

The Proposal: Special Education in Baltimore City Schools and Beyond

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“I understand and will uphold the ideals of academic honesty as stated in the Honor Code.”

Parents do everything in their power to make sure their child receives all the benefits they can in order to have an education and succeed in life. A child with special needs should not be excluded from an excellent education or shut out from their peers. The issue this proposal seeks to address is how to incorporate special education funding for public and Catholic schools in the Baltimore area. Throughout the years, the need for special education programs has increased while the budget for them continues to be cut. The purpose of this proposal is to balance the costs of special education funding within inner city and private catholic schools. Education is crucial for the further development of urban areas and for children’s learning, and without it many children with specific needs would be neglected. Poor disciplinary actions and insignificant savings are major hindrances to the Baltimore special education programs, which are still a massive work in progress. This plan seeks to address the following issues regarding special education services, and create one that Baltimore and other large cities can follow to help every child in the future. Specifically, this proposal suggests balancing the budgets of special education funding for Baltimore city districts through school partnerships, technology, and service learning opportunities on nearby college campuses.

The problem Baltimore and other urban areas face is that special education programs are failing because not all school systems have complied with government educational laws. One major cause of these systematic shortcomings in Baltimore is that certain districts do not identify some of the students as special-needs when they actually are. According to Green (2012) this city schools’ handling of special needs students was brought to public attention in the famous Vaughn G. lawsuit. The West Baltimore teen was denied access to special education services and

the case illuminates a range of insufficient actions. For instance, basic record keeping was sloppy or nonexistent. Also, the special needs students were not receiving assessments for their individual education plan, IEP, and those who might have had them were not receiving any service. Green (2012) states, “The result of this landmark lawsuit was that Baltimore did not comply with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that guarantees students with disability an appropriate and free education (Par. 5).” By 2010, three years after the present CEO Andrés Alonso arrived, the system has made massive progress. However, attorneys still acknowledge that problems persist:

More difficult issues, such as ensuring that students with disabilities obtain meaningful supports and services so they can access their education effectively, and ensuring that appropriate behavioral supports are in place as an alternative to disciplinary removal, remain challenging. (Green, 2012, Par. 27)

Moreover, this past school year special education students experienced challenges in math and reading proficiency scores on the Maryland School Assessments (Maryland State Board of Education, 2012), and the number of special needs students who were suspended last year rose from 500 to 3,499 (Green, 2012, Par. 28).

Recently, the Vaughn G. case has been brought back into the light because of Imani Frederick, a rising senior at the Friendship Academy of Science and Technology. He is one of many children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and expressive language disorder. When Frederick enrolled in the Academy, district officials could not find his IEP, which is required for special need students. Jackson, Imani’s mother, pressed the district to find her son’s files and was successful. She also took her son to the Kennedy Krieger Institute, a nonprofit institution for students with disabilities, for an independent evaluation where they

discovered her son did have ADHD and suffers from adolescent depression (Green, 2012, Par 16). Aside from these facts, the school system maintains that Frederick does not qualify for services.

This injustice is just one of many examples showing that the system is not recognizing those in need. Wanda Pulliam is another parent whose daughter suffers from Down syndrome, and is still segregated from those without special needs. Pulliam is a working parent who balances a night shift while caring for her daughter. Often times, she had to pick her child up from school; this is another problem in the way disciplinarians are handling situations. Classroom problems persist and the rate of improvement is not acceptable argue many auditor's reports (Green, 2012, Par. 34).

Another primary reason Baltimore's special needs students are not getting the education they demand is because the lack of funding for special education programs in public and private schools. Still today, parents and advocates believe that they are not being afforded the extra help. Special education students can only achieve success in a classroom setting if the instructional program includes goals and objectives in its services. Some state officials argue that the co-teaching model should be used more often, but this model is costly. Currently, only about 35 percent of schools in the city effectively use it (Green, 2012, Par 8). Outsourcing has been popular in past years as a final frontier. Schachter (2012) reports that special education services being moved elsewhere have enabled some cost-savings in certain districts. This is due to the rising diagnosis of children on the Autism spectrum which has attracted attention from the U.S. Department of Education (Schacter, 2012, Page 35). The majority of the school system's budget and funds is going towards distribution on implemented special education (SPED) programs (Cookson & Smith, 2011, Page 239). According to Cookson and Smith (2011), the American

with Disabilities Act (ADA) has resulted in just some services in speech and language therapy and hearing evaluations. On the contrary, private institutions initially required parents of students with special needs to pay extra tuition until the program was able to become self-sustainable and survive on regular tuition (Cookson & Smith, 2011, Page 244). Both public and private schools in urban areas have parents who are supplementing their own means to better the education of their children, but it is the district's budget that ultimately needs financial attention.

