

## **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 last of the four **CAC** meetings (held on March 10, 2008), listed alphabetically by subject. (Reports are not available on all twelve of the subcommittee meetings.) 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](mailto:twillard@aaas.org) and [sharon29@comcast.net](mailto:sharon29@comcast.net).

### **ARTS, THEATER, DANCE**

The process of assessing student learning using Measurement Topics was explained and new grade 3 lesson plan for a painting unit was reviewed and revised. The grade 3 drawing unit is being emailed to participants for review.

### **ESOL**

We reviewed the ESOL Curriculum blueprint for Pre-kindergarten. A blueprint is a pre-cursor to the curriculum guide. The staff gave us an overview of Pre-K ESOL instruction. Four-year-olds (a few 3-year-olds) in Pre-K are given the Language Assessment Test (LAS) to determine their need for ESOL intervention. Currently there are 69 sites offering Pre-K in the county in a half-day format. The children are pulled out to work on oral language proficiency as well as the typical Pre-K content which is provided in a scaffold environment. The blueprint provides a content-based language teaching approach. It is taught in the context of academic content, however the emphasis of instruction is on the language that students use rather than the content itself. Questions raised included why it was necessary to have a separate curriculum given that the children were so young and acquiring language in a natural way as were their English-speaking counterparts. The staff stated that English-speaking children come to kindergarten with as many as 5,000 words. If an ESOL child does not speak any English, s(he) is at a great disadvantage. Also, this is essentially the same Pre-K curriculum except that for one period a day they get extra help with language. Another question was why there was not more emphasis on vocabulary. They stated that the vocabulary was imbedded in the oral language that the children are being taught. We gave written feedback for the 20-page document (which they gave out via email prior to the meeting so that we could have time to review it before the meeting).

### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

MCPS will have an Institute for the Less Commonly Taught (LCT) languages this summer right after the school year, June 16-20. This year they will concentrate on Chinese and Japanese. (Russian and Arabic teachers were not available.) There will be two consultants who will be there all 5 days. Both have excellent credentials and a lot of teaching experience. This Institute is open to teachers from other school districts. The brochure will be on the web site.

We continued discussion on the Russian curriculum, looking at specific lessons for Russian 1B. Once again the topic of grammar was raised. As in the English curriculum, grammar is taught as part of other lessons as needed. There are specific lessons on grammar but the point is to communicate and the language structure is secondary. We discussed the issue of how language learning takes place at different ages, i.e. a 2-year-old learns language differently than an adult. (Adults benefit from learning the language structure.) Right now in America, the majority of middle and high school curricula are based on more communication without a big emphasis on grammar and structures. On the other hand, colleges and adult education institutes, such as DLI (Defense Language Institute) focus a lot on grammar. This is a nation-wide issue, not just in MCPS.

The pictures used were not all clear. The FL department was already aware of possible issues and will make sure good, clear pictures are used.

The community theme had an exercise which was too childish for high school. Judy and Iran want to put the exercise into Russian so that community isn't isolated from learning the language. (The exercise would be appropriate in the target language.)

We discussed the holistic rubrics and the fact that they require training to use properly. MCPS trains the resource teachers to train teachers in their schools. Training was done this fall. Future training depends on budget.

One participant spoke of education in France, where grammar isn't emphasized in French but it is in other languages. She believes it is easier to understand the native language after learning another language.

Although the grammar portion of the Spanish and French county exams had been removed, it is now back. It is only 10-15% of the test but it is important to ensure teachers are actually teaching grammar. Besides, the APs and SAT IIs test grammar.

Judy and Iran would like to see the curricula aligned with new textbooks which are coming out and are aligned with standards-based criteria. The problem with finding textbooks currently is that many are based on college level expectations and learning philosophy (grammar-based).

One participant said that schools with really successful language programs are ones where the state has made language a priority. Many successful programs receive funding from DoD.

## **MATH**

The Math staff brought us information about the Bridge to Algebra 2 class and the new class that is being developed -- Quantitative Literacy.

For the Bridge to Algebra 2, we reviewed updated framework materials. The staff wanted to be sure that changes we recommended several months ago had been appropriately included in the updated framework. MCPS is still planning on offering this class throughout the county starting next fall.

We spent time reviewing specific details that will help shape this future class -- Quantitative Literacy. These points included Elements and Expressions of Quantitative Literacy. We focused

on the key elements that are critical to quantitative literacy and also the most important expressions or applications of this. Many of the important elements focused on confidence with math, interpreting data, number sense and practical skills -- these are all items that all students will run into and need daily when they finish at MCPS.

We raised the issue of making this class into one-semester courses. This would enable more students to consider taking at least one semester. We also suggested that the course be offered at two different levels -- one on a basic level and one for high-level students. We believe that advanced students should take this and might be more interested in practicing/learning everyday math applications if some of it explains complex concepts like understanding the basics of stocks and how they are valued so that you can understand how to invest money.

This class is still being discussed by a work group and no timing was available on when it would be offered to students.

## **MUSIC**

The topic of discussion was music assessment and the use of technology as an aid to assessment. The question of the frequency of assessment at different levels and grades and the prevalence of technology/compute- assisted assessment had been previously raised by another MCCPTA CAC member. The Elementary Music Coordinator made the following points in answer to this question:

- Assessments are currently paper and pencil, playing, and listening response.
- Assessment is not technology-dependent at the present time.
- The county is not yet ready for technology-assisted testing.
- The exception to this situation is the use of video cameras and recording devices for some classroom testing. This practice allows the teacher to take the students' recorded performances home where the teacher can take the time necessary for an accurate and fair assessment of each student's work.
- Currently, there are no consistent county-wide criteria for, or methods of, testing at the middle school level.
- Educators are still writing the new middle school curriculum.

The two general issues of advantages and disadvantages of grading in general, and assessment of singing in particular, were discussed.

- It was agreed that if students are to receive a grade at all (on report cards), consistent and objective standards should be utilized county-wide for maximum fairness.
- The MCCPTA member of the committee observed that students who truly love music will not lose it as the result of testing in school. As with any other subjects in school, a student's attitude toward tests need not directly coincide with his/her attitude toward the subject matter.
- The same committee member also observed that singing assessments need not be biased in favor of "talented" students since many elements are considered in grading, e.g., pitch, rhythm, dynamics, etc. In addition, the level of musical talent possessed by a student does not affect assessment any differently than a student's level of scholastic aptitude for other subjects such as math or athletic aptitude for physical education.

At the end of the meeting, a sample demonstration of a third grade singing project assessment was shown to the committee. Designed to be graded over time at the teacher's home, the videotape showed two students singing their own parts in a round.