

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

March 23, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Literacy Education

Executive Summary

Literacy encompasses the reciprocal skills of reading and writing and directly relates to the ability to synthesize, evaluate, and convey complex information. To achieve college and career readiness, students must reach a high level of communication and critical thinking skills. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Pre-K 2 English language arts curriculum is designed as a cohesive, articulated progression of skills, processes, and concepts backmapped from college standards for literacy. The reform effort introduced with the Early Success initiative in 2000 has resulted in improvements in literacy across all grades and student groups. However, the district continues to face challenges related to implementation of and understanding among stakeholders about literacy curriculum and instruction. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information on the background, current state, and results of literacy education in MCPS, as well as on the actions taken to address identified challenges.

Background

Inquiries to the Montgomery County Board of Education indicate interest among stakeholders regarding literacy education in the district, particularly in the area of writing. Recent changes by the College Board to assess writing on the SAT and changes by the Maryland State Board of Education to remove written responses from the High School Assessments (HSAs) for the May 2009 administration may have sparked this interest.

Since embarking on the reform effort to establish standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment, staff members in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP) have developed and disseminated a well-designed set of literacy-related resources based on the Pre-K 2 English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks, backmapped from the SAT, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations, and approved by the Board

in 2001. These curriculum outlines, instructional guides, and assessments articulate a clear expectation for and provide resources to support direct instruction across the grades in reading and writing, as well as in listening, speaking, and viewing (Attachment A).

Beginning with the Early Success initiative, OCIP and the offices of Organizational Development (OOD) and Special Education and Student Services (OSESS) have collaborated to provide English language arts training for teachers and administrators. The offices of School Performance (OSP) and the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) collaborated with OCIP to establish a student performance monitoring system. The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) conducted in-depth studies that included a series of focus groups and data reviews. OCIP then considered achievement data and stakeholder feedback to refine products and services.

Staff members in OCIP, OOD, OSESS, and OSP support sustained implementation of the MCPS curriculum and assessments. School administrators and teachers receive course or grade-level look-fors to guide self-assessment, observation, and evaluation (Attachment B). Through regular meetings with staff development teachers, reading specialists, resource teachers, and principals, school leadership teams receive additional resources and information on effective practices. Central services staff members build understanding of literacy education among stakeholders by providing information about direct instruction in writing for all grade levels and opportunities for students to write in all content areas. Staff members explain how the reading program allows students to accelerate, as appropriate, and clarify the purpose of a Brief Constructed Response (BCR) on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in reading to assess reading comprehension, rather than writing.

Communication is critical to stakeholder understanding of how the MCPS program prepares students for college and careers. Not only do the SAT, ACT, and AP or IB English examinations assess critical reading and writing skills, but AP and IB examinations in other content areas also assess students ability to comprehend complex text and show content knowledge in written form. The MCPS English language arts curriculum, therefore, is designed to build students skills grade by grade to college literacy levels. Current challenges in our district include communicating this clearly to all stakeholders and ensuring that staff members continue to monitor literacy teaching and learning in order to address needs.

Current State of Literacy Education, Pre-K 2

The MCPS English language arts curriculum is guided by and extends beyond the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). The curriculum addresses four processes identified in the VSC listening, speaking, reading, and writing and two contents identified by the state language and literature. MCPS emphasizes writing and adds viewing as a fifth process, consistent with the College Board standards in English. The stated goal of the MCPS English language arts program is to create literate, thoughtful communicators, capable of controlling language effectively as they negotiate an increasingly complex and information-rich world.

Students refine specific skills and strategies in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing and use these skills and strategies widely as tools for learning and reflection.

Reading

Reading instruction in MCPS is founded on the principles that reading is an interactive process for understanding text, which develops across all grade levels, is effective when strategic and fluent, and requires motivation. In the early grades, instruction focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Students read fiction and nonfiction works and receive direct instruction in guided reading groups and whole-class lessons. In Grades 3 , instruction focuses on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In Grade 6, most students take a reading course that emphasizes exposition to prepare them for the demands of secondary courses. After Grade 6, students continue to build reading skills in English classes, where they learn to analyze literature and expository text. *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*, the MCPS strategic plan, has identified reading on grade level by the end of Grade 2 and reading proficiency on the MSA in Grades 3 as performance targets.

