their own experiences and perceptions.

The results from analysis of stakeholder feedback, student focus groups, previous evaluation efforts, and similar evaluation efforts from surrounding divisions were used to inform a draft overview of the scope of an RFP which was presented to SEAC on December 5, 2016. Feedback from SEAC was incorporated into a revised RFP scope which resulted in RFP Number 16-12-03 posted December 19, 2016 with responses to be submitted by January 30, 2017.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS:

A committee of ACPS staff including representatives from Curriculum and Instruction, Specialized Instruction, Accountability, and school-based administrators at the elementary and secondary levels met in February and March to make recommendations on the third-party vendor selected to conduct the evaluation. Negotiations continued into April and May because no vendor had all of the components desired by stakeholders in their original submission. Discussions with the highest rated vendor continued until the committee was satisfied with changes made to the outlined scope, data collection methods, and team makeup. Among the changes negotiated in the final contract was the addition of a team member with a background in cultural anthropology and the addition of student shadowing as an additional observation method to collect data on IEP service delivery. In order to cover the costs of stakeholder engagement during the scope development process; to increase the amount of time for the evaluation team to be in schools collecting data; and the addition of a team member with specific expertise in cultural anthropology, the division added an additional \$90,000 toward the evaluation effort. The contract was awarded to PCG Consulting in June of 2017.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions and data sources are included in the PCG work plan:

	DATA COLLECTION METHOD				
	Interviews & Focus Groups	Surveys	Student File Review	Student Shadowing & School Observations	Data, Policy, & Practices Review
<u>Instructional Services</u>	X	X	X	X	X
a. To what extent do the instructional delivery models demonstrate best practices and meet student needs?					
b. To what extent does the continuum of services offered by ACPS for students with disabilities address the needs of students? How do these services compare to other divisions?					
c. How are inclusionary practices being implemented across schools and educational settings? Are practices aligned to best practices in supporting student academic excellence?					
d. To what extent are instructional interventions and strategies meeting the					

	DATA COLLECTION METHOD				
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needs of students with disabilities? e. To what extent are behavioral supports meeting the needs of students with disabilities? f. To what extent does pre-K-postsecondary transition programming prepare students for life (including life after high school)? g. To what extent are services for dually identified (EL and SWD) students meeting student needs? h. To what extent do instructional services for students with disabilities have the capacity to positively impact student outcome data toward meeting performance goals found in the Office of Specialized Instruction Plan (e.g. SOL performance, GPAs, graduation rates, IEP goal progress data, postsecondary outcomes, etc.)?					
State and Federal Requirements a. How effective is Child Find and Early Childhood Special Education Services at identifying young children suspected of having a developmental delay or disability and providing/getting families access to services? b. To what extent is the referral and eligibility determination process working in terms of identifying students with disabilities? In identifying dually identified students? c. To what extent are IEPs being developed in compliance with state and federal regulations (e.g. VDOE special education indicator data)? d. To what extent are IEPs being implemented as written? e. To what extent is the IEP reevaluation process being implemented?	X		X	X	X
Human Capital/ Staffing Ratios a. How effective is ACPS in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified and effective staff servicing students with disabilities including teachers, related service providers and paraprofessionals? b. How do ACPS's caseloads compare to similarly situated divisions and divisions in nearby proximity to ACPS? c. How efficiently does ACPS allocate staffing to meet the needs of its population of students with disabilities? d. To what extent does the professional development ACPS provides adequately prepare and continually support school professionals to provide exceptional services to students with disabilities?	X	X		X	X
Supportive Culture and Climate a. To what extent are teachers and leaders held accountable for instructional and procedural practices that effectively support students with disabilities and their learning? b. To what extent do schools foster a climate where students with disabilities and their families are welcomed, supported, feel safe, and are active partners in student education? c. To what extent does the organizational structure support a culture conducive to supporting students with disabilities and their families? d. To what extent does ACPS staff demonstrate a belief system that establishes shared ownership of services and outcomes for students with disabilities?	X	X	X	X	X
Communication Efforts a. How effective are communication efforts in reaching targeted audiences with pertinent information (e.g. division to school, school to division, division to parent, school to parent, teacher to teacher, case manager to	X	X	X	X	X

	DATA COLLECTION METHOD				
	Interviews & Focus Groups	Surveys	Student File Review	Student Shadowing & School Observations	Data, Policy, & Practices Review
case manager at transition points, etc.)?					
b. To what extent are families and community members kept informed about services for students with disabilities (e.g. through the ACPS website, Parent Advisory Committee, Parent Resource Center, ACPS Express, etc.)?					