The effects that the lack of special education is having on the immediate city schools and urban areas around are on the students themselves. Many students suffer from emotional disturbances (ED) and self-esteem issues, which affect their academic performance. While mental health is already an obstacle to learning, their emotional health is increasing stress as well (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011, Page 323). In addition, parents are busy caring for their child, in some cases more than one child has special needs, putting even more pressure on the student and family (Green, 2012, Par. 33). According to Duchnowski and Kutash (2011), their results show significant variation by the school reform operating in ranging from 12.2 to 38.8 in the four schools that served as participants. The purpose of the study was to examine how school improvement activities in urban communities affect students, their educational program, and the services they receive (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011, Page 326). Overall, it was found that the results of the study were mixed, and student's stress caused a negative effect on their academic achievement level, especially in math and reading scores. Although some encouragement was seen, limitations were presented since this was only a small sample group of fourteen schools and the design approach did not have any specific inferences (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011, Page 331).

Secondly, lack of education affects principals, teachers, and school's board members. At private catholic educated schools the parents' concerns are how to pay for the program; they even provided original impetus in order to investigate the program's feasibility (Cookson & Smith, 2011, Page 245). Similarly in public schools the parents, who are tax payers, also pay for their child to receive separate evaluations and elective services (Green, 2012, Par 15-16). This affects the family's social economic status, and should not have to come out of their own monetary means. This shows the parent's care and desire to have their child be provided for. Also, principals play part in an additional role by ensuring appropriate education for every student (Cookson & Smith, 2011, Page 247). The establishments of SPED programs in public and Catholic schools have to be maintained and must provide for each student with special needs, including that they speak to teachers about implementing this process and are accepting of it. Generally, faculty approval was influential and positive, but only when used properly. Thirdly, school board members and towns are taken into consideration because they are spending the budget on such programs like SPED and IDEA. Finally, a spiritual component must be taken into consideration by private Catholic institutions. Catholic schools know it can be a rewarding feeling to work with children who have special needs because the ideals they instill: knowledge, service, and compassion (Cookson & Smith, 2011, Page 248). Comprehensively, it is found that special education programs involve a network of people and does not just affect students of all ages, but their parent, teachers, and leaders in the school districts as well. Other faith-based approaches involve school partnerships with upper-level education systems that focus on helping the child with special needs; not only for growth of the students, but for the mentors as well.

The best way to achieve a successful education program for children with special needs is to attain a fine quality of instructing by developing school partnerships. This will not only save

money, but more importantly it will give parents knowledge that their children are acquiring the exceptional education they deserve. In the study conducted by Sargent et al. (2009), it was found that professional development schools (PDS) in partnerships cause optimistic effects on all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and university faculty. Special education fields had been experiencing recent shortages on the quality which the districts have been providing. Therefore, it's imperative that the institutions of higher education (IHE) who decide to use the PDS programs, develop and continually maintain a relationship with their younger counter parts (Sargent et al., 2009, Page 69). The description of the program is as follows:

First, entrance into a multiyear agreement to participate in formal PDS activities [...] second, designate a school-based PDS sit liaison [...] to serve as a point of contract for all PDS-related business, and third, provide school and district-level administrative representation on the PDS's governances committees (Sargent et al., 2009, Page 70).

PDS programs will also need to rely on satellite schools who are partners with the PDS schools and IHE schools, who need special educators to serve as mentors for students.

