



DCASE

District of Columbia
Association for Special Education

A rising tide lifts all boats

Least Restrictive Environment: Working Toward a Long-term Collaboration

**Report and Proceedings
of the DCASE Forum**

March 12, 2010

Submitted by

Anne Gay

Executive Director

District of Columbia Association for Special Education (DCASE)

202.615.3070

www.dcase.org

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Ruth Logan, The Monroe School; **Tony Messina**, Chelsea School; **Leila Peterson**, SchoolTalk;

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Thank you!

I. Introduction

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has struggled with the delivery of special education services for many years. Many District students have been placed in nonpublic settings (private schools that specialize in special education) due to the failure of the DCPS system to deliver appropriate services within the public school the child would normally attend. A cycle of blame has developed around special education in the District of Columbia, a cycle in which some have blamed the District of Columbia Public Schools for failing to promptly assess students with special needs or provide adequate education in clean and safe schools; others have blamed parents who retain lawyers and seek nonpublic placements leading to great expenditures for legal fees, tuition and transportation; still others have blamed nonpublic school programs for consuming funds that DCPS could use for special education, general education or even building repairs.

It is clear that the law governing special education (*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, or IDEA) calls for a continuum of services that would include separate, nonpublic educational facilities for those with the most profound and severe needs. But the law also states that the child needs to be served in the *least restrictive environment* (LRE), that is, to be able to interact with peers who do not have disabilities to the "maximum extent possible." The recent educational reform efforts have included plans for the development of more rigorous programming for students with special needs in the public schools, as well as a focus on returning students from nonpublic placements. But many parents and advocates remain concerned that the reform efforts have not achieved the level of implementation needed to take on this task.

The purpose of the DCASE Forum was to start a frank and open discussion, drawing together various points of view, on how to achieve success in attaining LRE in the District. Each panelist was asked to address this question: **"What must my agency or organization have in place to ensure that all District students are achieving successful outcomes in the Least Restrictive Environment?"** Panelists spoke for up to ten minutes each on what it would take to make LRE successful from their unique perspectives. Participants then engaged in collaborative strategic planning using what had been heard from the panelists and what they brought to the discussion from their own experiences.

II. Participants

Panelists

Vincent C. Gray, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia*

Dr. Richard Nyankori, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education,
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

Tameria Lewis, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education,
Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)

Molly L. Whalen, Chair, District of Columbia State Advisory Panel

Julie Camerata, Executive Director, The DC Special Education Co-operative

Ruth T. Logan, Founder/CEO, The Monroe School

Jan Wintrol, Director, The Ivymount School

* Due to an unforeseen emergency, Chairman Gray could not attend.

Forum Participants

100 attendees participated in the strategic planning sessions. They represented:

Non-profit advocates

Charter school staff and administration

OSSE staff

DCPS staff

Nonpublic school staff and administration

Parents

Businesses

Advocates

Community representatives

III. Panelists' Presentations

Panelists made these key points in addressing the core question, "What must my agency or organization have in place to ensure that all District students are achieving successful outcomes in LRE?" –

Dr. Richard Nyankori, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

- DC is the most segregated state in the nation when it comes to numbers of children with disabilities who spend time with nondisabled peers;
- We believe this is the last big civil rights issue - 20-30 years to gain traction – we are still very far behind – traction in this movement is upon us;
- LRE – think of segregation – separate facilities are not right for the vast majority;
- 2500 students are in nonpublic settings, and these vary in quality, size and facility;
- Visits to nonpublic schools: opinion varies on quality of services offered– concern that a particular nonpublic may not be the best place for students;
- We need strongest early intervention;
- We need rigorous eligibility determination;
- We want to eliminate repeated mistakes with misidentification and over identification;
- We frequently observe that students may be disinterested in school;
- We must have as a goal not to over-identify black boys as ED or on the autism spectrum;
- Our Early Stages program provides: early identification of developmental delays and connection to appropriate services, support for families, long term follow-up and data collection;
- We need to change legislation so that we do not continue to under-identify 0-5 year olds;
- Our intention is to have the neighborhood school viewed as the first option and only extreme cases are sent elsewhere.

Jan Wintrol, Director, The Ivymount School

- Schools have changed over 50 years with legislative changes (IDEA);
- LRE is not all that new: goal is for our children to be in local school if possible; parents want them in neighborhood school, but want them to be safe and receive services to which they are entitled;
- Nonpublic is very different from private: not a private school;
- We have an extraordinary responsibility to be a partner on the continuum: we receive public money/funding, not just tuition from parents;
- Nonpublic should be viewed as a partner on the continuum – just a point on the continuum; the system must acknowledge that a child may be appropriate to move to a nonpublic school to be appropriately served;
- Know who you serve – understand their profiles – understand individuals' needs;

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Jan Wintrol (cont'd)

- Know what is keeping an individual from being served in a less restrictive environment and what needs to be in place for an individual to move to less restrictive setting;
- Know how to integrate services with the educational team so that a child gets the most out of a school placement and most “bang for the buck;”
- Nonpublic schools are privileged to receive students from public schools and need to recognize the importance of accountability;
- We must help a child make skills more generalized to be more successful in other settings;
- LRE does not necessarily mean a move to the neighborhood school, but it may mean changing the programming within the same nonpublic school; this may mean, for example, involving the student more in the community or providing more field trips that can provide added exposure to more community-based experiences;
- We should consider partial day participation in public school setting AND provide supports;
- We need to educate the community about our students, have public school students come in to volunteer in nonpublics to increase exposure of our students to community and connection with less restrictive environment as well as work toward getting students with disabilities accepted in community;
- We should seek and establish partnerships with other resources in the community;
- We are here today to honor the continuum and, most importantly, make decisions not on dollars but on children.

Tameria Lewis, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)

- Proud of the OSSE accomplishments over the last few years;
- Looks back in awe about what has changed in recent years with DCPS and OSSE;
- As we peel back layers of the onion, we need to understand what is behind the challenges;
- We have very strong beginnings of a community of practice – charter schools, public schools, nonpublic school, advisory council;
- As we expose issues, we must find solutions that will work and allow students in our system to succeed;
- We must keep asking, are we doing enough, are we doing the right things, do we have a complex enough understanding of what is needed, and we have to be open to recognizing if we got it wrong;
- Ultimately, everything we do should lead to good outcomes for our kids;
- The role of OSSE is important to set the stage for change;
- All parts must work together: we must have high expectations, be committed, believe in all children with IEPs -- those who need minimal services and those who need full services -- that they can succeed in school and grow into successful adults; there has been a mindset change in recent years, moving away from adults saying these children can't learn;
- We need strong and committed partners in DCPS, charter schools, nonpublic schools with strong leaders, effective teachers, and related service providers who believe in holding to high expectations;
- We need a strong state advisory panel – other advocates and parents who push for better solutions;

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Tameria Lewis (cont'd)