Writing

English language arts teachers in MCPS are expected to provide direct instruction in writing regularly aily in elementary grades. Students are expected to write often at all grade levels and they are expected to write in multiparagraph form by Grade 3. Writing instruction in MCPS reflects the philosophy that writing makes thinking visible. The program recognizes the recursive nature of writing, requiring individuals to organize and revise their thinking in multiple drafts. Students learn to consider word choice, sentence structure, and language conventions such as grammar and spelling as they write. Instruction also emphasizes awareness among students that writing has varied purposes, audiences, and forms. At all grade levels, students develop writing skills as their teachers instruct, model, coach, assess, and provide feedback related to the required components of the Pre-K 2 writing program (Attachment C).

Literacy Across Content Areas

Teachers of fine arts, foreign languages, health, physical education, science, social studies, mathematics, and technology support literacy by using methods that help students comprehend text. They build students understanding of essential concepts and vocabulary and they assist students in the application of reading strategies. While students *learn to write* in their English language arts classes, they *write to learn* in their content classes. Students may complete science lab reports, physical fitness logs, artists notebooks, or dialectic history journals. In MCPS, students are expected to write often in all classes n many forms and degrees of formality (Attachment D). Students also receive direct literacy instruction in content classes as appropriate. In social studies, for example, students read primary and secondary sources to gather evidence and express evidence-supported generalizations and opinions. Developing these skills begins in elementary grades and continues through middle and high school, culminating in AP and IB courses where students respond to document-based questions.

Literacy Assessments

Literacy in MCPS is assessed during instruction using classroom or district formative assessments. Districtwide reading assessments are used to monitor progress by individual students, classes, schools, and the district. Formal assessment of reading begins in the early grades with the MCPS Assessment Program Primary Reading (MCPSAP-PR), administered by K teachers using customized software on a handheld device. In Grades 3, students reading skills are assessed using a computer-adapted and individualized test, Measures of Academic Progress Reading (MAP-R). Data from the MCPSAP-PR and MAP-R are available online. Student performance on the MSA in reading also is available online. Reading benchmarks have been established by OCIP and OSA staff in collaboration with school-based staff members to determine success toward meeting system targets in reading through Grade 2. A work group currently is meeting to establish reading benchmarks for Grades 3.

OCIP and school-based staff members have developed writing assessments for Grades 1 and will complete development of additional assessments for Grades 4 and 5 for implementation during school year 2009-2010 as part of the elementary standards-based grading and reporting initiative. Writing assessments are in place for Grades 6-8 and data can be entered and are available to staff members for analysis online. Writing performance is monitored through the use of writing assessments (Attachment E).

Literacy Acceleration and Intervention

Students may accelerate by reading increasingly more challenging text or writing increasingly more complex compositions. Elementary teachers work with all students at the earliest text levels to build literal and interpretive comprehension skills, which students may demonstrate in oral or written responses. They assess students' facility at specific text levels and present more challenging texts to students who demonstrate they can decode more difficult words and understand more advanced vocabulary and syntax. Advanced literacy instruction is provided to elementary students through the William and Mary and Junior Great Books programs in all schools. Secondary teachers build all students' skills to manage texts with complex language and content and they teach strategies for critically analyzing literature and exposition. Secondary advanced instruction is formalized through advanced, Honors, AP, and IB classes.

In all grades, teachers shape students' writing performance by providing explicit instruction and strong writing models and allowing ample opportunity for practice. Teachers coach students through the writing process using rubrics to guide student efforts (Attachment F). Teachers use rubrics to provide students feedback on their writing and students record their progress and set individual writing goals. As teachers determine student readiness, they present more challenging writing assignments and focus on more complex aspects of writing.

Teachers differentiate instruction in the classroom to challenge and support all students. They teach students in flexible groups according to their needs, reviewing and extending instruction as appropriate. For students whose literacy skills continue to lag, schools provide formal intervention programs in addition to core instruction, based on diagnostic information. OCIP and OSESS staff have identified reading intervention programs for students in general and special education, Grades 2-6. Elementary schools may choose programs such as high-interest libraries, skill-based texts, and computer programs. At the secondary level, *READ 180*, a computer-assisted intervention program focusing on vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, is used in 61 secondary schools for students in both general and special education settings and for students receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages services, levels 2 and above. OCIP also has designed decision trees to aid secondary school staff in guiding placement of students based on data.

