



**Evaluation of the Implementation of Middle School  
Reform: Final Report 2007–2008**

**Office of Shared Accountability**

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## Executive Summary

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) conducted an evaluation of Middle School Reform in 2007–2008, with a focus on the extent and fidelity of implementation of the recommended actions described in the Report on Middle School Reform (Weast, 2007). The Montgomery County Public Schools Middle School Reform Report focuses on six goals, as follows:

- **Goal 1:** Ensure effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectations.
- **Goal 2:** Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using a rigorous standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.
- **Goal 3:** Provide extended learning opportunities that engage and motivate students to achieve at higher levels.
- **Goal 4:** Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationships, and promote increased student achievement.
- **Goal 5:** Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skill, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.
- **Goal 6:** Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.

### Methodology

Five middle schools, referred to as Phase I schools, were selected to implement all of the recommended actions for Middle School Reform in 2007–2008. The sample of schools for the evaluation was limited to these schools. Data sources for this evaluation included classroom observations; a school staff survey; a student survey; a parent survey; midyear interviews with principals and school leaders; end-of-year interviews with principals; reviews of program documentation; and analysis of MCPS data on course offerings. Classroom observations, student surveys, and parent surveys were restricted to Grade 6. Survey response rates were 48% for school staff, 82% for students, and 36% for parents.

### Findings

*Goal 1.* Implementation took place as intended for the following key actions for Goal 1: the Professional Learning Communities Institute, restructured roles and responsibilities for content specialists and team leaders, and two new positions related to rigorous instruction for all students, the Accelerated and Enriched Instruction (AEI) Mathematics Content Specialist and the AEI Literacy Coach. These actions had positive impacts on staff members' focus on learning, accelerated and enriched instruction for students, intervention support for students, and support for teachers.

*Goal 2.* Findings for Goal 2 were organized around four themes, the first of which was rigor in the classroom. Phase I middle schools did not offer additional high school courses, compared with the previous school year. All five offered two new semester elective courses to Grade 6 students. About half of Grade 6 students took at least one of the new electives. Three of the five principals felt that one of those courses, Arts Investigation, needed more rigorous content. Surveyed Grade 6

parents and students were positive about opportunities for acceleration and enrichment. Lesson content or materials considered rigorous (provocative, ambiguous, complex, and/or emotionally challenging) were observed throughout the class period in more than half of the 48 observed classes, but only about one third of the classes included sufficient combinations of instructional strategies associated with rigorous instruction or critical thinking to be considered rigorous.

The second theme of Goal 2 was technology in the classroom. Findings from late-year observations indicated that the use of Promethean technology to deliver lessons is still a developing capability. While Promethean technology was used frequently for warm-up activities and/or whole-group lessons, there was only minimal use for small-group activities (where differentiation might occur), individual practice, or closure. Teachers did use ActiVote for formative assessment purposes in about one third of the equipped classes. On surveys, teachers reported more frequent use of Promethean technology than was observed. In almost all classrooms without Promethean technology, another technology was used (e.g., computers, projectors). Through surveys, the majority of parents and students gave positive responses about the use of technology at school, although slightly more surveyed parents than students were positive.

The third theme of Goal 2 was support for instruction and assessment. The following supports were provided: formative and unit assessments for all English and most mathematics courses, unit assessments (not formative assessments) for science and social studies courses, Performance Matters as a technology tool to analyze assessments, and professional development delivered at all five Phase I middle schools on the following key topics: rigor, the adolescent learner, collaboration, and assessments/Performance Matters.

The level of implementation of these supports varied. Implementation of formative and unit assessments in Grade 6 was incomplete; not all schools used all available assessments. Middle school instructional staff confirmed in their spring survey that Performance Matters was used for the purposes emphasized in training, most often to identify at-risk students and examine Maryland School Assessment (MSA) results by subgroup. Implementation of job-embedded professional development was high. At least two thirds of instructional staff survey respondents confirmed attendance at training on each of the key topics; more than 8 in 10 surveyed staff members received training on rigorous instruction and the adolescent learner.

The final theme of Goal 2 was supporting middle school learners. At two points during each of the observed Grade 6 classes, all or most students showed the following signs of engagement: able to follow instructions, pay attention, and sustain their attention in class. Students were more likely to show enthusiasm if they were in small-group or individual activities than if they were in a whole-group lesson. According to observation findings in Grade 6 classes, implementation of instructional practices to focus on the needs of adolescent learners was incomplete. The most frequently observed indicator, the teacher providing one-on-one feedback to students, was in evidence throughout the class period in more than half of the classes (32 classes). Three other indicators of focus on adolescent learners were observed much less frequently. The majority of parents and students surveyed gave positive reports about student engagement and supports for adolescent learners. However, surveyed parents were more likely than students to give positive responses.

Enhancing student engagement and meeting the needs of adolescent learners are the expected results for all of the actions in Goal 2. These findings on engagement and supports for adolescent learners suggest some positive impact from the implementation of the other actions within this goal.

*Goal 3.* All five schools hired an Extended Learning Opportunities coordinator who fulfilled their duties as expected and offered a variety of mathematics and reading supports in the Extended Day Program, plus *Lights, Camera, Literacy! (LCL!)* and a related, advanced course. Evaluation findings in summer 2007 suggested that *LCL!* meets student learning goals of hands-on learning and engagement, but needs to strengthen literacy skills and links to the language arts curriculum.<sup>1</sup> While the option to add one bus for after-school transportation was available to each school in 2007–2008, none of the schools elected to take this option.

*Goal 4.* The following supports were implemented as intended: counselor allocation, funds for Cohort Collaborative Work (CCW), and 7-hour instructional data assistants. The increased counselor allocation had a positive impact; the ratio of students per counselor dropped at each Phase I school. Based on the reports of CCW participants in the staff survey, this action had a positive impact on common team planning and monitoring student performance.

*Goal 5.* Staff members (inside and outside the Office of Human Resources) who hire middle school personnel received some documents and training as supports. However, implementation of the proposed processes to support recruitment, hiring, and retention of middle school staff was incomplete.

*Goal 6.* The majority of respondents to the parent survey reported being involved with their child's school, typically by helping with homework or attending school events. The following resources were provided to promote positive family and community involvement:

- One-page information sheet for principals about National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
- Seminar by Dr. Karen Mapp, coauthor of *Beyond the Bake Sale*
- Study Circle program with parents at two schools
- Seven training sessions for central office parent outreach staff
- 37 Parent Academy sessions attended by 415 parents at the five Phase I schools

### **Recommendations from the Evaluation**

- Explore ways for the AEI literacy coach to increase effectiveness in helping more school staff members build their capacity in literacy strategies and provide support for all students.
- Revise the new Grade 6 elective course, Arts Investigations, to increase rigorous and relevant instruction.
- Emphasize the use of critical-thinking skills (outlined in the rigor look-fors) during professional development on rigorous instruction in the classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the study was conducted in 2007, a new document was developed by the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs, creating explicit alignment of *LCL!* to the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum.

- Explore ways to engage students more fully during whole-group lessons; student engagement is stronger during small-group work and individual activities.
- Emphasize the need for teachers to provide more of the strategies that are beneficial for adolescent learners, such as opportunities for students to work or discuss in small groups.
- Ensure that course codes used by schools to register students for elective, accelerated, high school, and intervention courses are the “official” course codes.
- Complete implementation of the processes proposed in Goal 5 to support recruitment, hiring, and retention of middle school staff.
- Collect feedback from parents and schools to determine which of the training, information, and resources provided through Goal 6 were most helpful.
- Include parents in Study Circle programs.

# Evaluation of the Implementation of Middle School Reform: Final Report 2007–2008

Elizabeth Cooper-Martin, Ph.D. and Rachel A. Hickson, M.A.

## Background<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) 1999 Strategic Plan, *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*, raises the challenge of increasing the achievement of all students. To meet this challenge, a comprehensive systemwide reform began with improvements in elementary and high schools. Due to success of the elementary school changes, entering middle school students have more advanced mathematics and reading skills. At the same time, expectations for high school students have increased, and have resulted in more and more students enrolling in Honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses. Concurrently, there is a need for students to compete and succeed in a global economy and for our schools to use the same technological tools that our students already use in this digital age. To meet this need, “MCPS must ensure that every middle school student is held to the highest academic standards, engaged in rigorous and relevant learning, and taught by caring and highly skilled teachers” (Weast, 2007). Therefore, to strengthen the bridge between elementary and high schools and to match the skills and interests of students, MCPS embarked on a comprehensive reform effort aimed specifically at its 38 middle schools.

Planning for the reform process included the input of diverse groups, including educators, parents, community members, representatives of employee associations, students, and other stakeholders. An external program review of middle schools was conducted by MGT America, Inc. School leaders worked together with Harvard University through the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) on sustaining progress at the elementary level into middle schools. In addition, a Middle School Reform Steering Committee and seven project teams focused intensively on elements of reform. Community forums were conducted in March and November of 2006. Project teams drafted recommendations, based on scientifically based research practices, benchmark exemplary models, and relevant data. Key components of the MCPS Middle School Magnet Consortium, a group of three whole-school magnet programs, also were examined. Concurrent with the development of this reform plan, the Board of Education reviewed and approved a revised Policy IEB, *Middle School Education*. The revised policy incorporated the latest research and input from the seven Middle School Reform project teams.

The steering committee synthesized all the findings and reports to develop a plan for “a rigorous and challenging middle school education program that improves teaching and learning, promotes continuous improvement in all middle schools, and ensures that all students are prepared for rigorous high school standards” (Weast, 2007) with a commitment to close the achievement gap.

The 2007–2008 evaluation of Middle School Reform coincided with the start of this initiative. Prior to evaluating the expected impact of this reform, it was critical to study whether the reform’s many recommended actions were implemented as expected. Therefore, the purpose of this formative evaluation was to examine implementation and to provide feedback to the program staff on how to improve the program. The focus was on evaluating whether specific actions had been implemented, to what extent, with what consistency from site to site, and with what quality.

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<sup>2</sup> This section is based on Weast, 2007.

## ***Description of Reform***

The MCPS Middle School Reform report focuses on six goals, as follows:

- Goal 1: Ensure effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectations.
- Goal 2: Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using a rigorous standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.
- Goal 3: Provide extended learning opportunities that engage and motivate students to achieve at higher levels.
- Goal 4: Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationships, and promote increased student achievement.
- Goal 5: Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skill, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.
- Goal 6: Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.

Recommended actions to support each goal were also developed (see list in Appendix A and descriptions in Weast, 2007). These actions address seven key areas and elements:

1. Collaborative and high-quality leadership
2. Professional development
3. Rigorous and challenging curriculum, instruction, and assessments
4. Supports for students
5. Teachers with strong content knowledge and teaching expertise
6. Strong parent and community engagement
7. Technology

The recommended actions to achieve the goals of Middle School Reform will be phased in over three years.<sup>3</sup> During the 2007–2008 school year, the following five middle schools were chosen to implement all of the recommended actions: Benjamin Banneker, Roberto Clemente, Montgomery Village, Sligo, and Earle B. Wood (see notes in Appendix A). The remaining 33 middle schools were expected to implement selected recommended actions.

## ***Scope of the Evaluation***

The evaluation addressed all six goals of Middle School Reform and nearly all of the available recommended actions for each goal. For each goal, selected actions were identified for more in-depth study.

## ***Evaluation Advisory Group***

An advisory group for the evaluation of Middle School Reform was formed and met periodically. Members of this group included a wide range of stakeholders: parents and staff from Phase I and non-Phase I schools, employee association representatives, and representatives from MCPS offices and departments involved with Middle School Reform (e.g., the Office of Curriculum and

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<sup>3</sup> Although the original report stated three years, the implementation period has been extended, due to budgetary restrictions.

Instructional Programs, the Office of School Performance, and the Office of Communications and Family Outreach, formerly Department of Communications). Two students from Phase I schools joined the group during spring 2008.

The advisory group suggested implementation questions for selected recommended actions related to the goals of Middle School Reform, helped to prioritize the amount of evaluation effort needed for each of the recommended actions within selected goals, and reviewed surveys in draft form.

### ***Organization of Report***

The next section of this report is a review of literature on relevant evaluations. It is followed by the methodology, which describes the sample, design, data sources, and data collection methods. The next section, on evaluation findings, is organized by the six goals of Middle School Reform; a summary and conclusion are included for each goal. The final section of the report is a list of recommendations based on the evaluation findings.

## Review of Literature

The evaluation was informed by a review of relevant evaluations conducted by external organizations, along with a review of relevant evaluations conducted within MCPS. These reviews helped to identify current issues in the field of middle school education, to understand the feasibility of various data collection methods, and to shape appropriate evaluation questions and measures.

### *Implementation Evaluations of Middle School Reform*

The Middle School Reform plan for MCPS can be characterized as “comprehensive” school reform—that is, “a coherent vision of its mission and educational strategy that addresses every aspect of its operations” (Vernez et. al., 2006).

However, the literature review revealed few studies concerning the *implementation* of comprehensive school reform. This deficit in past evaluations has been noted by other researchers, as follows:

“A major shortcoming of nearly all [comprehensive school reform] studies is that they fail to account for the extent to which schools have actually implemented their chosen model” (Vernez et al., 2006).

Most studies of middle school reform focus on student outcomes, such as mathematics or reading performance.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even in studies with successful outcomes to report, implementation can play a critical role. For example, in the Talent Development Middle Schools project, conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, the strength of any identified improvements in academic achievement among middle school students depended on the timing of reforms and the intensity of reforms (Herlihy & Kemple, 2004).