- 3 main responsibilities for OSSE:
 - 1) Set clear policies and regulations: Former policies were not consistent with federal law. The primary early focus was to get foundational policies to provide guidance. a) OSSE first established state policy on inclusion and serving children in LRE; since then: new policies and regulations clarify the roles and responsibilities of charter schools; we are drafting regulations for Certificate of Approval for nonpublic schools; b) OSSE is also working to establish a system of information to guide strategic planning and IEP development.
 - 2) Training: There has not been consistent training in the past, but currently, there are over 125 training offerings through OSSE. The Training and Technical Assistance team has been very successful in organizing training for staff, including how to provide interventions.
 - 3) Monitoring: The obligation is to achieve compliance but without forgetting the needs of the children behind the monitoring. Monitoring will include looking at secondary transition outcomes. OSSE needs staff in place to review IEPs and services provided, and must set goals early for students to prepare for secondary education. Strong monitoring teams will be put in place. The regulations are new and the monitoring team must implement very quickly. It's important to identify when things are not happening that should be happening. Decisions must be based on review of data.
- System change will come from policy, training and monitoring.

Molly Whalen, Chair, State Advisory Panel

Molly is the parent representative on the State Advisory Panel; she has a child in a nonpublic school and another in a DC public school

- The process of finding appropriate special education services was very difficult despite supportive family, college education, common sense, and savvy – how can other parents fare when they have fewer resources, language barriers, little or no knowledge about navigating the system;
- She was advised to get a lawyer or leave the city;
- Parents will try whatever is necessary to find most appropriate placement – they don't care about laws or money; they care only about service now for their child, and achieving timely results is difficult;
- Very positive about improved services for early intervention – likes idea of Early Stages;
- Historically there were no supports to help parents to find placements for students;
- We need to learn how to teach students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom – teachers may care and may be willing, but don't have the needed skills to successfully keep a child in the classroom with peers without disabilities – we need to learn how to implement OSSE's inclusion policy;
- Inclusion is very easy to do incorrectly – and when it's done incorrectly, people react with "I told you so;"
- Partnerships with other resources including nonpublic schools are important and valuable – it is hard to find a public school administrator who can provide examples of how inclusion can work successfully;
- Teachers must understand diagnoses and be able to provide differentiated instruction;
- Success is not achieved by simply placing a child with a disability in the class and calling it inclusion;

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Molly Whalen (cont'd)

- We need to use scaffolding strategies – and must be able to identify why inclusion is not working, i.e. why a child is falling behind his peers;
- We must identify resources that are working in other settings and bring these into the public school setting and incorporate new curricula;
- We need sufficient staffing – with special education co-teaching in the classroom;
- Speech/Language services shared across all schools does not provide sufficient services;
- We need to allow time in the day so that teams working with children with disabilities can review and discuss cases;
- We need to create a supportive environment for parents – parents are not the evil ones – and parents need to partner with schools and systems – parents should be invited to partner with the school;
- Educators must learn how to teach our special education students, and must be able to identify what they need in the classroom. Children without disabilities can benefit from some of those resources as well due to multiple learning strategies needed;
- Many parents get angry, but we need to stop bickering, stop the cycle of blame. We need continuity, cannot restart every 3 years. We have a real state office now, as well as DCPS's Early Stages, which is commendable and it works – parents are having a positive experience. We need to copy the success, constantly evaluate the job we are doing, keep a positive attitude, and enable all players to come together;
- Quality education is necessary for a child to stay in the neighborhood school.

Julie Camerata, Executive Director, DC Special Education Co-operative

Julie is a special education teacher and advocate; she has worked in nonpublic, public, and charter schools. The DC Special Education Cooperative is a nonprofit supporting special education services in DC charter schools.

- Charter schools knew they needed to serve special education students but didn't know how to do it;
- Maintaining the full continuum has been a challenge for charter schools – when charter schools were started there were no policies and regulations, no state policies, and charters received incorrect information about who they needed to serve, i.e. they were told only had to take level I and II, but that was not true;
- Now policies are very clear from OSSE – very helpful;
- Charters vary so greatly in size, which makes it difficult to serve small special education populations;
- For smaller facilities, it's difficult to provide continuum of support for special needs students;
- Partnered with Phillips – Expanding for LRE – to create more service options for students;
- A pilot professional development project will train staff in charters – behavior management;
- We must avoid sending kids out of charters due to behavior problems;
- We need to build skills for professional expertise to maintain students in the classrooms;

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Julie Camerata (cont'd)

- Satellite classrooms to operate in inclusive environments when facilities allow – they accept students from various charter schools to meet different types of disabilities – provide maximum inclusive experiences – may join nondisabled peers for lunch or other activities in host school – tailor to needs of children – maximum benefits for immediate but aim toward return to original school – satellite classrooms may be less restrictive for students returning to public from nonpublic – may be more restrictive for students coming from charters;
- We sometimes need LRE because of the adults rather than the children – need to help adults do better;
- Adults whose children attend the satellite would attend trainings monthly;
- Incorporating research component to test intervention-based strategies - OSSE is supportive of the process, and LEAs are desperate for it; there is also interest from the DC Council; moving forward to make it happen;
- The focus on the continuum should be not just on nonpublic vs. public, but also on the continuum within the public option – LEA needs to use creative solutions to meet needs of students;
- Thanks to OSSE for putting policies in place – we need the guidelines;
- Time is urgent, but LEAs do need time to implement – OSSE's bent is on progress and results;
- We look forward to real and meaningful monitoring from OSSE;
- We need more discussions like this involving practitioners – focus on quality and innovation – these need to guide compliance; we need to be inspired rather than focus on past barriers and failures;
- Share good practices with each other;
- Find innovative pieces that fit with your school and make it work;
- Centralize innovation – we need folks who have been here long enough to see that change can happen.

Ruth Logan

Ruth works at the Monroe School, a nonpublic school in DC, and is still involved in teaching in the classroom.

- Our students are primarily LD and some ED; our goal is to prepare students for college;
- We set high expectations – students are aware that behavior concerns will not be tolerated;
- Would like students to prepare for LRE but how do you do that?;
- Often services are not in place in LRE placements, and students fall further behind;
- We need to develop partnerships; satellite programs as described by Julie are great programs;
- There is a wealth of knowledge in the nonpublics – we should put this into public schools in satellites and we will then have good services for students with disabilities;
- This will support the transition of students back to LRE;
- Parent involvement is important – we need vocal parents, and need to be okay with parent coming to the school – view this as an additional support to meet the child's needs;

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Ruth Logan (cont'd)

- Partnerships can facilitate involvement of students with disabilities with others who are not disabled, such as intramural sport activities/teams – these provide opportunities for social engagement with nondisabled peers although not in the classroom – we’re still developing the social piece, i.e. other avenues for looking at LRE which are not just in the classroom – prepare them to go out into the community;
- Successful transition plans are being put in place for each individual student – not the same goals for all students but rather developing the best transition plan for the individual student;
- We have to identify what an individual needs to be successful at the next step and to prepare for after high school;
- Work together with DCPS and OSSE to return students to public school – but identify appropriate supports and/or satellite to help them return – support services need to be part of the plan to support success.

