

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 third of the four **CAC** meetings (held on January 28, 2008), 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.

ARTS, THEATER, DANCE

The group wrote assessment questions for two grade three lessons (on masks and clay calendars). The format created can be used as a template for assessments of all lessons at all elementary grade levels.

ESOL

Most of the meeting consisted of CAC member Diane August giving us a condensed presentation of her research that was done with ESOL students from Texas. The results of her study showed that there is a high correlation between oral proficiency and writing skills and comprehension. Diane demonstrated a number of tools used to develop English oral proficiency, which would also be beneficial to students in the general population but, because of lack of funds and personnel, such tools could not be made available for everyone.

The rest of the meeting was spent looking at MD's English Language Proficiency Standards and how MCPS is coming up with standards that are more comprehensible with the measurement topics.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

We had a small group to discuss the Russian curriculum. They had the curriculum outline but not the specific lessons so it was difficult to review vocabulary, etc. One new point is that the areas of Comparisons, Connections, and Communities will no longer be assessed. One concrete suggestion is to look at delaying teaching the script until the students have a better sense of the Cyrillic alphabet, maybe until the second semester of the first year. Textbooks are now available for first year students. We discussed the situation of multiple level classrooms and agreed that they are generally very difficult for the teacher and less than optimal for the students. Students often have to be more motivated and disciplined to do well. The lack of understanding of English grammar is detrimental to Russian learners because Russian grammar is very case dependent.

Verbs are also difficult. There are only 5 schools in MC which have Russian: Whitman, B-CC, SVHS, DHS, and Gaithersburg HS, which has the most extensive program.

One participant suggested using materials available through Rusnet and the ACTR (American Council of Teachers of Russian) at actr.org. The ACTR has ties to embassies to develop teacher supports. They are trying to tie into the National Standards. Part of the problem is that Maryland doesn't have standards in place for Foreign Language yet. It will be at least a year before VSC standards are approved. There are also national conferences which teachers can attend for professional development. The possibility of teachers teaching at more than one school, which is actually happening around the county, was discussed. This allows a school to offer languages for which they may only have one section. So a teacher may teach 2 classes each at 2 different schools. Principals pay for the number of hours at each school. The disadvantage is that often the teacher must travel during his planning period. Principals and clusters need to work together. HR can often help as well. Vacancies and partial vacancies are posted to help with the process. There are also electronic classrooms being used in MC. A teacher teaches in one location with a live connection to another school. The schedules of the two schools need to be in sync and an adult must be in the remote site classroom. The technology to have 2-way communications would have to be available. They can do prerecorded classes but it doesn't work as well.

There is a bill being introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Rush Holt to have a politically-appointed Assistant Secretary for Foreign Language and international education. If this passes it might help raise awareness of the importance of foreign languages.

MATH

First, questions were answered as follow up to the last CAC. One of these focused on the highest level of math offered after Calculus AB/BC. Many schools are offering Multivariable Calculus. Some schools have college professors come teach there, some send students to Montgomery College for this, and others combine students to make up one class. We asked why this class was chosen to follow Calculus. We determined that this is probably because most students who will need higher math in college for science or engineering specialties would need this course anyway. Students can take AP Statistics as well if they choose. The second issue that we discussed was the draft framework for a new course, Bridge to Algebra 2. This class should be offered next fall for students who successfully completed Algebra 1 and Geometry, but did not do strongly enough to be ready to successfully complete Algebra 2. This course will reinforce many Algebra 1 concepts and bridge into some Algebra 2 concepts. The course will use real-world examples to help students better understand the concepts. We were shown the draft framework and compared it to the frameworks for Algebra 1 and Algebra 2. Some issues were raised about the content, but most at the meeting agreed that the framework would work well.

MUSIC

We reviewed method books and a DVD presentation on "Smart Music," a software learning program designed to supplement a variety of music method books (the teacher chooses a particular publisher's series). "Smart Music" can be used for individual instrumental and vocal parts of school band, orchestra, and choral programs. With a home computer and microphone, students can practice with the assistance of a computer program that can provide warm-ups; highlight fingerings; provide practice assignments from the selected method or the teacher;