It is important not to rush to judgment about whether reforms have had an impact on student outcomes. Because of changes to the school climate, including the reorganization of teachers according to the way they teach, middle school reform can be subject to the “J-curve” phenomenon (an initial lowering of achievement before gains are ultimately made). As the reforms are applied more correctly and uniformly, driven largely by the increased cooperation of teachers and administrators, positive achievement outcomes begin to take place (Erb & Stevenson, 1999).

### *Evaluations of the Implementation of Middle School Programs in MCPS*

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) has conducted a number of recent or current evaluations in middle schools that relate to the goals of MCPS Middle School Reform. It helps to consider the experience of OSA evaluators in conducting a variety of data collection activities in MCPS middle schools (e.g., classroom observations, interviews, surveys, focus groups) using pertinent school-system personnel. These evaluations include a major focus on implementation. They are listed and summarized by applicable goal area below.

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<sup>4</sup> An outcome study may be appropriate for the later years of Middle School Reform in MCPS, when the fidelity of implementation has been investigated and established.

## Goal 2

### Algebra 1 Curriculum

In 2003–2004, a new Algebra 1 curriculum was introduced to better align with the requirements of High School Assessments. Middle school students comprise more than half of Algebra 1 students in MCPS; a district goal is for 80 percent of students to complete Algebra 1, in all 38 middle schools by 2010 (MCPS, 2006). OSA conducted a comprehensive multi-method evaluation of implementation of the new curriculum to determine the extent to which the new curriculum was implemented and to suggest refinements and improvements to the curriculum and related professional development for Algebra 1 (Hickson & Merchlinsky, 2007). The study concluded that implementation was incomplete and inconsistent from school to school and made specific recommendations for improvements to the delivery of the curriculum.

### Secondary Reading Interventions

OSA staff evaluated the implementation of Corrective Reading (CR) (SRA/McGraw Hill) as part of the evaluation of secondary reading interventions in MCPS during 2004–2005 (Hickson, 2005a). That year, one high school and one middle school used CR. Classroom observations and interviews with CR teachers and program coordinators revealed that the major components of CR were being implemented as designed. Two lesson components required additional development. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the first year of program training, professional development, and use. Program materials and placement testing procedures were revealed to need additional modifications.

OSA staff also evaluated the implementation of Read 180 (Scholastic, Inc.) as part of the evaluation of secondary reading interventions in MCPS during 2004–2005 (Hickson, 2005b). Read 180 was used by a limited number of MCPS schools for the first time. Classroom observations and interviews with Read 180 teachers and program coordinators revealed that Read 180 was not being implemented consistently with program design. In particular, a 90-minute block of daily instruction was not followed, as dictated by program design. The shortage of instructional time led to inconsistency of implementation of instructional components (e.g., whole-group instruction). The evaluation also identified hardware and software difficulties and a need for additional staff development and training with Read 180. Subsequently, corrections were made to Read 180. An OSA evaluation of the current implementation of Read 180 across 64 MCPS secondary schools is in process (Gheen, 2008).

### Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC)

Supplemented by a \$7.2 million federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant, MCPS opened three whole-school magnets in 2005–2006, providing students countywide in Grades 6–8 with the opportunity to engage in highly rigorous instructional programs focusing on information technology (Argyle Middle School), performing and creative arts (A. Mario Loiederman Middle School), or aerospace technologies (Parkland Middle School). Evaluation findings from the first two years showed progress in achieving MSMC’s overarching goals of improving student achievement and decreasing socioeconomic isolation (Weast, 2008).

*The Scaling Up Curriculum for Achievement, Learning, and Equity Project (SCALE-uP) Middle School Science Curriculum.*<sup>5</sup> SCALE-uP is designed to help staff understand how science curriculum materials, aligned with reform goals outlined in the Project 2061 Instructional Analysis, improves educational outcomes for diverse student populations on a large scale. The final wave of data was collected during 2006–2007. The fidelity of curriculum implementation is a focus of this research project, as reported in O’Donnell (2006).

*Grading and Reporting.* MCPS began implementing a standards-based grading and reporting policy during the 2005–2006 school year. OSA conducted a multiyear evaluation to determine the extent and consistency of implementation of the policy and procedures across and within schools. Evaluation activities included document reviews; stakeholder interviews; and surveys of school staff, parents, and secondary students. The level of implementation has varied across schools; with the most difficulties identified in the areas of reteach/reassess and academic meaning of the grade (Merchlinisky, 2006a and 2006b).

#### *Goal 4*

##### The Collaborative Action Process

The Collaborative Action Process (CAP) is a schoolwide, problem-solving process focusing on prevention, intervention, and collaboration that serves the needs of the school community. In 2006–2007, 61 MCPS schools were assigned to use CAP, including 10 middle schools. The evaluation of the 2006–2007 school year focused on the extent and fidelity of implementation (Cooper-Martin & Hickson 2008a, 2008b, & 2008c) and the factors that influenced the fidelity of implementation (Cooper-Martin, 2008). Principal interviews, online surveys of school-based staff, and analysis of CAP documents were used to gather information.

#### *Goal 6*

##### Study Circles

The MCPS Study Circles Program was developed to complement ongoing initiatives aimed at closing the achievement gap. Study Circles provide schools with a strategy for addressing racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement and parent involvement. OSA staff conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the Study Circles Program, examining implementation, participation, and impact. Early results based on participant surveys indicated that the program is meeting its goal; diverse groups of parents, teachers, and students are coming together for meaningful discussions, and action plans for positive change are being developed (Wade, 2006).

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<sup>5</sup>The Scaling Up Curriculum for Achievement, Learning, and Equity Project (SCALE-uP) is a collaborative effort between The George Washington University and MCPS and funded by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Institutes of Health under the Interagency Education Research Initiative.

## Methodology

A comprehensive methodology using multiple data collection activities was developed to address the following evaluation questions for this study:

1. Was Middle School Reform implemented as designed?
2. Did the recommended actions take place? and
3. If so, with what fidelity to the original intent and with what quality?

### *Sample and Design*

The sample of schools for this study was restricted to the five Phase I middle schools, as these schools were the only ones implementing all of the recommended actions available in 2007–2008. For certain data collection activities (i.e., student survey, parent survey, classroom observations), one grade level was chosen to maximize resources. Grade 6 was selected as the focus grade level because the new electives offered (see recommended action 2.6) were only for Grade 6 students.

The study was a nonexperimental design that utilized multiple data collection methods to triangulate information gathered from multiple stakeholders (e.g., administrators, school leaders, teachers, parents, students) to address the evaluation questions. Several data collection activities were conducted during the 2007–2008 school year as follows.

### *Data Sources and Data Collection Methods*

#### *Classroom Observations*

OSA staff conducted observations of 48 Grade 6 classrooms in four subject areas: English, mathematics, social studies, and the new technology elective, Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The goal was to observe at least eight classes at each school (including at least two class sessions of each subject) and not to observe any teacher more than once. This goal was achieved with the exception of English at one school (Table 1).

Table 1  
Grade 6 Observations, by Phase I Middle School and Subject  
(Total number of observations)

Subject	All Schools (48)	Banneker (9)	Clemente (10)	Montgomery Village (8)	Sligo (10)	Wood (11)
English	11	1 <sup>a</sup>	3	2	2	3
Mathematics	15	3	3	2	3	4
ICT	10	2	2	2	2	2
Social studies	12	3	2	2	3	2

<sup>a</sup> Only one English class was observed, because the only other Grade 6 English teacher was a long-term substitute.

The median size for the observed classes ranged from 22 students for ICT and mathematics to 23 for English and 25 for social studies. Most of the observed classes (60%) were a “45-minute” period; the rest (40%) were a block period.

The observation protocol was guided by relevant literature and included indicators of rigorous instruction and critical thinking (see Figure T1 in Technical Appendix<sup>6</sup>). These indicators were carefully developed using MCPS rigor look-fors and critical thinking look-fors for middle school and in close consultation with middle school instructional specialists in each of the subject areas observed. The protocol also included indicators of student engagement, which were based on educational literature on student engagement in the classroom and refined from an earlier MCPS evaluation (Hickson, 2008). The final category on the observation was indicators for technology use. All observers underwent training to ensure consistent interpretation of the indicators across classes. These strategies improved the validity of evaluation findings.

### *Staff Survey*

To learn about school staff's experiences with Middle School Reform and to get feedback on needed refinements, a Web-based survey focusing on the components of the reform was created for all instructional leadership and instructional staff members (see Figure T2 in Technical Appendix). The survey includes items that were not relevant for this evaluation, but were used for other reports. Program staff reviewed the survey instrument to enhance content and construct validity of the items. Links to the surveys were provided during late April via e-mail to the principal at each school, who was asked to forward the links to their staff. Two reminders were sent via e-mail to the principals during early May 2008. A total of 184 staff surveys were completed for an overall response rate of 44%, including 68% for leadership team and 36% for teachers and other instructional staff not on a leadership team. Total numbers for leadership team and instructional staff were estimated; actual numbers of eligible staff members may be lower, resulting in a higher response rate.

### *Student Survey*

To learn about students' experiences with Middle School Reform, a Web-based survey focusing on the components of the reform was created for Grade 6 students (see Figure T3 in Technical Appendix). This survey was modeled on the MCPS environmental survey for students. Program staff, the evaluation advisory group, and a group of Grade 7 and 8 students from a Phase I middle school reviewed the survey instrument to enhance content as well as construct validity of the items. School administrators scheduled student access to computers during a two-week window in late May 2008 for all Grade 6 students. At three schools, the initial response rate was greater than 100%, most likely due to individual students' completing multiple surveys. For each of these schools, the number of surveys analyzed was adjusted by randomly eliminating surveys so that the total number of surveys equaled the total number of enrolled students in Grade 6 as of June 1, 2008. For a fourth school, the response rate was below 50%, because not all Grade 6 students were offered the opportunity to complete the survey. For the final analysis, 1,115 surveys were used, which represented an overall response rate of 82.5%.

### *Parent Survey*

To learn about parents' experiences with Middle School Reform, a mail survey was created for parents of Grade 6 students (see Figure T4 in Technical Appendix). This survey was modeled on the MCPS environmental survey for parents. An initial mailing in mid-May 2008 was followed with a

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<sup>6</sup> The Technical Appendix is available from the authors.

second mailing to the entire sample 10 days later. Families who had indicated a preference for receiving MCPS materials in Spanish received the survey in English and also in Spanish.

Based on recommendations from the evaluation advisory group, the survey had a “friendly” format, and an online option was available. The following communication methods were used to alert parents at each school in an effort to increase the survey response rate:

- A backpack flyer for Grade 6 students
- Two Connect-Ed messages (two weeks apart) to Grade 6 parents from the principal
- E-mail messages to inform the parent community coordinators from the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs and from the Division of Family and Community Partnerships
- A posting on the listserv for each Parent Teacher Association

A total of 482 surveys were returned, for an overall response rate of 36%. The response rate from parents who received a Spanish survey was 28%. Among those parents who identified their child’s school, the response rate varied from 27% to 34% for each of the Phase I middle schools (because respondents to the Web survey did not identify their child’s school, the overall response rate was higher than the response rate for individual schools). By comparison, the response rate from parents to the 2006–2007 MCPS environmental survey ranged from 20% to 23% for these five schools.

### *Interviews with School Staff*

#### Midyear

During December 2007 and early January 2008, 39 interviews with principals and members of school leadership teams were conducted at the five Phase I middle schools (Table 2). Note that, in addition to the other positions, one Grade 6 team leader, one other team leader, and one or two content specialists were interviewed at each school. Interviews followed a semistructured protocol, lasted 30 to 45 minutes each, and addressed school staff experiences with the implementation of the major themes and actions of Middle School Reform. Protocol topics varied somewhat by staff position (see Figures T5-T8 in Technical Appendix).

#### End of year

A second interview was conducted with each of the Phase I principals during late April 2008 (see Figure T9 in Technical Appendix). Interviews followed a semistructured protocol, lasted 20 minutes each, and addressed experiences with the implementation of selected actions of Middle School Reform.

### *MCPS Databases*

Official OSA databases were used to examine student enrollment and demographic characteristics of enrollees for course offerings.

Table 2  
Midyear School Leadership Interviews

Position	Staff interviewed (N=39)
Principal	5
Staff development teacher	5
AEI mathematics content specialist	5
AEI literacy coach	5
Team leader (two per school)	
Grade 6	5
Grade 7	4
Grade 8	1
Content specialist (formerly resource teacher)	
Arts/Technology	1
English	2
Foreign languages	1
Physical education/Arts/Foreign languages	1
Physical education/Health/Arts	1
Science	1
Social studies	1
Technology/Foreign language/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	1

### *Program Documentation*

Program documents such as job descriptions for new and revised positions; program information on courses, activities, and workshop offerings; and attendance records for professional and family activities were reviewed and analyzed.

Other sources used to address the evaluation questions included presentations by school staff members about school-based actions that supported their Professional Learning Communities Institute (PLCI) activities and the results of a PLCI team survey distributed to participants (i.e., leadership team members, including parents) during the first and last PLCI professional development sessions. Out of 126 participants invited to PLCI, 86 responded to the survey at each of these sessions, for a response rate of 68% among all invitees. The first PLCI session was attended by 95 participants and the last session was attended by 86 participants; thus the response rate was higher among attendees.

### *Strengths and Limitations Associated with the Study*

The use of multiple data sources provided a more complete view of implementation. Due to resource limitations, primary data were collected only for selected recommended actions; therefore, the amount of data, although accurate, was limited for certain actions.