IV. Forum Working Sessions

Following the panelist presentations, Forum attendees moved into four break-out groups to consider the following discussion questions:

Question 1:

One goal of this forum is to create a shared understanding of Least Restrictive Environment. What is your vision for LRE in DC?

Question 2:

What must my agency or organization have in place to ensure that all District students are achieving successful outcomes in the Least Restrictive Environment?

Question 3:

What are next steps and specific actions that are necessary to achieve our vision of Least Restrictive Environment?

Professional facilitators led each of the break-out groups to ensure that the discussion would stay focused and productive. DCASE staff assigned participants to groups so that each group contained a heterogeneous sampling of professional roles and the broadest range of perspectives for the discussion.

Summaries—Question 1

One goal of this forum is to create a shared understanding of Least Restrictive Environment. What is your vision for LRE in DC?

Group 1

The facilitator requested a vision statement from each person. This took up the entire first session. The comments are as follows:

- Nonpublic and public schools should have the same understanding of LRE
 - Partnership = nonpublic representation on state advisory panel
 - Educate others about nonpublics and their role/mission
 - Provide training in public programs so reintegration can happen
 - Overcome barriers to reintegration
- Not all students can go back to public school
 - Satellite programs to assist in change
 - These satellite programs would provide students with some limited activity in public schools prior to full reintegration back to public school
- Alignment of regulations/codes, practices
 - Collect information on students across all components of continuum
 - Increase communication between agencies/schools, public and nonpublic
 - Have high standards for outcomes
- There should be a civil rights context around LRE
 - Children need exposure to typical peers
 - Teacher preparation and good training and resources so teachers can deal with all kinds of student needs
 - Have dually certified teachers
 - Principal needs access to real resources to help students
- LRE is about the individual child each time – not about budgets or quotas
 - Teacher training to provide a 'pocket full of ideas' to help students
 - All should be trained, including janitors, guards, and bus drivers, to properly interact with students

Q 1 Group 1 (*contd*)

- The local public school should be as much of a resource for students as possible
 - So students can be educated without special schools
- Have resources for families
 - Students should be where they need to be in terms of programming
 - This is not necessarily a public school
 - Specialized training is needed for teachers to assist with many kinds of disabilities
- Have teachers co-teach
 - Have a general education teacher teamed with a special education teacher
- Have administrators who are well versed and 'unafraid to educate'
- OSSE should have a standard for a certain staff/student ratio
 - Offer a whole systems approach
 - Parents should be engaged/involved
 - Parents are not always included in meetings
 - Monitor services
- Well informed teachers
 - Students who are behaviorally challenged should not be 'out'
 - Have more differentiation in the classroom
 - Have more educators in the classroom
- Adopt the same philosophy and terminology for LRE
 - LRE does not necessarily equal inclusion
 - Have input from teachers/parent/student for services
 - Must monitor this relationship to make sure it is happening
- More money in education
 - Have proper resources and technology for students
 - Pay teachers well

Q 1 Group 1 (contd)

- Create more partnerships
 - Provide more exposure to 'typical' students
 - Bring in performance arts for students who have trouble expressing themselves

- Recognize uniqueness of each child
 - Attach time limits to LRE, meaning a placement is not permanent
 - Move up and down the continuum as needed

- Analogy to segregation is not good
 - Compare to when you have a cold, you go to a general practitioner, but if you have a serious issue you go to a specialist
 - LRE is where the student can flourish

- Endorse a co-teaching model
 - Support classes with a trained specialist, e.g. a speech therapist in each class
 - To make inclusion work, support teachers with specialists in the classroom
 - Have more teacher support/training

- LRE is a concept that means movement along the continuum
 - There should be ongoing communication among a student's various placements
 - We should not think of each placement as a separate, individual, isolated placement

- LRE should also include the community
 - There should be a flow between services
 - Prepare students for graduation
 - The home public school may not be the most appropriate
 - Parents should be engaged in the whole process
 - Parents are experts on their child
 - No secrets should be kept from parents

- More emphasis on assessments (appropriate to student needs)
 - Assessments are culturally biased with too much emphasis on language
 - Pay more attention to cognitive functions

Q 1 Group 1 (*contd*)

- More interagency involvement/collaboration/education
 - Coordinate with agencies such as: DDS, DMH, CMSA, etc.
- LRE is empowerment
 - Teachers not empowered to voice opinion
 - Special Education coordinator cannot always bring resources into schools
 - Principals do not have resources to meet students' needs
 - Evaluations should be written so parents understand them
 - Appropriate decisions about LRE would minimize fear of repercussions
- Do more capacity-building in DC schools
 - Must have strong regular education program in DC
 - More training and support for DC schools
 - The whole system must be the story here
- Make sure all students are accessing services/LRE

Participants distilled main themes from the morning session, including:

- LRE means collaboration/communication/community
 - LRE must be inclusive and dynamic to succeed
- LRE means resources
 - Student/families/schools must have resources to succeed
 - Staff training on multiple topics
 - Staff training on curricula methods
- LRE means empowerment to advocate
 - Parents/teachers/principals and all players should have ability to advocate and steer resources and services to students/programs
- LRE means uniqueness of each child
 - Decisions are based on the child's needs

Q 1 Group 1 (contd)

- LRE means teachers/parents are involved in the decision-making process
 - These people spend the most time with the child and have a wealth of information
- LRE means being future-focused
 - How do we prepare students for post-school opportunities?
 - How do we best prepare students for adulthood and being 'tax paying citizens'?

Other issues:

- LRE is a civil rights issue
 - Prevalence of workplace discrimination based on disability
 - How do we prepare schools/employers to accept students with disabilities?
 - How do we prepare students to meet the challenges of adulthood?
- LRE requires proper evaluations
 - There is too much emphasis on language skills
 - There should be closer linkage between the assessment and instruction

Q 1 Group 2

- Focus on how staff think and act rather than on how students behave
- Classrooms reflect the diversity of the community at large in many different ways, including unique learning needs of students with disabilities – anti-segregation message delivered by Dr. Nyankori would better be viewed as a civil rights entitlement, i.e. children deserve to learn
- Environment that provides services for all students that meet their needs, including general education students, those with special needs, and gifted and talented students
- Classrooms where kids can feel enabled to appropriate expression without fear of ridicule or censure
- Teachers who are well trained in behavior management and differentiation
- Teachers and professional staff and support staff work in teams and not isolated in classrooms and students falling through cracks
- Programs not placements
- Services not placements
- All staff, not just teachers, who are well-trained, receive ongoing training
- Education, not general education vs. special education
- Make as invisible as possible who is receiving services

Q 1 Group 2 (contd)

