

Gifted Child Committee Report

May 2018

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Events:

4/10 – Lang attended MCPS Choice Study stakeholder committee meeting.

4/12 – Kim attended Mccpta BOD meeting.

4/24 – Kim and Iris attended the MCPS Curriculum Advisory Assembly meeting.

4/30 – GCC and GTAMC organized a parent information night on “Updates on Elementary and Middle School Magnet Programs.” Approximately 225 community members attended the event. Our full summary is on the next page.

Updates on Elementary and Middle School Magnet Programs Summary of April 30, 2018 community meeting

Organized by:

- MCCPTA Gifted Child Committee – Lang Lin, Kim Testa, Iris Masucci
- Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County – Michelle Gluck

Attendees:

- MCPS staff - Lori-Christina Webb, Executive Director to the Chief Academic Officer
Diane Morris, Director of School Support and Improvement for Middle Schools
Meredith Casper, Director, Division of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction
Kurshanna Dean, Supervisor, Division of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction
- MCCPTA -- Cynthia Simonson, Vice President for Education
Amanda Graver, Chair, Curriculum Committee
- Approximately 225 community members

Ms. Webb and Ms. Morris presented an overview (slides provided) of the elementary and middle school magnet selection processes for students enrolling in the fall of 2018.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to Q&A moderated by Michelle Gluck. Below is a summary of the major topics and the responses from MCPS staff.

MCPS perspective on ES and MS magnets

- MCPS believes that it is the responsibility of the school system – not parents, families or teachers -- to identify students requiring accelerated and enriched instruction.
- The major change is the review of students in relation to their peers at their local schools, i.e., identifying the outliers whose profiles “look different.”
- Parents understandably see these changes from the perspective of the effect on their individual child, while MCPS looks at this from a system perspective – how to provide access to advanced coursework to the most students possible.
- If there is a critical mass of highly able students (noted to be 20), they can receive programming in the local schools, leaving the magnets for those students without a peer group at the home school.
- Even at schools with many high performing students, there are still outliers among their peers.
- Teacher recommendations were taken out of the selection process because they are often not helpful and “can exacerbate inequity.” Parent input was also eliminated, but MCPS is open to revisiting the parent statement that had been part of the process in the past.

Selection process during the field test for the MS magnets

- Multiple tests and grades were reviewed: MAP, PARCC, CogAT, report cards
- None is weighted more than the others
- Each student profile is reviewed more than once, by committees of about 15 people.
- Selections were name-blind, race-blind, and school-blind

- There are no quotas or percentage goals for MS magnet admissions for students from Centers vs students from local elementary schools. They don't have the final numbers yet for this year.

Expansion courses in local middle schools

- Expansion courses will be delivered in homogeneously grouped classroom sections.
- MCPS believes the expansion courses will provide the "optimal educational experience," which is a mix of homogeneously and heterogeneously grouped classes.
- Data from the screening of all 5th graders in the field test has revealed that there are highly able students at all middle schools.
- Next year's expansion courses in math (Applied IM 6) and World Studies (Global Humanities 6) are a first step. Other courses will be considered in the future.
- In the field test catchment area, about 700 students have been identified for the math course, and about 600 for the humanities course for next year.
- English was not chosen for an expansion course because of the pending changes to the curriculum starting in Fall 2018 for K-8.
- Science was also not selected because of the changes in the science curriculum based on the new standards (NGSS).
- MCPS is working with magnet program coordinators at Eastern MS and Takoma Park MS to develop the curriculum framework for the expansion courses to be used at the local schools.
- Teachers will be trained this summer and will meet at least once per quarter for continued training.
- MCPS is not looking to fully replicate the full MS magnet experience at the local schools. The integrated coursework that is a key feature of the magnets will not occur with the local school expansion courses.
- Expansion courses in the middle schools next year are a pilot. MCPS acknowledges that those teachers will be less experienced at teaching advanced learners than those in the MS magnets.
- Students who had opted out of the MS magnet evaluation and testing process are still evaluated for expansion course eligibility. These decisions are still ongoing at some schools and should be completed shortly.
- Local middle schools should encourage activities like competitions, after-school computer science activities, etc. Those should not be offered only at the magnets. Schools will get support to do more of this, and funding is available.

Other

- One of the requirements for the new curriculum vendor being selected is that it include proposals for accelerated and enriched instruction.
- Ms. Simonson and Ms. Graver provided some information how the new K-8 curriculum will be rolled out. For the upcoming school year, schools can volunteer to participate in the Year 1 roll-out for Math, English, or both. (More information is available at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/curriculum-review.aspx>.)
- The Enriched Literacy Curriculum (ELC) is expanding from 10 elementary schools this year to 36 in total for 2018-2019.

- MCPS is interested in opinions from families about using a lottery system to select students for the magnets from among the group of those who qualify (not defined).

Concerns raised by parents

- The main concern voiced by multiple parents is that the magnet selection process needs to be more transparent, with information available publicly.
- Parents want information on how “outlier” students are selected among, for example, a group with 99th percentile test scores and excellent grades.
- Parents were not told at the beginning of the process that the availability of a peer group mattered.
- The recommendation in the magnet decision letter to talk to your school principal about programming for advanced learners was unhelpful and confusing.
- The benefits of attending a magnet program are beyond just academic. Students flourish in many ways in a school culture of like-minded peers.
- One or two expansion courses at a local middle school is an inadequate substitute for a full magnet experience and does not meet the special needs of this population.
- Families really want an extension course for English, a historically weak spot in MCPS middle schools.
- The universal screening has shown that large numbers of students are qualified for magnet programs, but there was no increase in seats in the MS magnets as was done for the ES magnets.
- If two students have identical academic profiles, basing acceptance decisions at that point solely on which local schools they attend (or will attend) does not represent true “equity.”