For both the staff survey and the parent survey, the response rate was below 50%; thus, the results are not generalizable beyond the respondents. The response rate of 82.5% for the student survey was high enough to make those results generalizable to all Grade 6 students. The student survey, as well as the parent survey and observations, were limited to Grade 6; this approach strengthens the findings by providing more in-depth information about this grade level, but the results cannot be generalized to other grades.

## Findings with Summary and Conclusions

Detailed findings are organized by Middle School Reform goal (e.g., Goal 1) with subheadings referencing a selected recommended action (e.g., 1.1) or a key theme that included several actions. The findings section for each goal ends with a summary and conclusion. A summary table at the end of each section indicates which actions are included in this report and, for each action not included in the present report, gives an explanation or a brief summary of findings available in other Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) reports.

***Goal 1: Ensure effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectations.***

The specific evaluation questions for Goal 1 were as follows:

- Did the recommended actions take place as intended?
- If so, what was the effect on staff members' focus on learning, accelerated and enriched instruction for students, intervention support for students, and support for teachers?

### *1.1 Professional Learning Communities Institute (PLCI)*

PLCI builds the capacity of each member of school leadership teams to implement beliefs, attitudes, strategies, and processes that will increase student achievement. All Phase I middle schools participated in PLCI, which included five full days of professional development distributed across the school year for the instructional leadership team of each school. Each day included an examination or review of the PLCI mission; exploration or review of the characteristics of an effective professional learning community; and time for each school team to meet, discuss, and plan. Each of the first four days included discussion of a case study (a real-life situation) that illustrated key themes such as change in organizational culture, leadership, organizational structures, and professional development. The final PLCI session featured a presentation by each school, described in more detail below.

In addition to providing the five days of professional development, PLCI staff visited the principal and staff development teacher at each school. Also, schools had the opportunity to request ongoing support from PLCI staff in between scheduled PLCI professional development sessions. All five schools did so; examples of such visits include a schoolwide discussion of a case study or process observations of meetings.

Each school had the responsibility to request enhanced school improvement funding through the PLCI Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan. All schools submitted plans for this enhanced funding; however, a budget freeze prevented some schools from spending all of their funds.

The enhanced school improvement funding was intended to support an action(s) from the school's School Improvement Plan. At the final PLCI session, staff from each school described what was done, the results of these actions, and the next steps to be taken. Examples of PLCI actions included small-group support to targeted students for Maryland School Assessment (MSA) help or for reteaching and reassessment, and departmental meetings to discuss instruction and data. At almost all the schools, the PLCI actions were systemic and included all teachers.

Each PLCI team survey asked about extent of agreement with beliefs and processes characteristic of a professional learning community. The results showed increases in these beliefs and processes between the first and last training sessions (Table 1.1). These attitudes include those related to a focus on learning (i.e., the first three items) intervention support for students (i.e., the last three items), and collaborative teams of teachers (i.e., the remaining two items).

Table 1.1  
Participants' Agreement with Items on PLCI Team Survey at First and Last PLCI Professional Development Sessions

	Summer 2007 (N=86) %	Spring 2008 (N=86) %	Change in percentage points from first to last session
Currently, at our school . . .			
teachers use common formative assessments that they have developed together. These assessments are aligned with state and local standards.	47.7	89.5	41.8
teams use formative assessments throughout the year to identify students who need additional time and support.	51.2	89.5	38.3
all staff members demonstrate the belief that all students can learn. Teachers do this through setting high expectations for all students.	57.0	79.1	29.1
teachers have worked together to clarify the essential outcomes for each grade level/unit of instruction. They focus their instruction on these outcomes.	62.8	86.0	23.2
all staff members believe that the fundamental purpose of our school is to achieve high levels of learning for all students.	82.6	89.5	6.9
teachers are members of collaborative teams who work interdependently to achieve common goals set by those teams.	61.6	94.2	32.6
the time teachers have to meet and work as collaborative teams on a regular basis is adequate.	39.5	57.0	17.5
when a student is provided with extra time and support, the intervention that is provided is carefully matched to the individual student's needs.	38.4	82.6	44.2
when a student is having difficulty learning, there is a schoolwide systemic response to provide extra time and support to that student.	32.6	68.6	36.0
student interventions are monitored over time to determine their effectiveness.	37.2	72.1	34.9

*Note.* Includes all responses of 5 or above, from a 7-point scale, with 7 (strongly agree) and 1 (strongly disagree).

### 1.5 Restructure Roles and Responsibilities for Content Specialists and Team Leaders

Roles and responsibilities were restructured for two leadership positions, team leaders and resource teachers; the title for the latter position was changed to content specialist. The responsibilities were differentiated; the focus for content specialists was to support teachers by developing teachers' content knowledge and teaching strategies. The focus for team leaders was to support student learning by leading an interdisciplinary (grade-level) team of teachers with shared responsibility for a group of students. Based on midyear interviews, all principals reported communicating the new roles and responsibilities for content specialists and team leaders to school staff (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008).

A large majority of surveyed school staff agreed that both content specialists and team leaders were effective (Table 1.2). Among departmental members who responded to the staff survey, 8 in 10 (84%) rated their content specialist as either very or somewhat effective in executing his or her major responsibility to support teachers. Among grade-level team members who responded to the staff survey, 8 in 10 (82.0%) rated their team leader as either very or somewhat effective in executing his or her major responsibility to focus the team on student learning.

Table 1.2  
Effectiveness of Content Specialists and Team Leaders

How effective was your . . .	Very effective %	Somewhat effective %	Not too effective %	Not at all effective %	No answer %
content specialist in helping you to develop your content knowledge and teaching strategies? (N=145) <sup>a</sup>	46.9	37.2	8.3	6.9	0.7
team leader in focusing you on student learning? (N=150) <sup>b</sup>	39.3	42.7	9.3	7.3	1.3

<sup>a</sup> Excludes 39 school staff who reported that they were not members of a department.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes 34 school staff who reported that they were not members of a grade-level team.

### 1.6 New Mathematics and Literacy Content Specialists

Two new leadership positions related to rigorous instruction for all students were created and filled at each of the Phase I middle schools: AEI mathematics content specialist (AEIMCS) and AEI literacy coach (AEILC).

#### Training

Three days of training during summer 2007 and eight full-day trainings during the 2007–2008 school year were provided to support these new positions. These eight days included two days of meetings for AEI instructional support teachers. AEIMCSs and AEILCs had separate sessions, except for some of the summer training and two of the school-year sessions. Of the eight full-day trainings during the school year, four were scheduled on the same day to provide opportunities for AEIMCs and AEILCs to practice coaching stances and skills as well as identify strategies to support rigorous instruction.

Training for AEIMCSs included the following topics:

- Coaching stances and strategies to use with teachers and teams
- Consistent implementation of the mathematics curriculum
- Rigorous instruction
- Meeting the needs of diverse student learners
- Effective team planning
- Strategies that provide access to mathematics content for English language learners
- Building relationships

Training for AEILCs included the following topics:

- Developing trust and rapport
- Equitable instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse student learners
- Schoolwide literacy program
- Coaching stances and skills to use with teachers
- Rigorous instruction
- Courageous conversations about race and culture
- Use and analysis of data to guide instruction and monitor reading progress
- Building teachers' capacity to teach students to think critically

Four or five AEIMCSs participated in each of the school-year sessions; all AEILCs participated in five of the school-year sessions and four or fewer participated in the other three school-year sessions.

Effectiveness

Each new position had the following two key functions: to be the school leader in his or her area (i.e., mathematics or literacy) and to promote success for every student. Staff survey results indicated that AEIMCSs and AEILCs were effective in working with school staff (Table 1.3).

Among the 67 staff who responded to the survey item about their school’s AEIMCS, nearly all (92.5%) found their school’s AEIMCS to be very or somewhat effective in helping them to provide support for all students. A somewhat smaller proportion, although still more than seven in ten respondents, found the AEILC to be very or somewhat effective on two dimensions: building their capacity in literacy strategies (73.8%) and helping them to provide support for all students (72.9%).

Table 1.3  
Effectiveness of Middle School Reform AEI Staff

How effective was your school’s . . .	Instructional staff Phase I middle schools (N=184)				
	Very effective %	Somewhat effective %	Not too effective %	Not at all effective %	Not applicable/ No answer #
AEI Mathematics Content Specialist in helping you to provide support for all of your students?	53.7	38.8	0.0	7.5	117 <sup>a</sup>
AEI Literacy Coach in building your capacity in literacy strategies?	45.3	28.5	19.0	7.3	47
AEI Literacy Coach in helping you to provide support for all of your students?	41.3	31.6	17.3	9.8	51

<sup>a</sup> Only math teachers were asked to rate this item.

*Summary and Conclusions*

Implementation

The PLCI was implemented as intended, except for funding shortages due to the budget freeze.

Midyear findings indicated that implementation of restructured and new positions largely took place as intended (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008). Specifically, based on descriptions of their activities, all AEIMCSs were implementing (at least somewhat) the majority of their key roles and responsibilities, all AEILCs were implementing most of their major roles and responsibilities, and the majority of interviewed content specialists were implementing (at least somewhat) nearly all of their major roles and responsibilities. All interviewed team leaders referred to analyzing student data to support school targets, but only about one half mentioned their other major roles and responsibilities.

Impact

At all schools, the PLCI actions (as described at the final PLCI meeting) focused on learning, most frequently through a focus on essential outcomes (i.e., Maryland State Assessments) and less frequently by encouraging common formative assessments or providing reteaching and reassessments. The PLCI actions at most of the schools supported teachers and encouraged collaboration as part of a professional learning community. Further, the attitudes of PLCI participants with respect to focus on learning and support for students improved over the course of the training.

The majority of survey respondents rated content specialists, team leaders, AEIMCSs, and AEILCs as effective with respect to staff members’ focus on learning, intervention support for students, or support for teachers. As noted in the midyear report, all the AEILCs and AEIMCSs supported AEI for students either by increasing access to rigorous courses or supporting differentiation to offer more challenging instruction (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008). Midyear findings also indicated that all interviewed content specialists, along with the majority of interviewed team leaders, worked to provide intervention support for students.

All recommended actions

This section reported on three actions for Goal 1. Information on the remaining actions for Goal 1 is shown in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 1

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
1.1 Professional Learning Communities Institute	X	
1.2 School Leadership Team Institute		Action not evaluated because it was not included in the approved evaluation plan.
1.3 New internship model for aspiring middle school principals		Implementation of this action is planned for FY 2009.
1.4 Continue the implementation of the Baldrige School Improvement Process		All Phase I middle schools reported that parents were members of their School Improvement Committee. (See Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008.)
1.5 Restructure roles and responsibilities for content specialists and team leaders	X	
1.6 New mathematics and literacy content specialists	X	

**Goal 2: Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.**

The specific evaluation questions for Goal 2 were as follows:

- Were the instructional resources and technology provided?
- If so, what was the effect on instructional practices, rigorous instruction, and student engagement?

This section is organized into four thematic areas, each area having a key role in supporting middle school learners: rigorous instruction, technology in the classroom, supporting instruction and assessment, and supporting the middle school student.

### **Rigorous Instruction**

#### *2.6 Rigorous Elective Course Offerings*

During fall 2007 and spring 2008, all five Phase I middle schools offered the following two new semester elective courses for Grade 6: Arts Investigations and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The former course introduced students to the main, aesthetic elements of visual art, music, dance, and theatre; the latter course introduced students to the use of application, Web-based, and multimedia tools and programming concepts applied to the development of games, educational simulations, and robotic products.

About 700 students were enrolled in each course during 2007–2008. Just over half of Grade 6 students (52.6%) took at least one of these electives (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1  
Enrollment in New Elective Courses

Course enrollment	Grade 6 students	
	#	%
Both Arts Investigations and ICT	647	46.8
Arts Investigations only	40	2.9
ICT only	40	2.9
Neither course	655	47.4

Based on end-of-year interviews, principals considered the ICT course (as modified to include more robotics and gaming and less Microsoft Word Office content) to be rigorous. Principals were not in agreement about the amount of rigor in Arts Investigations; three principals felt it needed more rigorous content. Criticisms included too much breadth, not enough depth, and not enough challenge for students who come to the course at an advanced level.

#### *2.9 Additional High School Course Offerings at Middle Schools*

The Phase I middle schools offered high school courses in both mathematics and foreign languages during 2007–2008 (Table 2.2). No additional high school courses were offered at Phase I schools compared with the prior school year (2006–2007).

Table 2.2  
High School Course Offerings at One or More Phase I Middle Schools

	2006–2007	2007–2008
<b>Mathematics</b>		
Algebra 1	X	X
Algebra 2 (Honors)	X	X
Geometry (Honors)	X	X
Magnet Geometry	X	X
<b>Foreign languages</b>		
French 1	X	X
French 2	X	X
Spanish 1	X	X
Spanish 2	X	X
Spanish 3	X	
<b>Technology Education</b>		
Software Applications by Design	X	X

Notes. Excludes high school courses taken by middle school students at high schools.

### 2.8 Offer Opportunities for Acceleration and Enrichment to All Students

Parents and students reported on acceleration and enrichment opportunities at their school (Table 2.3). A majority of both groups, but not all respondents, agreed that such opportunities and support for students were available. Three in four surveyed parents (75.0%) strongly agreed or agreed that their child is encouraged to take honors and advanced classes. A majority of surveyed parents (68.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that their child received the support needed to succeed in advanced classes. In the open-ended comments, two parents expressed concerns about a lack of opportunity to enroll in advanced courses for their children.

