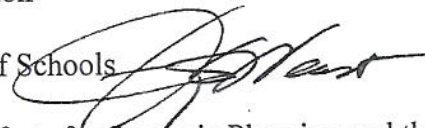


Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

December 7, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: Report on Public Engagement Efforts for Strategic Planning and the Operating Budget

Executive Summary

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with an update on the public engagement efforts for strategic planning and the operating budget. These efforts are guided by Board of Education policies and outlined in *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence—The Strategic Plan for the Montgomery County Public Schools*.

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) provides a variety of ways to engage the public in the strategic planning and budgeting processes. Students, staff, parents, and community members contact Board of Education members and MCPS staff directly, submit feedback cards, complete an online survey, and participate in community forums. On September 20, 2007, and October 11, 2007, the Board of Education conducted community forums at Quince Orchard High School and Wheaton High School, respectively, with approximately 440 individuals attending. Interpretation equipment and interpreters for five languages were available at the forums. Seventy-nine individuals testified at the forums, and each individual was given three minutes to speak. This format was used as a result of feedback received from the community forums held last year indicating that individuals wanted an opportunity to provide testimony directly to members of the Board of Education. The forums were cablecast on MCPS Channel 34 and Webcast on the MCPS Web site.

In addition to letters, e-mails, and phone calls, MCPS continues to receive feedback online and through TIP (*Tell It Please*) postage-paid feedback cards printed in six languages that were disseminated at the forums and have been distributed to all schools, MCPS offices, parent and community organizations, and Board of Education members for use in meetings.

The Board of Education's Strategic Planning Committee met on June 29, 2007, to review feedback from the previous year and discuss plans for strengthening public engagement in the strategic planning and budget processing. For 2007–2008, the committee recommended that—

- two forums would be held in different geographic locations,
- individuals would be allotted three minutes to speak in order to accommodate as many speakers as possible, and
- speakers would focus their comments on “The school system is doing well in what areas?” and “In what areas can the school system improve?”

The committee's recommendations were adopted by the Board of Education on July 17, 2007. Public input provided at the forums and via surveys, feedback cards, letters, phone calls, e-mails, as well as at meetings conducted by Board of Education members, MCPS staff, the employee associations, and community leaders was carefully considered during the development of the FY 2009 Operating Budget.

Background

Board of Education Policy ABA, *Community Involvement*, outlines the Board of Education's commitment to “ensure the ideas, interests, and concerns of its stakeholders are considered and valued in decision-making processes and that input and involvement are sought and encouraged from a broad spectrum of our diverse community.” Goal 3 of the MCPS strategic plan, *Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education*, includes specific milestones and data points to monitor the multiple processes used to engage stakeholders. The Board of Education and MCPS staff are committed to engaging the public in the development phase of the strategic plan and the operating budget and continue to make improvements to ensure that there is broad-based involvement by all stakeholders, particularly among our culturally and linguistically diverse parent communities.

There was extensive communication about the two forums and the various methods for the public to provide feedback, including media announcements in the local press and on the MCPS Web site and MCPS cable channels. Approximately 3,400 letters of invitation from the Board president with flyers printed in six languages were disseminated to the following:

- Community leaders and organizations
- Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) Board members
- Local parent teacher association (PTA) presidents
- Middle and high school Student Government Associations
- Middle and high school newspaper sponsors
- Saturday School parents

More than 100,000 flyers were disseminated at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, to the youngest in family at all schools, and to the MCCPTA delegates. Parent outreach staff also distributed flyers at meetings and workshops. Announcements were sent to all principals with a supply of TIP feedback cards printed in six languages, and three messages were provided via *QuickNotes*, the online newsletter for parents. Principals and local PTAs also communicated with their school communities through newsletters, list serves, and ConnectEd. For the first time this year, MCPS Instructional Television produced 12 public service announcements in Spanish and English, featuring the Board of Education president. The Spanish announcements were sent to Univision, Telemundo, and Hispanic radio stations. Public service announcements in both English and Spanish aired on MCPS Channels 33 and 34. In addition, Board of Education members and Executive Staff members met with a variety of constituents and community groups to inform them of ways to provide feedback on the strategic plan and operating budget.

