

Prepared: November 26, 2003 **New Business:** December 4, 2003 **Action:** December 18, 2003

Staff Contact: Brad Draeger, Chief Academic Officer (Acting)

SUBJECT: Alternative for Students with Autism

RECOMMENDATION:

That the School Board authorize the Superintendent to commit certain resources and to take certain immediate actions to support establishment of an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program alternative for students with autism, to include the following:

- create an ABA program position;
- retain the short-term assistance of expert consultants and leading public school ABA administrators, acceptable to both Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and Parents of Autistic Children's Education (PACE), to aid in defining the appropriate management and components of a new ABA program and to assist in selecting a suitable administrator; and
- request an Alternative Staffing Plan authorization from the Virginia Department of Education allowing FCPS to operate an ABA program with a 10:1 student-to-teacher ratio.

EXPLANATION:

When the School Board voted on November 20, 2003, to not approve the PACE charter school application, the School Board noted an apparent need to augment services provided to students with autism. Accordingly, it directed the Superintendent and staff to work with PACE to develop a program providing Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) options to interested parents for the 2004-05 school year. Designated PACE representatives and staff have been meeting and have identified certain fundamental requirements of the proposed ABA alternative, specifically that:

- therapeutic and instructional approaches used should incorporate methods established as effective by validated scientific research (e.g., B. F. Skinner's analysis of Verbal Behavior);
- adequate time must be allowed to permit careful design and implementation of the proposed program;
- certain commitments by FCPS and PACE must be made immediately to assure that program development proceeds on a technically sound, expeditious basis;
- implementation and operation of the program by FCPS should be led internally by an expert certified in the ABA approach, to assure appropriate technical and managerial direction;

- aide FCPS and PACE in the development of an ABA alternative program by consultation with a mutually agreeable panel of outside ABA experts and leading public school ABA program administrators. Their input also could aid in the selection of an FCPS administrator;
- cost-feasibility of the proposed ABA alternative is dependent on the state's approval, as authorized under the state's special education regulations, of a Modified Staffing Plan permitting a 10:1 student-to-teacher ratio;
- parents of students with autism and FCPS, alike, should pursue such authorization;
- PACE and FCPS should take such immediate steps as are necessary to carry out the foregoing.

The recommended School Board actions implement FCPS' participation to date as outlined above.

The FY 2004 cost of the proposed ABA program position would be approximately \$35,000, including benefits and supporting costs. Annual salary and benefits would be about \$81,000, depending on the actual position-level required. Consultant and expert administrator travel costs, expenses, and consulting fees (where applicable) would add an estimated \$33,000 to these 2004 costs. Thus, the School Board is asked to commit a total of approximately \$68,000 to this initiative at this time.

A Student Services Committee work session is scheduled for December 8, 2003, to discuss this initiative. Additional program details and cost estimates for FY 2005 will be provided at that time.

ALTERNATIVE:

None