Table 2.3  
Reports on Acceleration and Enrichment by Parents and Students

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know/ Does Not Apply %
<b>Parents (N=479)</b>					
My child has been encouraged to take honors and advanced classes.	38.3	36.7	12.1	3.4	9.5
My child has received the support needed to succeed in advanced classes.	28.2	40.5	11.6	6.1	13.7
<b>Students (N=1,115)</b>					
Teachers or counselors have encouraged me to take advanced-level classes.	23.4	37.7	18.5	11.2	9.2
I get extra help during class from teachers when I need it.	16.3	53.9	18.5	6.4	5.0
My teachers help me when I don't understand.	24.7	53.5	14.9	3.7	3.1
My teachers explain subjects in ways I can understand.	19.1	59.0	14.1	5.0	2.8

Only about 6 in 10 students (61.1%), strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers or counselors have encouraged them to take advanced-level classes, compared with parents surveyed. More students (at least 7 in 10) strongly agreed or agreed that support was available (i.e., they get extra help during class from teachers when needed (70.2%), teachers help them when they don't understand (78.0%), and teachers explain subjects in ways they can understand (78.1%).

## 2.7 Rigor in the Classroom

### Classroom observations

During Grade 6 class observations, observers looked for a variety of behaviors and strategies associated with the delivery of rigorous instruction and the development of students' critical thinking skills (Table 2.4).

Based on the PACE model of rigor, observers looked to see whether the lesson content was provocative, ambiguous, complex, or emotionally challenging.<sup>7</sup> This indicator of rigorous content was observed throughout the class period in more than half of the classes (29 classes) and once or twice in an additional 14 classes.

Among the instructional strategies for rigor or critical thinking, two—modeling and making connections—were fairly widely observed. In 8 out of 10 classes, teachers modeled strategies for the students. Modeling was observed throughout the lesson in 23 classes and once or twice in an additional 16 classes (39 classes total). Most teachers also made connections, either throughout the lesson in 18 classes or once or twice in 25 classes (43 classes total).

Table 2.4  
Classroom Evidence of Rigorous Instruction and Critical Thinking

Indicator	Extent of evidence (N=48 Classes)		
	Throughout #	Once or twice #	No evidence #
Lesson content is complex, provocative, ambiguous, or emotionally challenging to students (PACE model).	29	14	5
Teacher models strategies.	23	16	9
Teacher makes connections by subject, by theme, or to other topics or skills.	18	25	5
Teacher encourages students to think at analytic, interpretive, and abstract levels.	14	17	17
Teacher invites students to apply knowledge and skills to authentic situation or real-world issue.	13	17	18
Teacher encourages students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	13	17	18
Teacher encourages students to synthesize or summarize information within or across disciplines.	9	6	33
Teacher solicits many diverse thoughts and points of view about issues or ideas.	6	12	30
Teacher invites students to explain, elaborate on, or justify their thinking (not addressed above).	6	14	28
After posing a question or moving on to another student, teacher uses wait time before calling on students.	22	14	12

The following three instructional strategies for rigor or critical thinking were observed with less frequency throughout only 13 or 14 classes and once or twice in another 17 classes:

- Teachers encouraged students to think at analytical, interpretative, and abstract levels.
- Teachers encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.

<sup>7</sup> For information on the PACE model, see Strong, R., H. Silver, and M. Perini. (2001). *Teaching What Matters Most*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Teachers invited students to apply knowledge and skills to authentic situations or real-world issues.

Three indicators of rigorous instruction were observed in less than half of the classes. In just 20 classes, teachers invited students to explain, elaborate on, or justify their thinking (in 6 classes throughout, in 14 classes once or twice). In only 18 classes, the teacher solicited diverse thoughts and points of view about issues or ideas (in 6 classes throughout, in 12 classes once or twice). In just 15 classes, teachers encouraged students to synthesize or summarize information within or across disciplines (9 classes throughout, 6 classes once or twice).

The findings also can be examined with respect to usage of these eight instructional strategies associated with rigorous instruction or critical thinking throughout an individual class. Use of four to eight strategies throughout a class suggests a rigorous class. Out of the 48 observed classes, nine teachers used at least four strategies throughout the class. The following combinations of using some strategies throughout the class plus using others once or twice also suggest a rigorous class; the number of observed classes is noted as well:

- Three strategies throughout, plus at least three strategies once or twice: four classes
- Two strategies throughout, plus at least four strategies once or twice: four classes
- One strategy throughout, plus at least five strategies once or twice: two classes
- No strategies throughout; at least six strategies once or twice: zero classes

Altogether, about 4 in 10 of the 48 observed classes (19 classes) included sufficient combinations of instructional strategies associated with rigorous instruction or critical thinking to be considered rigorous.

One other practice, which supports each of the instructional strategies associated with rigorous instruction or critical thinking, was widely observed. Wait time, or “sticking with” a student, was used by teachers throughout the lesson in about one half the classes (22 classes) and once or twice in an additional 14 classes.

Each observer judged how much of the class time was student driven with teacher as facilitator versus teacher directed, because this distinction was suggested by several of the rigor look-fors. In one quarter of the classes (12 classes), all or most of the class time was student driven. In about one third of the classes (15 classes), some of the class time was student driven. In the remaining classes, a little (8 classes) or none (13 classes) of the class time was student driven.

### Parent and student surveys

The majority of respondents to the Grade 6 parent survey and the Grade 6 student survey agreed that several indicators of rigor were evident in their school (Table 2.5). A large majority of surveyed parents strongly agreed or agreed that good grades are important to the students at their child’s school (84.6%) and that their child’s teachers expect their child to do well in class (85.0%). About three quarters of surveyed parents strongly agreed or agreed that their child’s teachers care about their child’s grades (76.9%) and assign interesting, complex homework (74.6%). In their open-ended comments, ten parents called for more challenge in courses (in general), six requested more challenge in specific courses, and six suggested more homework.

Table 2.5  
Parent and Student Reports on Rigor

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know/ Does Not Apply %
Parent items (N=479)					
Good grades are important to students in this school.	44.1	40.5	6.8	1.1	7.6
My child's teachers expect my child to do well in class.	36.8	48.2	5.7	0.6	8.7
My child's teachers care about the grades my child gets.	28.9	48.0	11.9	1.7	9.4
My child's teachers assign homework that is interesting and complex.	20.1	54.5	17.8	3.4	4.2
Student items (N=1,115)					
My teachers have high expectations for me to do well in school.	38.9	51.7	4.2	1.8	3.3
My teachers often ask me to explain my answers.	39.7	47.3	8.0	2.8	2.2
I am given challenging work at school.	19.8	59.5	14.8	3.1	2.8
In class, my teachers often assign activities other than worksheets or reading the textbook.	20.9	47.0	21.9	7.5	2.7

Like surveyed parents, Grade 6 students were positive about rigor. A large majority of students strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers have high expectations for them to do well in school (90.6%) and often ask them to explain their answers (87.0%). Almost 8 in 10 students (79.3%) strongly agreed or agreed that they are given challenging work at school. However, only about two thirds of students (67.9%) were in agreement with a more objective measure, “In class, my teachers often assign activities other than worksheets or textbook.”

## ***Technology in the Classroom***

### *2.4 Innovative Classroom Technology (Promethean Technology)*

#### *2.5 Technology Instruction within Core Subjects*

#### Observations: Promethean technology

Each Phase I school received Promethean technology for 18 classrooms. Of the 48 Grade 6 classes visited for observations, 27 (more than one half) were equipped with Promethean technology. These classes included 24 in core subjects (5 English, 9 mathematics, and 10 social studies) and 3 of the new elective, ICT.<sup>8</sup> In every observed class, either the teacher alone or teachers and students used the ActivBoard and ActivPen (Table 2.6). These components were used most commonly during the whole group lesson (22 classes) or the warm-up (19 classes).

Use of the other components of the Promethean technology was less frequent. Students in one third of the classes (eight) used ActiVote technology to make selected responses to formative tasks. In seven of these classes, either the teachers (two classes) or students and teachers (five classes) used the ActiVote Data Display to discuss student responses to specific items. In four classes, content imported from the Internet and displayed on the ActivBoard was incorporated into the lesson. Other Promethean tools, such as the spinner, calculator, or timer, were used in about one half of the observed classes (12 classes).

<sup>8</sup> ICT classes were not reliant on Promethean-equipped classrooms. ICT classes were typically scheduled into workstation computer labs with a demonstration station for the teacher, or scheduled to use wireless laptop carts.

Table 2.6  
Classroom Uses of Promethean Technology

Component and users (# classes)	Lesson component (N=27 classes)						
	Outcomes, announcements #	Warm- up #	Whole group lesson #	Small group activity #	Individual practice #	Closure #	Other #
<b>ActivBoard and ActivPen (27)</b>							
Teachers (17)	7	11	13		3	2	2
Teachers and students (10)	2	8	9		2		
<b>ActiVote (8)</b>							
Students (8)		1	4	1	2	3	
<b>ActiVote Data Display (7)</b>							
Teachers (2)			1	1	1		
Teachers and students (5)		1	2			2	
<b>Internet content (4)</b>							
Teachers (2)			2				
Students (1)			1				
Teachers and students (1)			1				
<b>Other Promethean tools (12)</b>							
Teachers (9)		4	4	2	2	2	4
Teachers and students (3)			3				

Promethean technology provided an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experiences. In 15 classes, about one half of those with Promethean technology, students used one or more components of the technology.

*Observations: Other technology.* In all 48 observed classes, observers recorded the use of certain technologies other than the Promethean technology (Table 2.7). The most frequently used technologies were overhead projector and screen (15 classes) and computer hardware and software with connected projection screens (10 classes). In the 21 classrooms without Promethean technology, a large majority (18) incorporated at least one of the following technologies: overhead projector, computers, or Lego robots.

Table 2.7  
Classroom Uses of Other (Non-Promethean) Technology (N=48 classes)

Materials and users (# classes)	Lesson component				
	Warm-up #	Whole-group lesson #	Small-group activity #	Individual practice #	Other #
<b>Overhead projector and screen (15)</b>					
Teachers (13)	7	9	1	1	2
Teachers and students (2)	2	2	0	0	0
<b>Computer hardware and software and projection screen (10)</b>					
Teachers (1)	0	1	0	0	0
Students (6)	0	1	4	1	0
Teachers and students (3)	1	2	0	0	0
<b>Calculators (9)</b>					
Students (9)	5	4	1	7	1
<b>Lego NXT robots (3)</b>					
Students (3)	0	0	3	0	0

*Notes.* Observers did not see document cameras (“Elmo”), or audio or video equipment used. Observers did not see any of these materials used for announcements/outcomes or closure activities.

Staff survey

Respondents to the staff survey reported on their use of 21<sup>st</sup> century (Promethean) classroom technology during the past two weeks (Table 2.8). Among the 107 users of Promethean technology, nearly 8 in 10 reported that they had conducted warm-ups or activators (78.5%) or had students interact with the ActivBoard during a lesson (78.5%). Nearly as many (74.7%) said they used Promethean technology to show videos. Seven in ten teachers (70%) said they conducted lesson closure activities using the Promethean technology. Six in 10 teachers (61.6%) said they posted daily agendas, outcomes, or announcements using the technology.

About one half of teachers (54.2%) said they used the technology to post content directly from Web pages, conduct formative assessments (49.5%), and provide for HSA or MSA practice (47.6%). Less than one in five teachers had students develop lessons or presentations using the ActivBoard (18.6%), mentioned uses other than those discussed above (14%), or had not used the Promethean technology during the past two weeks (12.1%). Teachers of observed classes may or may not have responded to the survey.

Table 2.8  
Uses of Promethean Technology

	Users (N =107)
Uses in past two weeks <sup>a</sup>	%
Conduct warm-ups or activators	78.5
Have students interact with the ActivBoard during a lesson	78.5
Show videos	74.7
Conduct lesson closure activities	70.0
Post daily agendas, outcomes, or announcements	61.6
Post content directly from Web pages	54.2
Use the ActiVote capability to conduct formative assessments	49.5
HSA or MSA practice (selected response questions)	47.6
Have students develop lessons or presentations on the ActivBoard	18.6
Other uses	14.0
I use Promethean technology, but did not do so during the past two weeks	12.1

<sup>a</sup>Multiple responses possible.

However, for five of six uses of Promethean technology, the frequency of use reported in the staff survey was much greater than the observed use (Table 2.9). For warm-ups/activators, the observed use confirmed the frequency of use reported in the school staff survey. By contrast, for students interacting with the ActivBoard and for lesson closure, at least 7 in 10 staff reported such use, but it was observed in only 10 classes, about 4 out of 10, for the former, and in only five classes, about 2 out of 10, for the latter. Differences also were apparent for three other uses: post outcomes or announcements, Web content, and formative assessments.

Table 2.9  
Uses of Promethean Technology: Survey Reports vs. Observations

Use	Staff survey users	Observed classes	
	(N=107) <sup>a</sup> %	(N=27) <sup>b</sup> %	#
Warm-ups or activators	78.5	70.3	19
Students interact with the ActivBoard	78.5	37.0	10
Lesson closure activities	70.0	18.5	5
Post outcomes or announcements	61.6	33.3	9
Post content directly from Web pages	54.2	14.8	4
Use the ActiVote capability to conduct formative assessments	49.5	29.6	8

<sup>a</sup>Multiple responses possible; restricted to use in past two weeks.

