Curriculum Committee Report Submitted by: Michelle Gluck

February 2021 curriculum@mccpta.org

**Meetings/Calls/Events**

1/13 BOD Meeting

1/26 Delegates Assembly

1/28 BOE Public Meeting

**Upcoming**

2/10 BOD Meeting

2/11 MCPS Curriculum Advisory Assembly

2/16 MCPS Budget Advisory Committee Meeting

2/17 MCCPTA Curriculum Town Hall meeting

2/17 Curriculum Committee meeting with OCIP/OSSI

2/18 MCPS Fall Instructional Recovery Team Meeting

2/23 Delegates Assembly

2/25 MSDE GTAC EGATE Awards Ceremony

**Open Curriculum Meeting on Wednesday Feb 17, 12-1**

VP Ed Issues Rodney Peele and I will host an open meeting to discuss curriculum issues next week. The exact agenda is still under development, but we plan to make a presentation about proposed new statewide graduation requirements (spoiler alert: Yet More Math!) and invite input into comments MCCPTA may submit during the 30-day public comment period before changes are adopted.

Registration information will be forthcoming.

**Other Key Activities/Concerns**

1. **New Activity In Pandemic Curriculum Decisions.**

Following last month’s report, the Board of Directors voted in favor of a Curriculum Committee letter to Dr. Smith outlining our concerns about the relative lack of substance and genuine flexibility in the second semester course load and grading and reporting changes announced on January 12. The text of that letter (dated January 19) is included in this report as Attachment A.

I am pleased (and honestly rather surprised) to report, as most of you likely already know, that Chief of Teaching, Learning and Schools Janet Wilson responded on January 27 with a letter announcing that many of our requests would be incorporated into new guidance. Dr. Wilson’s letter is included here as Attachment B.

In brief, the primary new changes are as follows:

* The flexibility to take up to two courses not required for graduation on a Credit/No Credit basis, excluding those courses from the student’s GPA, will be retroactively extended to the Fall 2020 semester.
* The flexibility to drop a course altogether without having that course or its grade on the student’s transcript, will similarly be retroactively extended to the Fall 2020 semester. Students will be required to work with counselors to exercise this option, in order to receive academic counseling about the impact of that choice on high school graduation progress.
* The deadline for dropping a course or electing C/NC grading in up to two courses for the Spring 2021 semester will be extended to the end of the first marking period. Previously, the deadline was the 25th day of the first MP.

1. **Need for Further Clarity in New Grading and Reporting Guidance**

While we are very pleased with the new changes described in the previous paragraph, we have asked for specific clarification on the exact meaning of “courses not required for graduation,” as that term is less concrete than it first appears. The text of my email to OCIP requesting further clarification can be found in Attachment C to this report.

1. **Need for More Communication of New Flexibility Options**

In order to prevent the new options for both Fall and Spring semesters from remaining well-kept secrets, we asked MCPS to instruct schools to inform families of the changes to MCPS policy in stand-alone communications with clear instructions and deadlines. Some schools have done this, others are folding this guidance into longer communications about MCPS’s plans for hybrid instruction, commencement, and other developments. Attachment C also contains my renewed request for explicit and stand-alone dissemination of the clarifications we have sought.

1. **Indications of OSFA solutions for students experiencing significant learning loss in sequential classes**

Last month, we asked how students are being advised during the upcoming registration period with respect to sequential classes such as math or world languages in which students may have experienced significant learning loss. OCIP reported that MCPS is planning learning recovery on a 2-3 year model, incorporating lost material into future years of sequential classes. While no specific plans have been announced yet, we are getting preliminary indications that some schools will try to implement one-size-fits-all pandemic recovery pathways for all students in a given grade or subject, without regard to whether all students in that school actually need to repeat missed material. We plan to engage OCIP next week for further information.

1. **Planning for hybrid instruction**

Schools have begun to communicate with their communities on an individual (school-by-school) basis regarding planning for hybrid in-person instruction. It appears that some schools anticipate that students in their buildings will primarily (or entirely!) experience a supervised online instruction model, in which the teacher will be teaching online and students will be using Chromebooks in the classroom, with varying levels of supervision and support varying by school/grade level/classroom.

Parents who plan to make use of the hybrid instruction opportunity should pay very close attention to the model implemented by their own schools and their students’ particular classes.

