POLICY BOARD OF EDUCATION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Related Entries: ABA, ABC, ABC-RA, ACA, AEB, GEG-RA, IFA, IFA-RA, IHB-RA, IKA, IKA-RA, IOA, IOA-RA, IOB, IOD, IOD-RA, IQD, IQD-RB, ISB-RA, JEA-RA

Responsible Office: Chief Academic Officer

Middle School Education

A.   PURPOSE

The middle school years are pivotal in defining each child's academic, social, and emotional development and determining their future success. As such, the Board of Education is committed to producing a challenging and comprehensive middle school program that provides the basis for continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Such a program includes high expectations for academic achievement for all students and an environment supportive of the social, emotional, and physical development of students in Grades 6, 7, and 8.

Middle school is an opportunity for students to develop confidence, competence, and independent decision-making skills in a culture that supports students being willing to challenge themselves academically and explore their interests. With a rigorous curriculum, instruction designed for adolescents, and extracurricular activities, the middle school program can maximize success for students as they prepare for rigorous high school standards and the transitions to high school, postsecondary education, and the world of work.

Parents/guardians and families are the primary stakeholders in each child's academic achievement; and the Board considers partnerships with parents/guardians, families, and the community vital components of the educational process. It recognizes that enhancing and maintaining such partnerships, particularly with groups reflecting the diversity of the community, is an effective way to promote academic achievement as well as support the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth of students in their middle learning years.

B. ISSUE

Middle school is a critical juncture in the process in which students develop an academically challenging, appropriate, and comprehensive plan that meets high school graduation requirements and reflects postsecondary goal setting. Therefore, a middle school program that includes a comprehensive curriculum; a rigorous, differentiated instructional program; a highly qualified and committed staff and leadership; a collaborative yet flexible organizational structure; extracurricular activities; and opportunities for an engaged parental and stakeholder community is essential to ensuring success for every student in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). MCPS must accomplish this goal within the context of its diverse community with a variety of educational needs.

C. POSITION

The following elements are necessary for establishing and maintaining a rigorous instructional program that meets the needs of adolescent learners:

1. School Culture

   To develop a culture that fosters intellectual development, citizenship, responsibility, and mutual respect, schools will collaborate with parents/guardians and other members of the community to do the following:

   a) Provide a stimulating and supportive environment in which students are expected, encouraged, and given opportunities to learn and succeed at high levels.

   b) Encourage all students to pursue intellectually challenging courses and participate in extracurricular activities.

   c) Maintain a well-managed, safe, and nurturing environment, which encourages positive relationships among students and between adults and students.

   d) In alignment with Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency,* promote cultural competence among students, staff, and school community without regard to an individual's actual or perceived personal characteristics as defined in Board Policy ACA.

   e) Facilitate communication with the community, whenever feasible, in the languages spoken in the community.

f)   Engage parents/guardians in meaningful ways that support learning, emphasize the necessity of long-range educational planning, and result in higher levels of student achievement.

g)   Work to support and ensure equitable opportunities for all students to benefit from all academic programs and school activities.

2.   Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The MCPS approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment will ensure a high-level of challenge for all middle school students and meet the unique needs of the adolescent learner. Technology will be integrated into curriculum, instruction, and assessment to build or strengthen students' interest and skills in the use of technology.

a)   The middle school curriculum will be consistent with Board Policy IFA, *Curriculum* and MCPS Regulation IFA-RA, *Curriculum,* and will include the following:

    (1)   The written curriculum as presented in the curriculum framework and in the curriculum guides.

    (2)   The taught curriculum as implemented by teachers with students.

    (3)   The learned curriculum as demonstrated by assessments of student performance.

    (4)   The ongoing professional development needed to ensure consistent implementation, monitoring, and supervision.

    (5)   The monitoring of curriculum implementation by all teachers, administrators, and central services staff.

b)   Instructional practices will incorporate a variety of methods, strategies, and resources, such as technology, that encourage students to be active and engaged learners and will align with relevant Board policies and MCPS regulations, such as Board policies IKA, *Grading and Reporting,* IOA, *Gifted and Talented Education,* IOD, *Education of English Language Learners*, IOB, *Education of Students with Disabilities*, and MCPS Regulation IHB-RA, *School Academic Grouping Practices*.