<sup>b</sup>Limited to classrooms equipped with Promethean technology.

### Parent and student surveys

Through surveys, the majority of parents and students gave positive responses about the use of technology at school, although slightly more parents than students were positive (Table 2.10). More than 80% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that their child learns about how to use technology at school (84.1%), while about three fourths (76.3%) of students strongly agreed or agreed with a similar statement. Likewise, a large majority of surveyed parents strongly agreed or agreed (78.6%) that their child's teachers use technology to make learning more exciting; somewhat fewer students (70.6%) strongly agreed or agreed with a similar statement.

Table 2.10  
Parent and Student Reports on Use of Technology

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/ Does Not Apply
	%	%	%	%	%
Parent items (N=479)					
My child learns about how to use technology at school.	35.4	48.7	6.5	2.7	6.7
My child's teachers use new technology to make learning more exciting.	29.7	48.9	8.2	2.1	11.0
Student items (N=1,115)					
I learn about how to use technology at school.	28.5	47.8	14.2	6.4	3.1
My teachers use classroom technology to make learning more exciting.	28.3	42.3	18.1	8.0	3.2

In open-ended comments, five parents expressed concerns about the Promethean technology and one parent made a positive comment about it; six parents asked for improvements in the use of technology.

### ***Supporting Instruction and Assessment***

#### *2.2 Assessments and Performance Matters*

##### Use of assessments

Formative and benchmark assessments were available for all English and most mathematics courses in middle school. End-of-unit assessments were available for all units in social studies and for all but one unit in each grade-level science course. Standard formative assessments were not available for science or social studies.

Assessment usage by schools was examined for Grade 6; all Phase I middle schools did not use all of the available assessments. Data from English and mathematics assessments in the Instructional Management System (IMS) were reviewed for 2007–2008. All five Phase I middle schools administered all six unit assessments available for both Math 6 (Math A) and Math 7 (Math B). However, for the formative assessments for these courses, three of the schools administered all six and two schools administered only three. Use of available assessments was less extensive with English 6. All five schools administered two of the four formative assessments available and one of the two end-of-unit assessments available. Four writing assessments were available for English 6; four of the Phase I schools used all of them and one school used two of them. Two schools provided data from their unit assessment administration to instructional specialists for Grade 6 science. Information on usage of social studies assessments was not collected.

### Training on Performance Matters

Performance Matters was provided to Phase I middle schools as a technology tool that contained MCPS formative and unit assessment data. Among respondents to the staff survey, almost all staff members who used Performance Matters received professional development for it (Table 2.11). Most frequently, staff members said they received this professional development during the school year in their school building (63%) or during summer 2007 as part of preservice week, either as recipients of training (50.5%) or as a trainer-of-trainers for their school (13%). Not surprisingly, the trainer-of-trainers proportion (32.4%) was much higher among members of leadership teams. Consistent with the training plan for Performance Matters, relatively staff members reported that they received professional development off site during the school year (12%) or in some setting or format other than those addressed above (4.3%).

Less than 10% of staff members (8.7%) reported not using Performance Matters in 2007–2008. This figure includes 2.9% of leadership team members and 12.3% of non-leadership team instructional staff.

Table 2.11  
Settings for Professional Development on Performance Matters

Settings <sup>a</sup>	Total (N=184) <sup>b</sup> %	Leadership Team (N=68) %	Non-leadership Team (N=114) %
Professional development in my school building, during the school year	63.0	69.1	59.6
Summer 2007 training, during pre-service week	50.5	54.4	49.1
Summer 2007, as one of the trainer-of-trainers for my school	13.0	32.4	1.8
Professional development offsite, such as CTI, during the school year	12.0	17.6	8.8
Some other setting or format	4.3	--	6.1
I did not receive Performance Matters training during 2007-2008	4.9	4.4	5.3
I am not using Performance Matters in 2007-2008	8.7	2.9	12.3

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses.

<sup>b</sup> Two respondents did not identify their leadership team status.

### Use of Performance Matters

Performance Matters training identified several ways to use this tool to support instruction and assessment. Based on survey responses, school staff use of Performance Matters corresponded to content from the Performance Matters training (Table 2.12). The most frequently selected use of Performance Matters was identifying at-risk students (74.3%). Two other uses were selected by a

majority of instructional staff members—examining MSA results by subgroup (64.5%) and making comparisons to grade level, course, class, school, or district performance (52.7%).

Table 2.12  
Uses of Performance Matters to Help Support Instruction and Assessment

Uses <sup>a</sup>	Users of Performance Matters
	(N=144) %
Identifying at-risk students	74.3
Examining MSA results by subgroup	64.5
Making comparisons to grade level, course, class, school, or district performance	52.7
Making MSA performance predictions	46.5
Reviewing the progress of special education students	40.9
Conducting item analyses in English and math, including which item students chose	40.9
Reviewing the progress of ESOL students	31.2
Identifying students needing acceleration	25.0
Informing post-observation discussions	12.5
Other uses	6.9

<sup>a</sup>Multiple responses possible.

Three other uses were selected by about 4 in 10 users. These include making MSA performance predictions (46.5%), reviewing the progress of special education students (40.9%), and conducting item analyses in English and math, including which item students chose (40.9%). The remaining uses were selected less frequently.

### 2.10 Comprehensive Professional Development Plan for Middle School Teachers

Instructional staff members were surveyed about whether they had received job-embedded professional development during 2007–2008 (including preservice days of summer 2007) on several topics (Table 2.13). More than 8 in 10 of the surveyed staff members received training on rigorous instruction and the adolescent learner, two key topics for Middle School Reform. More members of the leadership team than non-members received training on each topic.

Table 2.13  
Topics for Job-embedded Professional Development During 2007–2008

Topics <sup>a</sup>	Total	Leadership Team	Non-leadership Team
	(N=184) <sup>b</sup> %	(N=68) %	(N=114) %
Rigorous instruction	87.0	94.1	83.3
Adolescent learner	84.8	98.5	77.2
Using student data to inform instruction	78.3	85.3	74.6
Equitable classroom practices	76.6	80.9	75.4
Technology <sup>c</sup>	65.8	77.9	58.8
None of the above	3.3	1.5	4.4

<sup>a</sup>Multiple responses possible.

<sup>b</sup>Two respondents did not identify their leadership team status.

<sup>c</sup>In addition to preservice and school year professional development, a selected group of staff members from each school received Promethean technology training as part of Tier I training in summer 2007.

## Supporting Middle School Students

This section reports on the implementation of two areas: student engagement and support for the adolescent learner.

### Student Engagement

#### Observations

The first of two observations for student engagement was conducted shortly after the class warm-up. The first observation was during whole-group instruction for a large majority of classes (39 or 81%); for the rest, it was during individual practice (5) or small-group activities (4).

During the first observation, three positive indicators of student engagement were evident for all or most of the students in more than two thirds of the classes (Table 2.14). In 41 classes, all or most students appeared to be able to follow instructions. In 36 classes, all or most students appeared interested (paid attention). In 37 classes, all or most students were able to sustain their attention and involvement throughout the observation time.

Table 2.14  
Student Engagement, First Observation

Indicator	Number of students (N=48 classes)				
	All/Almost all	Most	Some	Few	None
Students appear able to follow instructions.	23	18	6	1	--
Students appear interested (paying attention).	15	21	9	3	--
Students are able to sustain their attention and involvement throughout the observation time.	13	24	7	3	1
Students appear enthusiastic (curious).	5	9	13	13	8
Students make comments or ask questions that relate to the purpose of the lesson.	--	2	13	23	10
Students engage in off-task behavior.	--	--	6	27	15
Students engage in disruptive behavior.	--	--	2	9	37

*Note.* This observation was conducted shortly after the class warm-up.

Two other positive indicators of student engagement were observed less often. In 14 classes, all or most of the students appeared enthusiastic (curious). In just two classes, all or most of the students made comments or asked questions that were related to the purpose of the lesson.

The second observation for indicators of student engagement was conducted shortly before the class closure. This observation was conducted during whole-group instruction for fewer than half of the classes (21), during small-group instruction for 14 classes, and during individual practice for 13 classes. The evidence for student engagement at the second observation was very similar to the evidence at the first observation (Table 2.15). The same three positive indicators were evident for all or most of the students in more than two thirds of the classes. In 42 classes, all or most students appeared to be able to follow instructions. In 35 classes, all or most students appeared interested. In 34 classes, all or most students were able to sustain their attention and involvement throughout the observation time.

Table 2.15  
Student Engagement, Second Observation

Indicator	Number of students ( <i>N</i> =48 classes)				
	All/almost all	Most	Some	Few	None
Students appear able to follow instructions.	22	20	6	--	--
Students appear interested (paying attention).	12	23	11	2	--
Students are able to sustain their attention and involvement <i>throughout the observation time</i> .	10	24	9	5	--
Students appear enthusiastic (curious).	2	13	17	7	9
Students make comments or ask questions that relate to the purpose of the lesson.	--	2	13	20	13
Students engage in off-task behavior.	--	--	10	22	16
Students engage in disruptive behavior.	--	--	1	6	41

*Note.* This observation was conducted shortly before the class closure.

As at the first observation, two other positive indicators of student engagement were observed less often. In 15 classes, all or most of the students appeared enthusiastic (curious). In only two classes, most of the students made comments or asked questions that related to the purpose of the lesson.

Indicators of off-task or disruptive behavior were generally not evident. The number of classes with one or more off-task students was similar at both observation times. The number of classes with one or more disruptive students was slightly higher during the second observation.

### Student engagement and grouping practices

Allowing students to work or discuss in small groups is an identified best practice for supporting adolescent learners.<sup>9</sup> Support for adolescent learners and student engagement converge when grouping practices are examined. During the first observation of student engagement, 39 classes were in whole-group instruction and 9 were in small groups or individual practice. During the second observation, 21 classes were in whole-group instruction and 27 were in small groups or individual practice. In total, 60 observations during whole-group instruction and 36 observations during small groups or individual practice were available for analysis.

The observations confirmed that student engagement is enhanced by providing opportunities for small-group and individual learning during lessons (Table 2.16). In Table 2.16, the proportion reflects the number of observations in which all/almost students appeared engaged combined with the number of observations in which most students appeared engaged. For all five indicators, this proportion was larger for small groups and individual practice than for whole group instruction. In particular, students in small groups/individual practice when compared to those in whole group instruction were more likely to be paying attention (86.1% vs. 66.6% respectively) and to appear enthusiastic (47.2% vs. 21.6% respectively).

<sup>9</sup> Center for Collaborative Education, *At the Turning Point: The Young Adolescent Learner*.

Table 2.16  
Student Engagement by Grouping Practice

Indicator	% All/almost all students plus most students	
	Whole group instruction (N=60 observations)	Small group or individual practice (N=36 observations)
Students appear able to follow instructions.	83.3	86.1
Students are able to sustain their attention and involvement <i>throughout the observation time</i> .	68.3	77.7
Students appear interested (paying attention).	66.6	86.1
Students appear enthusiastic (curious).	21.6	47.2
Students make comments or ask questions that relate to the purpose of the lesson.	3.3	8.3

Note: Each of 48 classes was observed twice, once early in the class and once before the closure.

Parent and student surveys

Both parents and students reported on student engagement in their surveys (Table 2.17). Almost 8 in 10 parents (78.8%) strongly agreed or agreed that their child is eager to come to school each day. By contrast, on a similar statement, only 6 in 10 students (59.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that they look forward to coming to school each day. About the same number of students strongly agreed or agreed that they often find themselves concentrating so hard that time passes quickly in their classes (59.2%). Slightly more students strongly agreed or agreed that they often think what they are learning in their classes is interesting and worthwhile (64.5%) and that they feel welcome at school (68.5%). Almost all students (91.3%) strongly agreed or agreed with only one item: I often try as hard as I can in my classes.

Table 2.17  
Reports on Student Engagement by Parents and Students

Parent item (N=479)	Strongly			Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/ Does Not Apply
	Agree	Agree	Disagree		
	%	%	%	%	%
My child is eager to come to school each day.	31.5	47.3	15.3	4.4	1.5
Student items (N=1,115)					
I look forward to coming to school each day.	15.9	43.8	20.4	17.3	2.6
In my classes, I often find myself concentrating so hard that time passes quickly.	19.7	39.5	26.6	10.4	3.8
I feel welcomed at this school.	18.5	50.0	19.4	8.7	3.5
I often think what I'm learning in my classes is interesting and worthwhile.	11.6	52.9	23.0	7.5	5.0
I often try as hard as I can in my classes.	40.2	51.1	5.1	2.1	1.4

*The Adolescent Learner*

Observations

Observers recorded indicators associated with supporting the adolescent learner (Table 2.18). The most frequently observed indicator was the teacher providing one-on-one feedback to students. It was in evidence throughout the class period in more than half of the classes (32 classes) and seen once or twice in another quarter of the classes (13 classes). The remaining indicators were observed much less frequently. Students working or discussing in small groups was observed throughout in one fifth of the classes (9 classes) and once or twice in about one third of the classes (19 classes). Two indicators (the teacher provides positive role models and examples, and the teacher provides for

physical activity, movement, and/or breaks) were observed in only 15 classes. Finally, students monitored their own learning in only eight classes.

