

To: MCCPTA Board

From: Julie Reiley, MCCPTA Special Education Committee Chair

Date: April 10, 2019

Planning 31st Annual MCCPTA Special Education Committee Awards

May 16 is the next annual awards ceremony. We have solicited and processed nominations, invited speakers, general public, and wrote letters informing those who will receive an award or honorable mention (HM). We received many nominations, a fair number more than last year. I produced about 55 letters, mostly for awards, some for honorable mentions. I am continuing to write the announcement sheet, program, program highlights and script. Immediate past committee chair Jeanne Taylor is donating her time and resources to printing and framing the certificates. Rachel Watanabe Tate sent the emails with the letters and is obtaining food and beverage for the reception.

The speakers for the event are: Dr. Smith, Shebra Evans, Marc Elrich, Andrew Friedson and Lynn Harris; board member Brenda Wolff will help present awards, as will Lynn Harris, Kevin Lowndes, Phil Lynch and others. Two students will provide musical entertainment at the event.

For the 2020 ceremony, I highly recommend:

1. Specifically stating on the nomination form that submissions by any single person are limited to one nomination per category (or stating that under special circumstances, permission may be given to submit more than one nomination per category, but it must be requested and received in advance for the additional submissions to be processed);
2. Specifically stating on the nomination form that individuals must be nominated by a third party (*i.e.*, you can't nominate yourself);
3. No longer ensuring that everyone receives at least an HM;
4. Specifically stating on the form (and in the emails soliciting nominations) that the top half of the form requesting the contact details, *including the nominee's email address*, **must** be filled out in order for the nomination to be accepted and processed; and
5. Forming a multi-member award ceremony committee in the early fall, with a ceremony chair (this could be the special education committee chair), and three or more members who are assigned specific responsibilities.

Items #2 and #3 were discussed in a recent meeting with Kevin Lowndes; we all agreed that both make sense to give greater meaning to the HM, and also to prevent people from nominating themselves for a guaranteed HM for their resume.

Parent Outreach / Support

We have continued to support parents who contact us. The committee vice-chair hosted a speaker meeting for parents on ADHD and related resources and strategies.

Quarterly Meeting with Kevin Lowndes, Associate Superintendent for Special Education

Rachel Watanabe Tate and I met with Kevin Lowndes on April 4, 2019. We discussed: (1) the new curriculum and special education; (2) the expansion of support for SESS programs, including social workers assigned to every school with an SESS program, training RTSEs to oversee SESS programs at elementary schools (instead of principals), and consult support on the cluster level to support Dr. Sandi Posner and Nancy Fava in central office, the new SESS program in Clarksburg, shifting boundaries for the Westbrook ES SESS program (which was significantly under capacity) and the Silver Spring SESS programs; and (3) summer training. They also hope to open a new autism program up county in the next elementary school to open up, possibly 2024. Currently they are over capacity.

With regard to the FY 20 operating budget, concerns have been raised about cuts to special education programs, specifically para-professional support (something that has been raised twice, though I am not sure if it was by the same person). I have discussed the FY 20 operating budget with Kevin Lowndes on more than one occasion, reviewed the original FY20 operating budget for special education, and here is my understanding: Originally the FY 20 operating budget had an increase in special education funding, including an increase in the number of para-professional positions, but also eliminated 4.2 special education teachers and 3.6 RTSE. I submitted testimony opposing these cuts and explaining their detrimental impact.¹ Subsequently, MCPS received additional operating budget funds from the state. A significant amount of this funding was designated for special education, including, but not limited to, reinstating the RTSE and special education teacher positions, and providing social workers for SESS programs. Kevin Lowndes confirmed this was still the case when we met the first week of April. So, it is my understanding that any cuts to para-professional staff at certain schools would be due to a decrease in needs; which is not based upon enrollment *per se*, but rather on the number of service hours needed pursuant to the students' IEPs (the hours-based staffing model).

Class Size Workgroup

While technically in my capacity as a SEAC co-chair, I am serving on the superintendent's workgroup on class size in MCPS.

¹ I also submitted written testimony, along with others, opposing the elimination of the sole APE specialist, and that position was ultimately not cut.