    (1)   Programmatic and instructional decisions will lead to a long-term plan for a comprehensive high school education and will be based

on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, the students' academically challenging comprehensive plan, student and parent/guardian interests, student motivation, and analysis of student performance data in relation to established benchmarks.

(2)   Students will utilize technology across the curriculum to demonstrate mastery and monitor their own academic progress.

(3)   In order to enable students to function and compete in a global society and prepare them for using technology across the curriculum, all students, particularly those who reflect the diversity of the community, must have access to and instruction in technology.

(4)   Differentiated instructional practices will include acceleration, supports for improving student performance, enrichment, and other strategies as needed to foster intellectual growth and help students meet their academic potential. Such practices will address learning styles as well as physical, social, and emotional differences among students.

(5)   In both the planning and implementation of instruction, middle schools will utilize the special skills of all general, alternative, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and special education staff members.

(6)   Instructional practices should provide leadership opportunities for students as well as promote student discourse and effective self-expression.

(7)   Student service learning requirements will provide students with the opportunity to learn in community and other non-school settings.

c)   Assessment practices, as explained in Board Policy IKA, *Grading and Reporting,* are an important aspect of the instructional cycle and include the following:

(1)   Pre-assessments and formative assessments, as well as summative assessments, which are used to communicate achievement standards to students, plan and deliver instruction to meet learning goals, provide timely feedback to students on their performance, and offer additional opportunities for students to learn and demonstrate learning.

    (2)   A comprehensive assessment program, which is aligned with county, state, and national standards, will include the following:

        (a)   Fair representation of a student's performance on a variety of measures over time.

        (b)   Evidence of student learning, which teachers collect over time using a variety of methods.

        (c)   Meaningful feedback on student achievement to students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and the school system.

        (d)   Clear and timely communication to parents/guardians and students as to the grading criteria.

        (e)   Consistency within and among schools.

    (3)   Reteaching and reassessment are an integral part of a rigorous instructional cycle that promotes learning. Reassessment procedures are fair, promote effective teaching and learning, and are manageable within the instructional cycle.

3.   Organizational Structure

Organizational structures designed to promote and maintain high-achieving middle schools optimize time for learning and facilitate opportunities to build positive relationships among students, staff, parents/guardians, and community members and facilitate student transition, placement, and program continuity at each level. Effective, flexible, and collaborative organizational structures shall include the following:

a)   Opportunities for teachers across grade-level teams, subject areas, and elective courses to collaborate.

b)   Opportunities for staff to meet with parents/guardians to discuss student progress.

c)   Intervention and enrichment programs as well as interest-based elective courses.

d)   The ability to reconfigure schedules to support unique interdisciplinary units and/or enhanced educational opportunities.

e)   Smaller learning communities.

f)   Comprehensive and consistent articulation plans.

4.   Extended Learning Opportunities

Middle schools can provide coordinated instructional support through academic programs that assist students in meeting standards as well as providing opportunities for acceleration. Such programs must be built upon positive relationships between students and staff and presented in a way that engages students and meets the needs of diverse learners.

Middle schools' academic extended learning opportunities should be aligned with the curriculum and assist students with meeting or exceeding on-or above-grade-level course expectations.

Additionally, extracurricular activities should provide students opportunities to explore their interests, in accordance with Board Policy IQD, *Academic Eligibility for Extracurricular Activities* and MCPS Regulation IQD-RB, *Academic Eligibility for Middle School Students who Participate in Extracurricular Activities.* These extracurricular activities, such as participation in the arts and competitive and noncompetitive athletics and other clubs, will enhance students' social and emotional development and encourage a more complete engagement in school.