- Spaces available to accommodate variety of needs (large, lighting, acoustics, daily living needs) – Universal Design
- Rigorous academic standards taught in supportive environment; teaching skills to meet current needs while building and promoting independence so students can succeed later in life on their own
- Educators know zone proximal development (scaffolding), teaching up
- Access to resources and technology
- Recognition that students are assets and have something of value to offer and not just recipients of services
- Individualized
- Clear path within different agencies – plan and coordination/partnership to transition student to LRE
- Well organized and well set up classroom (appropriately) to promote learning
- Continuous monitoring of student progress and outcomes
- Joy, comfort and safe place for all students – welcoming atmosphere – so student feels good, feels equal
- High standards for everyone
- Continuity of program within school building
- Collaboration among team members working with individual students to ensure consistency

Q 1 Group 3

- Continuum of placements available for students in public setting and community
- Students receive all necessary services in public system based on child needs
- More education on LRE and its components for general educators, administration, and parents
- More training, equipment, education for teachers and professionals at regular public schools and charters to improve implementation – model sharing and partnering
- Expanded understanding of related services and how they should be delivered
- All students in public schools received services they need to access general curriculum with non-disabled peers
- Resources and services available to parents and teachers outside of school, in community
- Related services and transition services can be delivered outside of regular school day, in home services, family support, provided outside of the school day
 - Build more community partnerships with other organizations who do this well and can provide more broadly
 - More related services in schools, increased capacity in schools, hiring providers within schools

Q 1 Group 3 (contd)

- Transition services should start sooner and be more comprehensive and targeted
- Broaden the definition of transition services to include transition back to community as well
- Outcomes – best positive outcome upon completion of education, whether in nonpublic or public schools
- More strategic pairing of services with needs to achieve best possible outcome
- Allow for depth and breadth of needs, as well as learning styles of kids – horizontal planning as well as vertical intervention – tailored instruction for all kids
- Classroom size – need to look at number of students in class – student-teacher ratios need to be smaller
- Develop curriculum to include adaptations and use of technology in classroom for all students, special education and general education
 - Adaptations specifically targeted for tiered learning – clarify what the tiers are, and how to implement within the tier
 - Have the curriculum available for Related Service Providers for better collaboration
- Special education students to have same opportunity as general education students, especially re: Carnegie units – making sure resource teachers are certified to award Carnegie units
- Continuous support for school staff/LEAs re: resources for special education (curriculum, technology) beyond what attorneys provide
- LRE means more restriction in order to achieve better outcome for student (example given of an Oak Hill student placed in Virginia private program to begin reintegration as a step toward public school) – student’s home environment may be destructive, requiring that the student be placed elsewhere to build skills away from the toxic environment
- Systematic identification and early intervention
- Support for parents to make decision for placement of student, e.g. if a school is not the best setting, support the parent to NOT keep child there
 - Build trust between parent and public school system for transition purposes – DCPS program to build trust
- Need to develop exit criteria commonly agreed to, based on nature of students – includes achievement AND soft skills to ensure a successful transition
- There needs to be partial inclusion, step-down programs for re-integrating into the community
- DCPS should build resources within the area to avoid out-of-state placement
- More wrap-around services to serve families as well as students – without them students may end up in more restrictive environment
 - Better integration of social workers and schools working with our families
 - Wrap around services as a related service
 - Better coordination between agencies delivering services is more economical

Q 1 Group 4

- Integration through sports and special settings
- Educate public that special education is part of society
- Sense of belonging
- Continuum of services that meet individual needs
- Early intervention
- Inclusion in each grade
- Collaboration with general education
- Integration of resources
- Outreach/balance between policy makers/implementers
- Good allocation of resources
- Systemic change results in more effective/efficient innovation
- Facilities are important factor
- Access to continuum of services in DCPS
- Incremental step down
- Replication of innovative models
- Expectation of what LRE is for each child
- Measurable/accountable
- LRE is different for every student
- Satellite: nonpublic to public
- Co-teaching
- Dialogue among stakeholders: restorative justice
- Continuum of choices toward integration

Summaries—Question 2

What must my agency or organization have in place to ensure that all DC students are achieving outcomes in LRE?

Group 1

- Schools should use same screening tools
- All students should have the same access to resources
- All students should have same access to post-secondary school possibilities
- Develop transition plans and options in the community
- All students should have information on financial aide, application processes, Rehabilitative Services
- IF successful in nonpublic school, does the child have to go back to public school?
 - What is the degree of 'rightness'
 - Is the program ready to take the child back?
 - How can we help the nonpublic school to get students back to public school?
- Is there a conflict in LRE?
 - Does student success in nonpublic schools result in:
 - Better access to going back to a public school, or
 - A wider gap because public schools don't have the capacity to take students back if successful at a nonpublic
- LRE should not be viewed as a place – it's a concept
- There should be an entity that monitors the process of going to nonpublic and back
- If teachers in public schools were better trained, would we need nonpublics?
- Better behavior management training
 - Should share with charter schools to create training modules
 - Help bring expertise of classroom management to charter schools
- DCASE should:
 - Begin conversations to bring Dr. Nyankori and DCPS, and Tami Lewis and OSSE together to ensure consistency on policy and process
 - Build collaborations on all levels and in all child serving agencies
 - Push for change and mutual projects between public and nonpublic

Q 2 Group 2

- Training:
 - Continuously train, retrain and evaluate the training and outcomes of training, and ensure that training is working before retraining staff;
 - Provide training for all staff;
 - Have someone to model the training and help apply what is learned;
 - Contain training within the school day and as part of working time – learning is part of the job;
 - Train staff of receiving school to ensure successful transition to LRE;
 - Have an easy DCPS contracting mechanism to facilitate training by nonpublic staff for the public school staff that will be receiving the student;
 - Establish partnership between trainer and trainee.
- Establish strong support and collaboration with parents, including parent training to help them generalize from school to home those skills the child has learned school
- Money/funding flexibility
- Flexibility in transition planning – moving from a more restrictive environment to a less restrictive environment
- Commitment and leadership from the top down – accountability – and enforcement of general education teachers’ accepting inclusion of special education students in their classrooms
- Move toward integrating related services in classroom
- Utilize challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles
- Change in public school culture, mindset, attitude to promote success of LRE?
- Allow time for successful collaboration – reflection, build relationships, reflect on training – what works and doesn’t work
- Forced to be mediocre because special education spread so thin – need staff, time, and money to enable excellence
- Leadership that takes risks based on student needs
- Transportation to support flexible transition
- More knowledge of what programs/services are available in DCPS to build confidence about programs/services and support transition
- More early intervention/preventative measures/closing gaps at younger age
- Use data from early intervention programs to plan better for needed services to support LRE
- Establish new methodologies based on more brain-based research
- Support for inclusion in presence of Adequate Yearly Progress – without penalty
- Inclusion should inform programming – constant revisiting and retooling
- Flexibility for classroom program

Q 2 Group 2 (contd)