Attachment A:

Text of Letter from Michelle Gluck to Jack Smith

January 19, 2021

Superintendent Jack R. Smith, PhD

Montgomery County Public Schools

850 Hungerford Drive, Room 122

Rockville, Maryland 20850

Montgomery County Board of Education

850 Hungerford Drive, Room 123

Rockville, Maryland 20850

Via Email

Dear Superintendent Smith and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the MCCPTA Board of Directors, I am writing in response to the changes to student schedules and course loads proposed at the January 12, 2021 meeting of the Board of Education.  As a threshold matter, we applaud your recognition of the enormous and unprecedented challenges borne by secondary students learning on what is essentially a college model of instruction.  Unlike (adult) college students, for whom a full load is usually three or four classes,  MCPS secondary students have been asked to manage a full seven or eight class load with only two hours of live instruction per class each week and significant responsibility for self-teaching new material.  We agree with MCPS that students should have the option to take fewer classes for the duration of the pandemic virtual and/or hybrid learning status, and we also agree that students should have the option to take some classes on a Credit/No Credit basis.

We believe, however, that the proposed changes do not provide enough flexibility or calendar relief to meet the needs of many MCPS students.  MCCPTA recommends that MCPS amend the proposals for course withdrawal and Credit/No Credit grading choices to maximize flexibility and minimize negative repercussions for students and families for the entirety of the pandemic online/hybrid instruction period, including the current semester.  Specifically, we recommend the following:

**A. Relax the restrictions on designating classes Credit/No Credit, and extend the option to the Fall 2020 semester.**

The current policy and proposed changes to the Credit/No Credit rules retain two restrictions that we believe MCPS should reconsider:

1. The C/NC option is not available for the vast majority of classes; and
2. The C/NC option must be chosen at the beginning of the semester, rendering it unavailable for the Fall 2020 semester and severely limited for the Spring 2021 semester.

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/isbra.pdf>

*III.B.1.3*

*Credit/No Credit Courses and Replacement Grades*

*(a) Credit/no credit may only be used in courses not specifically required for graduation by MSDE or MCPS. Credit/no credit cannot be applied to a Certificate of Merit course (Refer to Diploma Endorsements in Section III.C.).*

The limitations on when a student may take a course “Credit/No Credit” is not governed by COMAR but is an internal MCPS policy.  At present, with the restrictions imposed by the current policy, very few courses could ever be taken for Credit/No Credit.

All courses taken by students in Grades 9 and 10 are effectively required for graduation.  Does MCPS intend to withhold the C/NC option from our youngest high school students?

A search of the MCPS Course Bulletin  yielded 541 courses with the “Certificate of Merit” designation, rendering Credit/No Credit a “non-option” for students who may wish to remain in a course during the pandemic but are interested in alleviating the stress of maintaining a GPA that reflects the amount of effort they are making to learn the curriculum.  As the MCPS Certificate of Merit is an internal MCPS designation, this limitation should be removed for the duration of the pandemic and recovery period.

Finally, we note that the concerns underlying the decision to extend the C/NC option to the Spring 2021 semester are equally applicable to the Fall 2020 semester, especially given that (as discussed more fully below) students were not offered and in some cases were actively discouraged from seeking course load relief in the Fall 2020 semester.

Therefore:

1. MCCPTA recommends that the Superintendent amend ISB-RA to allow students to take any two  courses Pass/Fail (referred to in the policy as Credit/No Credit).
2. MCCPTA recommends that the Superintendent allow students to apply Pass/Fail (Credit/No Credit) decisions retroactively to the Fall 2020 semester, up until the last day of the course (January 29, 2021).
3. MCCPTA recommends that the Superintendent allow students to designate Spring 2021 course(s) as Pass/Fail (Credit/No Credit) until the first day of 4th marking period.

**B. Students should be permitted to withdraw from courses throughout the Spring 2021 semester without transcript penalty.**

MCPS has belatedly recognized the challenge secondary students would face attempting to carry a full (7-8 class) course load while reducing the teacher-student contact hours from 5 sessions a week to 2 sessions a week.  MCPS Recovery Team discussions centered on allowing reduced course load options for students while removing any barriers for students to participate as a “full time student” in all other respects.

Unfortunately, even though MCPS had internal conversations and made modifications to the form “Request for Approval for Part-time Secondary Schedule” during the Fall 2020 semester, information about the availability of a reduced schedule was not made readily available to students and parents/guardians.  Further, Principals and Counselors were not adequately equipped with the information to counsel students about the option of reducing course load, including a commitment from MCPS to provide opportunities for students to take dropped classes at a later date, if necessary.