As for recruiting and retaining qualified mentors the following measures should be taken: focus on general educators as teacher applicants, two or three anchor schools that could help accommodate the influx of interns, and training for interns for utilization of the programs. Given the limited number of special education mentors, the PDS programs may need more than a few schools to fulfill the placements of the special needs requirement. Sargent et al. (2009) states, "For example, during the 2007 – 2008 school year, we used, in addition to our three anchor schools, eight satellite schools as well (Page 71)." This will greatly improve the number of schools involved in the betterment of special education. In fact, Towson University now graduates the largest number of special education teacher candidates because of the rapid growth

in the elementary education-special education (ESEE) and partnering schools track (Sargent et al., 2009, Page 71). Also, the field work experiences done by the university personnel will achieve a higher standard of quality in mentors of special education that are providing for special needs students.

A different method to obtain a satisfactory special needs program in Baltimore school districts is by using technology to develop online learning resources and tools (Schachter, 2012, Page 35). School counselors can set up a computer for speech and language programs that deal with expressive language issues and can be delivered via the Internet to the special education students. For instance, Donna Potts, the elementary schools counselor in the Clinton Massie Local Schools in Ohio, has done this (Schachter, 2012, Page 54). Today, our society is making great advancements in technology and it is more affordable than previous years. The use of technology will help benefit special needs students with an array of special needs in several disability categories, including learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, developmental disabilities, and behavioral disabilities. Technology and the utilization of PDS schools would expose teachers to a diverse range of ways to teach special needs students in the least restrictive environments (Sargent et al., 2009, Page 73). The goal is to set an achievement level for students with special needs at each grade level and also improve the districts' ability to educate those with disabilities (Green, 2012, Par 11-12).

Service learning is one more solution to achieving better education for special needs students. The advantage that service learning has over other previous approaches mentioned is that it is generally free and therefore, the most affordable plan for Baltimore. Loyola University Maryland, a private Jesuit school in Baltimore, is taking multiple steps to help students with special needs and still have it be affordable for families. For example, the Loyola Clinical

Centers offers a wide range of services for children with special needs. These include learning disabilities with specialty in literacy, speech language and pathology services, and audiology and psychology evaluations. Once an evaluation is completed the family can decide along with the help of a trained professional what the best course of action is for their child. There is an affordability form online where the family can decide the costs of their child's special based needs and individualized plan. The staff at the center tries to work to the best of their ability to provide the most affordable financial plan by using a reducing fees scale (Loyola Clinical Centers, 2010). Another instance of how the Loyola community is helping is the Center for Service and Community Justice (CCSJ). CCSJ provides outlets for students to serve the local community through a multitude of programs. Two partners of CCSJ that are specifically designed to help students are Growing Minds, formally known as Saint Ambrose Center and Mother Seton Academy. The Growing Minds program is of St. Vincent de Paul based out of schools in the Park Heights area of Baltimore. This after school program serves students ranging from fourth to eighth grade. The mission is for the college students to serve as mentors for the younger children so they can be self-sufficient. Correspondingly, Mother Seton Academy is innovative and tuition free. This Catholic middle school for culturally diverse boys and girls serves the children of Baltimore who are economically poor. In order to strengthen the program, volunteers are necessary for homework assistance and must commit to one afternoon a week (Loyola CCSJ, 2009). Both Growing Minds and the Mother Seton Academy affiliations can help benefit students who are economically not able to suffice. The Loyola students involved in CCSJ have free transportation due to Motor Pool Vehicle services and can help the students in many ways.

When the plan is complete, there will need to be a multitude of ways to deliver the resolutions to Baltimore and other urban areas. One way the plan can be presented is in pamphlets and education journals that are circulated around cities. These would be placed in clinics and other offices who evaluate children with special needs. Schools are the most important part of this plan to get the word out. Parents want to know about improvements being made to help their child. Principals and teachers will need to keep parents informed. The higher education schools (IHE) who are partnering with the professional developmental schools (PDS) and special education programs must constantly remain in connection with one another in order to keep the programs running. Technology is the best way to do this, including emails, online periodicals, and other electronic means of communication. Also, school and district board meetings will contribute to keeping communities in the area involved. Green's (2012) articles addressed the issues of districts in the Baltimore area not properly complying with state laws. The Baltimore and Maryland State Boards of Education must keep on top of public and private schools to ensure that programs are being followed correctly. Lastly, Loyola University Maryland can assist getting the word out by using the Loyola Clinical Centers, which already have copyrighted brochures and the Center of Community Service and Justice can have service fairs annually to continue having students get involved in educational after school programs. The Loyola University Maryland website is another way to deliver information to students about ways to get involved in community service activities and special education programs.

