

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF SOUTH ORANGE AND MAPLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY
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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Board of Education Members

FM: Peter P. Horoschak

DT: 6 February 2006

RE: Budget Analysis #8 – CHS Alternative High School Program

This analysis, along with other analyses produced in response to the Board's request for information, build on similar budget analyses produced in prior years. All analyses may be found on the district's website: <http://www.somsd.k12.nj.us/finance/AllYearsRpts.htm>.

A budget analysis of the CHS Alternative Program has been completed in order to explore the possibility of any budget savings related to this program.

Identification of Need

As stated in a recent report provided to the Board of Education by Dr. Barker:

The Alternative Program at Montrose is designed for students who are at risk of dropping out of high school because of their lack of success in a traditional high school setting such as Columbia High School. The reasons for their lack of success include academic, attendance, and behavior problems. Many of these behaviors stem from personal issues which impact on the students' educational progress. While attending a traditional program at Columbia, these students are often frustrated and discouraged which leads them to engage in disruptive and unproductive behaviors at school. Despite the investment of considerable time and energy by teachers and administrators, the students are not able to earn the credits required for graduation while on the Columbia campus. The Alternative Program is not punitive nor is it a program for students with severe behavioral problems. It is flexible and individualized so that students have a realistic chance to attain their high school diploma in a reasonable amount of time. Enrollment in the program is currently capped at 50 students in order to preserve the personal attention that is crucial to the program's success. There is a waiting list for admission to the Montrose campus and each year this list grows. Many students who are not successful at CHS view the Alternative Program as a last chance and arrive hopeful of a new beginning.

Resources Provided by the District

Total staffing costs for the Alternative Program based on average salary costs plus benefits is \$619,940. Presently there are 4.66 FTEs dedicated to instruction at the Montrose site (1.0 science, 1.0 social studies, 1.0 math, 1.0 English, 0.4 physical education, 0.2 guidance counselor and .06 art). In addition, there is a .6 administrator, a 1.0 instructional aide, a 1.0 secretary, and a 1.0 custodian. Presently this staff is serving 43 students enrolled in the program. A Student Assistance Counselor visits the Montrose campus regularly to advise students and to conduct group discussions of pertinent issues.

As state graduation requirements are phased into high schools across New Jersey, the Alternative Program will be faced with a shortage of course offerings necessary for students to complete graduation requirements (e.g. world languages, practical arts). CHS resources will need to be allocated to allow students at Montrose to meet all graduation requirements.

As there are no special education or ESL services provided at Montrose, the Alternative Program is not an option for these students. Preparation for the High School Proficiency Assessment is integrated into the regular curriculum and the Special Review Assessment (SRA) is provided in math and language arts for those students who do not pass the HSPA.

Alternatives for Scheduling Columbia High School (Montrose Campus) Students

Alternative #1:

Close the Clark St. facility (Montrose), which presently uses 6 classrooms: 2 for administration (one supervisor's office and one secretarial office) and 4 for classroom instruction (Science, Social Studies, Math, and English) for the 43 students (maximum of 50) enrolled in the program. It is possible, but problematic, that all 43 students might be absorbed into Columbia's current course offerings without requiring additions to the teaching staff. It might not be necessary to utilize the current Montrose teachers and instructional aide. Students can be scheduled into an eight or nine period day master schedule.

Savings: A budget savings of \$186,500 could be realized with the salary savings of a 1.0 secretary (average salary with benefits \$60,000), a .6 administrator (average salary with benefits \$84,000), and a custodian (\$42,500). Current teachers and the instructional aide may or may not be utilized in the CHS program. If they are not needed this would afford an additional savings of up to \$433,440. In the long-term, Montrose School could be sold or rented, thus bringing additional revenue to the district. It must be noted that the presence of these students in Columbia High School may put a strain on the counselors and the deans since they may need to devote more time to these students.

Alternative #2:

The Alternative Program can be moved to an area within Columbia, such as a portion of the former auto shop, which is now being renovated as the "Loft." If this is not possible, scheduled room availability would support four classrooms that could be used within the main building for the program. Rooms may or may not be contiguous. The program could be run under an 8 or 9 period day master schedule. Students would be on campus for athletics and electives if desired.

Savings: The savings of this alternative would be minimal because all of the instructional staff would be required to remain with the program, and possibly the administrator and secretary as well. If the administrator and secretary were eliminated, attendance, supervision of the program, etc. would have to be handled by the present CHS administration and by Data Processing personnel.

Alternative #3:

The Alternative Program could become a twilight school (late afternoon program). This program would be at CHS but would take place after the regularly scheduled CHS day.

Savings: There would be no savings of staff realized under this alternative because the same staff would be needed. However, once again, in the long-term, Montrose School could be sold or rented, thus bringing additional revenue to the district. A negative impact of this plan would be that these students would not be in school during the regularly scheduled school day.

Concluding Summary

A total savings of \$619,940 can be realized by cutting the staff of the Alternative Program at Montrose and absorbing these students into the regular program at CHS. However, to date, the investment of resources required to support the Alternative Program is amply justified by the success of this program in helping students reach their goal of earning a high school diploma. If the program were eliminated and these students were moved into the mainstream at Columbia High School, this would put a drain on the resources at CHS, namely the extra administrative time needed for guidance, discipline, academic support, and security. Additional seat-time may be required for these students to complete their graduation requirements, because these students will no longer be in an environment where they can accelerate their course work. At \$10,000 per student, a minimal estimate might be 25 percent of the students (10) would need an extra year of seat time, which would cost \$100,000. There may also be additional costs related to more students being sent out of District to an alternative program at cost of \$33,600 per student.

Based on this analysis, there is no recommendation being made to eliminate the Alternative Program. However, if the district's financial situation requires further cuts a savings of \$619,940 could be realized. Conversely, additional costs may result because these students may remain in CHS for more than four years in order to graduate and they may put a strain on support staff and the school environment. These factors may, in the long-term, significantly reduce the full amount of this cut.

JM/PPH/sas