

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

January 11, 2011

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Adolescent Literacy: Building on Early Success (Goals 1 and 2)

In a modern society, the ability to read [and write] well is the cornerstone of a child's education. In a modern economy, literacy is a prerequisite of a successful life.
(National Assessment Governing Board, 2008)

In response to the Board of Education's request for an opportunity to explore a significant topic in depth, Board members and executive staff members selected adolescent literacy as the first topic for an extended conversation at the Board table January 11, 2011.

The purpose of this memorandum is to frame Board members' discussion, which will be informed by the background briefing packet previously provided to Board members that delineates the extent of the issue nationally and locally, provides examples of college and career reading and writing, and presents research and literature on the topic of adolescent literacy. The document review and subsequent discussion will allow Board members to determine key issues, policy options, and implications for decision making at the local level.

Overview

During the last decade, employers and educators across the country have engaged in an extensive conversation about the critical reading and writing skills of high school graduates. A general consensus exists that fewer secondary students are acquiring the literacy skills that academic and career pursuits demand. Similarly, research indicates that as a nation, we will not succeed in changing this trend with a quick-fix approach. Rather, a solution is required.

In the recently published 2009 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 15-year-olds in the United States read at an average proficiency, with nine countries performing higher, 39 performing lower, and 16 showing averages not measurably different from the U.S. average. Scores for 18 percent of the U.S. students assessed indicate a lack of

competencies necessary to participate effectively and productively in life. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results for 2009 show that 38 percent of U.S. Grade 12 students score at the proficient level in reading achievement, demonstrating relatively flat performance since the first reading assessment in 1992.

Background

Reading and Writing Nationally

Nationally, responsibility for reading and writing instruction traditionally has been assigned to elementary schools. In fact, learning how to read and write appears to be considered the core work of elementary students and much less so of secondary students. It also appears that nationally, middle and high school students generally are expected to use reading to learn content and to use writing to show their knowledge of that content. The expectation that students in Grades 6–12 should receive direct instruction designed to help them read or write better gets lost in the current secondary model of an instructional day segmented into subjects with distinct curricular requirements. (*Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas*, 2007; *Reading Next*, 2004)

Also informing the national discussion is the acknowledgement that academic and workplace demands for higher levels of literacy are increasing while new media, electronic devices, and cyber formats lead our secondary students to varied forms of communicating and interacting with the written word. Some worry that the abbreviated writing of text messaging (e.g., RUOK, CUL8R) or novels on handheld tablets signal the end of a literate society. Others speculate that as long as students have the opportunity to learn how to manipulate language for a variety of purposes and audiences, and they are able to “code-switch” appropriately, there is no need for concern. Further, it is suggested that if students learn how to read extended texts in varying formats for more than initial understanding, and they are able to think deeply and critically about their meaning, then we need not fear new communication forms sparked by technology. (*NAEP Reading Framework*, 2008)

In response to these and other concerns across the country, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) convened a group of K–16 educators, researchers, and representatives of business and government in 48 states and the District of Columbia to develop the Common Core State Standards for College and Career Readiness (CCSS) in English. The full title of these standards signals the desired approach to literacy: *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. The English CCSS introduction states the expectation in clear terms:

“The Standards set requirements not only for English language arts (ELA) but also for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content

areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines . . .

“Literacy standards for grade 6 and above are predicated on teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields. It is important to note that the 6–12 literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects are not meant to replace content standards in those areas but rather to supplement them.

“As a natural outgrowth of meeting the charge to define college and career readiness, the Standards also lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the skills and understandings students are expected to demonstrate have wide applicability outside the classroom or workplace. Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature.

“They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language.”

Reading Issues

In April 2000, the National Reading Panel released the defining report that resulted in the language of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Five essential components of effective reading instruction are identified to ensure that children learn to read well:

- Phonemic Awareness—The ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words.
- Phonics—The understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes—the sounds of spoken language—and graphemes—the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. Readers use these relationships to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically and to decode unfamiliar words.