Community Forums

The Board of Education conducted community forums on September 20, 2007, at Quince Orchard High School and on October 11, 2007, at Wheaton High School. Interpreters for Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and French were available, and a total of 22 individuals used simultaneous interpretation equipment at both forums. Child care also was provided. More than 440 individuals attended the forums, and 79 individuals testified—42 parents, 20 community members, 14 students, and 3 staff members. Each speaker was allotted three minutes to testify, with more time provided for those individuals for whom interpretation was needed. The forums aired on MCPS Channel 34 a total of 23 times and they also can be viewed on the MCPS Web site. The written testimony provided by each speaker also is available on the MCPS Web site. The forum at Wheaton High School was recorded with a Spanish audio translation and was cablecast on Channel 34 and Webcast on the MCPS Web site.

Attachment A provides a breakdown of participants and speakers at both forums. There were more than 100 participants at the September 20, 2007, forum at Quince Orchard High School and 33 individuals testified. On October 11, 2007, at Wheaton High School, more than 300 individuals attended and 46 individuals testified. Attachment B includes a list of speakers and topics discussed at the forum on September 20, 2007, and Attachment C provides a similar list for the forum on October 11, 2007.

Speakers Comment on What is Working Well

Speakers generally had good things to say about the quality of instructional programs and services offered by MCPS. A student testified that she likes the way her school building is taken care of—a very clean and safe environment. The student also shared that the administration keeps a close watch on the students and takes the time to listen to their concerns. One speaker applauded the Board for implementing the school-based inclusion program for children with disabilities. A speaker commended the school system for the strides it has made over several

years toward building sensitivity to the Muslim student population. Another speaker applauded MCPS for supporting diverse communities, saying:

I feel fortunate to live in Montgomery County, one of the most welcoming communities in the United States, where many people choose to embrace its diversity and care for those in need; a county where leaders, such as Superintendent Dr. Jerry Weast and the members of the Board of Education have set a framework that will help the school system “ensure success for every student.”

The speaker went on to praise the creation and support of programs such as Conquista tus Sueños (Aim High), Study Circles, and the Parent Academy, saying that these programs help families overcome some of the most persistent barriers to academic achievement for their children. According to her, they make a great difference in informing parents about the U.S. educational system, empowering parents to be active participants, and helping all children achieve academic success.

The school system was complimented for initiating the Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC), and speaker after speaker urged the Board and the superintendent of schools to ensure continued funding for the initiative. One participant captured the sentiments of most speakers on the issue:

The Middle School Magnet Consortium is a great program that engages students, and it is resulting in higher academic achievement. Parents and students like the whole-school magnet model, which allows all students to earn up to 8 high school credits, drawing students who want to be challenged.

A representative for the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth applauded the efforts and successes of MCPS in reducing the achievement gap by race/ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency. The commission was encouraged by the initiative offering stronger early elementary literacy programs and the resulting 81 percent of kindergartners in 2005 who met or exceeded reading targets by the end of the school year, compared with 39 percent in 2001. The speaker representing the Commission also appreciated the school system’s efforts to expand publicly supported prekindergarten and was pleased that the MCPS strategic plan emphasizes the importance of productive partnerships between schools and the community to promote success as a tactical goal.

The Walter Johnson cluster coordinator, speaking on behalf of the cluster schools, testified that parents were happy to see the reduced class-size initiative and the initiative to increase the number of counselors at the secondary school level. This speaker mentioned the cluster also welcomed the advent of EdLine as a major improvement for communication with parents. The president of the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association stated that students are increasingly well represented when it comes to the decisions made by the Board of

Education and urged the Board to seek even more representation of students on work groups and committees.

