

Curriculum/Education Committee Report December 2009

Chairs: Rebecca Smondrowski and Ted Willard

Notes from the November 4 MCCPTA Parent Forum on the MCPS Math Work Group

Overall, the math meeting was excellent. Sherwin Collette, Chief Technology Officer and head of the Work Group, led the meeting. He outlined where the group was and a general direction and timeline. He stressed that he wasn't saying where the group would be because he has no preconceived notions of the outcome. There were also members of the Work Group who helped answer questions and clarified the goals and talked about discussions which had taken place in the Group to date.

The Work Group is looking at the following categories: Written Curriculum, Implemented Curriculum, Assessed Curriculum, Teacher Preparation, and Acceleration. The areas are being researched so results aren't based simply on feelings and hearsay. The Work Group started with a huge binder of information and research.

1. Written Curriculum (covers pacing and sequencing, national standards, how students learn, what structures help them think mathematically, what materials are appropriate)
2. Implemented Curriculum (how to engage students in learning; pacing, teaching, and learning)
3. Assessed Curriculum (what do they tell us? What is it in relationship to the national standards?)
4. Teacher Preparation (effective practices instead of best practices)
5. Acceleration (pacing and sequencing; how do students learn? What about Algebra? When should we start it? Is it appropriate for all students?)

The timeline is to have preliminary recommendations by the end of the year. Once findings are brought together, they need to be looked at to see how they connect in order to make a recommendation. They will have to look across all the teams as many of the topics are interrelated.

What is the end goal? To be mathematically proficient and to think mathematically. Ultimately whatever is completed will be brought to the Board of Education for approval. Mr. Collette listened to the parents and teachers present and answered questions. Because he is not in the math section of MCPS, he has no vested interest and was very open to comments. Parents brought up issues such as the curriculum moving too fast, not being able to review tests easily, the uselessness of a scantron in reviewing the test, and "mile wide, inch deep" problem with the curriculum. Does everyone need higher math? They are looking at that but they aren't at that part of the process yet. National math standards are due out next year.

How are textbooks chosen? Some math programs seem to jump around in the book a lot. Some books don't enable parents to easily understand the concepts or methods being taught so it is difficult to help with homework. Mr. Collette said this is one of the areas to

be looked at but that current textbooks are chosen with teacher input. They are looking at the fact that the curriculum is broad but shallow. This seems to be a difference between our curriculum and that of other countries. The Work Group agrees that there needs to be meaningful curriculum (why we do what we do, and when). Content is very important; we need to look at state standards and excel beyond them. Mr. Collette expects the general public should see draft recommendations at the same time as the administrative offices.

Notes from the November 9 MCPS Curriculum Advisory Committee Meeting
Writing K-12 - An overall look at the writing program in MCPS. This was mostly informational, but it was general information. The process seems well thought out and comprehensive. The need for teacher involvement is extremely high, especially with differentiation. They said that timely feedback is essential and that's why teachers may only focus on one item to correct. (e.g. capitalization at the beginning of the sentence and punctuation will be corrected but not spelling or sentence structure) There were questions about how to make subjective standards more objective. MCPS has had success with groups within schools and across schools sharing the grading. Also, using examples of good writing to show teachers what to look for. MCPS agrees this is a very difficult project. Parents brought up concerns about the average student. There were no examples of average writing. Questions came up about below average students and students who have difficulty forming letters in kindergarten and first grade. There did not seem to be answers to these questions.

Foreign Language Work Group Recommendations: At the very end we were asked to review the recommendations from the Foreign Language Work Group. There were many points to be aware of and/or concerned about but we were not given a copy to keep.