Table 2.18  
Supports for the Adolescent Learner in the Classroom

Indicator	Extent of evidence (N=48 classes)		
	Throughout #	Once or twice #	No evidence #
Teacher provides one-on-one feedback to students	32	13	3
Students work or discuss in small groups	9	19	20
Teacher provides positive role models and examples from history and literature	7	8	33
Teacher provides for physical activity, movement, breaks during long instructional blocks	2	13	33
Students monitor or assess their own learning (e.g., reflective writing, logs, self-assessment, portfolios, data notebooks)	3	5	40

Parent and student surveys

In surveys, both parents and students reported on support for adolescent learners (Table 2.19). About three quarters of parents (75.1%) strongly agreed or agreed that their child’s teachers understand the needs of middle school students. Eight parents asked for improvements related to meeting the needs of adolescent learners, such as more engaging or more hands on instruction. In contrast to parents, only about one half of the students (55.6%) strongly agreed or agreed with a similar statement, that their teachers understand the needs of students their age.

Table 2.19  
Parent and Student Reports on Supports for the Adolescent Learner

Parent item (N=479)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don’t Know/ Does Not Apply
	%	%	%	%	%
My child’s teachers understand the needs of middle school students.	25.1	50.0	9.3	2.3	13.3
Student items (N=1,115)					
My teachers understand the needs of students my age.	12.7	42.9	25.0	9.6	9.8
My teachers often give ME feedback about how I am doing in class.	20.1	49.1	20.3	6.2	4.3
My teachers give me opportunities to work with other students during class.	23.2	51.2	16.3	7.4	1.9

Most students (about 7 in 10) strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers provide two supports: often give them feedback about how they are doing in class (69.1%) and give them opportunities to work with other students during class (74.4%). As noted above, each of these supports was provided in a majority of the observed classes.

## *Summary and Conclusions*

### *Rigorous Instruction*

#### Implementation

All five Phase I middle schools offered Grade 6 students two new semester elective courses. Three principals felt that the Arts Investigation course needed more rigorous content. Phase I middle schools did not offer additional high school courses, compared with the previous school year.

Based on observation findings in Phase I schools, rigor has not been fully implemented in middle school classrooms. Lesson content or materials considered rigorous (i.e., provocative, ambiguous, complex, and/or emotionally challenging) was observed throughout the class period in more than one half of the 48 observed classes, only about one third of the classes included sufficient combinations of instructional strategies associated with rigorous instruction or critical thinking to be considered rigorous.

A majority of both surveyed parents and students agreed that acceleration and enrichment opportunities plus support for students were available at their school. A large majority of parents surveyed (75%–85%) agreed that several indicators of rigor were apparent at school. For three indicators of rigor, a similar percentage of students (79%–91%) confirmed that three indicators of rigor were apparent. Somewhat fewer students (68%) agreed that their teachers often assigned activities other than worksheets or textbook reading in class.

#### Impact on rigorous instruction

Although surveyed Grade 6 parents and students were positive about opportunities for acceleration and enrichment, only about one half of Grade 6 students took at least one of the new electives, and high school offerings have not increased. Classroom evidence suggests that instruction for Grade 6 students could be more rigorous.

### *Technology in the Classroom*

#### Implementation

At midyear, school staff at all five Phase I schools and in most academic subjects reported successful use of Promethean technology to engage students, to enhance differentiation, and to expand formative assessment capabilities (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008).

Findings from late-year observations in 27 Promethean-equipped classrooms in four subject areas (English, mathematics, social studies, ICT) indicated that the use of Promethean technology to deliver lessons was still a developing capability, as follows. While Promethean technology was used frequently for warm-up activities and/or whole-group lessons, there were few examples of use for small-group activities (where differentiation might occur), individual practice, or closure. In about one third of the observed classes with Promethean technology, teachers used ActiVote for formative assessment purposes. In almost all classrooms without Promethean technology, teachers used another technology.

Through surveys, the majority of parents and students gave positive responses about the use of technology at school, although slightly more parents than students were positive.

### Impact on instructional practices

Every teacher of three Grade 6 core subjects (English, mathematics, social studies) were observed; out of these 38 classes, 24 (less than two thirds) were equipped with Promethean technology. Observed use of Promethean technology was less frequent than reported use (by teachers) and could be increased, including expansion of opportunities for students to interact with this technology.

### *Supporting Instruction and Assessment*

#### Implementation

Formative and unit assessments were available for English and most mathematics courses; unit assessments, but not formative assessments, were available for science and social studies. Use of available formative and unit assessments for Grade 6 was not fully implemented in the Phase I schools.

Midyear findings indicated that, while capacity to use Performance Matters was still being developed, instructional leaders and teachers used Performance Matters in 2007–2008 to examine student data and plan adjustments to instruction. In a spring survey, instructional staff confirmed use of Performance Matters for the purposes that support instruction and achievement, most often to identify at-risk students and to examine MSA results by subgroup.

Implementation of job-embedded professional development was high. Midyear findings indicated that professional development was delivered at all five Phase I middle schools on the following key topics: rigor, the adolescent learner, collaboration, and assessments/Performance Matters. At least two thirds of instructional staff survey respondents confirmed attendance at training on each of the key topics; more than 8 in 10 of surveyed staff members received training on rigorous instruction and the adolescent learner.

### Impact on instructional practices

Given that implementation of assessments and Performance Matters is incomplete, it is premature to examine their impact on instructional strategies. As noted above, classroom evidence suggests that instruction for Grade 6 students could be more rigorous, suggesting that training on rigor had a limited impact on instructional practices. The next section discusses the impact on the adolescent learner.

### *Supporting Middle School Learners*

#### Implementation

Observations at two points during each observed Grade 6 class revealed that all or most students showed the following signs of engagement: able to follow instructions, pay attention, and sustain their attention in class. Students were more likely to pay attention and show enthusiasm if they were engaged in small-group or individual activities than if they were in a whole-group lesson.

According to observation findings in Grade 6 classes, implementation of instructional practices to focus on the needs of adolescent learners was incomplete. For example, while teachers in most classes provided students with one-on-one feedback, teachers in less than one half of classes provided for physical activity or movement, or provided positive role models from history and literature during lessons. Students in just over one half of classes worked or discussed in small groups; however, evidence of students monitoring or assessing their own learning was scant.

The majority of parents and students surveyed gave positive reports about student engagement and supports for adolescent learners. Surveyed parents were more likely than students to give positive responses. For example, 8 in 10 parents but only 6 in 10 students agreed that their child/they look forward to coming to school each day. (Topics of comments from parents on their surveys, in addition to those noted in this section, are summarized in Table B1 in Appendix B.)

Impact

Enhancing student engagement and meeting the needs of adolescent learners are the expected results for all Goal 2 actions. Therefore, these findings on engagement and supports for adolescent learners suggest some positive impact from the implementation of the other actions.

*All Recommended Actions*

This section discussed implementation of eight of the recommended actions for Goal 2. Sources of more information on some of these actions and information on the remaining four actions for Goal 2 are shown in Table 2.20.

Table 2.20  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 2

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
2.1 Alignment of English and mathematics curricula with new College Board Standards for College Success		Implementation of this action was delayed until FY 2009.
2.2 Assessments and Performance Matters	X	See also Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008.
2.3 Accelerated pathways and expectations for instruction in middle school curriculum guides		Implementation of this action in schools was delayed until FY 2009.
2.4 Innovative classroom technology	X	See also Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008.
2.5 Technology instruction within core subjects	X	
2.6 Rigorous elective course offerings	X	
2.7 Rigor in the classroom	X	
2.8 Opportunities for acceleration and enrichment	X	
2.9 Additional high school course offerings at middle schools	X	
2.10 Comprehensive professional development plan for middle school teachers	X	See also Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008.
2.11 Intervention programs	A separate study of Read 180 is underway.	
2.12 Organizational skills integrated into instructional program		Implementation of this action in schools was delayed until FY 2009.

**Goal 3: Provide extended learning opportunities that engage and motivate students to achieve at higher levels.**

The specific evaluation questions for Goal 3 were as follows:

- Were the recommended changes to the Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) program and processes implemented as designed?
- If so, was there evidence that student learning goals (hands-on learning, engagement, critical thinking) were addressed?

### 3.1 Redesign After-school and Summer Programs: Extended Day Program 2007–2008

The Extended Day Program at each Phase I school included mathematics and reading support at a number of grade levels, depending on school needs, plus two new courses: *Lights, Camera, Literacy!* (*LCL!*) and a second, more advanced course, *Lights, Camera, Literacy! Plus*, for students who have completed *LCL!* (Table 3.1). (One Phase I school offered *LCL!* as a school-day elective during the school year.) One Phase I school also offered an ESOL class after school.

Table 3.1  
Extended Day Program Offerings at Phase I Middle Schools

Course	# of schools (N=5)
Math 6	5
Math 7	4
Math 8	3
Reading 6	3
Reading 7	4
Reading 8	2
Reading 7/8	1
Read About	1
ESOL	1
Reading/Math 8	1
<i>Lights, Camera, Literacy!</i>	5
<i>Lights, Camera, Literacy! Plus</i>	5

Four of the five Phase I principals were not enthusiastic about *LCL!* as an extended-day course. Three of them recommended offering *LCL!* as an elective, instead of as part of the Extended Day Program; they felt it would be more successful during the school day when there were longer periods and more consistent attendance.

### 3.2 Extended Learning Opportunities Coordinator

All five Phase I schools hired .2 release Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) coordinators to support the Extended Day Program. Coordinators identified students, contacted and met with parents, followed up with students, collected data from teachers, and, at some schools, analyzed data. At one school, the coordinator used the release time to help students during the day and to attend meetings of the Educational Management Team and of teams that created Academic Intervention Plans.

Based on interviews, principals offered suggestions to improve this position, such as training for the coordinator on understanding interventions, increasing parent involvement, and evaluating the program's success.

### *3.3 ELO Data Monitoring System*

A system for entering data to register students and organize sections for ELO programs was created as an OASIS module and was available in summer 2007. During 2007–2008, aggregate reports at the school and system levels could be requested as needed. Future plans include links to MCPS student data systems such as Data Warehouse and Performance Matters.

### *3.4 Expanded Transportation Options*

In 2007–2008, each school had access to one additional bus, if it was needed for the Extended Day Program. However, none of the Phase I schools requested an additional bus.

## *Summary and Conclusions*

### Implementation

All five schools hired ELO coordinators who were fulfilling the duties of their position as expected. All Phase I schools offered a variety of mathematics and reading supports in the Extended Day Program, plus *LCL!* and the advanced course, *LCL!+*. However, the ELO Data Monitoring System is still in development, utilizing new data systems and stakeholder feedback. Also, while the option to add buses was made available to schools in 2007–2008, none of the Phase I schools elected to increase the number of buses for after-school transportation.

### Impact

Principals felt *LCL!* would be more effective as a school-day elective. The evaluation of *LCL!* as a summer course showed that it had potential as a learning tool and was fun and engaging for students (Hickson, 2008). These findings suggest that, while *LCL!* meets student learning goals of hands-on learning and engagement, the course curriculum needs to strengthen literacy skills and the link to the language arts curriculum.<sup>10</sup>

### All recommended actions

This section included findings for all recommended actions for Goal 3. The location of additional information for action 3.1 is noted in Table 3.2.

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<sup>10</sup> Since the study was conducted in 2007, a new document was developed by the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs creating explicit alignment of *LCL!* to the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum.

Table 3.2  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 3

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
3.1 Redesign after-school and summer programs	X	See Hickson, 2008 for a detailed implementation evaluation of <i>LCL!</i> as a summer course.
3.2 Extended learning opportunities coordinator	X	
3.3 Data monitoring system for ELO data	X	
3.4 Expanded transportation options	X	

**Goal 4: Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationships, and promote increased student achievement.**

The specific evaluation questions for Goal 4 were as follows:

- Were recommended structures for student support, structures for staff support, and guidelines for organizational processes provided?
- If so, what was the impact on common team planning, monitoring student performance, and student access to rigorous instruction?

*4.2 Increase Counselor Allocation*

In the five Phase I schools, the total number of counselors increased from 17.5 in 2006–2007 to 19 in 2007–2008. Three schools increased the number of counselors by one half of a position (.5 FTE) each; there was no change in the number of counselors at the remaining two Phase I schools.

*4.4 Cohort Collaborative Work (CCW)*

Middle School Reform provided funds to schools to create time for cohort groups to design, implement, or evaluate effective instruction. This action, known as Cohort Collaborative Work (CCW), was considered valuable by school staff who participated. A large majority (86.3%) of CCW participants who responded to the staff survey reported that their CCW activities were very or somewhat valuable in enhancing their professional practice (Table 4.1). CCW participants reported a variety of benefits (Table 4.2). At least one half of the respondents selected each of the following four benefits from the list provided: time to develop and execute good ideas, cohort lesson planning, focus on student achievement, and compensation.

Table 4.1  
Participants’ Reports on the Value of Cohort Collaborative Work

	CCW participants (N=131) <sup>a</sup>				
	Very valuable %	Somewhat valuable %	Not too valuable %	Not at all valuable %	No answer %
How valuable did you find the CCW activities in enhancing your professional practice during 2007-2008?	51.2	35.1	4.6	0.7	5.3

<sup>a</sup> Excludes 53 staff who reported that they did not participate in CCW.

Table 4.2  
Major Benefits of Cohort Collaborative Work

Benefit <sup>a</sup>	Participants in CCW (N=131) <sup>b</sup> %
Providing time to develop and execute good ideas that otherwise might not happen	72.5
Planning lessons as a cohort	64.1
Focusing on student achievement	59.5
Being compensated for my time	52.6
Building a professional learning community at my school	45.0
Supporting our School Improvement Plan (SIP)	38.1
Having regular meetings with the members of my cohort	33.5
Other uses of CCW	7.6

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses possible.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes 53 staff who reported that they did not participate in CCW.