During core instruction in the classroom, teachers are encouraged to employ Universal Design for Learning (UDL) using alternative formats and tools to make curriculum and materials accessible to all students. Staff members in OCIP, OSESS, and OOD are collaborating to raise awareness among school-based and central services staff about UDL; and to develop and disseminate accessible instructional resources and assessments, identify technology and software that will help students access content areas or demonstrate skill and understanding, and provide professional development on UDL strategies. Staff members in OSESS have identified software and strategies that assist students in literacy specifically and OCIP is incorporating them into curriculum resources in all content areas.

Student Performance

As a result of providing standards-based curriculum resources, assessments, professional development, and a monitoring system that allows staff members to make decisions based on student performance, we have seen increases in literacy skills across levels and student groups. Specifically, student performance data show the following between 2006 and 2008:

- The percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced on the MSA in reading has increased for all student groups in Grades 3-5.
- The percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the MAP-R has increased for most student groups in Grades 6-8.
- The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the HSA in English has increased by 13 to 20 points for Hispanic and African American students, and for students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meals System (FARMS) and special education services.
- MCPS students performance on the writing or critical reading subtest of the SAT compares favorably to state and national percentages.

- The percentage of students scoring 550 or higher on the writing subtest of the SAT has increased for African American students and students receiving FARMS services since 2006.
- The percentage of students scoring a three or higher on AP examinations that include writing and critical reading components compares favorably to state and national percentages.
- The percentage of students scoring a three or higher on the AP English Language and Composition examination has increased for African American students and students receiving FARMS and special education services.

Challenges

District efforts to improve literacy skills of all students are achieving the intended results, but we still face challenges in meeting our goals for students to be fully literate at key milestones in their academic careers. Implementation of literacy curriculum and assessments remains somewhat uneven in MCPS due in part to staff mobility. As a tight budget forces position cuts, continued focus on job-embedded training by staff development teachers, reading specialists, Accelerated and Enriched Instruction literacy coaches, and resource teachers becomes even more critical in sustaining strong literacy instruction. Other challenges include the following:

- Competing priorities: the MSA and HSA do not assess student writing, while the SAT, ACT, and AP/IB examinations assess student writing
- College and career requirements for high levels of literacy
- Misperception that the BCR component on the MSA in reading assesses student writing

Recent Actions and Next Steps

Staff members in OCIP, OSESS, OOD, OCTO, and OSP continue to focus on building the capacity of staff members and administrators to ensure consistent implementation of literacy curriculum and assessments. Work is ongoing to communicate the imperatives that teachers have the tools to accelerate and intervene in reading and writing, and that teachers have time to teach writing as well as the resources and expectation to do so. It is regularly communicated that the MCPS approach to teaching grammar, spelling, and handwriting reflects best practices. The implications of different literacy expectations on state and national assessments are shared with teachers and school leaders.

In addition, the following actions are continuing, in progress, or recommended.

Continuing Actions

- Provide regular professional development and support on curriculum implementation.

- Build on the schoolwide literacy plans previously developed in secondary schools.

In Progress Actions

- Conduct communication campaign about the MCPS English Language Arts Program.
- Provide information and support to principals on monitoring effective writing instruction.
- Clarify with all audiences the purpose of BCRs to assess reading, not writing.
- Complete the reading benchmarks for students in Grades 3 .
- Develop universally accessible instructional and assessment resources.

Recommended Action

- Explore the feasibility of conducting range-finding sessions with teachers and administrators to develop writing benchmarks for students in Grades 3 0.

Conclusion

Literacy education in MCPS is built on a cohesive curriculum backmapped from college levels, resources to support acceleration and intervention, assessments to guide instruction, and an online monitoring system. Professional development and communication promote consistent implementation, as well as understanding of the program design and rationale. Generally, students in MCPS perform well on assessments requiring literacy skills. While much is in place to provide a strong literacy program in MCPS, we have more work to do to ensure continued improvements in student achievement, sustained implementation, and stakeholder buy-in.

