MCCPTA Curriculum Committee Report

Please provide feedback to

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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 second of the four ***CAC*** meetings (held on November 26, 2007), 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: The group continued its review of new grade three *lesson plans*, being written to fulfill a new Maryland requirement that art curriculum be specific to each grade level. At the next meeting we will begin work on grade four plans. More parents are badly needed for this subcommittee.

ESOL: ESOL in MCPS has *3 levels*, with 3 the most advanced. There used to be 5 levels and students moved to new levels sooner. Now with 3 levels they tend to stay at one level for an entire school year. Students can stay in ESOL from 3-5 years if needed. In elementary school, students are pulled out from class for ESOL; in middle and high school they stay in ESOL classes and are mainstreamed when they master level 3. Once students are out of ESOL, they can have accommodations on the MSA. The English Language Learners team at each school tracks students' progress after they exit ESOL. We discussed how ESOL *assessment* questions are developed and modifications made to kindergarten assessments from our comments at the last meeting. We reviewed ESOL assessments for a poetry unit for middle school level 3. There was general agreement that the assessment would be a good tool to determine English proficiency, but the choice of poems may unfairly be a problem because of cultural differences independent of English abilities, such as a poem on the 4th of July. How students are taught to answer questions in preparation for MD State standardized tests was also discussed.

Foreign Language: MCPS language programs do not all follow the same outlines, as is common in other counties, but we are heading in that direction especially for upper levels. Making all languages conform may not work for some of the less commonly spoken languages. For example, Chinese may be too complex to be able to use all the same topics. The goal of language instruction in MCPS is functional communication. National *Standards* for Foreign Language include Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities; the last 3 are not used in assessments. There are now national standards for K-16. American Council

for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) should complete a survey of all language courses in a couple of years. They are looking at *demand* for languages.
A book has been identified for *Arabic*. How much MCPS looks at existing materials when designing courses varies. Textbooks are supplemental to the curriculum. It was suggested that a language program like Rosetta Stone be used to supplement the curriculum. This couldn't be tracked for grading purposes, but it may be useful because of the strong emphasis on auditory learning. Transliteration is not generally used in the Arabic lessons and there was some discussion of its value. There was a question of using root words to build vocabulary. This is probably a 3rd year lesson, which we aren't reviewing.

Math: This meeting focused on two topics - *curriculum sequencing from K-4*, starting with understanding numbers and counting up through multiplication and division facts, and development of a new course on *quantitative literacy*. Separate reports from three participants are included here.
Topic 1: We received assessments and instructional guides for K and 1 on counting and understanding numbers as symbols. Counting and representing numbers are the core concepts in K. Children use numbers as symbols, but really work on this in grade 1. The documents showed how to teach number concepts and strategies for adding and subtracting numbers. By the 3rd unit in grade 1, children get number problems without objects to represent the numbers. We received instructional guides on learning the concept of area through pictorial and other concrete objects in grades 3 and 4. This reinforces counting and begins multiplication. By grade 4, children learn 3-digit multiplication and the concept of factors and multiples, which teach and reinforce multiplication and division, and they start learning variables and numeric expressions.
Topic 2: We were told about a committee that is developing a new class to prepare high school students to be quantitatively literate in the 21st century. We received a research paper about what quantitative literacy (QL) is and should be, elements of QL (confidence with math, interpreting data, logical thinking, etc.) and QL expressions (citizenship, culture, education, professions, etc.). They want to ensure that students understand the elements so they can make sense of numbers and math in the expressions. We were asked what we think the critical parts of QL are, to review the research paper and the list of elements and expressions, and to tell which were most and least important and if the explanation of each item was complete enough. As of now, this course will not be required and its availability at individual schools will depend on student interest. If the committee finds, while working on the QL course, that certain math literacy issues should be taught differently in ES or MS, the math staff will revise that curriculum when the time comes for revising that part of the curriculum. We were also told that if a student learns a skill in MS, but cannot apply it by the time they leave school, the math curriculum staff cannot do much about it; they have put in the instructional items for learning those skills. We all liked the idea of this new course, but told them this needs to be given to all HS kids to ensure everyone can handle math in "real life."

Topic 1: Deliberate Sequencing in Early Elementary Math. We got sample worksheets of the progression from doing math using objects and pictures to using numerals (i.e. symbols). This transition is complete by grade 2. A parent commented that in her child's school students are expected to take grade 2 math in grade 1; but not all children had transitioned successfully to using numerals. MCPS does not expect all students be in grade 1 to take grade 2 math. But if 85% of MCPS expects 85% of students to take Algebra I in grade 8, they will have to skip a grade somewhere in K – 8 and many schools strive to make that jump in the earliest grades rather than later.