provide “practice loops” and 50,000 technical exercises; play accompaniments, the student’s solo part, or solo and accompaniment together; and produce an analysis of the student’s performance. Students can practice at a variety of tempi until an appropriate performance tempo is reached. After sufficient practice, students can record a performance which is graded by the software program on criteria such as incorrect notes, incorrect rhythms, and mistakes in intonation. During practice, students can self-assess and improve their performance on these same criteria as the computer program will indicate corrections to the student. Teachers can use “Smart Music” to email assignments to students, listen to students’ recorded performances, study the computer assessment of these performances, and receive update grades and grade averages which are directly entered into class grade books. The use of “Smart Music” by students also allows teachers to spend more classroom time teaching elements such as musical expression. “Smart Music” can also be used at festivals and contests to provide accompaniments for students who are unable to obtain accompanists. The educator subscription to “Smart Music” is \$100.00 a year and each student’s family must invest \$25.00 a year, have access to a computer and microphone, and have internet access. There are no known competitors to the “Smart Music” software programs as of yet. The main advantages of the “Smart Music” program include the possibilities that students will be engaged by the use of this technology, resulting in more student practice; the fact that the software allows for daily musical tutoring as students practice; and the additional time teachers will have to teach elements, such as musical expression. The major problems with “Smart Music” include the financial costs to the school system and families and the possibility that teachers may feel that professional judgment in grading is limited by the use of this software. Smart Music is currently used in Harford County and is being considered for Montgomery County for Fall 2008. It was suggested that an anonymous survey could be sent to parents/guardians to determine the prevalence of computer/internet access in students’ homes. At the end of the meeting, the MCCPTA member asked for clarification concerning the use of assessment in general and computer-assisted assessment in particular across grade levels within instrumental and general music programs. Follow-up regarding this question is expected for the next Music CAC meeting.

SCIENCE

The group focused its attention on a draft version of a new Grade 5 science unit entitled “Force, Motion, and Energy”. The committee was given a copy of this draft unit approximately four weeks prior to the meeting and written feedback from individual members of the committee shared liberally with the entire group. In part because of a strong physics background of the committee (including one retired Physics professor), there was considerable discussion about this unit, with most of it focused on how best to present complicated physics principles to fifth grade students in a way that they can understand, yet remain technically correct. As an illustration, the vector notation which is so critical to an understanding of Newtonian mechanics is not something that a fifth grader is yet prepared to tackle and this makes it more difficult to explain interesting principles like sliding down an inclined plane or pendulum motion. The committee discussed numerous ways that these issues could be better addressed, including different types of examples, modifications to the written material, and more detailed resource information for teachers to use. Teachers should have the correct (and more technically detailed) information at their disposal in the unit should student questions arise. At the end of the meeting, it was clear that the MCPS science representatives had been given a great deal of new information with which to modify this already well-designed unit and were very receptive to the suggestions offered by the committee.

SECONDARY ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

There was a short presentation by Arlene Cohen, MCPS, tracing the teaching of research skills from 6th through 12th grades. Each unit in the MCPS curriculum that deals with research skills

was iterated. This mainly consist of: unit #3 in 6th grade, bibliography creation; 7th, infuses a William and Mary protocol in voices form the past; 8th introduces note cards toward writing a persuasive paper; 9th “is slimmest” with reliance on history that informs fiction; 10th uses optional literature circles; 10th and 11th through a prism of a series of books to select from and the student researches a time period; 12th uses AP literature and I did not get any notes on regular 12th grade LA curriculum. AP and regular English curriculum differ. We are looking only at revising the regular English curriculum, not AP, so I can’t comment on the AP curriculum which I’d like to hear more about and requested doing so. 11th grade AP course is nonfiction/expository writing. A parent asked if the MCPS regular curriculum requires enough rigorous research writing to prepare for college. The answer was yes, but that both 6th grade and 9th are weak on it and the LA program is undergoing revision now beginning with the 11-12 grades and will work backwards to younger grades. I believe this is due to alignment with the more rigorous College Board standards and “back mapping.”

The need for more significant multiple feedback from teachers on writing drafts was mentioned and the CI folks said in high school (but not middle) there is a second set of eyes - a “composition assistant,” a paraprofessional who can help with that process. We agreed that the quality of writing instruction depends most of all on the teacher and how the teacher chooses to and has time to implement the curriculum.

The bulk of meeting was review of the draft of the proposed English 11 revised curriculum, although there wasn't really enough time for this.

Proposed English 11: Rhetoric and the Literary Citizen

Unit 1: Argumentative Writing: American Print & Visual Text

Unit 2: Research writing: Changing Bias in American Literature

Unit 3: Literary Analysis: Question of American Conscience

Unit 4: Creative & Reflective Writing: American Ambition