

"Federation Corner" column
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Two education issues

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Proposed move for Carl Sandburg Learning Center

Superintendent Josh Starr has released a memorandum dated October 14, 2011 in which he discusses the possible collocation of the Carl Sandburg Learning Center and Maryvale Elementary School. In his memo, Starr supports the collocation and recommends the feasibility study be added to the MCPS Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2013.

According to the memo, "...the superintendent of schools directed MCPS staff to convene a multistakeholder committee to review the possibility of collocating the Carl Sandburg Learning Center on the Maryvale Elementary School campus. Maryvale Elementary School was identified for the following reasons: an upcoming modernization is scheduled for the school, the school is centrally located in the Rockville Cluster, and the site is large enough to accommodate the programs that exist at Maryvale Elementary School and the Carl Sandburg Learning Center."

The memo also cites a "Roundtable Advisory Committee" but doesn't list the members of the committee, or when they met. It does outline concerns raised by the committee, and illustrate several possible building configurations.

Here is Starr's recommendation, from the memo: "I recommend that the Board of Education adopts the collocation of Carl Sandburg Learning Center with Maryvale Elementary School, beginning in August 2018. Although the modernization for Maryvale Elementary School is scheduled for completion in January 2018, I believe that relocating Carl Sandburg Learning Center midyear would create too much disruption for the staff and students. Waiting until the beginning of the following school year will ensure a smooth transition for students and staff from Carl Sandburg Learning Center and minimize the impact for students with multiple disabilities. To move forward with the planning for the collocation, a recommendation will be made in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013–2018 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for FY 2013 facility planning funds to conduct a feasibility study for the project. The purpose of the feasibility study is to determine the scope, cost, and constructability for the collocation of the two schools. Staff and parents from both schools will participate in the feasibility study."

It is unclear if the issue of "co-location" of Maryvale ES and Carl Sandburg Learning Center is a foregone conclusion, or whether the Board of Education will carefully weigh the pros and cons of eliminating a valuable placement along the continuum of special education placements and services. Over the last ten years, the population served by the Carl Sandburg Learning Center has changed, and the atmosphere and programming at Sandburg evolved to meet those needs. As the population of children with autism continues to grow, will MCPS regret losing a stand-alone special education facility for those children who need that setting? Lastly: what does MCPS plan for the empty Sandburg facility if the children are moved? Does the Board of Education have plans for that space that they haven't disclosed?

Our thanks to Lyda Astrove, an attorney and advocate for Special Education, for this information.

Student athletes and concussion

We are in the middle of football and sports seasons and so it is worth noting the tremendous increase in our knowledge of concussions, especially their deleterious effect on teenage brains. We now know that

these effects can last a lifetime. Last week the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Chair, held a session on “Concussions and the Marketing of Sports Equipment.”

Providing testimony were Alexis Bell, a senior at University of New Mexico, who had been a star soccer player; Steven Threet, a student from Arizona State University; Dr. Jeffrey Kutcher, director of Michigan Neurosport, University of Michigan and Chair of the Sports Neurology Section of the American Academy of Neurology; Dr. Ann McKee, Professor of Neurology and Pathology at Boston University; and Mike Oliver, Executive Director of the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment.

According to Dr. Kutcher, “There is great uncertainty, and with it significant concern, regarding the notion of possible long-term effects from concussion, especially on the pediatric population, which may be at even greater risk given the ongoing development of the pediatric brain.”

Regarding the role of helmets, Dr. Kutcher stated, “What helmets do not do well is significantly slow down the contents of the skull when the head is struck or moves suddenly. Since concussions occur not as a result of the forces experienced by the skull, but by those experienced by the brain, it is extremely unlikely that any helmet can be designed that will prevent concussions to the same significant degree that they have been shown to prevent skull fractures.”

Here is part of Mr. Threet’s testimony: “Statistics recently revealed that about 40% of athletes who have sustained a concussion return to play too early and that 50% of concussions go unnoticed. This makes me believe that the only focus should be to create an open dialogue between athletes, coaches, doctors, and families that addresses the seriousness of brain injuries in athletics and the need for a full recovery before returning to play. I know it is possible to decrease those statistics. I also know progress on this issue is already being made and many states have already passed legislation dealing with concussion protocols.”

If your child plays a sport, be informed. Make sure the school and sports staff know the signs of concussion; have the equipment necessary; and know what to do on the field. Be aware that some helmet or other sports equipment manufacturers’ claims that their products can reduce or prevent concussions are not true. Many hospitals and schools in our area offer education workshops to parents and children on concussions.

Video of the Senate Committee hearing, and text of the testimony delivered at the hearing, can be accessed online at the following URL:

http://commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=Hearings&ContentRecord_id=3c1ac485-cac3-4d53-9b6a-3f781d32dc49&ContentType_id=14f995b9-dfa5-407a-9d35-56cc7152a7ed&Group_id=b06c39af-e033-4cba-9221-de668ca1978a&MonthDisplay=10&YearDisplay=2011

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net