

SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE

2005-2006

Overview

Special Education in Falls Church City Public Schools continues its history of providing positive opportunities for academic, social, and personal success for its students with special needs. Our special education students are growing personally, succeeding academically, working diligently, and meeting their individual educational goals. This report provides an overview of current special education services in Falls Church City Public Schools.

Current Student Count and Demographic Information

Currently, our school division serves 259 special education students. 249 of these students attend city schools and 10 are in private settings. We serve 12 preschool students and one home-schooled student. During 2004-2005, we conducted 163 eligibility meetings; during the summer we held 21 meetings for a total of 184 eligibilities during 2004-2005 (Tables 1-3).

Inclusion

FCCPS continues to embrace the concept of inclusion, allowing our special education students to be educated to the maximum extent possible in a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This year, two students who had been placed in private day settings, returned to an inclusive classroom setting at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School. I am happy to report that the return of these students has already had a positive and significant impact on both the students and the staff at TJ.

This year we also hired a teacher of Emotionally Disabled students, who will be providing services to both our ED students and to our privately placed students. We are hopeful that the intervention services provided by this teacher will help our students at all grade levels to remain fully included in our school division.

Testing

This year our special education students will be assessed academically in the same manner as their general education peers using the Stanford 10 Achievement Tests, Cognitive Abilities Tests, QRI Reading Inventory, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Phonological Awareness Screening (PALS), and the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments. In addition, Virginia provides alternative assessments for students pursuing IEP diplomas using the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP). Last year five of our students successfully completed the 3rd and 5th grade VAAP. The state has also developed two additional assessments, the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP), which are EOC and Grade 8 English/Reading and Mathematics assessments, and the Virginia Grade Level Assessments for the population of students with disabilities enrolled in grades 3-8 who are unable to participate in the SOL assessments, even with accommodations, and who do not meet the participation criteria for the VAAP. We will continue to use assessments that appropriately measure the academic achievement of our students.

Transition

The goal of IDEA '97 is to provide services for all students: some students who receive an IEP or Modified Diploma are entitled to services through the age of 22. To accomplish this, our Transition Specialist currently works with two students placed full time in our transition setting, two students who graduated last year with a modified diploma and are on job placement sites, and current high school students who require work skills training and job placement assistance.

Program Successes

Highly Qualified Teachers - Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), all special education teachers must be Highly Qualified by July 2006. Using funding from our state Sliver Grant, five special education teachers attended English and Science summer institutes at George Mason High School. These institutes were taught by George Mason general education teachers, and the 30 hour sessions provided an opportunity for our special education teachers to become Highly Qualified while facilitating an understanding and awareness between general education and special education teachers. We will continue to work to ensure that all our special education teachers are Highly Qualified by June of 2006.

State Audit – This past year the office of special education also successfully completed phase II of a three year monitoring process. Phase II of Virginia's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process involved an on-site verification by the Department of Education's monitoring specialists to ensure that school divisions are meeting the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*. Our division hosted a team of two state auditors, who visited each school and met with school-based and central office personnel, and parents. The outcome of this audit was extremely positive. FCCPS received high marks from the state auditors who noted that our school division was one of the most professional divisions they had encountered in the state. We did not receive any major citations, and only received a few areas to monitor.

As a newcomer to FCCPS, I was lucky to be the recipient of this good news, but it was based on years of effort and devotion by a dedicated staff of special education teachers and administrators, concerned and caring parents, and wonderful students. Through its audit process, the state acknowledged the extraordinary work we do with our special education students.

Staff Development – The face of special education in FCCPS continues to evolve. As more students with a variety of disabilities enter our school division, it is necessary to provide appropriate and job embedded staff development to all personnel. Towards this end, on 9/1 and 9/2/2005, prior to the start of school, all special education personnel participated in training. The theme for this staff development, "Teamwork Moves Us Forward", emphasized the importance of teamwork to assist us in meeting the needs of our students within the parameters of the new law. Approximately 90 teachers, specialists, and paraprofessionals were trained during these two days. We were also pleased to have a few general education paraprofessionals attend training. Staff development for the paraprofessionals centered on the identification of challenges that

face special educators; strategies to assist classroom instruction, behavior management techniques; and public health issues. Training for the teachers focused on team building, the new law, procedures, the role of the teacher of Emotionally Disabled students, and a look at special education in each building. Special education staff will also be trained during October on our new computer management system (SEAS).

General education personnel will be participating in behavior management, Autism and Asperger's Syndrome, and IDEIA '04 training.

Program Challenges:

IDEIA '04 – The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004, will have a significant impact how we offer services to our students. Although we are still waiting final regulations and guidance from the state, the law went into effect on July 1, 2005. Currently, we are implementing changes in IEPs, evaluations, transition, services provided to private school students, procedural safeguards, and discipline. We will continue to monitor our procedures based on input from the state and federal government.

Growth – FCCPS continues to receive students with special education needs across a wide spectrum of disabilities. Providing a free and appropriate public education for these students will remain the primary focus in the year ahead.

Staff Development – As the new law takes effect, we will provide on-going training in procedures in order to be in compliance with the regulations. We are also providing training to our staff in Behavior Management, the Autism Spectrum, and implementation of our new computer system.

Special Education in FCCPS provides a wonderful academic service for our students with special needs. As we move into the future, we will be on the forefront of offering a positive and challenging environment for all our students.