5.   Leadership and Professional Development

The MCPS professional growth systems include regular and systematic opportunities for all administrators, teachers, and support services staff to increase their knowledge, skills, and capacity to continuously improve the teaching and learning process. Central office will support processes that must be established at the school level for the following:

a)   Monitoring and communicating the school or classroom's vision, mission, goals, and action plans.

b)   Working with stakeholders to help create a vision and implement strategies that will support a high-performing organization focused on continuous improvement.

c) Identifying potential leaders to participate in professional growth opportunities designed to enhance the teaching and learning process.

d) Building internal capacities that strengthen the school staff's ability to meet its vision, goals, and action plans and to establish high expectations for all learners.

e) Providing professional development for school staff on effective strategies for communicating with and engaging all parents/guardians to promote increased student achievement.

f) Providing professional development for school staff to deepen their knowledge of content, skills, the use of technology, differentiation and the delivery of instruction.

6. Parent/guardian and Community Engagement and Communication

Consistent with Board policies ABA, *Community Involvement, and* Policy ABC, *Parent and Family Involvement,* and MCPS Regulation ABC-RA, *Parent and Family Involvement,* parents/guardians and community members are critical partners in the social and intellectual development of students. This partnership will benefit from the following:

a) Opportunities for parents/guardians and families to increase their ability to support the academic achievement of their children.

b) Opportunities for parents/guardians to provide input, feedback, and involvement in decision making regarding the academic, social, and co-curricular programs.

c) Frequent two-way communication between families and schools to provide information and solicit feedback regarding an individual child's progress, as well as local and systemwide policies, regulations, and practices in the languages spoken in the community, whenever feasible.

d) Varied opportunities for families and community members to be involved in student and school projects, activities, and events.

e) Collaborative relationships with local businesses, community organizations, other agencies, and institutions of higher learning to support student success and parent/guardian involvement.

7. Human Resources

It is critical that middle school staff possess the knowledge, skills, and content expertise required to meet the needs of middle school students. Practices to recruit, attract, and retain highly qualified middle school teachers must be implemented to address academic performance and the individual needs of schools. Such needs may include, but are not limited to, Free and Reduced-Price Meals System participation, mobility, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

At each individual school, staff will do the following:

a) Be highly qualified in core academic subjects and able to deliver content with effective instructional methods.

b) Communicate high expectations for all students.

c) Create opportunities for professional learning communities to improve teaching and learning.

d) Be knowledgeable about the developmental characteristics of adolescents and be committed to the concept that all students can learn.

e) Develop relationships with students that will engage them in the learning process.

f) Develop relationships between parents/guardians and staff to support the educational process.

g) Reflect, to the extent possible, the diverse population of MCPS.

D. DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. An educational program that emphasizes academic achievement.

2. Core subjects, elective courses, and special interest activities that are integrated into every aspect of the middle school program and accessible to all students.

3. Programs, courses, activities and learning experiences that prepare students to transition successfully to high school, postsecondary education, and the world of work.

4. Partnerships with students, staff, parents/guardians, and families that support and encourage academic achievement, and the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth of students in their middle learning years.

5. A culture that fosters intellectual development, as well as citizenship, responsibilities, and mutual respect among students.

E.   REVIEW AND REPORTING

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the Board policy review process.

Policy History: Adopted by Resolution No. 486-92, June 22, 1992; amended by Resolution No. 98-07, February 26, 2007, technical amendments by Resolution No. 319-17, June 26, 2017.

Note: Prior to Resolution No. 486-92, this topic was governed by the following: Middle School Policy, adopted by Resolution No. 827-77, December 13, 1977; reformatted in accordance with Resolution No. 333-86, June 12, 1986, and Resolution No. 458-86, August 12, 1986; rescinded by Resolution No. 347-88, June 27, 1988; and Junior High School Policy, adopted by Resolution No. 163-74, March 25, 1974; amended by Resolution No. 827-77, December 13, 1977; reformatted in accordance with Resolution No. 333-86, June 12, 1986, and Resolution No. 458-86, August 12, 1986; rescinded by Resolution No. 347-88, June 27, 1988; new policy adopted by Resolution No. 347-88, June 27, 1988; rescinded by Resolution No. 486-92, June 22, 1992.