- Use a three to five year plan to give people the chance to master and implement in increments and not be punished for early mistakes – establish benchmarks – keep plan in place even when administration changes, maintaining continuity
- Overall, steps to LRE success fall within these broad categories:
 - Training
 - Partnering and Collaboration
 - Culture and Paradigm Shift
 - Resources
 - Innovation and flexibility

Q 2 Group 3

- Training and more understanding – for staff, for everyone
 - Instructional practices
 - Understanding disabilities
 - Removing stereotypes about the students we serve – improve understanding of what differences mean, different learning styles, who special education children are. They are different, not less. Multiple intelligences.
 - There should be tiers or levels of intervention for classroom management – i.e.. educate administrators on how to handle these issues as manifestations of the disability
 - Need a framework for pre-intervention services where staff and administrators agree how to handle - RTI
 - Use schools with experience in this to do training for schools that don't have the experience
 - Academic and developmental benchmarks are needed to strengthen intervention
 - Train administrators and decision-makers to understand the impact of prevention (like wrap around) as a cost-saving measure over time
- On-site resources – nurse, psychological, social worker
- Empower teachers and RSPs to have more decision-making authority and input re: educational programming, regardless of availability of resources (\$\$) – decisions should be based on need, not \$\$
- Resources – money for transportation, retention of teachers, RSPs
 - Shift funding from transportation to developing programs more locally in city
- Build more systems of review within our own organizations, taking a holistic view of student life, not just school life – formalize the informal communications between teachers, RSPs, administrators to better address the needs of the whole child – create a more unified picture of the child

Q 2 Group 4

- True understanding of the inclusion model
- More funding
- Share more information and expertise with public schools
- Informed advocacy agenda
- Collaboration of ideas
- Share expertise with bureaucracy
- Real collaboration
- Facilities becoming special needs-friendly
- Public system open to collaboration with outside stakeholders
- Use of Universal Design
- Alignment of mindset to achieve LRE
- Shared sense of accountability
- Fully trained staff: dually certified
- Define LRE for student at admission
- Clearly define expectations to be able to plan appropriate curricula
- Bring together resources
- Create partnership for inclusion
- Transition plans with documented success
- Maximize federal \$\$\$-70% matching (Medicaid)
- Cooperation from agency on dispute resolution options
- Clarify DCPS response to IDEA

Summaries—Question 3

What are the next steps and specific actions that are necessary to achieve our vision of LRE?

Group 1

- Ensure that standards lead to quality – this includes in monitoring and regulations
- Students need to pass standardized tests
- Troubling that leaders in DCPS view nonpublics as ‘segregating’ students
 - Poor choice of words from leadership
- For satellites to be successful:
 - Must be partnerships in order to make them work
 - Define LRE and have a common vocabulary
 - Recognize LRE as a concept not a place
- LRE is about services, not places
 - Should not be about ‘labeling’ issues
- Define full array of what’s available?
 - Explore using personnel at sending and receiving schools to discuss resources available – have communication flow between the two
- Must develop a road map for all to follow
 - Define next steps all along the LRE continuum to follow
 - What is Dr. Nyankori’s vision? – we must have this to succeed

Group 2

- Follow ups at our schools to brainstorm on meaning of LRE
- Develop working groups to address specific areas
- Needs assessments for parents, teachers, administrators to determine where the critical needs are – school by school and system; collecting data; transparency; creating efficiency; data help with planning and allocation of resources
- Define goal – is there a common goal to which all are working
- Identify organizational models that promote culture of innovation and flexibility – pull together and disseminate

Group 2 (contd)

- Vocal recognition on the part of people in DCPS, OSSE and City Government that LRE will not happen overnight – it has to be well planned and thought out to avoid lawsuits. All aspects must work together. It will require —
 - Shared resources and goals
 - Multi-faceted, incremental, needs collaboration with everyone on the same page
 - Increased commitment and actions that demonstrate commitment
 - Working in isolation won't be successful
 - Mayor's education reform act of 2007 called for the heads of all the agencies to form work group to address continuity and efficiency of serving families of children with special needs – need status
- Hold charter schools more accountable for hiring highly qualified teachers and establishing requirements for continued professional development; create framework of accountability so teachers meet all the required hours.
- DCPS use the expertise of charter and nonpublic schools who have expertise in special education
- DCPS have recognition system that gives strong message that this is important, that we value the application of effective approaches by teachers and administrators
- Incentivize school innovation (grants)
- Establish common definitions of LRE and identify effective programs locally and around the country
- Create school report cards – accountability – beyond AYP (inclusion, special education)
- Satellite classrooms (charter schools) – implement them in other schools
- Focus on older students, not just Early Stages -- don't write them off

Group 3

- Early intervention – avoid having students go into More Restrictive Environment
- Enlist parent support and communication throughout the process
- Put together a plan of action – build an infrastructure - with teams of stakeholders to do #s 1&2 and more (LRE task force based on Response to Intervention [RTI])
- Train those stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators, RSPs, etc.) on developmental milestones, processes – what to look for
 - RSPs do professional development for staff and other stakeholders
- Get all stakeholders together now to try to forge a strategic alliance or cooperative agreement to participate in improvement in LRE – everyone agrees on what needs to be done and how to do it. DCPS and OSSE need to agree to work with charters and nonpublics to make reintegration and LRE work.

Group 3 (contd)

- Push for RTI to prevent over-referral of students for services out of the classroom
- Create a shared view/philosophy of pre-intervention expectations
- Have shared database/information of student history for better transition between schools
- Push for integrated information systems between all schools, DCPS and OSSE – make sure ALL schools have access to this system
 - Ensure teachers and RSPs are qualified, and have the resources to pay them
- Develop partnerships with schools and teacher training programs for better-prepared teachers
- In addition to training, include coaching to ensure implementation of new techniques
- Increase accountability of schools through provision of supportive measures (coaching, technical assistance, etc.), rather than just punitive measures such as failed test scores and being forced into restructuring
- Strengthen School Study Team process
- Get DCPS and OSSE to express their interpretation of IDEA definition of LRE – what does it mean to them and how do they expect it to be implemented?

Group Four

- Four overriding themes for successful LRE:
 - Inclusion
 - Collaboration
 - Resources
 - Training
- DCPS needs to be committed to:
 - School-specific inclusion action plans
 - Making best practice models available to everyone (charter, nonpublic and DCPS)
 - Requiring administrators to participate in leadership modules specific to special education

IV. Group Summary Reports

Following the breakout sessions, all four groups met as one to report out the highlights of their sessions and summarize the key points for moving forward.

