

## Education Association Of Charles County Report

February 19, 2008

Reported by: Bill Fisher, EACC President

Following my report last month – ably delivered by Joe McMahan in my absence – the EACC and the Superintendent and some members of his administrative staff arranged to have a joint Roundtable Discussion on Teacher Workload and Testing, held on January 24th. As you know, teacher workload is one of the main reasons people leave the profession.

The Roundtable participants divided into three groups: one focused on Student Testing and Workload, one focused on general teacher workload, and one focused on Special Education workload. EACC appointed teacher volunteers from a variety of levels and subject areas so as to be as representative as possible. Each group was asked to state what was working in the schools, what was not working, and what some solutions might be. This input was recorded during the exchanges, and later the three groups were reassembled so that all participants could review the entire discussion.

Let me say I was very proud of the directness, astuteness, and professionalism with which our members participated in the Roundtable. They also came up with some creative solutions. Ironically, we asked them to give up two or more hours of their time for a discussion on teacher workload, and they really came through. We felt very positive about the discussion and the results; Mr. Richmond has already reviewed the input to see what can be addressed now. Without speaking for him, I sense he also felt that this exchange was very valuable, and he and I have made plans already to repeat the process on a variety of issues.

I believe you have a copy of the remarks recorded during our discussions. As you can see, there is a consistent theme throughout these comments: It's obvious that teachers are not given enough time to collaborate with each other, fill out the massive required paperwork, help individual students, pursue staff development, and communicate with parents. Many of the suggestions you see in these reports talk about the need for additional planning time within the regular work day in order to accomplish these goals.

REDUCE TESTING The testing burden is exacerbating the teacher workload problem, and you can see some suggestions regarding ways to eliminate duplicative testing, such as the elimination of County testing for special needs students. Trying to meet the requirements of their testing modifications as well as finding enough staff to meet those testing modifications during the test are almost impossible. Dibbles, Running Records for every elementary child regardless of level is not a useful tool when it also combined

with pre-testing provided by the reading series. Some teachers tell me that they don't truly get to a reading group until October since they have so many assessments to give.

Special Education Testing: As you can see another suggestion that was made was to create positions for special educators who only do testing of students, and who travel from school to school doing this job. Requirements that only allow certified teachers to give HSA's puts an extra hardship on our high schools. We now employ provisional teachers who are working towards full certification, but are not allowed to give these tests. Often these provisional teachers are in those subjects that have to be tested.

But revising the way we test students is not the only solution to the workload problem. In addition to the suggestions our members have advanced at the Roundtable, we offer the following suggestions, obtained by brainstorming with teachers members. Some are negotiable items and some will be items that we can address outside the contract:

Adjust the calendar to allow more early dismissal days. Law (**Section 7-103 of the Education Article**) mandates 180 days, 1080 hours. CCPS currently has 180 days X 6.5 hours = 1170 hours. That means we are (1170 – 1080 = 90) 90 hours over what is required by law. This could easily accommodate as much as one two-hour early dismissal every week during the school year. This would allow time for teachers to collaborate with each other, work with the Instructional team on new strategies, update the Parents@school system, communicate or meet with parents, mentor less senior teachers, take advantage of staff development offerings, and work on IEP's. For maximum participation and for ease of planning (for both staff and parents), we'd suggest the early dismissal day be on the same day each week, e.g., every Tuesday or every Wednesday. Adjusting the calendar is a way to provide additional teacher work time without needing to pay for additional staff at additional cost.

Have prepared ("off the shelf") lesson plans for teachers and for substitutes -- EACC has proposed this in the past, and some plans exist in some subjects already.

Over the summer, the Board could hire teachers or Instructional Specialists and pay them to create fully developed lesson plans, that are properly aligned with the curriculum, in all subject areas and grade levels. These plans could be stored on the BOE server and downloaded by the teachers. Use of the plans would be voluntary. This process would solve many problems:

- a) Helping New Teachers - the plans would be of particular use to new teachers, who are struggling to learn classroom discipline, parent conferencing skills, instructional techniques, and legal requirement of teaching in Maryland and who could have more time for these tasks if the lessons were done for them.