Present at the table for tonight discussion are Mr. Erick J. Lang, associate superintendent, Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs; Ms. Betsy Brown, director, Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Mrs. Sophie I. Kowzun, supervisor, Elementary Reading Language Arts; Mr. James P. Fliakas, acting supervisor, Secondary English Language Arts; Dr. Debra S. Munk, principal, Rockville High School; and Ms. Kathryn C. Williams, reading specialist, Oakland Terrace Elementary School.

JDW:kjm

Attachments

Montgomery County Public Schools

Status of Instructional Guides in English Language Arts, Pre-K-12

Elementary Instructional Guides	
Grade Level	All Guides for Grade Level Completed
pre-K	2003
K	2003
Grade 1	2003 (Revised 2005)
Grade 2	2003 (Revised 2005)
Grade 3	2003
Grade 4	2004 (Revised 2006)
Grade 5	2004 (Revised 2007)

Secondary Instructional Guides	
Course	All Guides for Course Completed
English 6	2005 (Revised 2008)
English 7	2004 (Revised 2008)
English 8	2003 (Revised 2008)
Reading 6	2005
Reading 7	2006
Reading 8	2007
English 9	2005 (Revised 2008)
English 10	2005 (Revised 2008)
English 11	2000 (Revised 2008)
English 12	2000 (Revised 2008)

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Curriculum Quick Reference
Reading/Language Arts—Grade 3**

	Is the MCPS curriculum being taught?	Are instructional practices consistent with MCPS curriculum? Are assessments used as described in the instructional guide?
Quarter One	<p>Reading Purposes-Literary Experience, To Be Informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing literacy processes of <i>before</i>, <i>during</i>, and <i>after</i> reading and independent reading <input type="checkbox"/> Strategy lessons-connections, story structure, text features, cause/effect, compare/contrast, questioning, determining importance, main idea <input type="checkbox"/> Genre studies-realistic fiction, picture books, and author study <input type="checkbox"/> Small group instruction-reading target Level M text <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary instruction-concept mapping, context clues, word sorts, prefixes/roots, probable passages <p>Writing Purpose-Personal Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Writing personal narrative using writing process <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling exploration-high frequency words, letter/sound, plurals, endings, compounds, contractions <input type="checkbox"/> Handwriting-introduce cursive 	<p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides 120 minutes of reading/language arts instruction using the literacy block model (includes daily small group instruction for all students). • maintains a literacy rich learning environment. • facilitates interactive and thoughtful student discussions about strategy use and elements of literary and informational text to support reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. • uses <i>before</i>, <i>during</i>, and <i>after</i> reading format to help students develop comprehension and fluency when reading across all curriculum areas. • uses effective prompts to support students as they problem-solve on words and word meaning. • checks students understanding of the instructional focus. • differentiates instruction to meet students’ needs. • uses assessment to guide instruction. • models effective reading strategies and traits of effective writing. • provides time for students to independently read and write. • provides a balance of instruction in the reading and writing purposes, making connections where applicable. • uses assessments to measure student mastery of curriculum standards. <p>The students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work individually, in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole class. • engage in reflective classroom discussion that focuses on strategy use, connections, clarifications, confirmations, new information, and questions. • use speaking and/or writing to express ideas. • monitor own learning using <i>before</i>, <i>during</i>, and <i>after</i> reading strategies when reading across all curriculum areas. • read and write independently.
Quarter Two	<p>Reading Purposes-To Be Informed, Literary Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strategy lessons-main idea, self-monitoring, using background knowledge, text features, summarizing, compare/contrast, inferring, theme, titles, sequence, fact/opinion, perform a task <input type="checkbox"/> Genre studies-folktales, fables, content area reading, author study <input type="checkbox"/> Small group instruction-reading target Level N text <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary instruction-Frayer model, multiple meanings, William & Mary vocabulary web, analogies <p>Writing Purpose-To Inform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Writing (about a topic, to answer science or social studies questions, game directions) using writing process and 6-Traits <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling explorations-high frequency words, letter patterns, prefixes, suffixes, comparatives and superlatives, derivatives, compound words <input type="checkbox"/> Handwriting-cursive 	
Quarter Three	<p>Reading Purposes-Literary Experience, To Be Informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strategy lessons-point of view, mood, figurative language, William & Mary literature web, test-taking strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Genre studies-William & Mary, historical fiction, novels, content area reading, author study <input type="checkbox"/> Small group instruction-reading target Level O text <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary instruction-multiple meanings, thesaurus, connotations, word associations <p>Writing Purposes-To Inform, To Persuade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Researching a topic using AGOPP, writing process, and 6-Traits <input type="checkbox"/> Art of persuasion using writing process and 6-Traits <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling explorations-letter patterns, homophones, prefixes, suffixes, derivatives <input type="checkbox"/> Handwriting-cursive 	
Quarter Four	<p>Reading Purposes-To Be Informed, Literary Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strategy lessons-self-monitoring, summarizing, inferring, author’s message, dialogue, perform a task <input type="checkbox"/> Content area reading (primary source documents), fantasy, poetry, author study <input type="checkbox"/> Small group instruction-reading target Level P text <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary instruction-using context, glossary, analogies <p>Writing Purpose-Personal Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Writing stories and poetry using writing process and 6-Traits <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling explorations-letter patterns, homophones, prefixes, suffixes, derivatives <input type="checkbox"/> Handwriting-cursive 	