Group 1

We need:

- Clarity about what LRE is in DCPS, then disseminate that information, as if undertaking a marketing campaign to disseminate widely; get people at the same table to talk about what LRE is
- Multiple groups coming to the table together – collaboration
- Local school follow-up to continue the LRE conversation – include private, charter, nonpublic, and public schools
- Satellite classrooms to be funded, implemented, and evaluated – looking to see if results work
- Special education to think not only about early intervention, but also middle and high school levels – attention to ages 0 through 21
- Disseminating, coordinating, collaborating; making everyone involved aware of the resources and sharing best practices
- Recognition of innovation and flexibility in the classroom
- Examining classroom strategies that might require taking some risk, supported by top-down leadership that agrees innovative risky things might work here

Group 2

We need:

- Commitment to continued collaboration
- Keeping same goals and focus in mind
- Compilation of best practices
- Consensus and agreement about what those services will look like, and dissemination to all in DCPS
- Opportunities for teachers to visit nonpublic schools to witness strategies that are effective
- Learning from each other, not operating only within our own environments
- Leaders within the schools, and training for administrators around concepts for special education services
- Keeping charter schools in mind and not just public schools

Group 3

We need:

- Early intervention
- Involvement of parents in the process
- Development of infrastructure plan
- LRE taskforce citywide – public, nonpublic, charter
- Stronger RTI model
- Framework for sharing student information among stakeholders
- Qualified teachers and providers – collaboration with universities for training programs
- Follow-up coaches for personnel
- Supportive accountability

Group 4

We need:

- Collaboration, community, communication, common understanding of LRE
- Future focus on how students transition out
- Civil rights – the real issue is not segregated settings for school-aged children, but rather whether we provide education opportunities that prepare students to be responsible, contributing, independent adults
- Testing – link instruction with assessment
- Common tools and measures between nonpublic and public schools
- Nonpublic students having access to the same programs, opportunities, and facilities that are available to public schools students
- Nonpublic students having access to post-secondary opportunities (provide information for parents on financial aid and other information)
- Public schools need to be fixed
- Resource organizations that serve charter schools
- Training modules, e.g. behavior management, differentiated instruction
- Address whether quality nonpublic schools make it possible for student to return to public schools or create a larger gap
- Help to improve children's health outcomes
- Support for parents to participate in the process
- Quality instruction and compliance

Group 4 (cont'd)

- Ongoing dialogue
- Dialogue on philosophy/issue – do nonpublics segregate children
- Building trust
- Successful satellites, e.g. partnership with building supervisor is needed
- Determine: will compliance tools lead to quality? Are standards common?
- Common vocabulary and definition of LRE
- Identify consistent ways to determine and implement appropriate assessments to assure that children receive correct diagnoses; eliminate excessive testing
- Assure there are available resources and personnel to develop and support transition plans to and from nonpublics
- All parties to be included in decision-making
- Assessments to guide instruction
- Accurate documentation of students' successes, not just on IEPs
- Awareness of laws and regulations
- More discussions among stakeholders with activities to build trust
- A roadmap for the future – not just ours but from the top leaders in DC

General Feedback

Participants offered a range of overall comments:

- Good to see people working together at the conference in a cooperative, collaborative atmosphere
- Learned more about the complexities of LRE at the conference; previously thought about it only in terms of sending students back to public school, but recognizes this is about more than just returning to public schools
- Intend to go back to school and talk with staff about what LRE means from a broader perspective, e.g. getting kids involved in the community and in outside activities
- LRE is complicated – each school needs to look at itself and identify what it needs to do differently – each school should develop an inclusion action plan – hold principals accountable for implementing the plan – then DC will be more confident sending kids there if the plan is implemented
- As a nonpublic school, we must address transition, and have a plan of action for students to consider returning them to public school; it currently is a requirement, but we need to develop resources for students to return successfully, and need to develop trust that the services will be there for students to return; need to collaborate; parents don't trust that DC schools can handle the students

General Feedback *(cont'd)*

- Realizing why LRE is difficult to understand – human uniqueness; complexity because of human nature, even with kids with same labels; children should be the primary issue to be considered
- DCASE Board members should see this as an opportunity to work together with Dr. Nyankori and LEAs – we have today set the stage with DCPS – we had OSSE support before and now can build on the relationship with Dr. Nyankori
- We need to work with all stakeholders for our children to understand the concept of LRE – back in 60's, in mental health the idea was isolation and seclusion of students with disabilities; we need to be clear about phrasing of the issues for parents and consider the stigma behind labeling students
- We need to believe that DC students deserve the best services available. This is not one size fits all -- all children deserve to be looked at individually

Next Steps for DCASE

- Disseminate Forum notes to all participants
- Distribute summary report of proceedings
- Address the question of who else needs to be involved in moving forward with next steps?
- Access discussions that may happen within each of the schools and facilitate replicating this process within other schools
- Capture the energy in the building today to continue to build on the future
- Work to achieve greater parent representation in future discussions

VI. Discussion of Outcomes

Everyone was in agreement that Least Restrictive Environment is a much more complicated and involved issue than most generally think; there is no consensus of opinion as to what the definition of LRE in the District should be. There was agreement on the need to bring the same sort of discussion about LRE as was held at the Forum to the general public, individual schools, communities and businesses to create environments where students with disabilities will be welcome and appreciated.

Participants focused on the individual student as well, and underscored the need to assess changes to a student's placement based on that student's achievement and progress, and not on the number of years spent in a nonpublic school or the label the student might have. It was deemed vital to maintain a continuum of services, as outlined in IDEA, which includes nonpublic school options. There was agreement that evaluations need to support a nonpublic placement, and that there should be ongoing review of the continued need for such a placement.

All participants agreed that there has not been enough training for public school staff on how to accommodate a variety of needs in a single classroom. Key areas in which training is needed are: co-teaching with special and general educators, differentiated instruction, and behavior management.

Resources were viewed as a concern. Participants strongly favored development of partnerships between nonpublic and public schools as a way to provide resources such as mentor teachers as well as training. Concerns about sufficient resources included having an adequate number of appropriately trained therapists to continue some of the nonpublic schools' innovative practices.

Participants addressed the need for appropriate facilities; several spoke to ensuring that school renovations must take into account universal needs such as proper lighting, adequate space, ADA compliance, as well as the need for smaller therapy rooms, conference rooms for IEP meetings, etc.

Each group discussed collaboration and partnerships as valuable tools to move successfully toward LRE in the District. Many participants highlighted the value of having all parties in the same room talking to one another, and emphasized the need for this dialogue to continue so there can be an attitude of professional integrity and trust between all parties, including parents. Resources and training are currently significant obstacles; collaboration and partnerships would address them. It is essential that we encourage innovative practice and foster environments in which teachers will feel comfortable and safe about being innovative.