Topic 2: We discussed the concept of quantitative literacy to provide input to the committee preparing a new high school full-year course in the subject. We discussed chapter 1 of *MATHEMATICS and DEMOCRACY: The Case for Quantitative Literacy* (from The National Council on Education and the Disciplines; the whole book is at http://www.maa.org/ql/mathanddemocracy.html) and "*What mathematical processes and content that are rigorous and accessible should a high school graduate have to be quantitatively literate in the 21st century.* Several members said that most students on a college prep path would either not have the opportunity to take the course or would choose not to, thereby missing valuable skills training that could enable them to navigate important banking and credit management tasks. A couple of days after the meeting, *The Washington Post* and *Gazette* reported that Nancy Grasmick stated a goal that all Maryland students be provided with the practical skills necessary to keep them out of debt because debt, which can affect security clearances,, which defines the scope of quantitative literacy desired. Hhigh schools should require students who don't take the course to attend sessions on "Staying out of Debt: the First Five Years Following High School."

Topic 1: We discussed curriculum sequence in K and grade 1 math and why word problems are introduced at a pre-reading level. These are read by the teacher with pictures to help students understand how "5" means 5 items. Homework should emphasize that reading the problem aloud to a child is acceptable. There is concern that "Part-Part-Whole (Part unknown)" with a setup like "6 + __ = 8" is a difficult concept that is really beginning algebra and may be too much to expect in grader 1. The distributed resource for this type of problem indicates "No commonly used strategy corresponding to the action in the problem." If done at the correct age, this is a challenging math curriculum, but it should probably not be accelerated. In grade 1, students should be given the grade 1 questions with grade 2 as challenge, but if this is given to accelerated K students, the curriculum would not work because the questions are geared for the higher grades. The materials for grades 4 and 5 are appropriate; but the sequencing (putting factor "rainbows" ahead of division, for example) makes learning frustrating for students. Difficult factoring and GCF and LCM topics should not be unit 1. Starting with something that is not so new and difficult would make grade 4 and 5 math less intimidating.
Topic 2: We discussed a replacement for "consumer math." We read "The Case for Quantitative Literacy" and commented on what we think the important topics to discuss are. A class like this should be required, not an elective. The concepts of compound interest, interpreting data, etc. are critical for ALL high school students in the data- and credit-driven world students will face.

Music: We discussed MCPS implementation of *standards-based assessments*. MCPS is rapidly moving to a uniform curriculum with a *common method series* for instrumental music ("Essential Elements") and computer-assisted scoring of standards-based assessments. A common method series ("Spotlight on Music") is also being adapted for general music. The combination should allow instruction at the same rate at all MCPS schools and reduce scoring subjectivity. Teachers were recently introduced to a new scoring rubric for assessments that aligns with other disciplines, more objective performance scoring, and immediate feedback during formative assessments (when used with computer-assisted scoring). Year-one instrumental music students are given written and performance assessments; year-two students are only given performance assessments since knowledge of music concepts can be determined through performance at this stage. Two negative aspects of the new assessments are that teachers believe some students fear solo singing for general music assessments (so standards should be set low) and the new assessment emphasis cuts into teaching time.

Science: The group listened to a presentation by Dr. Jonathan Balcombe from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) on alternatives to animal *dissection* in middle and high school. Dr. Balcombe demonstrated software packages and argued that these are better than live dissection and should be available to students who object to live dissection. He outlined strategies for MCPS to acquire the software (it's not free). The subcommittee unanimously felt that dissection software might be a useful adjunct to, but certainly not a replacement for, live dissection and would support its adoption only if it did not divert funds or efforts away from discovery-driven, inquiry-driven, dissection projects.

Secondary English

1. We reviewed feedback to the *Advanced Guidelines* (AG). What MCPS is doing to address the feedback was not included. Local school resource teachers are expected to monitor implementation by observing teachers in the classroom. MCPS will offer professional development to teachers this summer for AG to be implemented in fall 2008 in all MCPS middle schools. Every MCPS English curriculum guide states upfront that teachers are not bound to follow the curriculum; it is just a guide and teachers may deviate as long as they meet instructional objectives and standards and use some text from the anchor list for that grade level.
2. We discussed the planned revision to the English curriculum for *grades 11 & 12* for regular (not AP or IB) classrooms, using College Board standards. Our committee will review the proposed curriculum and offer suggestions. (All English AP syllabi must be submitted to and approved this summer by College Board.) College Board standards are more rigorous than MD State Voluntary or America Diploma standards. Parents expressed the need for more writing education in the curriculum. MCPS is changing the curriculum from the current 80% reading to 30% reading; 40% writing; and 10% (each) listening, speaking, and viewing.
3. We brainstormed on the *essential knowledge and skills* in English for college or for work life in the following areas: writing (more of it, revise with teacher feedback), viewing (be critical and discerning), speaking (opportunities to do so), listening (have practice/testing on it), reading.