

POLICY

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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

Responsible Office: Chief Academic Officer

Framework and Structure of Early Childhood and Elementary Education

A. PURPOSE

To affirm the Montgomery County Board of Education's commitment to promoting the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth and development of children in their early learning years through high quality, developmentally appropriate, challenging, and comprehensive early childhood and elementary programs

To establish a framework for early childhood and elementary education, in partnership with parents/guardians and collaboration with community stakeholders, including county government, and state and local agencies, that allows each child to establish a solid foundation for learning through high quality early childhood experiences and attain key educational and developmental milestones in each successive grade as they progress from elementary grades, to middle and high school, then a lifetime of academic and personal achievements.

To provide early identification and intervention strategies for identified children.

To set expectations for early childhood and elementary education that includes evidence-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum and instructional practices in a supportive and culturally proficient learning environment, through family and community involvement, staff development, and collaboration with community early childhood education programs and community partners, including community child care centers, family child care homes, and private preschools.

B. ISSUE

A strong and growing body of evidence shows that successful programs during the early childhood and elementary school years lead to high levels of school success in later years.

The Board is committed to effectively utilizing county, state, and federal resources, along with community partners, to establish a continuum of essential services needed by young children and their families in order to identify children in need of services and facilitate student development, transition, placement, and program continuity at each stage of a child's development, from home, child care, or preschool to prekindergarten (pre-K), as appropriate, and from one elementary grade to another.

The Board collaborates with public and private agencies across Montgomery County to support children in the early years from birth to five years and prepares them for elementary school success as set forth in the Montgomery County Early Care and Education Strategic Plan.

Among these community partners, Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS') role in the meeting the educational needs of Montgomery County's diverse young learners is to provide early intervention and special education services for children who are not yet of kindergarten age who meet eligibility criteria pursuant to state and federal laws. Head Start and pre-K programs offer high-quality educational experiences to income-eligible children in order to prepare them with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for school success in kindergarten and beyond. In addition, Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers, or "Judy Centers," are state grant- and locally-funded early childhood and family learning centers which provide comprehensive early childhood services for children birth through age five.

MCPS also provides a variety of screening, early intervention, and special education services to children, from birth to eight years, through home and school-based programs and other area and central programs. Services are provided to children with a wide range of needs, including, but not limited to, speech/language, auditory, vision, orthopedic, and developmental delays.

The Board affirms the importance of the continuity provided by early childhood education programs for students in pre-K and kindergarten through Grade 3, and the important academic milestones for academic readiness that mark the transition from Grade 3 to the upper elementary grades.

Young children's unique developmental stages and characteristics must guide the implementation of the early childhood and elementary programs. Young children's thinking, learning styles, and view of the world are qualitatively different from older children and adults.

Although young children share similarities as a group, they differ remarkably from one another, and appropriate programming will be flexible enough to accommodate each one. Family background, language, culture, gender, personality, learning styles, interests, and abilities contribute to a child's individuality. Most children pass through the same

sequence of developmental stages, but the pace of development varies from child to child. Moreover, development often does not proceed evenly. The cognitive, physical, social, and emotional levels of maturity may vary within the individual child.

The following elements are necessary for establishing and maintaining a rigorous instructional program that meets the needs of early childhood and elementary students: comprehensive curriculum and related assessments; a rigorous, differentiated instructional program; opportunities for purposeful play; committed staff and leadership that is appropriately certified, licensed or credentialed; a collaborative yet flexible organizational structure; and fully engaged parents/guardians and community stakeholders.

C. POSITION

1. Early Childhood Program and School Culture

Each MCPS elementary school will develop a culture that promotes children's physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional, and social development; personal integrity; self-confidence; social responsibility; mutual respect among all students; as well as motivation, and an eagerness to learn and excel, as follows:

- a) Encourage the natural curiosity and creativity of all young learners to actively explore, discover, and construct knowledge through intellectually challenging experiences, and interactions with an inviting, stimulating, and supportive learning environment that –
 - (1) encourages active engagement in learning through self-selection of materials and self-direction as appropriate,
 - (2) encourages constructive risk-taking and use mistakes as instructional tools, and
 - (3) provides young children with a continuum of time in which to learn.
- b) Maintain a well-managed, safe, and nurturing environment that encourages positive relationships among children and between adults and children.
- c) Provide daily activities for purposeful play and gross motor physical development, through age-appropriate classroom and play spaces.
- d) Use the outdoors and other opportunities outside the classroom as important environments for learning, on the playground, neighborhood walks, and field trips.