Speakers Suggest Areas for Improvements

The majority of speakers did not explicitly tie their comments to stated goals in the school system's strategic plan. However, the concerns and suggestions for additional support may be easily related to specific goals and strategies in the strategic plan. While several speakers applauded the efforts to engage more parents in the school system, there was a sense from other speakers that there is a need for more community outreach; e.g., the provision of translation services for Hindi, and cultural competence and sensitivity training for staff to help overcome cultural barriers within the Asian American community. The areas of need or suggestions for improvements from speakers generally related to increasing support for and multilingual communication with parents, supporting students by allocating positions for additional counselors and access to increased rigor in the classroom, diversity training for students and staff, ensuring that the needs of special education students included in the general education classroom are met, and providing capital improvement of school facilities, including increased environmental awareness through the Green Schools Program.

The following six themes represent the ideas and concerns shared by forum participants:

1. Partnerships and Community Outreach

- Increase racial and ethnic tolerance by working to eliminate cultural barriers
- Enhance community input into MCPS decision making
- Provide enhanced support for community partnerships and include student leaders on committees and work groups
- Partner with other county agencies to develop and support after-school programs by improving use of school space, providing transportation, and coordination

2. Counseling and Parent Outreach Supports

- Provide bilingual counselor supports for schools and for the immigrant population
- Increase the number of parent outreach specialists to work in schools
- Further disaggregate the population characteristics in certain schools to ensure that impacted children receive supports such as Title I; e.g., Maryvale Elementary School

3. Enhanced Academic Support and Rigor—The requirement to pass the High School Assessments is a concern.

- Provide academic support to increase rigor
- Eliminate large class sizes and relieve overcrowding in schools
- Increase minority participation in advanced courses

- Ensure robust support for the French Immersion Program at Maryvale Elementary School
 - Ensure access of immersion classes as students matriculate to higher levels
 - Ensure continued funding for the Middle School Magnet Consortium
 - Ensure that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs are staffed adequately
 - Review ESOL programs for appropriateness of tests and placements
 - Provide an excellent equitable education to all by implementing an equity policy, not a gifted policy
 - Initiate new programs to address supports for closing the achievement gap
 - Modernize and implement new and more efficient ways of delivering services to schools and offices
4. **Special Needs**—Closing the learning centers is of concern. Continue to work to eliminate overrepresentation of minorities in special needs programs; e.g., emotional disabilities.
- Provide better awareness and information about special education
 - Improve on transition of students with disabilities from school to life in the adult world by providing additional transition support teachers and paraeducators
 - Ensure more inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom through Universal Design for Learning
 - Provide increased use of technology in the classroom
5. **Sustaining Initiatives**—Stay the course on the strategic plan and initiatives. Also evaluate entire program of professional development and make appropriate changes.
- Continue to attract and retain experienced principals and highly qualified teachers
 - Continue to improve on staffing allocations for schools
 - Provide comparable educational facilities to all, longevity bonus for teachers in highly impacted schools, housing subsidies, and subsidized child care
6. **Capital Improvement**—Invest more in the Capital Improvements Program. Some schools are outdated and run down, which negatively impacts learning. There was opposition to the site recommendation for Watkins Mill Middle School #2.
- Provide security cameras in halls and stairwells
 - Allocate more resources for school facilities maintenance
 - Ensure good indoor air quality program
 - Promote environmental awareness through the Green Schools Program
 - Develop an enhanced recycling program in secondary schools

Feedback from TIP Cards and Online Survey

We continue to receive input on the strategic plan and operating budget through postings on the MCPS Web site and from completed TIP feedback cards. From the period of mid-September 2007 to November 30, 2007, 110 TIP cards have been returned and 19 online surveys have been completed. Of these, 103 of the respondents were parents, 20 were staff, 3 were students, and 3 were community members. Most of the comments on the cards focused on—

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Operations and services
- Teacher and staff quality, compensation, and diversity
- Communication
- Accountability, testing, and test scores
- Facilities

Table 1 provides a summary of the responses to the two questions categorized by theme from TIP feedback cards and online surveys from mid-September–November 30, 2007.

