

28 February 2017
SECAC – PGCPS Monthly meeting

Attendees

Ellen O’Neill
Jamie Brown
Diana Gough
Patricia Rogers
Tamika Jones (MNCPPC)
Trinell Bowman
Gwendolyn Mason
Mary Bell
Sarah Wayland
Pamela Talley

Update from Department of Special Education

200 parents registered for Parent Empowerment Conference.

Special Education Survey from Maryland State Dept. of Education is online at <https://www.mdparentsurvey.com/> – parents can share information about your experiences with Special Education in PGCPS on the survey. This information is shared with PGCPS – and can be a great way to get feedback. The survey must be completed by **May 1, 2017**.

PGCPS has put a link to the survey on the PGCPS website on the main page and on the Parent Support page.

Tjameika Jones described upcoming programming available through Prince George’s County’s Parks & Planning Department. These included:

- Spring Break Camp – April 17-21st ages 5-21
- Autism Glow Walk raising money for students with autism to go to summer camp (Bling for Blue).
- Traveling Teens Camp
- Swim & Gym Program – March 18 – May 6th – is there going to be a summer session.
- Trying Camp Schmidt again this year – will bus kids from Kentland Community Center to the site. Reverse inclusion.
- Also Spring Guide for programs. (Mid March – early May)
- Summer Camp Guide
- Annual Spring Fling – April 21st – dance ages 13 and up
- Quad Rugby Tournament – March 24th (Rugby for People in Wheelchairs – like Murderball)
- Curling Tournament in Laurel
- *Life Animated* tentatively showing on April 13th.

You can learn more at <http://www.pgparcs.com/>, with information specific to people with disabilities here:

http://www.pgparcs.com/Things_To_Do/Individuals_with_Disabilities.htm

Update from SECAC Chair, Pamela Talley

April's meeting will feature a 3 hour training on *Facilitated IEPs, Conflict Resolution, and Mediation Trainings*. It will be held on March 29th 2017 from 9am – noon at John Carroll. If there's enough interest, we will host an afternoon session.

Officer Elections will take place at our March meeting.

Presentation on Dyslexia

Ellen O'Neill from the Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center (ASDEC) began by asking two parents to talk about their experiences getting support from their PGCPs public schools for their children with dyslexia.

Statement 1.

I would like to share my son Cs' experiences so far in Prince George's County Public Schools. He began pre-school at the Employees' Child Care Center at ____ ES. During his four years there, his teachers commented on his spacial intelligence, his empathy for others, and his good social skills. They never brought any academic concerns to my attention and felt that he was ready to enter Kindergarten on time.

C began Kindergarten at *** ES. His teacher informed me on parent teacher conference day that he was unfocused and needed to practice his reading. At the end of the school year, my son handed this to me with tears in his eyes. I can only imagine that she embarrassed him in class by discussing this in front of other students.

During first grade, he was selected for a leveled literacy intervention with the reading teacher in late October. In January, I received a letter that C was up for retention. I attended a school meeting soon thereafter, and the reading specialist began working with him using Reading Recovery. By May he had advanced several DRA levels. When the school team met in May, I was adamant that he not be retained.

During second grade, C's teacher expressed concerns about C's focus and reading progress. I agreed to an evaluation and the school tested him that February. He did not qualify for Special Education services.

When his third grade year began, I decided to pursue private testing. C was diagnosed with specific reading and writing disabilities, executive function

disorder, and ADHD. The school team met and formulated an IEP for C, which began in January. I was not particularly happy with his reading progress over the second semester of 3rd grade, and asked for an IEP meeting just before he began fourth grade. At that meeting, I requested a one-on-one intervention for him to increase his reading level in order to access the grade level academic content. My request wasn't granted. C continues to be pulled out in a group of seven or eight children, and the resource teacher uses a program that is not useful for students with dyslexia.

I have grown weary of looking for appropriate help for my son inside the school walls. I have tried to find him additional help on my own. C attended the UMD summer reading program after 2nd grade. He attended after school tutoring one evening a week during his 3rd grade year. That same year, he began working with a private tutor who is trained to work with dyslexic students. C goes once a week, even though I know that he should go more often. I simply cannot afford it. I believe that C is making gains in reading due to the tutor's efforts, but I want him to receive similar help in school.

Every child with dyslexia needs access to high quality, researched-based interventions in school. These interventions need to be delivered with fidelity. Students need to be given a universal screening for dyslexia, and teachers must learn methods to reach these students. PGCPS must put in place a program that is available in every school for students with dyslexia. Effective interventions exist. I am astounded that our school system boasts myriad teachers who do not understand what dyslexia is. This cannot continue to be the narrative. Our students deserve better.

Last week, C showed me some of his graded work. I noticed a page where the handwriting at the end of the assignment was not his. He told me that his resource teacher had written the rest of it. He shared that she is always telling him and his classmates to hurry up. C would rather stay with his regular classroom teachers than go out to resource. You see, my kid is no dummy. He knows that the interventions he is receiving are not working. He knows that his spelling and grammar are poor. He knows that almost all of his friends read better than he can. He is devastated by all of this.

