

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

February 28, 2018

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Middle School Magnet Field Test Update

I am writing to update you on the selection process field test for the Takoma Park Middle School Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science Magnet and the Eastern Middle School Humanities and Communication Magnet, and to share preliminary data. I will provide the complete report at the conclusion of the magnet selection season, as has been the customary practice. The field test included an examination of the educational records of every Grade 5 student in the catchment area for the two magnet programs. This represented 80 elementary schools and approximately 8,164 students. This global review of our Grade 5 students offers valuable information for programming at the middle school level, well beyond magnet program placement. There were 4,057 students assessed using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)¹ from the 80 schools. This is in stark contrast with prior practice when approximately 700 to 800 students applied to the two programs. In addition, an important consideration when selecting students to participate in the magnet programs was whether or not a student had an academic peer group at his or her home middle school.

Preliminary results reflect increases in selected Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, and students receiving Free and Reduced-price Meals System services. Additionally, the vast majority of the 80 elementary schools in the field test have students selected for the magnet programs. This is significantly different from past years where students from a few elementary schools dominated the admission process. Overall, the gender balance in both programs improved, and the 4,057 assessed students are reflective of the student population of the catchment area. The process revealed a large number of highly able cohorts at a number of local middle schools. Given the universal nature of the process and the appreciable increase in student participation, staff anticipated that there would be a greater number of appeals as well as varied acceptance rates.

As with the elementary school expansion, the intent of the new middle school process is to build the infrastructure to meet the needs of highly able students in multiple locations and mitigate the perception that middle school students only receive enriched and accelerated instruction through a magnet program. Given there are a number of highly able cohorts remaining in their local middle schools, all schools in the catchment area will receive support and training on enriched and accelerated programming. It is important to note that the existence of these cohorts at local middle schools are not new this year; what is new is the explicit support provided for programming for highly able students.

¹ Parents/guardians of Grade 5 students will receive a detailed summary report for their child prepared by the publisher by March 2, 2018.

Building upon the magnet curriculum, staff in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs is developing two enriched and accelerated courses for highly able cohorts in local middle schools in the catchment area for implementation in the 2018–2019 school year. Course descriptions follow.

Applied Investigations into Mathematics (IM) 6

This Grade 6 course is designed to extend students' understanding of mathematical concepts aligned with Common Core State Standards, accelerating the pace of instruction while diving deeper into concepts. This course offers access to academic competitions and the opportunity to conduct applied fieldwork. Students work with an academic cohort to conduct independent inquiries using mathematics, computer science, and the scientific process to solve real-world problems. Upon successful completion, students will matriculate to an accelerated and enriched Algebra 1 course in Grade 7 and Geometry in Grade 8.

Historical Inquiry into Global Humanities 6

This course is built around the core Grade 6 social studies curriculum that includes historical content from early civilizations, the empires of Greece and Rome, the dynasties of China, and civilizations of the first millennium. Cohort students will go beyond this core as they learn additional content, explore deeper connections to today's world, conduct research, engage in investigative inquiry to strengthen their writing through Document Based Questions modeled from Advanced Placement courses, and enhance their learning through relevant literature connections and expanded writing output.

Middle school principals will be notified of the student cohort assigned to the course or courses in early March 2018. For scheduling purposes, students identified in the highly able cohorts will be grouped together in sections of the course or courses. As seats are available, local school principals will identify additional students who demonstrate need for accelerated and enriched instruction for placement in the course or courses.

All middle schools in the catchment area will implement one or both courses in the coming school year, depending on the size of the cohort in mathematics and humanities, respectively, with the exception of Argyle, A. Mario Loiederman, and Parkland middle schools, the three Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) schools. This is because MSMC schools are whole-school magnets with enrichment and acceleration opportunities embedded in the programs. Schools also will receive professional development, consultation on master scheduling, and focused support during implementation. The catchment area schools are: Benjamin Banneker, Briggs Chaney, William H. Farquhar, Robert Frost, Herbert Hoover, Cabin John, Francis Scott Key, Col. E. Brooke Lee, Newport Mill, Rosa M. Parks, North Bethesda, Thomas W. Pyle, Silver Creek, Silver Spring International, Sligo, Tilden, Julius West, Westland, Earle B. Wood, and White Oak middle schools. Currently, 16 of the 20 middle schools are scheduled to offer 2 courses, while 4 of the middle schools are slated to offer at least 1 course. Throughout the remainder of the school year, final course(s) and sections will be determined based on student enrollment and achievement data. In mid-March, schools will communicate with parents/guardians and their communities regarding the new course(s) for the 2018–2019 school year.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Erick J. Lang, associate superintendent for curriculum and instructional programs, Office of the Chief Academic Officer, at 301-279-3411.

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Copy to:

Executive Staff

Mr. Ikheloa