



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY | CASE 25-0002-I

Findings Regarding the Howard County Public Schools' Alleged Staffing and Safety Concerns at Cedar Lane School, a Public Separate Day School for Students with Disabilities.

The Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) initiated an investigation in January 2025, in response to complaints alleging staffing and safety concerns at Cedar Lane School, a public separate day school operated by the Howard County Public Schools System (HCPSS). A separate day school is a type of educational setting designed for students with disabilities, where the school building is physically separate from a regular school. These schools often provide specialized instruction and support tailored to the unique needs of their students. The complaint alleged that persistent staffing shortages, particularly the absence of paraprofessionals and unfilled certified teaching positions, had resulted in inadequate student supervision, unsafe learning conditions, and unequal access to educational resources for students with significant physical and cognitive disabilities.

The investigation confirmed that at least two classrooms operated for an extended period without a certified special education teacher assigned directly to the class. While paraeducators in these classrooms received support from nearby certified staff, this staffing model does not fully conform to the instructional standards outlined in the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.09.10.17(E)(2), which prescribes certified teacher-to-student ratios for special education settings. A paraeducator, also known as a paraprofessional, is an educational staff member who provides support to teachers and students in a classroom setting. This staffing approach reflects broader systemic challenges, including the nationwide shortage of certified special educators, particularly in high-needs environments such as Cedar Lane School (Cedar Lane).

Regarding safety, the investigation found that Cedar Lane has implemented structured crisis response procedures, including the deployment of a Behavioral Response Team (BRT) and the use of modified lockdowns to manage student outbursts. Staff reported that while these measures have effectively prevented escalation, the frequency of incidents and the limited availability of Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) contribute to ongoing disruptions and stress among staff and students. Additional concerns were noted regarding the physical safety of vulnerable students due to shared proximity with peers exhibiting aggressive behaviors, as well as deficiencies in emergency communication equipment and access control systems.

Despite these challenges, staff demonstrated a strong understanding of behavioral protocols and a commitment to maintaining a safe and supportive environment. The findings underscore the need for systemic solutions to address staffing, safety, and structural barriers affecting the school's ability to serve its complex student population effectively.

OIGE has concluded its investigation.

Unless otherwise noted, OIGE applies the preponderance of the evidence standard in determining whether local school agency personnel have committed misconduct.