

**Responses to the April 24, 2008
MCCPTA Gifted Child Committee Meeting
Walter Johnson High School**

**Questions
About Grouping Practices and Differentiation**

- My child's coming from an elementary school with a low percentage of advanced learners; and the middle school is similar. Will she get the same degree of difficulty and level of interaction with intellectual peers as she would at a "high-achieving" middle school?

The expectation is that all schools offer the same rigorous curriculum and level of challenge. Students who are achieving at high levels or who show potential or motivation should have access to accelerated and enriched instruction and should have dedicated time to interact with their academic peers, as well as time to interact with all students. We know that all students need to be challenged, and that includes our advanced learners.

Math Labs – Elementary

- Is it up to individual schools in terms of how they execute this program/these ideas?
- Can this work effectively with a class of 26 kids/1 teacher?
- Do you receive any push back by teachers on the need to develop multiple lessons plans for each class?

Effective differentiation need not require multiple lesson plans for each class. Teachers can differentiate lessons in a variety of ways. They can select different resource materials, use learning centers and contracts, or vary the amount of complexity or abstractness of the content. Teachers can use small group instruction along with strategies like tiering, cubing, adjusting prompts, graphic organizers, problems, and procedures to differentiate the learning process. Teachers can adjust student products to meet different readiness levels, learning styles, and interests. Teachers can also provide different levels of structure and independence to differentiate the learning environment.

- Math Labs How do you address the needs of the student who has mastered counting money? What does that student do during the whole group lesson?

If a student is working far above grade level, that child's needs would be accommodated. For instance, in many schools a student will take math with students in the next grade level. In the upper elementary grades, students sometimes travel to the middle school for the appropriate math instruction.

- Math Video Lab: Can this 3 grouping approach of differentiation occur only in small classroom like pictured?
- Ms. Van's 1st Grade Math Video: Watching the 1st grade teacher differentiate was terrific to see, but she had no more than 14 students in her class. My first grader has

27 kids in his class. Even for a highly skilled teacher, that is much more difficult than what we saw in the video. Please discuss this discrepancy and explain what is being done to support teachers with bigger classes to do effective differentiation.

Math Lab Response: There are six math lab classrooms in MCPS and only two are reduced class size. So, yes this type of differentiation can occur in larger classrooms. The approximate class size for each math lab is below.

- Kindergarten- 24 students
- Grade 1- 17 students
- Grade 2- 18 students
- Grade 2-26 students
- Grade 4- 31 students
- Math 6- 33 students

It is up to the individual teacher to select a structure to differentiate his/her math instruction. Ms. Van uses a structure that enables her to target the needs of her students through mini and whole group focus lessons. Additional structures can be used to differentiate math instruction. Examples of various structures can be viewed on the math lab website. To view log onto the page below and click the “Additional models of math block structures for differentiation” link.

http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/development/resources/math_lab/index.shtm

- Reading Differentiation – Shared Inquiry
 - How would these discussions be implemented in a mixed-ability group class; i.e. no separate GT class? (Sherry)

Regardless of students’ reading levels, teachers can divide a class into manageable discussion groups.

Teachers can schedule each group’s discussion on a different day. Students who are not participating in that day’s discussion can work on an independent or small group task related to their reading instruction.

Some teachers structure a “fish-bowl” with an inner circle of students participating in Shared Inquiry discussion and an outer circle of students observing and recording key ideas discussed. The next day, students from the outer circle move into the inner circle to discuss a different question, while students who already participated in a discussion move to the outer circle to listen and record key ideas.

When Shared Inquiry discussion is used with short texts, teachers often read the stories aloud so all students may participate in the Shared Inquiry discussion.

- MS Expansion: Do students who choose the advanced curriculum learn in the same classroom as those who choose the regular curriculum?

It is a local school decision whether to have homogeneously or heterogeneously grouped classes for the advanced courses.

- Are all teachers in Montgomery County REQUIRED to give differentiated instruction in their classroom?

Teachers are required to meet the instructional needs of their students. To accomplish this, teachers can differentiate/adjust the setting, content, process and/or product in response to student readiness, interests, and/or learning profile. Differentiation can be accomplished by adjusting the setting in which the instruction occurs (i.e. homogeneous grouping or heterogeneous grouping); the content that is instructed; the process or delivery of instruction; and/or the product that students share to demonstrate understanding.

- There were about 850 kids applying to Eastern/Takoma Park this year and 200 slots available. Has there been thought given to taking some courses or expanding those programs to those who weren't admitted but are still "highly gifted" and or could also have done well in those programs?

Because the programs require an interdisciplinary approach, it is difficult to take one course and make it available at a different location. Five years ago, the programs were replicated at Clemente Middle School to allow for more students to have access to the entire program. Three choice based magnet programs were established and serve many students who were not able to attend application-based program. These programs took some of the concepts taught in the elective courses and made them available to a wider range of students. Additionally, each middle school is responsible to provide appropriate programming for students working above grade level. Over the next few years, the challenging elective courses developed at the MSMC will become available at more schools.

- How are the MSC accelerated courses being distributed to non-magnet schools?

The roll out of the advanced courses is following the same timeline as middle school reform. Next year all Phase I and Phase II schools will have access to the accelerated core curriculum courses. This includes summer professional development and on-going professional development next school year. In addition, DEIP and AEI will work to monitor the implementation of the new courses.

- List of schools and timing. How does it affect the (2) MCPS elementary schools that go to 6th grade – CCES and NCC?

All sixth grade teachers of science, and seventh grade teachers of world studies and English at Phase I and Phase II schools will receive the training. If CCES and NCC are not currently connected to a Phase I or Phase II middle school they will receive the training when their companion middle school receives the training. We will have to explore offering ICT6 at CCES and NCC as part of the linked elective pathways.

- Budget implications for upcoming year?

Nearly the entire initiative is budget pending. Professional development, technology, equipment, etc. all have a budget implications.

- What is the timeline for implementing the new accelerated curriculum in non-magnet middle schools?

See above - we are following the same timeline as middle school reform.

- How do I find out what accelerated classes/curriculum our home school will be offering next year/ in two years?

Contact Mr. Brian Betts at 301-517-5844.