- b) Managing the workload for ILT members – instead of writing sample plans for teachers on an individual basis, as needed, sometimes in more than one school, Instructional Specialists and Resource Teachers can use the plans created in this process for all the teachers they assist. This will also make instruction and subjects covered CONSISTENT from school to school.
- c) Improving quality of instruction by substitute teachers – Generic, grade level plans could also be used for substitute teachers so that regular teachers would not have to write substitute plans when they are absent. If the plans were on the web site, the prospective sub could download them the night before and have a chance to review them prior to instruction. The plans would be aligned with the curriculum and instructional goals, so there would be no “wasted” time doing “busy work” when a substitute teaches the class.

In addition to writing specific plans, the BOE can buy materials of instruction that have the plans and lessons standardized, so that teachers are not out looking for materials and trying to copy them from magazines etc.

#### Address Special Education Paperwork Issues –

- Hire More IEP Facilitators – The BOE agreed with EACC in negotiations last year that they would try to hire more IEP Facilitators and to take that enormous duty off the plate of elementary vice principals, some of whom still have to serve as IEP facilitators in their school. The vice principals who are IEP Facilitators lose time they could spend on observing and mentoring teachers, maintaining student discipline, and interfacing with parents and community members. Even beyond relieving the Vice Principals from that job, the BOE needs to hire more IEP facilitators across the system – the special education regulations are very complex and technical, it is imperative that employees be designated to focus on understanding them and making sure they are followed. Right now, special education teachers – especially those serving as Dept Chairs in the high schools – are trying to juggle legal paperwork with instructing students who have special needs. Moving the paperwork onto specially trained IEP Facilitators will allow the teachers to focus on students, most of whom need to be prepared for state assessments.
- IEP Planning Day(s) – Prince Georges County provides a day within the calendar designated for IEP planning for Special Education teachers. Especially with the change from using the county IEP system (Encore) to the state-IEP form (Which is not compatible and requires virtually rewriting all the IEPs) and the need to develop Alt-MSA goals in addition to the IEPs, the extra time is desperately needed. We suggest one day per quarter as a good start.
- Hire more Speech Language Pathologists and provide “make-up” days in the schedule– Our speech and language therapists have huge caseloads, and when a

student misses service due to a field trip, or the SLP is absent, or numerous other reasons, that service needs to be “made-up” in the already crowded schedule within the student day. SLPs are overwhelmed trying to do all the paperwork – including Medicaid billing, which brings money into the system – and trying to make up student sessions.

Increase mentoring efforts. EACC has proposed in the past that teachers who serve as Teacher Mentors/Partners for other staff will have one extra planning period per day of at least forty minutes, in order to observe and provide feedback to the teacher(s) they are assisting. The proposal was declined due to insufficient resources.

Offer formal training to teacher mentors and administrators. School systems who hire full time mentors and administrators and formally train them on how to mentor new teachers have much higher retention rates (e.g., the Santa Cruz retention program and Connecticut). Our current system of part-time retiree mentors is helpful, but not enough.

Non-teaching duties can be taken off the teachers' plates - Really, you don't need a masters degree in education to do hall duty or bus duty. The BOE can hire para-professionals and security personnel to take over these duties, allowing teachers to focus on instructional duties and lesson preparation. That would be a good use of Board money.

Reduce mandated amount of paperwork and plans to be turned in -- This varies by location, but in some schools, professional staff are required to submit daily, weekly and monthly plans, portfolios of student work, quarterly overviews, and more -- a ridiculous amount of paperwork, some of which has to be redone as schedules change, kids are absent, fire drills and assemblies happen, etc. Most principals require a daily plan for the day, which is far more reasonable. Our hope is that we can work with the division of instruction to standardize what can be required -- though if the plan "binders" we suggested are available, that might not be needed.

At Mr. Richmond's request, EACC members will continue to have these discussions with Board of Education Division of Instruction Staff as well as bring other issues to help teachers deliver instruction in a more efficient manner as well as improve conditions to lessen teacher workload. Our goal is for our students to be successful --- something which can be accomplished with our professional staff!

The EACC would like to invite all to our annual celebration of Read Across America on Wednesday, March 5, 2008 at the Old Country Buffet Restaurant in Waldorf, MD. The event, which takes place from 5 to 7 P.M., invites children to be read to by teachers, Future Educators Association members from area schools, as well as dignitaries like you!

The Education Association of Charles  
County (EACC)

And

The Old Country Buffet

Proudly present

*A Read Across America Celebration!!*



Wednesday, March 5, 2008

**5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.**

**At The Old Country Buffet**

**Festival Shopping Center, Waldorf, MD**

**First 100 Children (10 and under) eat**

**FREE, courtesy of EACC and OCB!! \*\***