- e) Recognize that parents/guardians are their child's first teachers, and welcome and acknowledge the unique contributions of parents/guardians and families to the child's growth and development.
 - f) In alignment with Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*, foster mutual understanding, respect, and cultural competence among students and staff without regard to an individual's actual or perceived personal characteristics as defined in Policy ACA.
 - g) Provide a system of standards and expectations that promotes personal responsibility, integrity, and citizenship.
 - h) View discipline as a developmental process, in alignment with Board Policy JGA, *Student Discipline*, respond to inappropriate student behavior in a timely and age-appropriate way that supports personal growth and learning opportunities for students, and administer school discipline in a way that keeps students within their regular school program to the greatest extent possible.
 - i) Promote readiness, smooth transitions and progress of children from one grade level to another by encouraging teachers and other staff members to exchange pertinent information about each child's needs, learning styles, and attainment of developmental milestones.
 - j) Facilitate communication in the languages spoken in the community, whenever feasible.
 - k) Assist children to make the transition from home, family child care or child care centers, and preschool into the MCPS elementary program; support each child's development and academic achievement; and facilitate the critical partnership of families and schools in planning for and attaining the long-range educational goals for each student.
 - l) Work to ensure that school programs and activities reflect the diversity of the school population and provide equitable access to all academic programs and school activities.
2. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

MCPS's approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment will meet the unique needs of each young learner while setting high expectations for all students. Teachers welcome and plan for students' wide range of abilities, developmental

levels, interests, backgrounds, learning styles and experiences, and provide manageable challenges to promote early successes that foster self-esteem.

- a) Student achievement depends on the implementation and provision of a consistent curriculum that addresses the needs of the whole child. The early childhood and elementary 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, including reading/language arts, math, social studies, science, art, music, and physical education, 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 teachers, administrators, and central services staff
- b) Instructional practices will incorporate a variety of methods, strategies, and resources that encourage students to be active and engaged learners. Such practices will align with relevant Board policies and MCPS regulations, including, but not limited to, Board policies IKA, *Grading and Reporting*; IOA, *Gifted and Talented Education*; IOD, *Education of English Language Learners*; and IOB, *Education of Students with Disabilities*; and MCPS Regulation IHB-RA, *School Academic Grouping Practices*.
 - (1) Technology will be integrated into the curriculum as well as instruction and assessment to build or strengthen students' interest and skills in the use of technology.
 - (2) Programmatic and instructional decisions will be based on the analysis of student performance data in relation to established standards.
 - (3) Differentiated instructional practices will include acceleration, supports for improving student performance, enrichment, and other

strategies as needed to help students to meet their academic potential. Such practices will address learning styles as well as physical, social, and emotional differences among students.

- (4) In both the planning and implementation of instruction, early childhood and elementary programs will utilize the unique skills of staff members in general education, special education, education of English language learners, and other disciplines and supports integral to the comprehensive educational program.
- (5) Instructional practices should –
 - (a) adapt materials and equipment, when necessary to meet the developmental needs of a child,
 - (b) emphasize the use of hands-on activities, children's life experiences, concrete materials, and manipulatives,
 - (c) give children choices and the opportunity to initiate activities,
 - (d) recognize play (both planned and spontaneous) as a valuable means for children to learn and develop,
 - (e) assure that opportunities are provided that help children develop initiative, responsibility, confidence, and independence,
 - (f) provide leadership opportunities for children, and
 - (g) create a language-rich environment that builds literacy and infuses all learning tasks and activities with opportunities for children to understand and use language with adults and peers.

c) Assessment

Board Policy IKA, *Grading and Reporting*, sets forth assessment practices as an essential aspect of the instructional cycle.

- (1) Teachers use pre-assessments, formative assessments, and summative assessments to communicate achievement to parents/guardians and students; plan and deliver instruction to meet

learning goals; provide prompt appropriate interventions; 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, includes the following:
 - (a) Representation of a student's performance on a variety of measures over time.
 - (b) An opportunity for students to demonstrate proficiency through a variety of methods.
 - (c) Meaningful feedback on student achievement to students and parents/guardians.
 - (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 enhance student learning and provides focused instruction to meet individual student needs.

3. Organizational Structure

- a) The organizational structure of a high-achieving early childhood and elementary school program –
 - (1) effectively utilizes county, state, and federal resources to establish a continuum of essential services to provide the continuity needed by young children and their families, in close communication and collaboration with community child care providers, partner agencies, and other community service providers,
 - (2) optimizes time for learning, and
 - (3) identifies children in need of services and facilitates student transition, placement, and program continuity at each stage of a child's development, from home, child care, or preschool to pre-K, as appropriate, and from one elementary grade to another.