#### *4.5 A 7-hour Instructional Data Assistant in Every School*

Each Phase I middle school had a 7-hour instructional data assistant (IDA) in 2007–2008. For all five Phase I schools, this was an increase from 6 hours in 2006–2007.

#### *4.6 Systemwide criteria for selecting a school schedule*

A document that identified actions steps for redesigning a school's Master Schedule was created and distributed by The Joint Technical Assistance Team. An initial version was sent to the administrators of all schools with a 5-out-of-8 or 6-out-of-8 schedule, which included one Phase I school, in November 2007 and a final version was sent in spring 2008.

#### *Summary and Conclusions*

##### Implementation

Counselor allocation (a student support), plus CCW and 7-hour IDAs (staff supports), were implemented as intended. Additional counselors were hired and the allocation for IDAs was increased to 7 hours. As noted in the midyear evaluation, all Phase I schools participated in CCW, although the number of staff varied by school (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008).

##### Impact

The increase in the number of counselors had a positive impact, as all Phase I schools experienced a drop in the ratio of students per counselor from 232 in 2006–2007 to 209 in 2007–2008. At two schools, where there was no increase in the counselor allocation, enrollment changes were responsible for the decrease in the ratio of students per counselor.

Based on the reports of CCW participants in the staff survey, this action had a positive impact on common team planning and monitoring student performance (Table 4.2 above). These findings support those reported in the midyear evaluation (Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008).

Information on the impact of the increased hours for IDAs was not collected in 2007–2008.

##### All recommended actions

This section discussed four of the recommended actions for Goal 4. Other information on these actions plus information on the remaining five actions for Goal 4 are in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 4

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
4.1 Hours-based staffing allocations		This item is being monitored/evaluated by the Department of Special Education Operations.
4.2 Increase counselor allocation	X	
4.3 Schedule ESOL students according to the middle school ESOL instructional pathways		Implementation of this action in schools was delayed until FY 2010.
4.4 Provide funds to schools to create time for team planning and professional development	X	See also Hickson & Cooper-Martin, 2008.
4.5 A 7-hour instructional data assistant to every school	X	Implementation of new roles and responsibilities was delayed until FY 2009.
4.6 Share systemwide criteria for selecting a school schedule	X	Implementation of this action in schools is planned for FY 2009.
4.7 Develop a systemwide K–12 vertical articulation process		Implementation of this action in schools was delayed until FY 2009.
4.8 Provide guidelines for effective implementation and evaluation processes of advisory periods		Implementation of this action in schools was delayed until FY 2009.
4.9 Implement the Honors/Advanced Placement Potential Identification Tool (HAPIT)		Implementation of this action was delayed until FY 2009.

**Goal 5: Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skills, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.**

The specific evaluation question for Goal 5 was as follows:

- Were recruitment, hiring, and retention processes for middle school staff implemented as intended?

*5.1 Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Middle School Staff*

To support recruitment and hiring, the Office of Human Resources (OHR) staff were to receive a list of research-based characteristics of highly qualified middle-level educators and a new job description for middle school classroom teachers. OHR staff received the final report from the Middle School Reform Initiative Human Resources Project Team. This report contained information on the knowledge, skills, and content expertise of middle school teachers required to meet the unique needs of middle school students.

The first MCPS job description for a middle school classroom teacher was developed in May 2006, based on the work of the Middle School Reform Initiative Human Resources Project Team and was used for hiring teachers who began in 2007–2008. However, this job description does not incorporate the following, desired characteristics (Weast, 2007):

- Ability to use data for instructional decision making
- Ability to model inclusive, collaborative, and team-oriented approaches to teaching and learning

*5.2 Training for All Staff Members Who Hire Middle School Personnel*

OHR staff received training from the Office of Organizational Development on the characteristics of adolescent learners and rigor in middle school instruction. Selected staff members outside of OHR received preliminary training on hiring appropriate middle school personnel. However, training was not completed because of funding cuts due to the budget freeze.

*Summary and Conclusions*

Staff members (inside and outside of OHR) who hire middle school staff members received some supports; however, implementation of the proposed processes to support recruitment, hiring, and retention of middle school staff was incomplete.

This section presented findings for both of the recommended actions for Goal 5 (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 5

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
5.1 Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Middle School Staff	X	
5.2 Training for All Staff Members Who Hire Middle School Personnel	X	

**Goal 6: Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.**

The specific evaluation question for Goal 6 was as follows:

- What training, information, and resources were provided to promote positive family and community involvement?

**6.1 National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs**

Two resources were provided to support schools in implementing the six National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement: an information sheet and a presentation. Specifically, the Department of Family and Community Partnerships (DFCP) developed a one-page information sheet about the six areas of involvement published by the national Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs. This information sheet was distributed to all principals.

DFCP hosted a seminar in December 2007 led by Dr. Karen Mapp, co-author of *Beyond the Bake Sale*, a book which gives practical guidance to schools on building strong collaborative relationships with families and communities. All middle school principals were invited, along with their PTA presidents.

**6.2 Study Circles**

The plan for Middle School Reform proposed the Study Circles program as a way to enhance parent involvement. All Phase I middle schools held Study Circles in 2007–2008, but only two schools included parents. At one of these schools, the Study Circle included nine parents and five staff members; at the other school, the Study Circle included 10 parents, three staff members, and the principal. Both of these Study Circles included a series of six 2-hour discussions led by trained facilitators. Action ideas as a result of these sessions included a student survey, building relationships or mentoring minority parents, and public service announcements and ads for Spanish media to reach Latino parents.

The Study Circles at two schools consisted only of students; the fifth school included only leadership team members.

**6.4 Multimedia Resources to Parents**

MCPS provided parents with a wide variety of resources in various formats (print, video/DVD, the Web, and workshops) and several languages. A list of print and video resources is in Appendix B (Table B2); Web resources generally include all of the print resources in PDF format and video resources by webcast. In addition, parents could subscribe to QuickNotes, an electronic newsletter that provides news, emergency messages, and items of special interest to the MCPS community. Information on workshops for parents is below, under action 6.6.

### *6.5 Training for Central Office and School-based Parent Outreach Staff on Key Topics*

Parent outreach staff from DFCP and ESOL/Bilingual Programs are central office staff who spend most of their time in schools. DFCP organized and facilitated seven training sessions for these staff members in 2007–2008. An average of 12 parent outreach staff attended each of these sessions. These sessions covered the following topics:

- Parent Academy
- Communicating with teachers
- Helping with homework
- Navigating the school system
- Understanding the MSA
- Parent involvement and No Child Left Behind
- School improvement process in Title I schools
- High School Assessment (HSA) updates
- The Collaborative Action Process
- Helping families in crisis
- Consortia and choice programs
- Ethnicity/race identification

### *6.6 Parent Academy*

While the Parent Academy program was not unique to Middle School Reform, the Phase I middle schools were focus sites for the workshops. A meeting was held in summer 2007 with the principals from the schools to introduce the Parent Academy and to gather initial feedback. Individual follow-up meetings were held with each principal to identify workshop topics that would benefit parents at their schools. Workshops were scheduled to complement other events in the school or during a time that did not pose conflict. Principals were able to meet with their leadership teams, PTAs, and other parents to finalize the workshop topics and adjust the schedule of workshops during the next month.

One third (34%) of all Parent Academy workshops took place at these schools. Each Phase I middle school typically hosted one workshop per month, for each of seven months, during 2007–2008. Total attendance of middle school parents at the five Phase I middle schools, was 415 over 37 workshop sessions, for an average of 11 parents per workshop.<sup>11</sup> As proposed, workshops covered a wide range of topics; sessions with higher-than-average attendance addressed middle school success, MSA, Edline, homework, advanced-level learners, gang awareness, positive discipline, and Internet safety. (Table B3 in Appendix B.)

### *6.7 Training Plan on Cross-cultural Communication*

A DVD plus a training plan on effective cross-cultural communication for school staff is in development.

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<sup>11</sup> The figure of 415 parents could include parents who attended more than one of the 37 workshops.

*Parent Involvement*

The majority of respondents to the Grade 6 parent survey indicated that they were involved with their child’s school work and school, except for volunteering at the school (Table 6.1). More than 8 in 10 of the respondents (84.7%) almost always or sometimes helped their child with homework and school projects. Likewise, about three quarters reported that they almost always or sometimes attended schoolwide meetings (77.7%) or school events (73.5%). Volunteering at school, however, was a less common way for parents to be involved at their child’s middle school, with about one half of parents (53.5%) reporting that they rarely or never volunteered at school.

Table 6.1  
Parent Involvement (N=479)

How often do you ...	Almost always %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %
help with your child's homework and school projects?	40.5	44.2	13.8	1.5
attend back to school night or other school-wide meetings?	40.5	37.2	16.7	5.6
attend school events, such as athletic events, drama/music performances, etc.?	29.1	44.4	14.3	12.2
volunteer to help with activities in this school?	11.8	34.7	25.3	28.2

The majority of surveyed parents reported positive perceptions of their Grade 6 child’s school environment and communication (Table 6.2). At least 80% of respondents to the parent survey were in agreement (strongly agree or agree) with several items such as feeling welcome, getting information, overall instruction, and accessibility to teachers. Somewhat fewer respondents (about three quarters) agreed or strongly agreed that their child’s teachers kept them informed or were easy to talk to.

Table 6.2  
Parent Reports on School Environment and Communication (N=479)

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don’t Know/ Does Not Apply %
I feel welcomed at this school.	39.7	50.3	5.9	2.3	1.7
This school does a good job of getting important school information to parents.	40.6	48.0	6.9	2.7	1.7
This school does a good job of informing me about meetings and special school events.	42.9	45.0	8.8	1.7	1.7
I am satisfied with the overall instruction my child receives at this school.	26.1	57.1	12.0	3.4	1.5
There is an atmosphere of open communication in my child's school.	32.6	49.4	11.9	2.3	3.8
My child's teachers are accessible to me when needed.	27.3	54.0	11.1	1.9	5.7
It is easy for me to talk to my child's teachers about things concerning my child.	26.4	50.0	14.1	2.1	7.4
My child's teachers keep me informed about my child's progress in school.	24.5	51.2	18.0	5.3	1.1
The principal is responsive to the concerns of parents and the community.	30.4	40.5	4.2	2.7	22.2
The principal is accessible to me when needed.	29.8	39.1	5.9	3.2	22.1
The principal takes actions to resolve my concerns.	23.8	32.5	4.9	3.8	35.0

Fewer parents were in agreement with the three items involving the principal (e.g., the principal is accessible to me when needed). However, at least 22% of parents replied with don’t know/does not apply for each of these items; when these parents are excluded, at least 86% of respondents agreed

with each of the statements about the principal's responsiveness, accessibility, and response to concerns (see more detail in Table B4, Appendix B).

### *Summary and Conclusions*

#### Implementation

The following training, information, and resources were provided to promote positive family and community involvement in the five Phase I middle schools:

- One-page information sheet for principals about PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
- Seminar by Dr. Karen Mapp, co-author of *Beyond the Bake Sale*
- Study Circle program with parents at two schools
- Seven training sessions for parent outreach staff from DFCP and ESOL/Bilingual Programs
- 37 Parent Academy sessions attended by 415 parents

The majority of respondents to the parent survey reported being involved with their child's school, typically by helping with homework or attending school events. Parent respondents also had positive perceptions about their child's school with respect to environment and communication.

#### All recommended actions

This section provided findings on the implementation of six recommended actions for Goal 6 and on parent engagement. Information on the remaining recommended action for this goal is in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3  
Findings on Implementation of Recommended Actions for Goal 6

Action	Included in this report	Details for actions not included in this report
6.1 National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs	X	
6.2 Study Circles program	X	
6.3 Principal's tool kit		Implementation of this action was delayed until FY 2009.
6.4 Multimedia resources to parents	X	
6.5 Training for central office and school-based parent outreach staff on key topics	X	
6.6 Parent Academy	X	
6.7 Training plan on cross-cultural communication	X	
All Parent engagement	X	

## Recommendations

Recommendations to improve implementation of Middle School Reform follow, based on the above findings. These findings were strengthened through the use of multiple data sources to provide a more complete view of implementation. For both the staff survey and the parent survey, the response rate was low, which limits generalization beyond the sample. The response rates for the PLCI survey and the student survey were high enough to make those results generalizable to the full sample. The student survey, as well as the parent survey and observations, were limited to Grade 6; this approach strengthened the findings by providing more in-depth information about this grade level, but limits the generalization of the results to other grades.

### *Goal 1*

- Explore ways for the AEI literacy coach to increase effectiveness in helping more school staff members build their capacity in literacy strategies and provide support for all students.

### *Goal 2*

- Revise the new Grade 6 elective course, Arts Investigations, to increase rigorous and relevant instruction.
- Emphasize the use of critical-thinking skills (outlined in the rigor look-fors) during professional development on rigorous instruction in the classroom, especially developing students' analytic and interpretive skills and developing students' ability to elaborate on and justify their thinking.
- Explore next steps for expanding the number and type of high school course offerings in middle schools, as proposed in the Middle School Reform report.
- Explore ways to engage students more fully during whole-group lessons; student engagement is stronger during small-group work and individual activities. Promethean technology may be helpful for this, as teachers and students are already using Promethean most frequently for whole-group activities.
- Continue to develop teachers' ability to use the formative assessment capabilities of Promethean technology (ActiVote and ActiVote data display).
- Emphasize the need for teachers to provide supports for the adolescent learner, such as opportunities for physical activity or movement during class, positive role models from history, and opportunities for students to work or discuss in small groups.
- Investigate the pattern of nonuse of certain formative and unit assessments that were available to middle schools in 2007–2008.
- Ensure that course codes used by schools to register students for elective, accelerated, high school, and intervention courses are the official course codes.