In the long run, benefits of the special education funding will significantly outweigh the costs. The costs of the special education plan cannot be fundamentally free. However, the solutions are drawn to help alleviate any economic pressure, particularly in the Baltimore area. Steps can be taken to relief costs of special education funding. First, individualized education

plans can be evaluated free of charge at the Kennedy Krieger Institution to determine if children have special needs. Second, public and private schools can perform speech and hearing screenings regulated by governmental standards that do not cost any money. Thirdly, parts of the plan that will cost money are when dealing with partnerships and private schools. Parents of children with special needs who are enrolled in private institutions will need to pay through tuition until a plan can become self-sustainable. Also, partnerships are not as expensive as starting a new program, but teachers still need to make a salary and that is where most of the money is going to fund. Lastly, the costs to deliver the plan will have expenses, including delivering pamphlets and the new technology to develop adjustments to help students with special needs. Overall, the costs of the plan will fluctuate due to each child's individualized educational plan and clinical services, but the total of special needs program on a state level can range from 5,000 to 10,000 dollar budgets. On the other hand, non-profit and service learning organizations, such as Loyola University's Center for Community Service and Justice, can provide free help and mentoring to students. The effort and time being put into the special education funding for Baltimore city schools will be substantially teacher based, but would likely have to be revisited in the next few years to assure progress.

Benefits of special needs funding will considerably compensate for the costs of multiple plans. Green (2012) quotes Jerrelle Francis, Baltimore's school board commissioner, "The question we have to keep asking ourselves is: Are we doing the best we can for our children? [...] not because of [the lawsuit], but because it's the right thing to do" (Par. 4). The more attention Baltimore and other cities pay to special education will better the quality of the education children will receive. Baltimore will continue to make progress in numerous areas for students with special needs: required services of the students, support for families of those

students, quality of teaching they need, reducing the number of those suspended, and county and state level literacy and math score increases. These changes will attract more special needs children and their families to the Baltimore area. The key to success of special education programs and funding being affordable for Baltimore is to make sure that the Board of Education does not regress and that efforts will remain to encourage further academic growth.

Special education funding for Baltimore city's public and private schools, and other urban areas is important because every child deserves a complete education. The quality of education for special needs students is an issue and something Baltimore continues to work on. Budget costs and disciplinary conduct are another difficulty for the city. This problem should be addressed and continually relooked upon so that every child in need can have the support themselves and their parents deserve. Through school partnerships, the advancement of technology, and service learning participants from colleges, the benefits of the plan will exceed the costs in the long haul. Every student, parent, principal, teacher, and board member will help contribute to Baltimore bettering the special education programs for every child in need. In the future, education should be looked upon to not just better the statistics, but ultimately the goal should be to treat each child individually, and adapted to specialized plans. Not one student should be able to slip through the cracks. If you would like to find out more about special education services in Baltimore, or are interested and have a child with special needs, refer to the Maryland State Board of Education or Loyola Clinical Centers websites listed in references.

Annotated Bibliography

Cookson, G., & Smith, S. J. (2011). Establishing Special Education Programs: Experiences of Christian School Principals. *Journal Of Research On Christian Education*, 20(3), 239-253. Retrieved from <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2011.623653>>

The point of Cookson and Smith's journal article was to research how special education programs in Christian Schools benefited the students and teaching community. This article discussed multiple people who were involved in the process, including students, parents, principals, teachers, and board members. Specifically, this source was useful to me because it discussed the effects which special education has not only as a progressive component but spiritual component as well. This article helped me shape my problem analysis section of my proposal.