- Reading Fluency—The ability to read text accurately and quickly. It provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time.
- Vocabulary Development—Development of stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words necessary for communication.
- Reading Comprehension Strategies—Strategies for understanding, remembering, and communicating with others about what has been read. Comprehension strategies are sets of steps that purposeful, active readers use to make sense of text.

The first two components typically are taught and learned by the end of Grade 2, and the expectation for most students is that they will be fluent readers who are able to understand what they read by the end of Grade 3. In a somewhat over-simplified view of reading, the common explanation is that students *learn how to read* in the early grades and *read to learn* in the later grades. The shift to applying reading skills begins in Grades 4 and 5 and is well established in most schools in the country when students move to the secondary level. This oversimplification of literacy learning and the resulting shift in focus in later grades may well be a root cause of the decline in adolescent literacy that we see nationally.

In the *Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress*, the authors write, “Reading behaviors vary with the type of text encountered by a reader.” The NAEP reading assessment is guided by a definition that “conceptualizes reading as a dynamic cognitive process . . . an active and complex process that involves:

- “Understanding written text
- Developing and interpreting meaning
- Using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation”

As students encounter texts in different formats about different topics, as they read texts that use different types of vocabulary or sentence structures, and as they read texts for different reasons and in different situations, the reading demands vary and students’ approaches to those texts also must vary. These approaches, or reading strategies, are not developed automatically by most individuals—they must be taught.

The English CCSS “insist that instruction in reading . . . be a shared responsibility within the school. The grades 6–12 standards are divided into two sections, one for ELA and the other for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This division reflects the unique, time-honored place of ELA teachers in developing students’ literacy skills while at the same time recognizing that teachers in other areas must have a role in this development as well.” The English CCSS document does not define *technical subjects*. However, it does indicate that students must learn to read in “a variety of contents” to be ready for college and career pursuits in “multiple disciplines” and “fields.”

Writing Issues

While secondary English teachers around the country may clearly see themselves as teachers of writing, they and their colleagues in other content areas may not understand the strong connection between writing and reading, as well as the connection of both to thinking about and learning content. In *Writing to Read*, authors of that 2010 research study conclude that “students’ reading abilities are improved by writing about texts they have read; by receiving explicit instruction in spelling, in writing sentences, in writing paragraphs, in text structure, and in the basic processes of composition; and by increasing how much and how frequently they write.” They further state that writing should be taught and emphasized as an integral part of the school curriculum—by implication, an integral part of instruction in all subjects. In the 2007 report, *Writing Next*, researchers state, “writing has been shown to be an effective tool for enhancing students’ learning of content materials.”

The English CCSS expectation for shared responsibility among English language arts and content teachers to teach writing reflects this thinking, as does the CCSS expectation for an integrated approach to literacy. “The standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language for conceptual clarity, [but] the processes of communication are closely connected. For example, Writing standard 9 requires that students be able to write about what they read . . .” and “When editing writing, students address Writing standard 5 (“Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach”) as well as Language standards 1–3 (which deal with conventions of standard English and knowledge of language). When drawing evidence from literary and informational texts per Writing standard 9, students are also demonstrating their comprehension skill in relation to specific standards in Reading.”

Reading and Writing Locally

In June 2010, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted the CCSS in English, as well as in mathematics, with the plan to revise state curriculum by June 2011, and to develop an assessment plan and timeline to reflect the change in curriculum. Until then, Maryland state curriculum stands as the state expectation for literacy, and the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in Reading and the High School Assessment (HSA) in English continue to be administered and reported.

MCPS curriculum in English outlines grade-by-grade expectations for what students must know and be able to do in the areas of reading and writing, following a college and career preparation trajectory that exceeds the current state curriculum. Additionally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment resources in English and in content areas such as science and social studies emphasize the connections between and among reading, writing, thinking, and learning content. Challenges in MCPS relate to secondary teachers’ expertise in providing direct instruction to students to help them understand texts in unfamiliar formats, using unfamiliar vocabulary, about

unfamiliar content. Similarly, many secondary teachers may not be prepared to help students in their content areas to write “like a scientist” or “like a historian.”