**Goal 3**

- Consider offering *LCL!* during the school year as a school day elective, rather than as an after-school offering.
- Continue to develop the ELO data monitoring system to allow for interaction with other MCPS student data systems.

**Goal 5**

- Complete implementation of the proposed processes to support recruitment, hiring, and retention of middle school staff.
- Update the job description for middle school staff to include the abilities to use data for instructional decision making and to model inclusive, collaborative, and team-oriented approaches to teaching and learning.

**Goal 6**

- Collect feedback from parents and schools to determine which of the training, information, and resources provided to promote positive family and community involvement were most helpful, so as to focus and streamline future efforts. Include the DVD and training plan on effective cross-cultural communication for school staff, once completed and distributed. Review Parent Academy records and feedback and determine those topics that were most popular and most helpful, to assist with the selection of future programming.
- Enhance parent involvement by including parents in Study Circles Programs, as proposed in the plan for Middle School Reform.

**Additional Recommendations**

See Hickson (2008) for additional recommendations related to Goal 3 and Hickson and Cooper-Martin (2008) for additional recommendations related to Goals 1, 2, and 4.

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**Appendixes**

## Appendix A

### Recommended Actions for the Six Goals of Middle School Reform During 2007-2008

**Goal 1:** Ensure effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectations.

- **1.1** Implement a comprehensive professional development plan for middle school leaders through the Professional Learning Communities Institute (PLCI) (Phase I)
- **1.2** Provide school leadership teams with the opportunity to participate in the School Leadership Team Institute
- **1.3** Establish a new internship model for aspiring middle school principals to develop leadership skills specific to middle school (FY 2009)
- **1.4** Continue the implementation of the Baldrige school improvement process
- **1.5** Restructure roles and responsibilities of resource teachers and team leaders (Phase I)
- **1.6** Create new mathematics and literacy content specialist positions (Phase I)

**Goal 2:** Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.

- **2.1** Begin alignment of mathematics and English curriculum with the new College Board Standards for College Success
- **2.2** Continue to develop and use formative and benchmark assessments
- **2.3** Identify explicit accelerated pathways within the middle school curriculum guides, and establish expectations for instruction
- **2.4** Utilize innovative classroom technology in selected content area classes to actively engage students in instruction (Phase I)
- **2.5** Ensure all middle school students, especially those who are underrepresented in advanced-level technology courses, experience rigorous and relevant technology instruction
- **2.6** Offer rigorous elective courses in the arts and technology using courses from the Middle School Magnet Consortium as a model (Phase I)
- **2.7** Clearly define what rigor looks like in the classroom
- **2.8** Offer opportunities for acceleration and enrichment to all students
- **2.9** Offer additional high school courses (e.g., computer technology, Grade 6 foreign language, and other courses as appropriate) (Phase I)
- **2.10** Implement a comprehensive professional development plan for middle school instructional staff on topics such as differentiation, rigor, technology, using data to drive instruction, and equitable classroom practices
- **2.11** Expand intervention programs for students who are not meeting academic standards
- **2.12** Integrate study skills including time management, organizational skills, test-taking strategies, and note taking skills into the instructional program (Phase I)

**Goal 3:** Provide extended learning opportunities that engage and motivate students to achieve at higher levels.

- **3.1** Redesign after-school and summer programs to increase reading, writing and mathematics skills, provide enrichment and acceleration, use hands-on and authentic learning and promote critical thinking (Phase I)
- **3.2** Increase student enrollment and participation in after-school and summer programs by strengthening the recruitment of staff and students using a coordinator (Phase I)

- **3.3** Implement processes to monitor student participation, academic progress, and the effectiveness of the extended learning opportunities program
- **3.4** Expand transportation to increase student participation in after school programs by decreasing the students' commute time (Phase I)

**Goal 4:** Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationships and promote increased student achievement.

- **4.1** Provide hours-based staffing allocations to support the inclusion of special education students in general education classes (Phase I)
- **4.2** Increase counselor allocation
- **4.3** Schedule ESOL students according to the middle school ESOL instructional pathways (Phase I)
- **4.4** Provide funds to schools to create time for team planning and professional development (Phase I)
- **4.5** Provide a 7-hour instructional data assistant
- **4.6** Establish a systemwide criteria for selecting a school schedule
- **4.7** Develop a systemwide K–12 vertical articulation process
- **4.8** For schools whose schedules include advisory periods, provide guidelines for effective implementation and evaluation processes
- **4.9** Implement the Honors/Advanced Placement Potential Identification Tool to increase enrollment of African American and Hispanic students in advanced-level classes

**Goal 5:** Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skills, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.

- **5.1** Recruit, hire, and retain staff who are highly skilled in meeting the needs of middle school students and who reflect the diversity of the MCPS community
- **5.2** Train all staff members who hire middle school personnel to match potential candidates to the needs of middle school students

**Goal 6:** Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.

- **6.1** Provide support and assistance to schools to ensure that the six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs are implemented
- **6.2** Implement Study Circles and provide support to school leadership teams to integrate action steps in the school improvement plan (Phase I)
- **6.3** Develop a tool kit for schools that includes resources, best practices, and strategies for effective two-way communication and parent and community engagement
- **6.4** Provide multimedia resources to parents in various languages that include information on the school system
- **6.5** Implement training for central office and school-based parent outreach staff on key topics (e.g., High School Assessments, graduation requirements, the special education process, grading and reporting, advanced level courses, extended learning opportunities, etc.)
- **6.6** Create a Parent Academy in collaboration with parents and community partners to help parents access school and community resources and enhance their skills to support student learning
- **6.7** Develop a training plan on cross-cultural communication that builds on the school system's efforts to increase cultural competence among staff

## **Appendix B**

### Additional Details on Findings

Table B1  
Topics of Additional Comments from Parent Surveys

Topic	N=180 <sup>a</sup>	
	#	%
Communication: all	78	43
• School staff/teachers should communicate, reply to messages, be more proactive	48	27
• Edline Update more often, post homework, be correct, not replace personal touch	16	9
• Edline: Positive comments	5	3
• Need translations	4	2
• Other	5	3
Parent complaints on discipline, safety, and lack of teacher control	28	16
Complaints about instruction in specific courses (not technology): all	26	14
• Science at one school	8	4
Students need more help (not mentioned elsewhere): all	13	11
• Help for students with IEP, 504 , or special needs	8	4
• Other	5	3
Requests for staff or teachers to be more sensitive, more friendly, attentive to more students	15	8
Comments about Clemente’s magnet program	12	7
What is Middle School Reform?	10	6
Request for more after school activities	7	4
Request for uniforms	4	2
Request for more sports for Grade 6	3	2
Requests for cleaner bathrooms	3	2
Other comments about magnet programs or Gifted/Talented classes	3	2
Other comments, negative, want changes	14	8
Other comments, positive	11	6

<sup>a</sup> Out of 482 parent surveys, 180 (37%) included written comments.

Table B2  
Print and Video Resources for Parents, 2007–2008, by Media

**Print resources**

- A Student’s Guide to Rights and Responsibilities\*
- Aim for Success\*
- Annual Report on Our Call to Action
- Annual Report to the Community
- Board of Education Year in review
- Board of Education handbook
- Change of School Assignment\*
- CIP Plan
- Citizen’s Operating Budget
- Community Resource Guide\*
- Conquista Tus Sueños\*
- Consortia Choice Pathways booklet\*
- Destination Imagination brochure
- Directions to Schools
- Due Process brochure\*
- Early Entrance to Kindergarten\*
- Eastern MS brochure
- ESY: Extended Year Services
- Evening & Saturday High School brochure
- Federal Title I School Choice Options
- Getting Ready Career Planning Guide
- Getting Set: A Guide for Middle School Students and Their Parents\*
- Getting Started: Career Planning Guide\*
- Grading and Reporting
- Head Start brochure
- Head Start Newsletter
- Health Tips (nutrition)
- High School Course Bulletin
- High School Plus brochure\*
- Homeless Children in MCPS brochure
- Home and Hospital Teaching pamphlet
- HSA Graduation Requirements\*
- HSA Prep Workshop Courses
- IB Programme brochure
- IEP booklet
- International Students Admissions Process\*
- Internet safety
- ITV Program Guide
- Kindergarten Handbook\*
- Listing of MCPS Schools
- Members of the Board of Education brochure
- Middle School Magnet booklet\*
- Middle School Program Guide
- Navigating the System\*
- NEC Pathways
- Options\*
- Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence
- Parent Connection Newsletter\*
- Parent Education program: helping Families Build Strong Families
- Parent Guides (Grades K through 5)\*
- Parents: Nurturers, Teachers and Advocates: A Parent’s Role in the Strategic Plan\*
- Parent Tips: Kindergarten Orientation\*
- Pathways to Success\*
- Piano Loaner Program
- Poolesville Magnet brochure
- Pre Kindergarten Newsletter
- Prep Talk newsletter
- Procedural Safeguards: Parents Rights
- Resource Guide to Services, Support & Advocacy Groups in Gifted and Talented Education
- Ride by the Rules: A Parent’s Role
- Roberto Clemente MS brochure
- Runaways: A Reality in Montgomery County resource booklet
- Saturday School brochure
- Schools at a Glance
- School Lunch menus—Headstart, PreK
- School Lunch Menus—Elementary
- School Lunch Menus—Secondary
- Section 504 brochure
- Special Education Administrative Review and Mediation procedures
- Special Education at a Glance
- Special Edition Quarterly Newsletter for Special education
- Strategic Plan Summary\*
- Student Graduation and Credit Reports
- Student Service Learning brochure
- Takoma Park MS brochure
- Transition Connection
- Transition Guide for MCITP Families
- Working Together

**Video resources (partial list)**

- Child Find\*
- Cover to Cover (40 segments per year)
- Diez Minutos\*
- Education Matters
- News Update
- Our Schools Today\*
- Student Service Learning
- Take Ten
- Technology Today: Success Tomorrow\*

\*Resource is available in multiple languages.

Table B3  
Attendance at Parent Academy Workshops Held at Phase I Middle Schools, 2007–2008

Middle school	Topic	Attendance sign-in <sup>a</sup> #	Feedback completed #	Have middle school child #
All workshops <sup>b</sup>		427	348	173
October workshops		116	100	58
Benjamin Banneker	MSA	29	19	17
Roberto Clemente	MSA	12	8	6
Montgomery Village	Gang awareness	38	38	20
Sligo	Homework	11	11	6
Earle B. Wood	Middle school success	15	13	6
Earle B. Wood	MSA	11	11	3
November workshops		60	52	20
Benjamin Banneker	Reading matters in middle school	11	8	5
Roberto Clemente	Reading matters in middle school	14	13	--
Montgomery Village	ESOL programs and services	11	9	4
Sligo	MS success	4	4	4
Earle B. Wood	Communicating with teachers	4	4	--
Earle B. Wood	Homework	16	14	7
January workshops		101	92	48
Benjamin Banneker	Homework	26	19	12
Roberto Clemente	Staying connected using Edline	15	15	11
Montgomery Village	Middle school success	23	23	17
Sligo	Advanced level learners	16	15	3
Earle B. Wood	Positive discipline	21	20	5
February workshops		47	40	28
Benjamin Banneker	Middle school success	5	5	3
Roberto Clemente	Internet safety	11	9	3
Montgomery Village	MSA	22	18	20
Sligo	Navigating the system	3	3	2
Earle B. Wood	Gang awareness	6	5	--
March workshops		56	37	19
Benjamin Banneker	Gang awareness	18	13	8
Roberto Clemente	Middle school success	11	6	2
Montgomery Village	Internet safety	12	3	4
Sligo	Positive discipline	9	9	3
Earle B. Wood	Helping teens make good decisions	3	3	2
Earle B. Wood	Empowering parents as decision-makers	3	3	--
April workshops		31	25	12
Benjamin Banneker	Internet safety	9	7	2
Roberto Clemente	Understanding preteens and teens	6	6	4
Montgomery Village	Articulation, high school graduation requirements, IEP, 504	9	5	4
Sligo	Introduction to basic computer skills (in Spanish)	5	5	2
Earle B. Wood	Taking control and managing money	2	2	--

Table B3 (Continued)

		Attendance sign-in <sup>a</sup>	Feedback completed	Have middle school child
Middle school	Topic	#	#	#
<b>May workshops</b>		16	10	8
Benjamin Banneker	School improvement process – parents as decision makers	2	2	2
Montgomery Village	Positive discipline (PBIS)	9	3	2
Sligo	Relationship building - reunification	3	3	2
Earle B. Wood	HSA high school graduation requirements	2	2	2

Source: Division of Family and Community Partnerships.

<sup>a</sup> The number preregistered for workshops was higher than the number who attended.

<sup>b</sup> Totals may count the same parent or family more than once.

Note. Dashes (-) indicate no parents belong in this category.

Table B4  
 Parent Reports on School Principal (N=479)

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know/ Does Not Apply #
The principal is responsive to the concerns of parents and the community.	39.1	52.0	5.4	3.5	106
The principal is accessible to me when needed.	38.3	50.1	7.5	4.0	106
The principal takes actions to resolve my concerns.	36.6	50.1	7.4	5.8	168