The DCASE Forum — *Least Restrictive Environment: Working Toward a Long-Term Collaboration* was the beginning of an important discussion with the potential to impact all students in the District. Through thoughtful collaboration, targeted partnerships, ongoing and inclusive communication, optimization of available resources, training in innovative practices, and concern that **every** child reaches his or her potential, we can gain a broader understanding of how to achieve LRE successfully and accomplish the necessary steps to take us there.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA

DCASE Forum— *Least Restrictive Environment: Working Toward a Long-Term Collaboration*

Friday, March 12, 2010

- 8:00 On-site Registration / Pre-registration Check-in / Continental Breakfast
- 8:30 Welcome—**Dr. Philippe Dupont**, President of DCASE
- 8:40 Keynote Address—**Dr. Bert L’Homme**, Education Policy Director and lead coordinator for the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Crusade* at the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)
- 9:10 Introduction of Panelists—**Dr. Bert L’Homme**
- 9:15 Panelist Presentations
- Dr. Richard Nyankori**, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education, DCPS
Jan Wintrol, Director, The Ivymount School
Vincent C. Gray, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
Tameria Lewis, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, OSSE
Molly Whalen, Chair, District of Columbia State Advisory Panel
Julie Camerata, Executive Director, The DC Special Education Co-operative
Ruth T. Logan, Founder/CEO, The Monroe School
- 10:15 Break
- 10:30 Session 1 Discussion Groups
- 11:45 Lunch
- 12:15 Session 2 Discussion Groups
- 1: 00 Group Report Outs and Questions
- 2:15 Next Steps
- 2: 45 Wrap-up and Thank You

APPENDIX B

Evaluation Results, based on 58 completed evaluations

Ratings

- 1 – Strongly agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Disagree
- 5 – Strongly disagree

Average ratings

Keynote speaker helped clarify definition of LRE	2.23
Forum began on time and was well-paced	2.51
Liked panelists presenting their point of view	1.46
I gained new insight about complexities of LRE	1.59
I had opportunity to share my ideas and concerns about LRE	1.45
Liked concept of leaving conference with some possible solutions	1.54
Forum was well-organized	1.59

Evaluation Results *(cont'd)*

Please note: some responses have been consolidated; the complete evaluation report is available from DCASE.

Favorite Part of Forum

- Panelists and panelist presentations - 11 responses
- Collaboration, sharing with others - 2 responses
- Parent presentation - great to hear her perspective - 3 responses
- Discussing various topics, dialogue - 2 responses
- Break out groups, discussion in break-outs, small group discussions – 18 responses
- Networking with other professionals, meeting new people – 7 responses
- Combination of panelists' perspective with small group discussion
- Bringing all participants together
- Collecting ideas in break-out sessions
- Having an opportunity to break in diverse groups
- Group presentation
- It was nice to hear that I am not the only person with concerns
- Chance to get inside heads of some public officials
- Things ran well
- The opportunity to participate & have dialogue
- The next steps to look forward to
- Hearing others opinions/ideas and being able to speak with others not in SPED or Education
- Food, drinks, info
- Building relationships
- Report out

Next Steps Should Include:

- Designated personnel to facilitate process of the return of students
- Strong integration plans that can be implemented
- Similar discussion in smaller setting with just key policy makers/high level program staff
- Getting DCPS on board
- Sharing info with OSSE

Next Steps Should Include *(cont'd)*

- Development of a more uniform conceptual definition that all can agree on
- How to tackle wide knowledge and communicate awareness that change is happening
- Create partnerships so that students needs can be met more effectively
- Things learned actually implemented and re-assessed
- More discussion groups with even distribution of nonpublic, public, charters, OSSE, DCPS
- Another conference or focus group of key folks - DCPS, OSSE, nonpublics, and parents/public educators
- Identifying Richard's [Nyankori] vision for LRE and develop a road map with all stakeholders
- Follow up brainstorm session
- Follow-up at our schools for specific implementation of ideas
- Marketing campaign
- Actually implementing them - ACTION!! Positive communication between public and nonpublic education systems. Road map to an end resolution between both sectors. Possible representation from students with these special needs - we are servicing them so why not include them
- Implementing, collaborating, partnering with parents
- Continue the dialogue among the stakeholders
- Encourage parents to become more involved and challenge the system
- Fundamental examination of premises behind LRE "segregation"
- Follow through on sharing info; "Marketing" – re: moving forward in working with DCPS to have these programs so that there are quality programs for our young people who can move to LRE
- A follow-up forum
- Publication of list of Best Practices School Model so teachers can go and observe what a good inclusion program looks like
- Additional conversations between DCPS, nonpublics and charters, families and some students (nothing about me without me)
- The entire conference was excellent
- Bring DCPS and OSSE to the table
- Teacher training - behavior management
- Development of satellite programs that can be implemented in the public school setting
- Summary; exchange of contacts; action plan agreed upon by the main stakeholders (DCPS, OSSE, public, charter and private schools and parents)
- Follow up! And a plan for all stakeholders to follow
- Quickly following up with DCPS & OSSE
- Meeting on the community level
- Move quickly to help this plan come to life!!

Next Steps Should Include *(cont'd)*

- What a satellite program of the Monroe School would look like in the community
- Work groups including representatives from all categories of stakeholders
- Early intervention, accountability from all teachers, administrators, stakeholders, parents
- Continue the talk to develop an action plan
- More collaboration
- More forums and actions
- More collaborations between teachers, parents, school leaders, stakeholders, and community agencies
- Request more training for parents and staff
- More collaboration
- An action plan
- Working groups
- Creating "task forces" to move forward on best practices/collaborations/education, etc
- Creating a shared-definition of what LRE means in DC
- Follow up on behalf of DCASE
- Continue forum, work-groups

Comments

- Brainstorms would have been MUCH more productive if facilitators had been more expert in subject matter
- Big room wasn't best for all to hear/see panelists - 2 responses
- Shall we do a community forum with special education groups from nonpublic/private, charter and public. Many of us wouldn't mind meeting up to do things further (regroup, hash out immediate knowledge and next steps compiled)
- The parent was the best in helping me understand
- Good forum. Sorry I joined in at noon
- Forum was late starting. Follow-up can focus on chronic problems and issues at our respective schools
- I'm a counseling intern preparing to do my thesis on inclusion - thanks for all the good information
- I think attitudes are contagious and Dr. Nyankori set the standard that nonpublic schools are segregating special education students and that sounds very negative. I hope we get more positive leaders to support what is best for students and not just sending them to public school to save money for DCPS

Comments *(cont'd)*

- Meeting rooms should be designed for talking together, not lecture situation. A "discussion group" doesn't mean each person making a statement of their views. Comments from each person on one question took longer than the full time allotted for discussion
- Forum started late but was well-paced and well adjusted
- Worthwhile!
- Thank you for a very productive & thought-provoking day!
- Also, I think it would be useful to reach out to the teacher's unions
- No DCPS representative in groups
- PLEASE help build connections and partnership and to define LRE
- Thank you!
- Education in ALL areas of "Life" is a necessary tool
- Follow on what was said!
- Red Group was lacking facilitator. Would do better to help focus, expand discussion, definitely not very dynamic. Kind of missed big piece: different "camps" and big picture issues as a context
- Having Dr. Nyankori present was wonderful
- This kind of forum should continue

APPENDIX C

Invited Panelists - Bios

Dr. Richard Nyankori

Dr. Richard Nyankori is the Deputy Chancellor for Special Education for the District of Columbia Public Schools. Under his leadership, the Office of Special Education is focused on reforming special education in the district and ensuring special education students can receive the supports they need to succeed in their neighborhood schools alongside their peers.