Let us consider other parents whose children have dyslexia. Some of them don't have the money for private tutoring. Some speak limited English and may not understand what is going on. Some parents may have kids like mine, who did not qualify via the current tests in place. Those parents may spend night after night imploring their kids to just try harder.

We would be horrified if an ophthalmologist gave an incorrect prescription for eyeglasses to a young patient. We would be equally distressed if a child with a hearing loss received an ill-fitting hearing aid. We should be just as upset that there is no effective plan in place for students with dyslexia. Let us make

effective changes so that C's academic journey from this time forward will be a happy and successful one. He and all other students with dyslexia deserve it.

Statement from Jamie Brown

Good Evening All,

My name is Jamie Brown and I am a parent of two students with **Specific Learning Disability and Dyslexia**. I would like to express my children's experience in PG County Schools.

Due to poor classroom structure, lack of training & development of Prince George's County teachers, and lack of proper support services my children suffer mentally, cognitively and socially while in school.

I would like to share my son's story tonight. I have been trying since 2nd grade to find help for my son who now in the 8th grade and is 4 grade levels behind. I have tried endlessly to work with the educators, ask for the appropriate interventions and accommodations that would help him, and I even hired an attorney in 5th grade and I was told he was making progress. I was told he had attention and behavior issues when really he could not read and understand math concepts. I am disappointed that my son had to endure such a horrible elementary experience in PG County Schools System. He really endured a traumatic experience that he will never forget. He knew he could not learn the way he was being taught in school. Stress and anxiety is a big part of the discouragement about continuing in school due to problems he faced and it has affected his self-esteem tremendously. My son would cry everyday begging not to send him to school, he would leave school when he wasn't able to comprehend and became so frustrated due to not getting the support and the teachers not understanding him. As a parent, this heart breaking and I felt like no one was listening and no one cared.

His testing and assessments showed that he was 4 grade levels below but he still was not receiving instruction that addressed his foundational reading needs. Each year he got behind more & more. The school was not unable to obtain a clear and concise observation and plan to assist Arvin with his learning disability. Just one year ago today, I was scared at where my child would end up as High School is approaching.

After years of suffering and stress, I thank God I finally found advocates who understood dyslexia and his disability. They were able to provide resources and programs that could provide the support he needed.

The county finally recognized this year after years of torture that he needed specifically designed instruction they awarded him with a non-public placement for which we are very Grateful. He is making amazing progress now because he

is working trained specialist who knows how to teach children with dyslexia and who have other disabilities. He feels better about the environment and is motivated to learn. It is such a pleasure to see him smile and be a kid. I am praying that he can enjoy and feel good about learning for the rest of his journey through school.

After advocating for over 6 years to get the help my son needs, I worry about all those years he felt "stupid" and unable to learn. I am happy he is now in a place where he knows the teachers can help him. But now he and I both worry about the students he left behind whose parents don't understand their children's learning needs.

We worry about all of the other students, the 60% in 8th grade who read below grade level. What will happen to them? How will Prince George's County narrowing the gap for these students?

“Listen to your children and read their body language”

We all need to realize that our children’s future is so uncertain without Solid Education and a Healthy Self-Esteem!!!

Here is a little something to remember:

We have to hold school and staff accountable

Request meetings often to get clarification and understanding of the curriculum

Talk with other parents

Find an advocate and advocate for your children

Watch for progress and growth

Keep your eyes on your child

Celebrate when appropriate and be grateful for the many folks who assisted in the journey- it does take a village!

Both parents reported that their kids felt stupid, and knew that they were not getting instruction that helped them learn. They also reported that teachers were humiliating their kids in the classroom.

Jamie Brown’s son is in 8th Grade. In 8th grade, he was on a 4th grade level for reading, and 3rd grade for math. He sees a therapist three times a week. He has been at Harbour School for 6 weeks and in that time has learned to write a paragraph all by himself. He has also been working with a pro-bono tutor to learn to write in cursive. He is now able to do his homework all on his own. While he is very happy to be at Harbour, he talks about how he “left his friend [who also struggled to read] behind”. Ms. Brown wants

PGCPS teachers to be able to help all kids like hers. This is particularly important if it is true that 60% of 8th graders in PGCPS are reading below grade level, as indicated on the Maryland Report Card

(<http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/ParccResults.aspx?PV=71:8:16:AAAA:1:N:0:13:1:1:0:1:1:1:3>)

Presentation by Ellen O’Neill

Ellen O’Neill then talked about:

- the MSDE Technical Assistance Bulletin on SLD: Focus on Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Education/TAB/MDTABulletinSLD.pdf>);
- Task Force Report to Study the Implementation of a Dyslexia Education Pilot Project (<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/26excom/html/12dyslexia.html>) released in December of 2016, and
- PARCC/NAEP statistical information on reading scores (<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>)

She mentioned that she and Diana Goff met with Alonzo Washington, a state delegate from District 22, and alerted him to the existence of the Task Force report. Mr. Washington spoke with the superintendent of PGCPS, Dr. Maxwell, about the Task Force Report, but when they met, he told Mr. Washington about the Specific Language and Reading Development (SLRD) Program – that was developed and implemented in Prince George’s county in the 1970s, and which had served as a national model for helping students with dyslexia learn to read.