	<p align="center">Is the MCPS curriculum being taught?</p> <p align="center">Curriculum Element from Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning</p>	<p align="center">Are instructional practices consistent with MCPS curriculum?</p> <p align="center">Are assessments being used as described in instructional guide?</p>
Yearly	<p>Enduring Understandings</p> <p>Literate individuals are discerning writers, speakers, readers, viewers, and listeners. Literate citizens incorporate new knowledge to adjust their world view. Literate individuals employ a variety of effective strategies to communicate with others.</p> <p>The success of a democracy depends on the literacy of its people.</p> <p>Essential Questions</p> <p>How do readers and viewers engage meaningfully with text?</p> <p>How does a literate individual become part of the conversation?</p> <p>How is a writer both empowered and limited by writing from personal voice and experience?</p> <p>How does a literate writer know when to change strategies to communicate more effectively?</p>	<p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses the entire instructional period effectively, bell-to-bell. (PL,I) • maintains a dynamic language learning environment. (EX, I, EL, PL) • facilitates interactive and thoughtful student discussions about the concepts of language and literature and the processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. (EX, I, PL, EL) • maintains a high level of student engagement and expectations for students. (EX, I, EL) • helps students make connections to prior knowledge. (PL, EX, I, C, EL) • uses a variety of strategies to check for student understanding. (EL) • uses assessment to guide instruction. (EL, PL, I) • differentiates instruction to meet students’ needs. (EL, PL, I, C, EX) • models thinking, reading, and writing strategies. (PL, I, EX) • provides rigorous instruction as described in MCPS Look-Fors. <p>The students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work individually, in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole class. (PL, I, EX) • engage in inquiry, discussions, and tasks that focus on understanding and applying language and literature concepts. (EX, I, PL) • use reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing strategies, skills, and processes to communicate effectively. (EX, EL) • apply multiple strategies to construct meaning about text they read, or view. (EX, I) • use the vocabulary of language and literature to express related ideas precisely as they speak and write. (C, EX) • engage in in-class timed writings and writing products that require the full writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, proofing, and publishing). (I, EL, EX, PL) • use the writing process and the language of Six Traits—ideas and development, organization, syntax (sentence fluency), semantics (word choice), voice, and conventions—to write effectively. (C, I, E) • develop and apply their understanding of grammar, language usage, and conventions in the context of literature and their own written and spoken products. (EX, C, I, PL) • develop deep understanding of a varied and essential vocabulary and apply their understanding in written and spoken products. (C, I, EX, PL) • use computers as tools to communicate effectively and to manage information. (C, PL, EX) • monitor their own learning through journals, logs, reflection, self-assessment, and portfolios. (EL, EX)
August September October	<p>Unit 1: Examining Argument in Print and Visual Texts</p> <p>Texts Modeled: <i>The Color of Water</i>, essay collection</p> <p>Common Tasks: portfolio set up; argument in visual text paragraph; argumentative paragraph with MLA documentation; multi-paragraph essay analyzing a writer’s argument; Socratic Seminar; response to a quotation in-class multi-paragraph essay</p>	
November December January	<p>Unit 2: Challenging Truth in Narrative</p> <p>Texts Modeled: Various fiction and nonfiction texts, documentaries</p> <p>Common Tasks: comparison of visual texts paragraph; comparison of news articles paragraph; still visual presentation; research paper on documentary and literary analysis multi-paragraph essay or research paper on text and documentary analysis multi-paragraph essay</p>	
January February March	<p>Unit 3: Questioning Society’s Conscience</p> <p>Texts Modeled: various fiction texts, short stories</p> <p>Common Tasks: theme essay; Shared Inquiry; narrative devices multi-paragraph essay using critical articles; Literature Circles; rewrite a short scene imitating the style of the author; write a poem; portfolio reflection</p>	
April May June	<p>Unit 4: Exploring Individual Ambition and Desire</p> <p>Texts Modeled: various Shakespeare plays, various modern drama texts</p> <p>Common Tasks: character’s ambition or desire paragraph; foundations of American drama research and presentation; letter from character; theme multi-paragraph essay; performance; personal essay</p>	

