

**Comments by Michelle Gluck, Chair, MCCPTA Gifted Child Committee, to Members of the Board of Education on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011.**

Laurie [Halverson] has highlighted some of the general concerns about the implementation of Curriculum 2.0. As chair of the Gifted Child Committee, I'd like to spend a few minutes addressing the concerns about what acceleration and enrichment are going to look like in the new curriculum.

As you know, the Common Core State Standards address reading and language arts as well as mathematics, and as someone who writes for a living I often think we focus too narrowly on math in these fora, but I'm going to reinforce that sin tonight because that's where I'm hearing the greatest concern from parents.

Under the previous, "spiral" math curriculum, multiple topics in math were introduced early and then revisited from year to year in rising spiral that supposedly allowed students to master the concepts in layers while simultaneously building layers of other intersecting concepts. As you know from the report of the Math Work Group, this approach had a lot of flaws, including the fact that the amount of time spent on each topic, and the shallowness of the unit assessments, tended to mask some students' failure to fully grasp what they were supposed to be learning. Even the higher achieving math students were not necessarily building strong foundations, and many other students were pushed ahead into accelerated or advanced math without adequate foundation at all.

I'd like to say right here that I never liked the spiral curriculum, and while I'm not an expert on math curriculum, I believe the new curriculum has the potential to be much better for everyone, including high-achieving students. I'm not here to complain about the change, and I've urged parents who do complain about it to give it a chance.

But the one benefit the spiral curriculum did provide was a relatively simple, straightforward pathway for students who are capable of learning more quickly than their peers to move ahead at a pace that was appropriate for them, rather than waste significant instructional time waiting for their age peers to catch up with them. A student who mastered all of the on-grade-level material in one level of the spiral could go on to master the next spiral's material on the same topic. If he or she did this with enough topics in a given year, that student could skip ahead to a higher grade level where all the topics would be visited yet again, giving the student an opportunity to pick up any bits and pieces from the skipped year that he or she didn't get before.

As a result, parents of high achieving students were able to see clear evidence of their students being challenged at an appropriate level in elementary school. This evidence is often sorely missing in all of the other core subjects.

Furthermore, many such students reached Algebra I by seventh grade and Geometry in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and thrived in those classes, arriving at high school prepared to reach multiple years of AP mathematics.

Under the new, "do it right the first time" curriculum model, grade skipping in the conventional sense of the word doesn't make sense. Each grade presents the only opportunity to learn the foundational material that the next grade is built on, and every student needs to master that material before moving on. Further, we are told that because the new curriculum builds depth at each level instead of shallow spirals, it has increased rigor that will challenge a broader swath of students.

Fine. I accept that, or at least I am hopeful at this point that the new curriculum will live up to this promise.

At the same time, however, it is an indisputable fact that no matter how rigorous the new curriculum is, and no matter what the appropriate scope of a given year of material is for most students in a given grade, some students will understand sooner, master the material faster, and need to move ahead of their age peers in order to remain challenged. A few of those students will move so fast that they can skip a grade. But most will need more than one year, yet less than two, to master two years of material. Those students need a compacted curriculum that moves through all of the "do it once" milestones, just at a faster pace because those students need significantly less time to learn them. Those students also need to be able to start the following year where they left off, rather than back at the beginning of a grade level they are already part way through.

The new curriculum has been rolled out without any clear path for that sort of compacting to happen on anything but an ad hoc, hit-or-miss basis, and this is worrying me and a lot of parents of high-ability students. The individual teachers who are teaching this new curriculum have not received much or anything in the way of professional development on how to identify students who need acceleration, and there are no assessment tools in place to help them. We're told those are coming. The superintendent told me that in the first year of a new curriculum, you can expect some bumps. But there is a cohort of thousands of students in second grade this year for whom this year is their only shot. Next year,

when the third grade curriculum is in its first bumpy rollout year, that will be their only shot at third grade, as well. And this will continue until those kids are in middle school. MCPS hasn't made any decisions about whether curriculum compacting will ever be available to them or whether any child in the second grade this year will have a pathway that allows him or her to get to Algebra I in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. And yet we also know, from our current experience, that there is a cohort in that group that needs to be on that pathway. Not as big a cohort as in the past, certainly. But the pathway still needs to exist, and right now, it doesn't.

The curriculum specialists here at Carver tell us that acceleration is built in to the new curriculum. But some principals are telling parents that no acceleration is allowed at all. Carver tells us that local schools are free to regroup within each grade in math instruction to make acceleration more feasible. But some principals are telling us that they've been forbidden to regroup in math.

I don't know whether the problem lies in the communication from Carver to principals, or whether principals are seizing a chance to end regrouping they never liked doing anyway and using Curriculum 2.0 as an excuse. But I do know that parents are worried, and with good reason, that the planning for handling our highest achieving students is lagging behind the rollout of the curriculum. We worry also that teacher training and the assessment tools teachers need to measure whether the new curriculum is working are also lagging behind.

Earlier this week, a parent wondered to me why our current first and second graders were being used as guinea pigs. She compared the ad hoc, anecdotal, try-it-and-see-if-it-works-and-then-fix-it-later-if-it-doesn't approach to the type of controls and safeguards that go into designing a new drug study and asked, where are the controls and safeguards here?

I urge you to ask for data on this new curriculum, sooner rather than later, and insist that it be shared with parents, as well. It is not possible that the new curriculum, delivered at a single pace, suits all students. How are students being assessed for acceleration, or, for that matter, for scaffolding and support? What's being done with the students who need to move at a different pace from most? How are those data being collected? MCPS has stated openly that it doesn't know what math in middle school or beyond is going to look like for these kids, that no decisions have been made. I don't have a good idea about how those decisions will be made, or when, and I hope you will insist on better answers than we've received so far. This is too wrenching a change to try to make in the dark.