Duchnowski, A. J., & Kutash, K. K. (2011). School Reform and Mental Health Services for Students with Emotional Disturbances Educated in Urban Schools. *Education And Treatment Of Children*, 34(3), 323-346. Retrieved from <<http://wvupressonline.com/journals/etc>>

Duchnowski & Kutash's studies looked at school reform and mental health services in students and what districts were doing for students with emotional disabilities. The journal article included data and table sets of fourteen schools that participated in the research. I found the article particularly intriguing because it focused on urban areas as problem areas, so the objective matched with my plan. The goal of the scholarly journal was to analyze how urban communities with school improvement activities and the amount of difference in the reform. Also, how those

activities affect academic performance and emotional functioning of the students. This article greatly helped me in my effects section of special education proposal.

Green, Erica L. (2012, June). "For Baltimore schools, special education still a work in progress: Parents, advocates say that despite progress, school system had long way to go after Vaughn G. settlement." *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from

<<http://tinyurl.com/d46yo34>>

This newspaper article, written by Erica Green, was posted online in the June 2012 edition of *The Baltimore Sun*. The article provided background information on the city lawsuit involving Vaughn G, which was extremely useful for my history regarding special education in the Baltimore area. Also, the article addressed a more recent case involving Imani Frederick and his mother who serve as advocates for students with special needs. The source is argumentative and helped me develop my own opinions on the topic. Baltimore does still have a "long way to go." The article convinced that that special education reform must happen as soon as possible, and needs to be revisited constantly. Compared to other sources in my bibliography, I found this one almost as useful and the peer-reviewed journal articles, because it had quotes from many professional in the field of special education.

Green, Erica L., (2012, June). ""City school officials assure special education advocates at meeting: They say that efforts will continue after 28-year federal lawsuit." *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from <<http://tinyurl.com/cmmjmq5>>

The second newspaper source I found was a following up article Green's first article. This article gave facts about the schools officials assuring special education advocates at the school's board meeting. Additionally, Green mentioned a lot of quotes from school board

commissioners and other elites in the special needs department. The quotes were strong, but not biased, and kept reiterating the need for special education problems in Baltimore city to be addressed now. This piece was useful to my paper because is filled in missing information from Green's previous article.

Loyola University Maryland Clinical Centers. (2010). *Services and Affordability*.

Retrieved from <<http://www.loyola.edu/clinical-centers/affordability.aspx>>

The Loyola University Maryland Clinical Centers website has a clear layout of services offered with affordable plans for children with families or special needs. The page also has a support and therapy section which I would like to further look into too, especially speech-language pathology. This webpage was useful to me because it contributed to my ideas for the plan in my proposal.

Loyola University Maryland Center for Service and Community Justice. (2009). *Mother Seton Academy*. Retrieved from

<http://www.loyola.edu/ccsj/community_service/service_options/ongoing_service/TST%20agency_list.html#motherseton>

Similarly to the Clinical Centers website, Loyola's CCSJ page gives a copious amount of lists of school and programs for students with special needs that Loyola partners with. I chose to use Growing Minds and Mother Seton Academy because I believed those two best fit my paper. Both sites were credible educational websites and very useful in one major step of my plan section to cut costs for special education funding. I thought this would appeal to students the most, which is important because we are the future and the apart of the audience reading my proposal.

Maryland State Board of Education. (2012). Math and Reading Proficiency Records [data set].

Retrieved from <<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/stateboard/>>

The Maryland State Board of Education is a governmental site. The site was not so easy to navigate, but eventually I was able to find the information I wanted. Compared to other sources in my reference list, this gave a more statistical approach to special education and the affects that school reform has on students with special needs. Finally, the article showed increases in math and literacy scores in recent years, and less school drop outs of kids with special needs which added information to my proposal.

Sargent, A., Gartland, D., Borinsky, M., & Durkan, K. (2009). Strategies for Overcoming Challenges when Establishing and Sustaining Special Education Professional Development School Partnerships. *School-University Partnerships*, 3(1), 69-74.

Retrieved from <http://www.napds.org/school_university_partnerships.html>

Sargent and her other colleagues researched a unique plan that Towson University uses to create partnership with younger special education schools to develop in the area. The journal article went into great detail about ways to train the teachers in the professional development programs (PDS), and maintain the programs in the Baltimore area as well. I have never heard of school partnerships to such an extent. This article not only had credible authors, but was helpful to start off my plan and develop it further. Also, to have such a good example so close to my own school, it was neat to know that Baltimore, Maryland is trying many new things.