Key: MLA= Modern Language Association EX=Expectations
 C =Curriculum PL=Planning
 I =Instruction EL=Evidence of Student Learning

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Required Components of the Pre-K–12 Writing Program**

Purposes for Writing

- Elementary
 - Informing
 - Persuading
 - Expressing

- Secondary
 - Research and synthesis
 - Argument
 - Creative and reflective writing
 - Textual analysis

Steps in the Writing Process (all grade levels)

- Prewriting
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing and proofreading
- Presenting and publishing

Six Traits of Effective Writing (all grade levels)

- Ideas and development—the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, and how details are used to enrich and develop that theme.

- Organization—the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern, so long as it fits the central idea well. Organizational structure can be based on comparison-contrast, deductive logic, point-by-point analysis, development of a central theme, chronological history of an event, or any of a dozen other identifiable patterns.

- Voice—the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message.

- Word Choice—the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader.

- Sentence Fluency—the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear—not just to the eye.

- Conventions—the mechanical correctness of the piece—spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing (indenting at the appropriate spots), use of capitals, and punctuation.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Minimum Number of Writing Assignments in Elementary Content Areas
As of March 2009

Art	
Grades 1–3	1 per quarter
ESOL	
K	1–2 per quarter
Grades 1–5	5–8 per quarter
General Music	
Grades 2–3	2 per quarter
Health Education	
Grade 5	2 per unit
Physical Education	
Grades 4–5	3 per year
Reading Language Arts	
pre-K	26 per year
K	144 per year
Grade 1	98 per year
Grade 2	94 per year
Grade 3	107 per year
Grade 4	79 per year
Grade 5	118 per year
Science	
K–5	2 per quarter
Social Studies	
Grade 1	30 per year
Grade 2	39 per year
Grade 3	21 per year
Grade 4	49 per year
Grade 5	53 per year
<p>Note: In mathematics students learn to communicate their understanding mathematically where symbolic representation often replaces words to explain, inform, prove, or justify.</p>	

Montgomery County Public Schools
Minimum Number of Writing Assignments in Secondary Content Courses
As of March 2009

Art	
Art 6	7 per semester
Foundations of Art	8 per semester
English	
English 6–12	5 per quarter
ESOL	
ESOL Grades 6–12, Levels 1–5	5–8 per quarter
Health Education	
Health Education 6–8	7 per quarter
Comprehensive Health Education 10	7 per semester
Physical Education	
All Physical Education courses Grades 6–12	4 per year
Science	
Science 6–8	2 per quarter
Biology	2 per quarter
Matter and Energy	2 per quarter
Chemistry	2 per quarter
Physics	2 per quarter
Earth Space Science	2 per quarter
Social Studies	
Social Studies 6	19 per year
Social Studies 7	12 per year
Social Studies 8	33 per year
U.S. History 9	33 per year
NSL 10	47 per year
Modern World 11	22 per year
<p>Note: In mathematics students learn to communicate their understanding mathematically where symbolic representation often replaces words to explain, inform, prove, or justify.</p>	

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Elementary Writing Assessments 2008–2009**

