

**Decision Item #21: REDUCE/REORGANIZE THE PROGRAM SUPPORT FTE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION (ELIMINATION OF 3.0 PROGRAM SUPPORT TEACHER POSITIONS)**

**Background:** The Department of Educational Services, Division of Special Education, is responsible to deliver specially designed instruction and related services to students with disabilities. The Division of Special Education has dedicated program support teachers to assist in the implementation of those services.

Specifically, program support teachers function like “master teachers,” and perform the following functions:

- Serve as special education teacher on initial IEP (Individualized Education Programs) evaluations – this is part of the District’s centrally coordinated IEP system (CCIS)
- Serve as facilitator for IEP meetings to determine manifestation related to expulsion recommendations
- Provide professional development services to staff
- Respond to staff requests for support

Although the law does not specify a level of support required for special education, the Federal law that governs delivery of special education services (IDEA 97) does require that individual plans include a statement of program modifications or supports that will be provided for school personnel. Program support teachers (PST) play a crucial role in ensuring that these supports to staff are in place.

In addition to the functions identified above, program support teachers play a variety of roles that vary with their designation, including coordinating professional development for all special education staff and serving on the collaborative school reform project. In addition, some PST’s are dedicated to particular functional areas (including autism, assistive technology, occupational and physical therapy, technology, and early childhood). Five PST positions implement specific mandated programs, including 1.0 early childhood, 2.0 child find, and 1.5 private parochial – assisting with screenings, public information and child identification).

Workload figures provided by the Department indicate that the program support teachers complete approximately 600 IEP evaluations annually (an average of approximately 32 per PST primarily assigned to evaluations). Program support teachers also complete approximately 75 manifestation determinations annually. In 2000-2001, program support teachers responded to 214 requests for support from staff, including 104 autism requests, 39 staff training requests, and 71 student specific requests. These requests for support are directly related to implementing students’ IEP’s.

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**Expenditures:** There are currently 33.8 program support teachers in the Division of Special Education, according to the most recent organizational chart, including 4.5 FTE funded through IDEA flow-through funds. This equates to approximately \$2,181,020. The department's total special education services budget for 2001-2002 is over \$53 million, approximately 19 percent of the District's total budget.

**Revenues:** The District does receive Federal Entitlements (IDEA Flow-Through) as well as categorical IDEA Grants and State Aid. Entitlement funds are based on an unduplicated head count. Categorical aids reimburse based on expenditures (at the rate of approximately 30%). Total budgeted revenue from federal entitlements in 2001-2002 is approximately \$3 million, with an additional \$200,000 in categorical revenue and \$17 million in state categorical aid. The District also receives Medicaid reimbursement for many direct services to special education students, including the time spent by Program Support Teachers in evaluating students.

**FTE:** Program Support Teacher FTE broken out as follows:

<b>Function</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Centrally Coordinated IEP System (primary focus is evaluation)	18.3
OT/PT <sup>4</sup>	1.0
Assistive Technology	1.0
Staff Productivity/Technology	540
Autism	2.5
Child Find/Screening	2.0
Early Childhood	1.0
Private & Parochial	1.5
Professional Development	2.0
Collaborative School Reform	2.5

**Anticipated Savings:** Expenditures anticipated to be reduced by \$180,000, for elimination of 3 program support teacher positions, assuming an average salary of approximately \$54,000, including fringe benefits. These savings would be partially offset by reduction of \$60,000 in state categorical aid, for a net savings of \$126,000.

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<sup>4</sup> There are two OT/PT program support teachers listed on the organizational chart. However, each of these positions spends half his/her time serving as a therapist. Therefore, the total PST allocation is 1.0.

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**Student Impact:** The services provided by program support teachers primarily affect students indirectly as the support is primarily directed to special education staff to ensure optimal services. Some services, such as child find and assistive technology are provided more directly to students (either screening or helping match students with appropriate technology). Others, such as professional development and collaborative school reform, are exclusively indirect in the effect they have on students. The professional development PST positions were created when the centrally coordinated IEP program was developed. At that time, all program support teachers were removed from schools, as the evaluation system was redesigned to ensure consistency in evaluation and PST's were assigned to serve on evaluation teams.

**Strategic Priorities:** Supports strategic priorities of staff development. (3)

**Board Priorities:** NA

**Effectiveness:** The direct impact that these positions have on students and staff is not possible to quantify. The majority of the activities directed by these positions result in implementation by special education teachers or assistants. There are no data available to determine the effectiveness of staff development or the role that program support teachers play in ensuring compliance with the law.

**Redundancies or Availability of the Service Elsewhere:**

Some functions performed by program support teachers are also performed elsewhere within the organization. For example, while there is one PST dedicated to technology, there are also technology support staff in research and evaluation who are available to respond to staff questions or concerns. The department has two staff dedicated to professional development, which is a function shared by all program support and by the staff and organizational development department. In addition, there are three staff dedicated to collaborative school reform.

**Service Delivery:** Reductions in program support staff (if not taken from targeted support such as professional development, technology, or collaborative school reform) would likely increase the caseloads for support requests and evaluations. Assuming all reductions were taken from CCIS, the average number of evaluations per PST would increase from 32 to 35.

**Other Considerations:** The CCIS PST's have allowed the District to experience a decline over the past two years in the percentage of students being found eligible for special education. The department also reports that the CCIS PST's have increased compliance with IDEA.

Collaborative school project PST's (2.5) and staff development PST's could play an important role in supporting schools with redesigning service delivery and staffing schedules if the student/teacher ratio were to increase.