Table 1

Category/Theme	Question 1: Doing Well	Question 2: Needs to Improve	Total # of Responses
Accountability/Testing/Test Scores	8	14	22
Class size	1	7	8
Closing the gap/expectations	2	2	4
Communication	13	9	22
Curriculum, instruction, assessment	27	21	48
Differentiation	6	0	6
Discipline	3	4	7
Early childhood education	1	0	1
ESOL	1	0	1
Facilities	4	11	15
Gifted and Talented	3	1	4
Operations/services	5	22	27
Other	5	13	18
Parent involvement	4	1	5
Professional development	3	1	4
Rigor	5	2	7
Safety/security	1	5	6
School quality	7	0	7
Special Education	2	7	9
Special programs/extended learning	6	6	12
Teacher/staff quality, compensation, diversity	25	9	34
Technology	4	0	4
Textbooks and materials	0	4	4
TOTALS	136	139	275

In regard to the responses for the first question, "The school system is doing well in what areas?" 19.8 percent focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment; 18.3 percent focused on teacher/staff quality, compensation, and diversity; and 9.5 percent focused on communication.

The responses to the second question, "In what areas can the school system improve?" indicated that 15.8 percent focused on operations and services; 15.1 percent focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and 10.0 percent focused on accountability, testing, and test scores.

Next Steps

The Communications and Public Engagement Committee will review the issues in this memorandum and make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Board of Education at an upcoming meeting. Data from the TIP cards and the online survey will continue to be compiled and reviewed. In addition, Board of Education members and MCPS staff will continue to partner with community organizations in order to reach parents who traditionally have not been involved in the decision-making process at the system level and will continue to meet with parents, staff, students, and community members throughout the year to gather their input.

JDW:vnb

Attachments

Copy to:

Executive Staff

**Board of Education Community Forums
2007**

September 20, 2007 – Quince Orchard High School
October 11, 2007 – Wheaton High School

Participants in Attendance (approximate)

Forum Date	Parents	Students	Staff	Community	TOTAL
September 20	51	19	21	26	117
October 11	182	63	62	18	325
TOTAL	233	82	83	44	442

Speakers Who Provided Testimony

Forum Date	Parents	Students	Staff	Community	TOTAL
September 20	11	8	2	12	33
October 11	31	6	1	8	46
TOTAL	42	14	3	20	79

**Community Forum
September 20, 2007
Speakers at Quince Orchard High School**

Name	Position	Organization	Topic
1. Maria Diaz	Student Magruder HS		Need more bilingual counselors to help with college process and career
2. Oscar Lemus	Student Magruder HS		HSAs should not be graduation requirement (he didn't pass them)
3. Chris Lloyd	Staff		Tell stories of MCPS
4. Danuta Wilson	Community		Dogs on school grounds are safety hazard
5. Holly Defnet	Student Poolesville HS		Improve indoor air quality
6. Karen Bowers	Community	Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education's Montgomery County Least Restrictive Environment Access Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding to expand preschool collaboration classes, job embedded staff development, additional staffing for LRE at secondary level, and countywide itinerant LRE resource teachers • Increase capacity of High Incidence Assistive Technology Team • Fully implement UDL systemwide • Enable parents to access worksheets and other instructional materials online • Include best practices for implementing LRE and UDL in staff development
7. Kaushal Chauhan	Community	Secretary, Indian American Forum for Political Education, MD Chapter	Translate materials into Hindi for parent communication
8. Steve Augustino	Parent	Gaithersburg HS PTSA	Build GHS replacement school now
9. Julie Wilhelm	Parent		Offer inclusion program to all clusters – it works at Damascus
10. John Zachary	Student Walt Whitman HS	Montgomery County MCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify how to pay for teachers' professional development • Provide stipend for recycling programs in middle and high schools • Provide diversity education to teachers – especially at

