

MCCPTA Curriculum Committee Report *Please provide feedback*

The MCCPTA Curriculum Committee has three functions:

1. To initiate discussion of curriculum issues in the schools, bring these to the MCCPTA Delegates Assembly to consider possible action, and advocate to MCPS on curriculum issues that have been agreed on by the MCCPTA delegates.
2. To represent MCCPTA and all parents at four yearly MCPS Curriculum Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings. Twelve CAC subcommittees, each for a different subject area, meet simultaneously, as mandated by School Board policy, to review and provide feedback on curriculum as it is developed or revised.
3. To represent MCCPTA and all parents at four yearly MCPS Curriculum Assemblies, as mandated by School Board policy that explain and provide feedback on curriculum issues that are not limited to a single subject area.

The following is a report on the first of the four CAC meetings, listed alphabetically by subject. Please send this report out on your school listservs. Parents who read this should send their questions and comments to the MCCPTA Curriculum Committee co-chairs, Ted Willard and Sharon Schulman, at twillard@aaas.org and sharon29@comcast.net.

Art, Theater, and Dance: Maryland has a new requirement to develop curriculum by grade level. CAC members are reviewing individual *lesson plans* as they are written from grade 1 up. Members were given a form with specific criteria for evaluating the detailed plans. Comments will be incorporated in the final plans. Grade 3 is currently being reviewed.

Elementary Reading/Language Arts: Because of the high *correlation between vocabulary acquisition and reading ability*, there is a critical need to better integrate vocabulary acquisition into classroom activities. We reviewed a seven-page teacher's guide to vocabulary building and provided feedback to MCPS, although there wasn't enough time to provide all the feedback we might have wanted. MCPS develops its own curriculum - whole language ("balanced literacy") based on specific books, handouts, and teacher-directed instruction. The Curriculum Guide was mentioned, but not shown. A 5-page vocabulary document that was distributed was a broad summary, not detailed or comprehensive. A supplementary vocabulary program is "available for school purchase" by individual schools.

ESOL: We reviewed the English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessments for kindergarten ESOL students and discussed the *complex scoring for the assessments*. There are three proficiency levels that the students can be assessed at - beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Within each proficiency level, the assessment allows the student to be scored at 4 different levels. For a class assessment to gauge proficiency there was a consensus that this type of scoring seems overly complicated. We also gave feedback on the assessments that were presented for the different units in the curriculum. Specific feedback on trying to separate the vocabulary assessments from the grammar assessments by fine tuning the questions to be sure that the correct metric was assessed.

Foreign Language: We first reviewed the foreign language program in Montgomery County. *Eleven different languages* are taught in MCPS, including Spanish for Spanish Speakers. Seven

ES have total *immersion programs* (only PE and art are taught in English), but there is a problem with discontinuity with MS because there is no MS immersion program. Ten foreign languages are taught in MS, but only Spanish is spread everywhere. *National standards* are used for foreign languages evaluations. Students are assessed on written and oral skills.

The committee reviewed the MCPS program for *Arabic*, which has been taught for one year in one high school and starts this year in another one. The new teacher will be allowed to test and improve the curriculum. Most students now studying Arabic have links with Arabic culture and therefore some prior knowledge. The two main issues with teaching Arabic are which form of Arabic to teach and how to teach it without teaching Islam, since Arabic has spread all over the world through the Koran. It is impossible to avoid the religious connections of Arabic language and culture, but teachers must teach from a cultural, not religious, point of view. They teach "literary Arabic," the language form used in the Koran and traditional literature. The committee reviewed the blueprint for Arabic 1, which was satisfactory (as far as we could judge!). It has to be tested one more year by the two teachers.

Health: This year we will review the curriculum for *10th grade* health. We reviewed the two units on *Mental Health* and on *Tobacco, Alcohol, & Drugs*. We mostly agreed with the curriculum outline, but suggested that additional resources for students on where and how to reach out for help when needed should be included. We discussed whether "destructive behaviors" was a good topic title, given the negative connotations, but didn't have viable alternatives. We discussed adding to the TAD unit that sharing prescription drugs is a bad idea.

Math: *Investigations into Mathematics* and its newly-revised Instructional Guide were discussed. Several of the points that the CAC discussed last year (starting with a less challenging and more familiar part of the curriculum, the order of the material, etc.) were incorporated into the final updated IM county curriculum. It now starts with the statistics unit and harder concepts are now mixed in at different times during the course. Teachers and students find these changes make the course much easier. The guide includes references to how to teach this to GT/LD students. This guide, like all class guides, should be in the Media Center of each school that teaches the given course. Some of the resources listed in the guide are accessible online from the MCPS Math web site under IM.

MCPS is developing a new, in-depth *Math Curriculum Brochure* to explain K-12 math and how each child's progress and assessments relate to what class they are in; including goals, class requirements, and MSA score requirements for specific courses. It will also explain the concepts in each MCPS math course. This new document is being reviewed and will be available in January. This will be the first MCS document on the complete math curriculum.