Reading

Maryland State regulations do not require secondary schools to provide an instructional program in reading, except to meet identified needs of students in Grades 6–8. Although reading processes and comprehension are included as content standards for English language arts in Maryland schools, and reading is mentioned as a process skill in social studies, there is no mention of an instructional program in reading in Grades 9–12 in the Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations (COMAR). The MSA in Reading measures students’ reading proficiency in Grades 3–8. The HSA in English yields a score representing achievement of English language arts content and does not provide a specific measure of reading proficiency.

Like the state regulations, Montgomery County Board of Education policies do not specify reading program requirements at the secondary level. Policy IEA, *Framework and Structure of Early Childhood and Elementary Education*, stipulates reading as part of the curriculum and requires school staff members to emphasize literacy. While the recently approved Policy IED, *Framework and Structure of High School Education*, mentions instruction that prepares students to comprehend, gather, evaluate, and synthesize information, neither Policy IED nor Policy IEB, *Middle School Education*, emphasizes reading or literacy.

Practice in MCPS adheres to state regulation and local policy. All students, Pre-K–5, receive daily instruction in reading. At Grade 6, however, a separate reading course is not mandated for all students and at Grade 7 and beyond, a separate reading course only is offered to students reading well below grade level. The following list represents secondary reading courses available for middle and high school students:

Middle School

- Reading 6—for students above grade level
- Reading 7—for students below grade level
- Reading 8—for students below grade level, using Scholastic reading program, *READ 180*

High School—for students below grade level

- Academic Reading, using *READ 180*
- Basic Reading
- College Prep Literacy
- Developmental Reading

Secondary students who demonstrate reading skills more than two years below grade level typically are recommended for a reading intervention during a separate course period. A listing of approved interventions for a variety of purposes and student groups (e.g., students with or without disabilities and students with or without limited English proficiency) has been

disseminated to schools and is included in the briefing packet. Staff members in the offices of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP) and Special Education and Student Services collaborate on the review and dissemination of new intervention programs and they provide support to schools on effective implementation.

While some variability in expectations about reading instruction in secondary schools may exist in Maryland and MCPS, reading assessment practices are more consistent in MCPS. Secondary school staff members administer the Northwest Evaluation Association product, Measures of Academic Progress–Reading (MAP-R) two times each year in Grades 6–8, and high schools have the option of administering MAP-R to selected students in Grade 9. MAP-R is a computerized adaptive test that assesses general reading processes (e.g., decoding and vocabulary), as well as comprehension and interpretation of expository and literary texts.

In Maryland, no additional coursework in reading instruction or assessment is required for certification as a teacher of English in Grades 6–12, other than what is required for all secondary teachers. The state does not require prospective English teachers to receive additional preparation in reading instruction that is different from the two reading courses required for secondary teacher certification in any content area. The limited state requirement for secondary English teachers exists at a time that the state curriculum in English includes content standards for comprehending text. At best, this circumstance translates in MCPS to muddled expectations for secondary teachers and administrators about their responsibilities.

Writing

COMAR outlines expectations for writing instruction in English language arts and lists writing as a process skill in social studies. MSAs do not assess writing, although students must demonstrate reading comprehension in written responses. The state HSAs do not assess writing, other than selected response questions related to usage and grammar on the English assessment. Writing is not mentioned in Montgomery County Board of Education policies for middle school or high school education. Current practice in MCPS secondary schools is for English teachers to hold full responsibility for providing direct writing instruction and for social studies and science teachers to address writing as a way to learn content or as a method for “making thinking visible.”

On March 23, 2009, Board members were provided with an update on literacy education in MCPS, with a specific emphasis on writing instruction, Pre-K–12. The presentation and memorandum (Attachment) described the current writing approach in MCPS, which integrates writing, language, reading, and thinking. English language arts teachers at the elementary and secondary levels have been provided resources and training to support their efforts to engage students in the writing process to generate compositions for a variety of purposes. Challenges identified in the memorandum included the discrepancy between state curriculum and state assessments regarding writing, limited choices in comprehensive writing assessments nationally,

inconsistent implementation of the MCPS writing program, and the need for clear and timely communication to stakeholders about writing instruction.