- b) Effective, flexible, and collaborative organizational structures shall include—
- (1) public understanding of the importance and availability of quality early childhood programs and services and effective outreach, which includes building relationships with families of students eligible for early intervention services and programming,
 - (2) opportunities for MCPS teachers to collaborate across grade-level teams and subject areas, and communicate among special education and general education program staff,
 - (3) opportunities for staff to meet with parents/guardians to discuss student progress,
 - (4) effective identification, intervention, and enrichment programs,
 - (5) adequate time for instruction in all curricular areas,
 - (6) a comprehensive education program that prepares students to attain key educational and developmental milestones in each successive grade as they progress from the elementary grades through middle and high school.
- c) Class sizes and student-adult ratios are assigned to the elementary classes with full recognition of the importance of young children's need to have easy and frequent access to an adult for –
- (1) supporting cognitive or emotional development,
 - (2) promoting adult-to-child and child-to-child interaction,
 - (3) individual and small group learning experiences, and
 - (4) differentiated support for highest needs schools.

4. Leadership and Planning

Administrators, teachers, and support services staff increase their knowledge, skills, and capacity to continuously improve the teaching and learning process. At the program and school level, there must be processes in place for –

- a) monitoring and communicating the program, 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, and
 - d) building internal capacities that strengthen the program and school staff's ability to meet its vision, goals, and action plans and to establish high expectations for all learners.
5. Parent/Guardian and Community Engagement and Communication

Consistent with Board Policy ABA, *Community Involvement*; 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 children. The interrelatedness of the roles of family and school requires a partnership involving communication and shared decision-making. This partnership promotes –

- a) communication and outreach that assist families and children in the transition of children from home, child care, family day care, or preschool, as appropriate, into and through the MCPS elementary program,
- b) opportunities for families to increase their children's ability to succeed in school and in life,
- 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 school and systemwide policies, regulations, programs and practices,
- d) collaboration with stakeholders within the community such as local businesses, community organizations, institutions of higher education, and other agencies such as libraries to support early academic achievement, and
- e) varied opportunities for families and community members to be involved in early childhood and school programs, projects, activities, and events with children

6. Human Resources and Professional Development

MCPS recruits, employs, and retains early childhood and elementary school staff members who possess the knowledge, skills, and content expertise required to meet the needs of all young children.

- a) Staff members are –
 - (1) knowledgeable about the developmental characteristics of young children,
 - (2) committed to the concept that all children can learn and succeed, and
 - (3) skilled at developing positive relationships with students and parents/guardians and engaging them in the learning process.
- b) Staff members communicate high expectations for all students.
- c) In alignment with Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*, MCPS will take positive steps to eliminate structural and institutional barriers to recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting a diverse workforce.
- d) Staff selection considers the individual needs of each program and school.
- e) Ongoing professional development for program and school staff and administrators –
 - (1) deepens their knowledge of early childhood development, curricular content, appropriate uses of technology, and the delivery and differentiation of instruction, and
 - (2) provides effective strategies for communicating with and engaging all parents/guardians to promote increased achievement of children.

D. DESIRED OUTCOMES

High-quality, comprehensive early childhood and elementary programs that allow each child to establish a solid foundation through challenging early childhood and elementary experiences and to attain key educational and developmental milestones in each successive grade as they progress from elementary grades, through middle and high school, then onto a lifetime of academic and personal achievements

E. REVIEW

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

Policy History: Adopted by Resolution No. 345-88, June 27, 1988; amended by Resolution No. 284-07, May 21, 2007; technical amendments by Resolution No. 319-17, June 26, 2017; amended by Resolution No. 205-18, April 12, 2018.

Note: Prior to Resolution No. 345-88, this topic was governed by the following: K-8 Policy, adopted by Resolution No. 161-80, February 12, 1980; amended by Resolution No. 912b-83, November 8, 1983; reformatted in accordance with Resolution No. 333-86, June 12, 1986, and Resolution No. 458-86, August 12, 1986; rescinded by Resolution No. 345-88, June 27, 1988. Tenets of Board policy IEF, *Early Childhood Education*, were incorporated by Resolution No. 205-18 amendments to this policy, and was rescinded upon adoption of amended Board Policy IEA on April 12, 2018.