			the elementary level
11. Jackie Suzich	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider French and English programs as separate for staffing purposes and buying instructional materials • Create a high school language program that would offer higher level French classes
12. Don O'Neill	Community	Fmr Chair, Strategic Planning Stage, Friends of Centerway Park	Opposes site recommendation for Watkins Mill MS #2
13. Preston Kavanaugh	Community	Friends of Centerway Park	Opposes site for Watkins Mill MS #2
14. Rebecca Newman	Community	President, MCAASP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor employee contracts • Continue to support initiatives • Use data to assess programs • Continue to work with stakeholders
15. Bonnie Cullison	Community	President, MCEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to fund PGS • Keep salaries competitive
16. Merle Cuttitta	Community	President, SEIU 500	Continue to support employees
17. Marti Wade	Parent		Opposes site for Watkins Mill MS #2
18. Karen Neilson	Parent		Opposes site for Watkins Mill MS #2
19. Tatiana Murillo	Student Clarksburg HS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep buildings clean • Improve cafeteria food
20. Sumbal Sheldon	Parent		Opposes site for Watkins Mill MS #2
21. Chad Chitvaranund	Parent	PTA President, Burtonsville ES	Reduce class size at the school
22. Morganne Reid	Student Poolesville HS		Offer AP French at her school and other high schools
23. Rodrigo Fuentes	Student Gaithersburg HS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is overcrowded • Faucets in bathrooms don't work • Improve food
24. Victor Fuentes	Student Quince Orchard HS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help build positive relationships between Latino and African American students
25. Oliver Fajardo	Community	Volunteer Coordinator, Identity, Inc.	Add bilingual counselors
26. Valerie Ricardo	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include messages to help students socially • Include security cameras in halls and stairwells • Develop lifelines in schools

			to help troubled youth
27. Mimi Hassanein	Community		Acknowledge Ramadan and Eid
28. Harris Akhta	Student Seneca Valley HS		Make Eid a school holiday
29. Ron Brown	Community (no written testimony provided)	Teen Driving Guard program	Awareness about his program to promote safety
30. Gary Sharp	Parent (no written testimony provided)	Darnestown ES CIP Taskforce	Renovate school – look at air quality, handicap accessibility and a host of other issues
31. Louis Wilen	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need new auditorium seats • Air quality issues in gym – need specialized testing
32. Susan Young	Parent	Cluster Coordinator, Watkins Mill PTA President, Montgomery Village	Supports site for new Watkins Mill MS #2
33. Rita Lewi	Community	Exec Director, Chinese Culture and Community Service Center	Add more bicultural Asian American counselors for both ESOL and non ESOL students

**Community Forum
October 11, 2007
Speakers at Wheaton High School**

Name	Position	Organization	Topic
1. Carole Rayburn	Community	President, Montgomery County National Organization for Women	Need to raise awareness about and oppose sexualization of girls
2. Susan Conbere	Parent	Parkland MS PTA	Continue to fund Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC)
3. Leigh Leslie	Parent	Loiederman MS PTSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to fund MSMC • Provide countywide transportation
4. Jane de Winter	Parent	President, MCCPTA	Provide more bilingual local-school based parent community outreach coordinators
5. Lillian Eguino	Parent		Support programs like Conquista tus Suenos and other diversity initiatives
6. Carol Boyd	Parent	President, Argyle MS PTSA	Continue to fund MSMC
7. Karen Leggett	Community	Transition Work Group	Add more transition support teachers and transition paraeducators to support students with disabilities
8. Sally Taber	Parent	Cluster Coordinator, Downcounty Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put bilingual parent outreach workers in all Title 1 schools and in middle and high schools that that did not make AYP • Address facilities needs for new HS academies next fall • Provide equitable programs for Lee MS and Silver Spring International MS • Move hiring for central office positions to early spring not in May or June
9. Pete Lafen	Parent	Cluster Coordinator, Blair Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make facility improvements • Add bilingual school-based parent outreach staff • Expand access to Eastern MS magnet program • Use a more flexible system to predict enrollment • Forge a coalition of BOE, county government, and state legislature to make pedestrian safety a priority
10. Emma Ross	Student	Commission on Children and Youth	Include Out of School Time programs in Goal 3 of the strategic plan