Challenges for Policy-Makers

Traditional approaches to programming and instruction support literacy learning to an extent, but they may not be enough to meet secondary students' need to attain college and career levels of literacy. Researchers in the field identify the following challenges faced by educators nationally:

- Time for reading and writing instruction and feedback to students
- Assessments and methods for measuring results
- Integration of technology into literacy teaching and learning
- Support for teaching literacy in all subjects
- Meeting the needs of second language learners and students with disabilities

Researchers also generally agree on the following considerations:

- Emphasis on critical reading and writing in content standards in all grades
- Emphasis on instruction in and assessment of critical reading and writing
- Teacher preparation that includes reading and writing theory and practice
- Resources to upgrade current teachers' skills in reading and writing instruction
- Progress monitoring and accountability systems
- Technology to facilitate reading, writing, and thinking instruction and assessment
- Targeted interventions and supplemental instruction matched to student needs

Current State of Adolescent Literacy in MCPS

The English CCSS, adopted by the state of Maryland June 22, 2010, introduces a new emphasis at the state level on writing and an expectation that reading and writing will be integrated into all content areas. MCPS is well-positioned regarding writing, as our Pre-K–12 English language arts curriculum currently emphasizes direct instruction in this aspect of literacy at all levels. The expectation for all secondary content area teachers to address reading and writing, while welcome, is somewhat problematic because secondary teachers in MCPS, like elsewhere, have not been provided the competencies needed to navigate this change easily. As the authors of *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas* write, “Content area teachers may no longer remember what it was like to learn these things for the first time. They have learned the literacy skills and strategies of their content area to automaticity.”

Review of our record regarding literacy teaching and learning in the early grades reveals that MCPS has succeeded by employing many of the strategies recommended by researchers in the field. We now are considering which of the lessons learned from our Early Success Initiative may be applied to the current challenge of adolescent literacy. OCIP reorganized staff and resources during Fiscal Year 2011 to focus on supporting secondary reading and to refine

existing plans for revising the secondary reading curriculum and for identifying, disseminating, and supporting use of new secondary reading intervention products. An elementary reading supervisor position has been redeployed to coordinate support to secondary school administrators and teachers and to identify and disseminate effective resources and strategies for secondary literacy instruction.

While data at the national level appear bleak, a review of the briefing packet will reveal to Board members that MCPS student performance data exceed the national trend. This fact most likely is a direct result of the many well-established and promising initiatives currently implemented in MCPS to address adolescent literacy, which include but are not limited to the following:

- Aligning MCPS curriculum resources with the CCSS
- Providing curriculum and instructional resources that emphasize literacy and critical thinking in all content areas
- Embedding information literacy and technology literacy in all content areas
- Establishing literacy benchmarks through Grade 8, using MAP-R
- Monitoring literacy performance data and practice
- Providing targeted support to schools through Achievement Steering Committees
- Providing guidelines to inform decisions about instruction and interventions
- Providing research-based literacy interventions for students below grade level
- Developing an online resource to match interventions to students' diagnosed needs
- Training general and special educators on a co-teaching model
- Providing assistive technology to students with disabilities
- Supporting teachers of students with disabilities, including highly able students with disabilities
- Emphasizing academic literacy in English for Speakers of Other Languages curriculum
- Developing secondary courses to address literacy needs of English language learners
- Providing programs and courses for advanced learners
- Providing ongoing training to resource teachers in all contents on literacy instruction
- Partnering with the University of Maryland to offer a master's program in literacy
- Offering Continuing Professional Development courses in reading for state certification
- Providing secondary school improvement/leadership team training on literacy coaching, planning, and instructional leadership
- Introducing literacy specialists in middle schools as part of the reform initiative
- Establishing a school cluster focus on literacy at all school levels

Implications for MCPS and Possible Next Steps

Although MCPS has much to celebrate regarding our students' achievement, we have room for improvement. The materials in the briefing packet may generate more questions than they answer and they may spark conversation that leads to potential solutions. It is clear that we need more information about how well our secondary students are reading and writing, who exactly

the students are who are not on track to meet the literacy demands of college and career, and what we have tried that does or does not work. Specifically, the following issues emerge:

At the State Level:

- Secondary teacher preparation programs currently place low emphasis on literacy instruction in the content areas
- COMAR provides little guidance regarding secondary instructional programs and teacher certification

At the Local Level:

- Policies provide limited expectations regarding secondary literacy instruction
- Reading benchmarks are not set beyond Grade 8
- Secondary reading course materials and clear guidelines for assigning students to specific courses providing direct reading instruction need updating
- Additional reading intervention programs for high school students are needed
- Grades 6–12 writing assessments and performance benchmarks are needed
- Effective practices for teaching literacy in all contents must be disseminated more widely

Next steps under consideration for MCPS include a comprehensive study of adolescent literacy teaching and learning, with a critical review of existing student performance data. Dissemination of effective practices in MCPS would follow the study.

Conclusion

Board members have initiated an important review of the current and desired state of adolescent literacy, both in MCPS and nationally. The discussion today should help our district determine what we know and don't know about this topic. Our goal is to improve all graduates' literacy skills—their ability to read critically, write effectively, and think deeply about substantive ideas and information. It is imperative therefore, for us to continue the hard work of meeting the challenge through a comprehensive approach that invites our local, state, and national leaders to join us.

Present at the table for today's discussion are Dr. Frank H. Stetson, chief school performance officer, Office of School Performance; Dr. Renee A. Foose, associate superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability; Mr. Erick J. Lang, associate superintendent, Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs; Ms. Betsy Brown, director, Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Mrs. Renay C. Johnson, principal, Takoma Park Middle School; and Mrs. Carole A. Working, principal, Quince Orchard High School.

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Attachment

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–12 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–12 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–12

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 3–5, 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 3–8 as performance targets.

Writing

English language arts teachers in MCPS are expected to provide direct instruction in writing regularly—daily 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–12 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—in 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–2 teachers using customized software on a handheld device. In Grades 3–9, 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 3–9.

OCIP and school-based staff members have developed writing assessments for Grades 1–3 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 6–10 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 2–12. 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 3–8.
- 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 3–9.
- 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 3–10.

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's 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

<p>Quarter One</p>	<p>Is the MCPS curriculum being taught?</p> <p>Reading Purposes-Literary Experience, To Be Informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing literacy processes of <i>before, during, and 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>Are instructional practices consistent with MCPS curriculum? Are assessments used as described in the instructional guide?</p> <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, during, and 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, during, and after</i> reading strategies when reading across all curriculum areas. • read and write independently.
<p>Quarter Two</p>	<p>Reading Purposes-Literary Experience, 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 	
<p>Quarter Three</p>	<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 	
<p>Quarter Four</p>	<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>Is the MCPS curriculum being taught? Curriculum Element from Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning</p>	<p>Are instructional practices consistent with MCPS curriculum? Are assessments being used as described in instructional guide?</p>
<p>Yearly</p>	<p>Enduring Understandings 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. The success of a democracy depends on the literacy of its people. Essential Questions How do readers and viewers engage meaningfully with text? How does a literate individual become part of the conversation? How is a writer both empowered and limited by writing from personal voice and experience? 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)
<p>August September October</p>	<p>Unit 1: Examining Argument in Print and Visual Texts Texts Modeled: <i>The Color of Water</i>, essay collection 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>	
<p>November December January</p>	<p>Unit 2: Challenging Truth in Narrative Texts Modeled: Various fiction and nonfiction texts, documentaries 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>	
<p>January February March</p>	<p>Unit 3: Questioning Society's Conscience Texts Modeled: various fiction texts, short stories 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>	
<p>April May June</p>	<p>Unit 4: Exploring Individual Ambition and Desire Texts Modeled: various Shakespeare plays, various modern drama texts 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
C=Curriculum
I=Instruction
EX=Expectations
PL=Planning
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

Note: In mathematics students learn to communicate their understanding mathematically where symbolic representation often replaces words to explain, inform, prove, or justify.

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)	Portfolio, Pinnacle

**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.