Schachter, R. (2012). Seeking Savings in Special Ed. *District Administration*, 48(1), 35-36.

Retrieved from <<http://tinyurl.com/cm6asav>>

This journal article gave my insight into other ways which school districts in major cities beside Baltimore are dealing with children and special needs. A great deal of the article discussed outsourcing programs due to budgets cuts. However, one aspects of the article that I found interesting was the use of technology to help create internet and school-networking programs for students with special needs. This may be costly at first, but the benefits of this can pay off in the long run. This article was helpful compared to the other scholarly journals I found because it was easy to read, concise, and provided pictures, so it was more enjoyable.

Research Log

2/28/13

In the library for class and searched for article on elective services in the greater Baltimore area. Found one academic journal on early intervention services for children. Would have to request it through a loan, so kept searching. Also found a PDF on lessons for rehabilitation not sure if it's useful though because it is a very broad article from the NY Times on Health Disability. Time: 20 minutes

3/10/13

Talked to Casey, who is an education major, she thinks broadening special need services would be great. However, she also mentioned that many people would just rather send their children to public school because the speech language pathology programs there would be more affordable or even free. I still personally think to extend special education to Catholic and private schools are important, especially in the Baltimore area where African American dialects are strong. Time: 35 minutes

3/12/13

I continued to look for scholarly journals using Seeker. Found three, all relevant to my topic with credible authors and information. The first source, "Seeking Saving in Special Ed" talked about accelerating costs to driving some districts to outsourcing and technology uses to save money in special education budgets. The second article, "School reform and Mental Health Services for students with Emotional Disturbances Educated in Urban Schools," discussed the causes and effects of special needs children on inner city schools. Finally, "Experiences of Christian School Principals: Establishing Special Education Programs," was about how to create an effective model of special education in private schools in urban areas. Time: 2 hours

3/18/13

Went to www.marylandpublicschools.org and searched both public and non-public schools for information on special education statistics on supplemental Educational services in Maryland. I found the city from the Baltimore based Researched guide using the Loyola-Notre Dame library's website. Time: 1 hour

3/19/13

I decided to search for newspaper articles on *The Baltimore Sun* website. Found two good ones which discussed a specific Baltimore teen's struggle with the state government and compliance with special education services. After reading and annotating the article I discovered that Baltimore's special needs programs still have a long way to go. Then, I found a follow up article on the case about city school officials assuring special education advocates at school board meeting. Both articles dated from June 2012, so they were recent. I also found an article

form *The New York Times* about affirming court reimbursement of special education funding but it would not load properly. I became too frustrated and continued my readings. Time: 4 hours

3/26/13

Research and revision of draft in last class before Easter break. Time: 25 minutes

4/2/13

While in writing class found one last more journal article that I will substitute for my book. One was about strategies for overcoming challenges when establishing and sustaining special education partnerships between schools. This article also is about how local universities pair off with younger schools to help special needs children at lower costs and how to train the teachers to act as mentors, thus providing innovative techniques in their field. This research was being conducted at a neighboring university, Towson. I can definitely use this in the solutions section of my proposal. Time: 1 hour

4/3/13

Found more stats on Maryland governmental site to show educational improvement. Later that night I worked on my paper and made a lot of progress. Time: 5 hours

4/4/13

This was the last day of in class workshop to peer edited rough drafts. At the end of class after I was done editing my partner's paper I decided to look at Loyola's homepage for CCSJ and Clinical services to see if we could or already were doing to help special education programs in Baltimore become more affordable. Time: 40 minutes

4/7/13

I finished writing my paper, but still need to work on the annotated bibliography, will tackle that tomorrow. Finally, finished all my research though ☺ Time: 3 hours

Total: 18 hours

Hi Dr. Brizee,

On my Project 3 Paper you wrote that after I edited my essay I could send it back to you, so you could post it to the Writing For A Change Page. I've attached my revised (Project 4) version. Thanks for a great semester and have a good summer!

Best,
Amanda