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/forms/pdf/280.98.pdf>

Students who struggled with course loads and attempted to drop classes were often counseled that they had to maintain a full schedule, allowed to drop one class but required to replace it with another to maintain a seven-course load.  Students who tried to drop courses after the 25 day deadline during the Fall 2020 semester were advised that the “W” designation and grade would still appear on their transcript and affect their GPA, further discouraging this option.

The inclusion of “W” and the grade averaged as of the date of withdrawal on the transcript is not a requirement of MSDE but is an internal MCPS requirement.

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/jecra.pdf>

*III.A.4*

*Grades and credits shall be awarded according to the following guidelines:*

*a) If a student withdraws from a course before the end of the fifth week (25 school days), no notation is made on the student's permanent record or report card.*

*b) If the student withdraws after the end of the fifth week (25 school days) of the course, "withdrew" or "W", the date of the withdrawal, and the grade averaged to the time of withdrawal will be entered on the report card and permanent record.*

We believe that this internal requirement should be removed for the duration of the pandemic and recovery period, as follows:    

4. MCCPTA recommends that the Superintendent amend regulation JEC-RA to allow students to withdraw from courses (with counselor/principal approval) until the end of the first semester (January 29, 2021) with no record of the course on the student transcript and no effect on student GPA.

5. MCCPTA recommends that the Superintendent instruct MCPS communications team to include in QuickNotes the option of reduced course load for second semester, Spring 2021.  Further, MCCPTA recommends that he instruct OTLS to monitor secondary level principal communications to ensure all parents/students are advised of the option to reduce course load and outline the process to follow if this is of interest to the student. We strongly suggest that schools send a message specific to this issue to ensure it isn’t overlooked in routine transmittal messages.

We recognize that these recommendations represent a significant departure from established practices based on many years of experience.  Nevertheless, under these unprecedented circumstances, we believe strongly that these further changes are necessary for the health and future success of MCPS students.  We also believe that MCPS leadership, including the Superintendent and secondary school principals, should be vocal with the community about the need for this flexibility and that neither MCPS nor colleges nor the public should stigmatize students who avail themselves of these options.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michelle Gluck

Chair, Curriculum Committee

Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

cc:  Cynthia Simonson, President, MCCPTA

MCCPTA Board of Directors

MCCPTA Delegates

Attachment B:

Text of Letter from Janet Wilson to Michelle Gluck, January 27, 2021

January 27, 2021

Ms. Michelle Gluck, Chair

Curriculum Committee

Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

Dear Ms. Gluck:

Thank you for your letter of January 19, 2021, to Dr. Jack R. Smith, superintendent of schools, and members of the Board of Education, in which you advocate for additional flexibility with secondary student schedules, beyond what already is in place for the remainder of the 2020–2021 school year. Your thoughtful input is very helpful as Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) implements schedule adjustments and considers additional flexibility moving forward. MCPS agrees that the unprecedented circumstances of the global pandemic require constant adjustment and flexibility to address the extreme challenges that students are facing, and we are committed to making additional changes as needed. A summary of adjustments made to date was provided in a public message for the community on January 21, 2021, posted here:

<https://news.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/quicknotes/semester-2-adjustments-and-optionsfor-secondary-schedules-middle-and-high-schools/>

The adopted changes will temporarily override specific elements of MCPS Regulation ISB-RA, *High School Graduation Requirements*, in order to allow students to take Certificate of Merit courses as Credit/No Credit in courses not specifically required for graduation, during the 2020–2021 school year. This option also has been extended to middle school students. This additional flexibility will be formally included in the next edition of the *MCPS Recovery of Education Guide*.

Moving forward, in addition to the changes noted above, MCPS also will be implementing the following additional options for student schedules and grades:

● Retroactively allowing grades of Credit/No Credit in up to two courses taken during the first semester of 2020–2021, given the parameters above. As there will be some time needed for systems development to apply these changes retroactively, students/parents/guardians will be able to make this request beyond January 29, 2021.

● Extending the timeline to withdraw from a high school course without notation on the academic record, or declare Credit/No Credit, from the 25th day of the semester to the beginning of the second marking period of the semester.

● Retroactively applying the extension of the timeline for withdrawing from a course, without a notation on the academic record, to include the first semester of the 2020–2021 school year. This also will require systems development and will be processed during the second semester of 2020–2021.

These additional changes also will temporarily override specific elements of MCPS Regulation ISB-RA, *High School Graduation Requirements* and MCPS Regulation JEC-RA, *Student Withdrawals from Classes and School*, in order to extend the timeline to withdraw from a course beyond the 25th day of the semester. These temporary provisions will be formally included in the next edition of the *MCPS Recovery of Education Guide*.