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE:

Planning and data collection occurred during the summer of 2017. PCG submitted a comprehensive data request for specific documentation and student-level data for their own analysis. A kick-off meeting with representatives of major stakeholder groups (school-based administrators and lead specialized instruction staff, Central Office staff, School Board and SEAC members) was conducted on September 20, 2017. The kick-off meeting was proposed by PCG as an opportunity to explore and better understand the expectations and visions of key stakeholders. The PCG team delivered a presentation on the proposed evaluation review outlining their approach and key considerations. Attendees were then provided the opportunity to engage in a SWOT analysis around their choice of one of five topic areas related to the evaluation: 1) instructional services; 2) compliance with state and federal regulations; 3) human capital resources; 4) culture to support meeting the unique educational needs of students with disabilities; and communication practices (internal and external). The kick-off was an additional opportunity for refinement of the work plan developed by PCG.

PCG team members will be on-site this fall an additional 10 days collecting data through observations, focus groups, and interviews. The team will visit eight schools including the high school, both middle schools, and five elementary schools. School sites at the elementary level were selected to be representative of the continuum of services offered (including city-wide programs), geographical/economical distribution of the population, and performance outcomes among students with disabilities. The first round of visits to schools includes observations of classrooms and the school environment using a PCG-developed observation protocol. The second round of visits to schools will involve PCG team members discretely following randomly selected students and monitoring the services they are actually receiving as compared to the services outlined on the IEP.

Two days have also been set aside for focus groups and interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders. Multiple parent focus groups including a SEAC-specific focus group are planned and interviews with School Board members are being planned. As it stands now, all parents expressing interest in participating in a focus group will have the opportunity to attend. Focus groups are planned for various staff roles including specialized instruction teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, and student services roles. In addition, and similar to a process conducted in Arlington County Public Schools, PCG staff will conduct eight student file review focus groups

with staff randomly selected by PCG from all schools. Identified staff will be instructed to present pre-selected student cases (selected by PCG) to the assigned focus group session. Multiple 90-minute sessions will consist of eight-ten school-based staff from different buildings. Case managers will present their student's case to the group and how the IEP team came to the decision they did. PCG staff will facilitate the discussion and will be simultaneously gaining an understanding of the level of consistency/inconsistency in processes and decision-making applied in the development and implementation of IEPs across schools.

In addition to the on-site work, PCG will be conducting online surveys for parents, staff, and administrators. Parent surveys will be available in four languages. The division will be working with schools to ensure computer labs are available for parents and paraprofessional staff use to complete the survey. All parents of students with a disability will be invited to respond to the survey. Parents of multiple students with IEPs will be offered the opportunity to submit the short survey for each child.

TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION:

The on-site data collection effort will continue through the fall of 2017. Data analyses and synthesis are activities that will be conducted in the winter and spring of 2018 with a final deliverable in late spring of 2018. As part of the contract, PCG will return on-site to present findings to stakeholders and also conduct an action planning session. PCG staff will help facilitate discussion towards agreement on an action plan addressing findings from the evaluation with the various stakeholder groups represented in the kick-off meeting and throughout the evaluation project. Following the action planning session, PCG will review the final ACPS implementation plan to provide external, objective feedback ensuring alignment to the decisions made during the action planning session and that it is designed to achieve the desired results.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Superintendent recommends review of the information within this memo pertaining to the evaluation of services to students with disabilities.

CONTACT PERSON: Clinton Page