The discussion focused on a general parent feeling that there's a *problem* with the *overall math curriculum*. Parents feel that students are not attaining math fluency and are advanced to the next level before they truly grasp previous levels. There were complaints about (real or perceived) insufficient textbooks, that students just get handouts with no context. There were complaints that the curriculum doesn't stress rote learning enough and teaches math concepts out of order. Several parents mentioned that an entire tutoring industry has sprung up to fill the gaps of the MCPS math curriculum. MCPS staff said that problems are with "school specific" implementation and not an overall MCPS curriculum problem. Some principals, however, have said that MCPS has decided this is the best way to teach math. Here is a link to the MCPS website talking, specifically, about the goal to get 45% of 5th grade students in math at least one

grade level ahead by 2010:

<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/regulatoryaccountability/> (or, the letter specifically at <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/regulatoryaccountability/pdf/reports/MathA2007.pdf>).

Music: Curriculum revision is complete for *elementary general* and *instrumental* music courses. Training was provided for elementary instrumental and 110 elementary general music teachers for grades 1-3. The general music teachers were trained in standards-based assessments. The elementary instrumental curriculum instructional guide for levels 1 & 2 and the high school curriculum guide for music technology should be released next summer. The middle school general music curriculum guide is scheduled to be released in '09. This is especially important since *general music is being cut in some middle schools* (replaced by an integrated arts course, which is thought to be more rigorous). *Choral* programs are also being cut at some middle schools. A country-wide middle school standards-based assessment for instrumental music should be released in '08-'09. Currently, secondary music course offerings include band, orchestra, chorus, guitar, piano, and music technology. Standards-based instruction and use of county-wide, standards-based assessments, assessment scoring rubrics, and digital assessment tools were discussed. This school year is the first to implement country-wide standards-based lesson plans and assessments. Copies of the following were shared: 1) blueprint drafts for the Music Connections Unit of the grade 8 general music curriculum and the Music and Its Technology unit of the Careers in Music Technology course; 2) published instructional guides for Instrumental Music Level I and Level II.

Physical Education: We reviewed the *grade 3* identified *assessments*, broken into the 4 quarters, and discussed each of the skills students need to learn and how these are taught. We looked at 2 books that have been relied on for setting out the "plan." The entire program is based on the "voluntary" state curriculum. We discussed the FITT principle that third graders need to learn and how they encourage regular physical activity. We went over the grading system and how the teacher determines if a student has demonstrated proficiency, which hinges on whether a student can do a task automatically or needs prompting (verbal or physical). We touched on the fact that *PE is only one day a week* for elementary students, not enough to ensure good health.

Science: The group addressed two topics: 1) Grade 5 Astronomy Unit-At-A-Glance; 2) Draft Guidelines for Advanced Instruction in Middle School Courses. Elementary science is undergoing rapid changes, with most of the effort last year focused on revamping the 4th grade curriculum in anticipation of standardized testing (*MSA*) in 5th grade this year. Fourth grade was completed last year and the effort this year is on 5th grade science. However, teacher feedback from last year indicated that the pace of change was too rapid and confusing, so MCPS decided to make this year a *transitional year for 5th grade* science. Instead of providing detailed instructional guides to the teachers, *Unit-at-a-Glance* guides are being developed, with the expectation that feedback and experience with these guides will prepare teachers for final instructional guides next year. Unit-at-a-Glance guides are bridges to support teachers' instruction on what will be included in the final instructional guides. This year, science in 5th grade will be a mix of the old and new science curriculum. The science subcommittee reviewed one of the new Unit-at-a-Glance guides for Astronomy and provided feedback, including issues that are vital to science instruction and areas that might be confusing or need of additional materials/insights. The consensus was that these guides are well developed and the idea to use

this year as a transition year in 5th grade science sound. The committee also briefly discussed a prototype for advanced instruction in middle school. Each committee member was charged with reviewing this draft and submitting comments to MCPS.

Secondary English: MCPS is developing explicit, specific *Advanced Guidelines* (AG) for MS and HS English to clarify challenges for *able learners*. The new guidelines are based on the current MCPS English curriculum and suggest using a single, uniform unit pre-assessment and, based on response to it, use of extensions and a different post-assessment for GT learners or those who wish to participate in advanced instruction. Some advanced exercises and extensions are suggested in the guidelines, but it seems that implementation is based on teachers' willingness and ability to offer differentiation in a classroom and whether the local school principal appreciates its importance and supports and oversees its implementation. This year we will review grades 8, 11 and 12. We began with a prototype unit 1 advanced guideline for grade 8. We asked for more time to review the handout. On further review, in my opinion the AG in English are already in the current 2007 printed MCPS curriculum as "extensions," so they are not truly new or different from what was offered previously. In addition, not all AG have all 3 categories of advanced work specified - process, product, and content differentiation. New formative assessments will be written for grades 6, 7, and 8 English midterms to be used in all school beginning this year.

Social Studies: No report available at this time.

Special Education: Special Education is organized under the MCPS Department of Special Education and Student Services and no longer has a separate section in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (which runs the CAC meetings), but MCPS will continue to send representatives to hear stakeholders views and opinions at the CAC special education subcommittee. *Special Ed should be represented in each of the other 11 subcommittees.* The discussion tonight included such issues as flexibility with grading, with accommodations as they affect county and state final tests; the speed of the curriculum including review and repeat times as it affects students with learning challenges and an IEP; and other goals regarding the curriculum products and assessments of their results.