Grade	Assessment	Writing Content	Format	Reporting Tool
Grade 1	Quarter 1 Assessment	Personal Expression, sensory details, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-sentence narrative	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 2 Assessment	Writing to Inform, related facts, sensory details, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-sentence section of book about animals	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 2 Assessment	Writing to Persuade, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-sentence persuasive letter	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 4 Assessment	Personal Expression, sensory details, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-sentence narrative	Grading and reporting data point
Grade 2	Quarter 1 Assessment	Personal Expression, sequence, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-sentence narrative	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 2 Assessment	Writing to Inform, research, facts, sensory details, revision, grammar, usage	Informative paragraph(s) related to topic	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 3 Assessment	Writing to Persuade, argument, revision, grammar, usage	Paragraph(s) book recommendation	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 4 Assessment	Personal Expression, sequence, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-paragraph original folktale	Grading and reporting data point
Grade 3	Quarter 1 Assessment	Personal Expression, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-paragraph narrative	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 2 Assessment	Writing to Inform, research, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-paragraph report	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 3 Assessment	Writing to Persuade, argument, techniques, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-paragraph persuasive letter addressing an issue	Grading and reporting data point
	Quarter 4 Assessment	Personal Expression, revision, grammar, usage	Multi-paragraph original realistic fiction story	Grading and reporting data point

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Secondary Writing Assessments 2008–2009**

Grade	Assessment	Writing Content	Format	Reporting Tool
Grades 6–8	Common tasks (minimum of 5 per quarter)	Textual analysis, argument, research and synthesis, creative and reflective	One paragraph responses and multi-paragraph essays (also poems, narratives, speeches, and journals)	Portfolio, Pinnacle
	Common task (one per quarter)	Textual analysis, argument, or research and synthesis	Multi-paragraph essay	IMS, Performance Matters, Pinnacle
	Formative (one per quarter)	Revision, grammar, usage, and sentence structure	5 selected response items	Achievement Series, Performance Matters, Pinnacle
		Textual analysis	Written response—a paragraph or more	
	End of Unit (one per semester)	Revision, grammar, usage, and sentence structure	5 selected response items	Achievement Series, Performance Matters, Pinnacle
		Textual analysis	Written response—a paragraph or more	
		Argument	Essay—multi-paragraph	
Grades 9 and 10	Common tasks (minimum of 5 per quarter)	Textual analysis, argument, research and synthesis, creative and reflective	One paragraph responses and multi-paragraph essays (also poems, narratives, speeches, and journals)	Portfolio, Pinnacle
	Formative (one per quarter)	Revision, grammar, usage, and sentence structure	5 selected response items	Achievement Series, Pinnacle
		Textual analysis	Written response—a paragraph or more	
	Exam (one per semester)	Revision, grammar, usage, and sentence structure	10–15 selected response items	Achievement Series, Pinnacle
		Textual analysis	Two written responses—a paragraph or more for each	
		Argument	Essay—multi-paragraph	
	Grades 11 and 12	Common tasks (minimum of 5 per quarter)	Textual analysis, argument, research and synthesis, creative and reflective	One paragraph responses and multi-paragraph essays (also poems, narratives, speeches, and journals)

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Scoring Guide for Writing in Grade 5
As of March 2009**

Score 4	The student demonstrates unusually thorough understanding of the concepts, skills, and processes defined at score 3 by applying, extending, connecting, combining, transforming, or transferring the concepts, skills, and processes.
Score 3	<p>While engaged in writing, the student demonstrates an understanding of the content or processes identified in score 2 as well as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing and supporting an opinion with compelling reasons and relevant support that is well organized with a convincing conclusion <i>organization, ideas & development</i> • providing evidence of persuasive techniques with attention to word choice to support an opinion that appeals to the reader <i>word choice & voice</i> • applying grade level appropriate principles of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation with few inaccuracies that do not hinder meaning <i>conventions</i> • varying sentences in length and structure (e.g., combine sentences) <i>sentence fluency</i> • using the writing process
Score 2	<p>While engaged in writing, the student demonstrates an understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing and supporting an opinion with relevant reasons and examples with limited organization and development <i>organization, ideas & development</i> • providing some evidence of persuasive techniques and word choice to support an opinion <i>word choice & voice</i> • applying principles of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, with limited evidence that may hinder meaning <i>conventions</i> • varying sentences in length and structure, with limited evidence <i>sentence fluency</i> • using the writing process, with limited evidence
Score 1	With help, the student demonstrates a partial understanding of the simpler content or processes. The student exhibits some errors in the simpler content or processes.