Moving forward, MCPS will continue systemwide communication of these additional schedule options, training for school staff, and monitoring of implementation with local schools. The next systemwide message will be sent in concert with the start of the second semester.

Thank you again for your ongoing advocacy and collaboration, as we work together to support our students and families during the global pandemic.

Sincerely,

Janet S. Wilson, Ph.D.

Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Schools

JSW:llh

Copy to: Members of the Board of Education

Dr. Smith

Dr. McKnight

Mrs. Hazel

Mr. Murphy

Ms. Simonson

Attachment C:

Request for Clarification of Jan. 27 Guidance (via email)

Dear Niki and Scott,

I see that the guidance to families recommends that students wait until report cards are finalized on Feb. 16 to engage with counselors about making use of the new flexibility options outlined in Dr. Wilson’s letter of Jan. 27. In response to some questions we’ve received so far and anticipation of the many others I expect to flood in once those conversations begin, I am writing to seek some specific detail clarifications of the general statements in the guidance. I am numbering the questions for ease of response.

(1) As a threshold matter, I want to highlight one aspect of my letter that went unaddressed in Dr. Wilson’s response, and that is, what is the basis for the limitation of C/NC grades to courses not required for graduation?

We’ve heard cited the fear that colleges won't accept pass/fail credits in graduation requirements. However, I know that Cynthia has shared with you written assurance from UMD that C/NC credits will be accepted. Further, there is already precedent for awarding C/NC credits for graduation requirements, since students were offered the option of C/NC grading for all classes in the Spring 2020 semester, and I haven’t seen any indication that colleges are penalizing students with C/NC graduation credits on their transcripts from the spring.

Can this issue be revisited, and if not, can you provide concrete reasons for treating 2020-21 online instruction grades differently from Spring 2020 grades? I would think the limitation of C/NC to two out of seven classes is a sufficiently strong increase in rigor from Spring 2020.

(2)  It is my understanding that every math class beyond PreCalc is technically an elective, notwithstanding the MSDE requirement that students enroll in (but not necessarily pass) a math class every year. Therefore, those classes should not be considered “required for graduation” in this context.  Can we get clear explicit guidance that students who want to take a post-4th credit math class C/NC can do so?

(3)  Same question for post-third credit science or social studies classes – can you provide explicit guidance that any class in excess of graduation requirements can be taken C/NC?  These would mostly be AP/IB classes, where students would have the opportunity to prove themselves on the AP exam if the grade has suffered from assignment completion issues. This is particularly important given the inconsistency with which the deadline flexibility guidance was implemented by schools. We heard many reports, which we’ve shared with you, of AP/IB teachers believing that because they retained the discretion to assign as many graded assignments as necessary to cover the tested material, they also were exempted from the deadline flexibility instructions issued on November 23.

(3.1) I’ve been asked one specific wrinkle on this subject with respect to the science breadth requirement. If a student below 12th grade is taking a first physical science credit this year, but subsequently completes a different physical science class, can one or both semesters of this year’s class be converted to C/NC? Some students are particularly struggling with online versions of lab science classes.

(4)  Given the number of required credits and the elective requirements, will students have the option of taking a C/NC grade on any two of their current elective classes? Or will that option only be open to students who have completed one of the "Elective" options?

(5) Specifically for 9th and 10th graders who will not have completed any of the course credit categories, including electives, are they allowed to take C/NC on any classes, and if so, which ones?

(6)  Dr. Wilson’s letter says that the flexibility option has been extended to middle school students.  However, with the exception of the third year of a world language, all HS credit classes open to MS students are graduation requirements, aren't they?  Which courses, specifically, can MS students take C/NC if they choose to do that rather than repeat the class for a better grade?

We are not asking for these clarifications lightly. I believe our experience of the implementation of the November 23 guidance to schools makes it very clear that “classes not required for graduation” is more vague than it might appear even to school leaders, especially given that different graduating classes have different requirements and families with multiple students do not always realize their students are subject to different requirements.

In closing, I will also restate our plea for explicit, stand-alone guidance from schools to families on these changes. To date, many schools have embedded these changes in general communications covering many topics, including those focused on return to in-person instruction plans which understandably grab more attention. I also haven’t seen any deadline for requesting Fall 2020 semester changes, and possibly that hasn’t been set yet, but that too has to be clearly communicated.

Thank you as always for your efforts on behalf of students.

Michelle