Indeed, as part of the task force report, Marilyn Zecher of ASDEC submitted a letter about her experience as a teacher in PGCPS in the 1970s. Back then, all students were screened for reading disabilities in grades 3,5,7 & 9. Indeed, the report from the Dyslexia Task Force recommended several screeners that would allow teachers to determine whether a student has a reading disability.

Ms. O’Neill also shared a letter from Dr. William Hite from November of 2016 documenting the fact that in the Philadelphia Public Schools, their policy was to use teachers who are accredited in Orton Gillingham training.

She noted that teachers in Washington DC are being trained in Orton Gillingham, and that pilot programs implemented in both Ohio and Durby County Pennsylvania (Durby County) found that there was no summer slide in reading skills after appropriate Orton Gillingham instruction was implemented in the regular education classrooms.

She urged PGCPS to roll out a similar pilot program. She feels that the urgency is profound.

Presentation by Trinell Bowman, PGCPS Director of Special Education

(please also see attached PowerPoint Presentation)

PGCPS has been proactive about addressing the bulletin; it has been out for 2 months, and making sure that PGCPS is compliant has been a top priority for the system. One of the first things Ms. Bowman did was to update PGCPS psychologists about the Task Force report, and the guidance from MSDE.

Dr. Gwendolyn Mason, Associate Superintendent of Special Education & Student Services, noted that it had been her lifelong mission support students with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia. Mary Bell, a Coordinating Supervisor in Special Education, has devoted her career to implementing evidence-based practices in PGCPS schools. When Dr. Mason returned to work for PGCPS, she recruited University of Maryland professor, Jade Wexler re: appropriate interventions. The department recognizes that students need a continuum on interventions designed to meet their individual needs.

Dr. Mason noted that the data on reading levels is “flat-lined” – the testing shows that there is not growth in number of students who are proficient in reading. Our children in PGCPS are no more disabled than those in neighboring counties, so we need change what we are doing so more of our students learn to read.

Ms. Bowman began her presentation by describing what action steps have been taken by PGCPS. The first step was to convene a Task Force to Study the Implementation of a Dyslexia Education Program. They recommended that assessment/identification be done by a psychologist, speech language pathologist, or a reading specialist who should be present at IEP meetings. The task force noted that 100% of students identified with SLD’s in PGCPS were coded as having a primary disability in the area of reading (despite 8 areas possible).

Ms. Bowman reported that the Special Education Chairs for each school in the PGCPS system meet monthly, and they reviewed the TA Bulletin in Dec 2016 as soon as it was released. The task force looked at every intervention used at every school – to evaluate what grade level it was used for, which standards were being addressed, and computer access status. They were also interested in issues related to fidelity of the delivery of the intervention. Because the interventions are computerized, it was easy to check for fidelity of implementation. They learned that some schools were only delivering one intervention for all children in the school, which was not appropriate.

As a result of the PGCPS Task Force’s findings, PGCPS SLPs are working with teachers to implement appropriate instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, Dr. Adrian Talley has been re-engineering the SIT, SST, and RtI process. (See slide in the PowerPoint presentation on Aug/Sep 2017).

Mary Bell remarked that the Governor's Task Force Report on the Implementation of a Dyslexia Education Program is quite a document (over 150 pp long). It has taken the

team several months to interpret it and to insure that they are appropriately addressing the guidance. Teachers/administrators need to be educated as to what the guidance requires.

Ellen O'Neill remarked that the Technical Assistance Bulletin was based on an OSERS letter from Federal DoE (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf>).

Ms. O'Neill then asked how much training PGCPS teachers receive. Dr. Mason said that they receive training and on-the-job coaching. She also mentioned that PGCPS Reading Specialists had not been trained on the reading skills as required under the Common Core, and that PGCPS is working to rectify that.

Ms. Gough asked whether all students in the system would be able to access all the programs available in the county? Dr. Mason stated that that is the goal. She believes that the interventions are supposed to look the same across all across the curriculum so that when students transition to another school, they will still have access to the same resources.

Dr. Mason also said that research-based reading interventions are important for students with intellectual disabilities. While it may not be possible to “close the gap”, our goal should be to “narrow the gap” so that, while students with disabilities may not be able to read on grade level, they can read at the highest level at which they are capable.

Ellen O'Neill mentioned that the pilot data from Ohio was interesting in part because the district was actually saving money since students were not getting diverted to special education.

Dr. Mason also mentioned that standards-based IEP guidance from OSERS (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-fape-11-17-2015.pdf>) also came out at same time as the OSERS Dear Colleague Letter on Dyslexia. She said that students should be given access to grade-level material by appropriate accommodations while teaching the skills. She also mentioned that increasing access to technology for students with disabilities is an area of need in PGCPS.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32pm.