

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ELEMENTARY INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

Why is MCPS making changes to the curriculum?

Under the federal No Child Left Behind law, educators and parents have been rightly concerned that content areas outside the core, tested subjects of reading and mathematics have not received sufficient instruction time. The EIC addresses this concern head on.

By teaching thinking and academic success skills across all subjects – reading, math, information literacy, the arts, science, social studies and physical education – our students will receive a more comprehensive, challenging and engaging learning experience in the early grades.

We began integrating thinking and academic success skills across the curriculum in 2007 and implemented it in kindergarten in 2009-2010 at 80 schools on a voluntary basis.

What is the Elementary Integrated Curriculum (EIC) and how is it different from the existing curriculum?

We are upgrading the existing MCPS curriculum for the elementary grades in a way that will better engage students and teachers, and dedicate more learning time to subjects such as the arts, science, social studies and physical education. By blending these subjects with the core content areas of reading, writing and mathematics, students will receive robust instruction across all subjects in the early grades. The new curriculum, called the elementary integrated curriculum (EIC), is built around developing students' critical and creative thinking skills, as well as essential academic success skills.

When is it coming to my school?

Full implementation in Kindergarten and Grade 1 will begin in all schools in 2011-2012. The rollout plan for Grades 2, 3, 4 and 5 will be determined by the end of the 2011-2012 school year.

How is the EIC different from the curriculum that's already being taught?

The EIC is an upgrade to the highly successful MCPS curriculum that has been in place since 2001. The content taught at each grade level is very similar, though it may have been rearranged to take advantage of the natural connections among content areas.

For example, when students study weather in science in Grade 1, it will be aligned to the same time they collect data and study measurement in math. Doing so allows teachers to use real life examples to teach math and use accurate math concepts to teach science.

The development of critical and creative thinking and academic success skills are an explicit focus throughout instruction to help students develop into independent, successful learners.

How will I know what my child is learning through the EIC?

The topics for instruction are included in a synopsis document here for each grade:

- [Kindergarten \(/uploadedFiles/curriculum/integrated/IntegratedCurriculumOutcomes-Kindergarten.pdf\)](#) (PDF)
- [Grade 1 \(/uploadedFiles/curriculum/integrated/IntegratedCurriculumOutcomes-Grade1.pdf\)](#) (PDF)

With full implementation of the EIC in Kindergarten and Grade 1 in the 2011-2012 school year, teachers will continue to share progress with parents and report cards will be aligned to the new curriculum. The report cards will also include a record of student progress in critical and creative thinking skills and academic success skills.

What are critical and creative thinking skills and academic success skills?

We know that students who are successful in their academic careers learn more than just facts. They have a certain set of skills that enable them to learn and thrive in almost any setting. Those skills include creative thinking such as generating multiple responses to a question; critical thinking skills such as analysis; and academic success skills such as collaboration and persistence.

More about critical and creative thinking and academic success skills

How did the EIC develop?

Beginning in 2001, MCPS developed a comprehensive curriculum by each content area at the elementary level. The curriculum resources for mathematics and reading language arts were last updated in 2003. In 2007, MCPS reviewed existing research and collected stakeholder feedback to determine ways to improve the MCPS curriculum. Many teachers and parents mentioned the narrowing of the curriculum to math and reading as a concern. System research also indicated that students who were successful in their academic careers had a distinct set of skills.

A cross-functional team of MCPS offices was established to design a new model of curriculum that included:

- Creative and critical thinking, as well as academic success skills
- Integrated curriculum to maximize instructional time and to save teachers' planning time
- Small group instruction in reading and mathematics
- State curriculum requirements in all content areas
- An all-electronic platform for disseminating curriculum

In 2008, the Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum was developed and stakeholder feedback was sought to improve all aspects of the design. The new curriculum and beta web portal were piloted in 2009-2010 and further refinements were made. Voluntary implementation of the Elementary Integrated Curriculum began in 2010.

I've heard that Maryland has adopted a new set of standards for public schools. How will the new curriculum align with those?

The EIC will be aligned to the new, common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics that many states, including Maryland, have recently adopted. The Common Core State Standards – which define what students are expected to learn in those two subjects at every grade level – were developed by a consortium of states and national education groups to ensure that all students are well prepared for a world that increasingly demands college-level skills from every student who graduates from high school.

The MCPS curriculum has been more rigorous than the state’s voluntary curriculum for many years. The Common Core will bring the rest of the state more in line with the expectations MCPS has for its students.

Common Core Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/>)

How is the EIC different for teachers?

The biggest improvement for teachers is the ability to access and plan for instruction online and to upload and evaluate curriculum. The EIC will also help teachers plan for instruction by showing possible connections among content areas so they can maximize instructional time.

The EIC also provides teachers on-demand professional development experiences and the ability to collaborate with colleagues through an innovative online community.

I heard MCPS won a federal grant to work on this and is partnering with Pearson. How will that affect the EIC?

MCPS was recently awarded a \$5 million federal grant by the U.S. Department of Education to help develop the EIC. MCPS was one of only 49 winners of the federal grant out of a pool of 1,698 applicants. One requirement of the federal grant competition was to enlist a partner willing to contribute at least 20% in matching funds.

MCPS established a partnership with Pearson, a major educational publisher, to use their expertise to help develop assessments and to expand online professional development for teachers. However, this curriculum is being developed by MCPS educators for use in MCPS classrooms. MCPS always retains final authority over what is taught in its classrooms.

The federal grant and partnership with Pearson will accelerate the timeline for development, provide MCPS with additional expertise to strengthen the EIC, and ultimately improve the quality of resources for students and teachers. Pearson plans to market this curriculum nationally to other school districts. MCPS will receive royalties from the sale of the curriculum, which will be invested back into the school system.

***Adapted from Frequently Asked Questions About the Elementary Integrated Curriculum (EIC) that is posted on the MCPS website.