

Activities (since Feb. 1)

MCPS magnet information for minorities (Feb. 3)
Julius West MS parent curriculum information night (Feb. 13)
MCCPTA Board of Directors (Feb. 13)
Richard Montgomery HS PTA (Feb. 18)
MCPS magnet information for minorities (Feb. 18)
Richard Montgomery HS IB magnet program night (Feb. 18)
Richard Montgomery HS IB Parent Advisory Council (Feb. 19)
MCCPTA Executive Committee meeting with MCPS Superintendent Smith (Feb. 20)
MCCPTA Curriculum touch base with Safe Tech (Feb. 24)
MCCPTA Delegates Assembly (Feb. 25)
RM cluster coordinator meeting with OSSI (Feb. 26)
MCPS ESOL revisions information night (Feb. 27)
MCCPTA Board of Directors (Mar. 12)

Curriculum Committee:

Discussions between curriculum and safe tech committees include broad discussions about technology's impact on academic achievement. The committees committed to continue to share information about:

- Ongoing communication to make more impactful changes to technology practices
- Advocating for access to print materials
- Input regarding Student Information System
- Best practices for screen use
- MCPS policy on personal mobile devices

Information:

MCPS is rolling out new ELA (English language arts and mathematics) curriculum this year in elementary and middle schools. The purchased curricula also drive changes in the delivery of curricula content. We asked MCPS for more information. This is what MCPS told us about the ES curricula (Eureka for math and Benchmark for ELA), as well as expectations for classroom delivery in kindergarten:

Eureka Math

The instructional block for schools implementing the Eureka Math curricular materials has a daily sequence of four components: Fluency, Application Problem, Concept Development, and Student Debrief. Each day during Mathematics, all elementary children in a class work through the four components in the same sequence. This is different from the “workshop model” classrooms may have been using in recent years, when teachers interacted directly with students through a small group rotation. The implementation of this 4-component model ensures that students are actively engaged in mathematically thinking and learning for the entire math block each day. In this way, teachers are more equipped to effectively engage with the students and monitor their learning time.

As teachers prepare for math instruction, they are expected to make informed decisions that match problems, questions, activities and models to the individual students in their class. This is called “customizing” the lesson and teachers are taught the process for doing this during their third full training day, typically in early fall. While some of the learning each day happens as a whole class, there are also quite a few experiences that are differentiated. Most commonly, teachers can differentiate engagement with the Application Problem, with the Problem Set (the guided practice accompanying Concept Development), and with the Student Debrief. In each of these components, it’s common to see students working in a variety of configurations, including independently, with partners, or in small groups. Rather than the teacher bringing the students to him/her for a set period of time, she/he is providing feedback by moving from student-to-student or group-to-group.

Benchmark Advance

Benchmark Advance is an English Language Arts (ELA) program built to address the key shifts in curriculum as highlighted by the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. Benchmark Advance provides us with a balanced literacy approach to teaching English Language Arts by providing both whole group and small group instruction opportunities daily. This approach to ELA is very similar to the approach that our elementary schools have followed in the past, with the biggest difference being in ensuring that there is a balance of both whole and small group instruction.

The structure of the ELA block is designed to allow all students to encounter complex grade-level texts during daily whole-group instruction. These whole group lessons are instructed in a mini lesson format and usually last from 10 - 20 minutes each and are often taught between small group lessons. These lessons include —read-aloud experiences, shared reading, and close reading opportunities. Additionally, teachers choose from a variety of small group structures designed to meet students individual learning and reading needs during small group instruction time. Within a given week, students may engage in small group reading opportunities such as guided reading, reader's theater, close reading, novel studies, and inquiry projects to build and expand their literacy skills. Students are exposed to a variety of resources to support these learning goals which include, decodable texts, differentiated leveled texts, anchor text passages, close reading passages, and trade books during small group reading time. As teachers prepare for their students learning experiences, they are expected to engage students in grade level whole group experiences daily and to make the appropriate decision as to which small group option suits the academic needs of your students.

While the majority of the school year follows the Benchmark Advance instructional block outlined above, the first few weeks of the year are a bit different. It was during this first month of the school year that teachers may have experienced some frustrations in the implementation of Benchmark Advance as they focused on foundations, review, and routines. These lessons and activities were instructed using a whole group/classroom structure and were designed to give teachers time to get to know their students and collect informal data on students’ foundational literacy skills. While there is not a plan to eliminate the foundations, review, and routine component of the curriculum in future years, we have taken feedback into consideration and plan to structure the time differently to include both whole group and small group opportunities.

Kindergarten:

Schools are provided with scheduling guidance each spring, in the guidance it is stated that kindergarten students should have self-selected time every day. This is where the traditional kindergarten “play” centers like blocks and housekeeping would fit in to the day for an MCPS kindergarten student. ... As far as the rest of the day, it is a balance of whole and small group instruction and independent work time to ensure that students are receiving instruction on grade level standards as well as engaging in targeted instruction to meet specific student needs.

Based on the significant body of research supporting the importance of play in the development of young children, time for self-selected centers is included as a part of the kindergarten schedule. This is intended to be an opportunity for structured play to allow for extending student learning and building language. During this time, students can engage in the traditional kindergarten play centers such as blocks, housekeeping, and sensory tables, and extend their learning across content areas as they visit the writing center or explore math manipulatives. Engaging in traditional play centers provides an opportunity for teachers to support and enhance oral language development in an authentic setting. It is also a time for students to develop and practice social skills, such as turn taking and problem solving, as children develop play scenarios and play games. For many of our students, participating in these centers provides an opportunity for them to engage with materials and activities that are not readily available to them outside of school.

This is not additional preparation or planning time for kindergarten teachers. Teachers are expected to actively engage with students during this time. Teachers may choose to interact with students in a center to facilitate oral language development or to collect observational data. Teachers can also model expected behaviors for interactions and problem solving. They may choose to use data collected at other times during the school day to work with a needs-based flexible group to support literacy or mathematics. It is important that teachers consider the structures established for this time so that students are engaged in productive activities.

Daily Recommended Minutes: **30 minutes**

Weekly Recommended Minutes: **150 minutes**