Prior to leading the Office of Special Education, Dr. Nyankori was Special Assistant to the Chancellor. He advised her on instructional and special education policy and led the Chancellor's Critical Response Team. Before joining DCPS, Dr. Nyankori was the Director of Training and Certification for The New Teacher Project (TNTP). In all, Dr. Nyankori led the development of more than 20 curriculum titles and training programs for TNTP. His materials have been used by teachers across the nation.

Dr. Nyankori has held the positions of teacher and school administrator. He holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from Emory University, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from McDaniel College, and a PhD in education policy, planning, and administration from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Jan Wintrol

Jan Wintrol, M.A., Spec. Ed., has served as Director of Ivymount School since 1997 and was a program coordinator at Ivymount School from 1983-1990. From 1990 to 1997, Ms. Wintrol was Director of the National Child Research Center (NCRC). Prior to 1993, she worked in Montgomery County Public Schools and Prince George's County Public Schools as a classroom teacher, special education teacher specialist, and special education in-service training specialist. Ms. Wintrol is past president of MANSEF (Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities) and is a current board member of the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes (JFGH). Ms. Wintrol is the 2009 JFGH's Robert Cohen Award recipient.

Invited Panelists - Bios *(cont'd)*

Vincent C. Gray

Vincent C. Gray has built a solid reputation as a champion for children and their families in the District of Columbia. His career in social services spans over 30 years, beginning with his service as Executive Director of the D.C. Association for Retarded Citizens, where he successfully advocated for innovative public policy initiatives on behalf of people with mental retardation.

In 1991 Mr. Gray was Director of the Department of Human Services, where he oversaw the functions of a 7,000 person department and directed activities related to Public Health, Social Services, Mental Health Services and Health Care Finance. Mr. Gray shepherded the implementation of several initiatives to address the developmental needs of children, and served longer than any other Director since the department became DHS in 1980.

In December 1994, he was selected as the first Executive Director of Covenant House Washington, an international, faith-based organization dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk youth. During his decade of service, Mr. Gray guided Covenant House Washington into one of the most effective agencies of its kind in the city and led successful campaigns to purchase and renovate a crisis center for homeless youth, a multi-purpose center, and to build a new community service center in the far southeast community of the District of Columbia.

In November 2004, Mr. Gray was elected to the Council of the District of Columbia representing Ward 7; in 2006, he was elected to the office of Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia. Since becoming Chairman, Mr. Gray has led efforts to improve the Council's operations and transparency and presided over the Council's deliberations on public education reform. He also spearheaded the Pre-K Expansion and Enhancement Act, which establishes a voluntary, high-quality pre-school program that will provide 2,000 new classroom slots for 3 and 4 year olds over the next six years.

Mr. Gray is a native Washingtonian and a proud graduate of the District of Columbia public school system. He attended undergraduate and graduate school at George Washington University.

Tameria Lewis

Tameria Lewis has spent her career in public service, serving in various capacities throughout the District of Columbia government. Ms. Lewis currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education in the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

Invited Panelists - Bios *(cont'd)*

Molly Whalen

Molly Whalen has been a training and development consultant with the dynamic company Leadership Outfitters since 2001. She has over 20 years of association and community development experience, specializing in strategic planning, marketing, leadership training, chapter and membership advancement, volunteer management, and non-profit management. She has worked with a variety of scientific and medical associations and non-profit organizations and has designed and presented hundreds of dynamic and interactive workshops and seminars. Ms. Whalen has written three resource handbooks for organizations and developed numerous interactive leadership and management programs.

She is a graduate of the University of Virginia, and a member of the American Society of Association Executives. An active volunteer, she has served as a volunteer and board member for several organizations, including the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Alexandria Volunteer Bureau, Stop Child Abuse Now, Into Safe Arms of Northern Virginia, Bridges Public Charter School, Ivymount School PTA, and the Chi Omega Women's Fraternity, where she served as Vice-Chair of their national Laurie Leadership Institute. She is currently serving as Chair of the State Advisory Panel for Special Education in the District of Columbia, to which she was appointed by Mayor Adrian Fenty in 2007.

Ms. Whalen is the mother of two children on the autism spectrum and has a passion for improving the environment of special education for all stakeholders. Since the diagnosis of her children she has matched her leadership and development skills to the challenge of creating a positive experience for parents of children with special needs within the DC educational community. She and her husband, a 27-year veteran police detective with the MPD, are life-long Washington DC residents and are committed to the DC public school system.

Julie Camerata

Julie Camerata is the Executive Director of the DC Special Education Co-operative. This non-profit organization was formed by local charter schools that needed support for their special education programs. Julie is a special education teacher by training. She received her Master's Degree in Transition Special Education from the George Washington University, and has worked in the District's nonpublic, public, and charter schools. For the Co-operative, Ms. Camerata provides and organizes professional development sessions, offers technical assistance, and acts as an advocate for charter schools. She also works part-time as a school Special Education Coordinator, providing direct service, teacher training, and program administration. Julie is a graduate of Oberlin College and the mother of a vibrant five year old.

Invited Panelists - Bios *(cont'd)*

Ruth T. Logan

Ruth T. Logan has worked with learning-disabled students for over seventeen years while serving as a teacher, high school principal, manager, program director and recent entrepreneur. She has consistently served in leadership positions influencing the educational programs of the District of Columbia and Maryland public school systems.

In 1992, Ms. Logan became a corps member of Teach for America, beginning her teaching experience in Northridge, California. She worked as a science teacher for students with learning disabilities and emotional disabilities at the Lodge School in Gaithersburg, MD, and later served as a manager, program director, and principal of a private high school in the District of Columbia that serves students with emotional and learning disabilities. From 2000 to 2003, Ms. Logan was Education Coordinator at the National Center for Children and Families, a community based organization serving children and families for over 90 years. Later, she was Community School Director at JC Nalle Elementary School in DC.

Ms. Logan has worked for Teach for America addressing budget-planning issues within educational environments, and has taught in the California, New York, and Baltimore Public School Systems. Filled with the drive, ambition, and desire to help students with learning disabilities receive their high school diploma and attend college, Ms. Logan founded and opened The Monroe School in Northeast DC in September, 2006. The following year, she founded The Maya Foundation Inc, (Metropolitan Alliance for Youth Advancement), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, to assist students with academic scholarships to attend the Monroe School and to provide financial assistance to those students desiring to attend college.

Ms. Logan is a native of Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa and a naturalized citizen of the United States. She holds a B.S. in Biology from St. Augustine's College in North Carolina, and a Master of Science in Pharmacology from the University of Maryland (Baltimore).