



REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF BALTIMORE COUNTY
WORK SESSION ON ELEMENTARY CLASS SIZE

Thursday, March 7, 2002 - Greenwood

The work session was called to order at 6:11 p.m. by President Donald L. Arnold. In addition to President Arnold, the following Board members were present: Ms. Maria R. Cirincione, Ms. Phyllis E. Ettinger, Mr. Thomas G. Grzynski, Mr. John A. Hayden, III, Ms. Jean M. H. Jung, Mr. Michael P. Kennedy, Mr. James R. Sasiadek, and Mr. James E. Walker.

Ms. Johns, Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, provided a brief historical perspective on class size.

Mr. Evans, Position Administrator, provided a Power Point™ overview of prekindergarten-12 staffing, which included the present philosophy on staffing, basis of allocations, and a clarification of elementary class size.

Ms. Murray entered the room at 6:22 p.m.

Ms. Johns noted that in an effort to realign the process and to bring greater coherency to the process, everything dealing with allocation of positions goes through Mr. Evans' office.

Ms. Audette, Chief of Staff, explained for Ms. Jung the difference between student/teacher ratio and class size.

Mr. Hayden expressed his concern that the system has moved toward a mechanical approach to staffing which doesn't address the needs of some of our schools in trouble. He suggested including more of a thinking capacity into teacher assignment in schools. Ms. Audette explained that the process does provide an equal base throughout the system, and that the grant structures that come into play also provide equity in the system. There is also other additive staff in schools with low student achievement.

Ms. Ettinger tried to clarify earlier questions and statements by stating we have a base level staffing allocation which is altered through grants and other federal programs. She stated that perhaps we do ourselves, and parents, a disservice by not stating what we are doing in a more direct way.

Mr. Hayden left the room at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Ettinger expressed concern about positions that appear to be allocated for a specific purpose, but in some instances are not. She stated if this is optional, it should be noted as such. She also expressed a similar concern to reading positions, particularly at the secondary level. Ms. Ettinger questioned why there is no variation of staffing based on the size of school population and the degree of need in particular areas--for example, guidance staffing and nurses. She noted that some schools have a more complex situation.

Ms. Audette stated that in some needy schools, there is more than one nurse and perhaps a nurse assistant. In severe or desperate cases, the Deputy Superintendent would place additional staffing in schools.

Ms. Johns and Ms. Audette explained to Ms. Ettinger the allocation of staffing positions for magnet programs.

Ms. Ettinger suggested a simple matrix or graphic presentation that shows our goals with regard to baseline allocation and the various ways additional staffing may be fed into schools that have special needs might be helpful.

Mr. Kennedy suggested a comparison of several schools, elementary and secondary, to show how additional funding from grants and other sources play into staffing allocations.

Ms. Murray inquired if a teacher's experience plays a role in the staffing formula. Ms. Johns responded that experience only comes into play in the mentoring program. Ms. Murray shared her concern that some schools that present more challenges have many new teachers. She also expressed concern about only one (1) reading position per school. She suggested staff look at that systemwide.

Mr. Grzynski asked how Baltimore County's 23.9 class size compares with other systems nationally. Ms. Audette stated that in her experience, Baltimore County's average is good. Most systems that she has been involved are in the 25-27/1 ranges.

Responding to Mr. Grzynski's question, Ms. Johns described some of the staffing issues for small schools.

Mr. Evans explained for Mr. Walker how the determination is made to provide additional staffing for schools whose enrollments may have drastically increased or decreased. He stated that estimated enrollment changes are reviewed on a weekly basis, and adjustments are made as needed. As an example, Ms. Johns noted that as the student enrollment increased at New Town Elementary last fall, additional staff was immediately deployed.

Mr. Walker asked if, typically, there was only one custodian assigned to a school during the day. Dr. Gehring stated that custodial allocation is based on the size of the building and characteristics of the building, not student enrollment.

With regard to facilities, Ms. Ettinger stated there appears to be a base level allocation based on square footage, and it would seem that in an overcrowded school, there would be higher wear and tear on school because of number of students. She also stated that it would seem necessary to supplement staffing to maintain building in the manner we would like.

Ms. Audette explained that Mr. Wingerd (in Facilities) does look at school enrollment as well as the complexity of the building. Ms. Johns added that many of our buildings are frequently used by Recreation and Parks and the community, which also has an impact on the wear and tear of our buildings.

Ms. Ettinger noted that school administrators are using various staffing philosophies. For example, some elementary school administrators are trying to keep the primary level classes small, and in other instances, an individual class in each grade has been kept small. She expressed her hope that these decisions are based on sound instructional practices. Ms. Ettinger also inquired about how school staffs communicate with parents to explain staffing decisions. Mr. Lawrence stated as schools build their organizations, principals share this information with faculty, school improvement teams, PTA executive boards, and perhaps a general PTA meeting.

Ms. Ettinger expressed some concern that those decisions/objectives are not being communicated with the community, as the Board would hope. She stated it might be helpful if regular dialogue was occurring within communities so parents understand how and why decisions are made.

Mr. Kennedy asked about the costs associated with reducing class size. Mr. Evans referred Board members to a handout. Ms. Audette reminded the Board that the figures in the handout do not include space costs, instructional materials costs, training, and recruiting costs.

Mr. Sasiadek inquired about what educational research indicates with regard to the student/teacher ratio that will provide the most significant increase in instructional performance. Ms. Johns cited two studies—one indicating a 17/1 ratio in the primary grades and another study indicating a 15/1 ratio.

Mr. Grzymiski suggested including with Mr. Kennedy's earlier request information on the difference lower student/teacher ratios would make on the particular schools. Ms. Ettinger asked that information targeting kindergarten-grade 2 be included in the hypothetical situations. She also requested that information about the availability of space be addressed.

Mr. Sasiadek suggested reviewing what research has indicated are the critical junctures—Do split classes help or hurt? Is there a difference at reducing class size at grade 1 or grade 5, behaviorally or emotionally? Where would reduced class size have the greatest impact? Mr. Sasiadek also expressed an interest in the number of split classes in the system.

Mr. Arnold announced the topic for the next work session, on March 19th, would be secondary class size and space allocation.

Report of the Work Session – Page 4

Ms. Johns recognized Ms. Audette and Mr. Evans for their work in preparing for tonight's session.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe A. Hairston
Secretary-Treasurer

dz