11. Sara Mussie	Parent		Provide Amharic translations
12. Misrak Zeleke	Parent		Provide teacher assistant
13. Ricky Ford	Parent	Cluster Coordinator, John F. Kennedy Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue funding for MSMC • Develop signature program at Lee MS
14. Marianne Warner	Parent		Limit excessive homework levels
15. Kapil Chauhan	Student Springbrook HS	Springbrook HS Liaison, Montgomery County Region of Maryland Associations of Student Councils	Translate school system materials in Hindi
16. Susan Loftus	Staff		Increase Elementary P.E. teacher allocation
17. Nancy Leopold	Community	Executive Director, College Tracks	Provide academic support to students in rigorous courses
18. Edith Salazar	Parent (no written testimony provided)		Address overcrowded buses
19. Joanne Vanderhorst	Parent	Coordinator for the Walter Johnson Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add more school-based parent outreach coordinators • Provide supports for general and special education students during phase out of secondary learning centers • Provide more training and instructional materials to math teachers • Add more resources for maintenance and indoor air quality
20. Jennifer Chambers	Parent	Co-coordinator Northwood Cluster and Task Force to Improve Our Schools	Improve principal and teacher retention in downcounty area
21. Rockzana Flores	Student Loiederman MS		Continue funding for MSMC
22. Tosha M. Dyson	Parent		Designate Maryvale ES as a Title 1 school
23. Piper Phillips Caswell	Community		Fund programs for vulnerable students

24. Eyal Bergman	Community	Facilitator, Identity, Inc.	Provide more bilingual school counselors for Latino students
25. Estefany Carrillo	Community		Provide more support for Latino students to take AP classes
26. Ben Elkind	Student Richard Montgomery HS	President, Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association	Increase student participation in MCPS policymaking processes
27. Larry E. Edmonds	Parent	Vice President, Burtonsville ES	Reduce class size at Burtonsville ES
28. Simeona Leon	Parent		Continue funding for MSMC
29. Joan M. Taylor	Parent		Posed questions about special education and secondary learning centers
30. Eddy Benscome	Parent		Improve ESOL placement decisions and programs
31. Maritza Cornejo	Parent (no written testimony provided)	Parents of Latino Students in Action	Provide facilitators for Latino parents in each school to guide parents
32. Evelyn Gonzalez	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create bilingual parent community coordinator position • Hire bilingual counselors • Develop orientation program for immigrant students and families
33. Sharon Strauss	Community		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide better awareness and information for special education • Improve monitoring of ED programs • Other suggestions to improve ED programs
34. Elizabeth Gamero	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide basic computer classes for parents • Provide bilingual parent coordinators and interpreters • Provide interpretation equipment to schools
35. Christi Messer	Parent (no written testimony)		Keep secondary learning centers open
36. Lucia Leung	Parent		Provide more staffing at Little Bennett ES
37. Maya Prather	Student Little Bennett ES		Add more counselors at Little Bennett ES

38. Morgan Hines	Student Little Bennett ES		Add more counselors at Little Bennett ES
39. Brian Roberts	Parent	Montgomery County Education Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate implementation of GT policy before reviewing the policy • Develop an equity policy
40. Henry Pittman	Parent (no written testimony provided)	Vice Chairman, NAACP, Education Committee	Support the NAACP 5-year strategic plan and ensure ongoing collaboration with Board and MCPS
41. Mona Boggs	Parent		Reduce class size at Burtonsville ES
42. Diana Conway	Parent		Improve Chinese immersion program, develop curriculum more quickly, provide materials, and recruit and train more teachers
43. Karen Sees	Parent		Improve Chinese immersion program
44. Pamela Moomau	Parent		Include maintenance and indoor air quality goals in the strategic plan
45. Jacqueline Zamora	Community		Provide more academic support for Latino youth
46. Janet Kotowski	Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct inaccuracies in the Health curriculum • Make entire Health curriculum available online