

Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs
Office of School Performance
Office of Staff Development
Office of Student and Community Services
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

January 5, 2004

MEMORANDUM

To: All Principals

From: Dale E. Fulton, Associate Superintendent
Donald H. Kress, Coordinating Community Superintendent
Darlene Merry, Associate Superintendent
Carey M. Wright, Associate Superintendent
Bonnie Cullison, President Montgomery County Education Association
Rebecca Newman, President Montgomery County Association of Administrative
and Supervisory Personnel

Subject: Guidelines Regarding the Development and Communication of Enduring
Understandings, Essential Questions, Indicators, Mastery Objectives, and Lesson
Itineraries

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance for developing and communicating what students are expected to know and be able to do in all classrooms in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Over the past several years, a number of terms have been added to our repertoire for planning lessons and teaching, and it is important that we are consistent in our understanding of these terms.

The rationale for communicating these guidelines is as follows:

- Students need clarity about what they are expected to know and be able to do within a unit of study and for a lesson within that unit.
- Teachers need to focus their teaching and expectations for student learning on the MCPS curriculum.
- Principals and other classroom observers need to see evidence that the lesson has been planned and implemented in a way that is aligned with the MCPS curriculum and assessed student needs.

Definitions

Please note the following working definitions from the MCPS curriculum and expectations within the Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) coursework:

Enduring Understanding: An enduring understanding is a lasting idea or concept that is centrally important to a discipline and valuable to the individual.

Essential Question: An essential question is a question that examines a student's knowledge to determine if he/she has acquired an enduring understanding and provides a focal point for an instructional unit.

Indicator: An indicator is a statement related to a standard that describes in detail what students should know or be able to do by the end of a particular grade level in a specific subject or discipline.

Mastery Objective: A mastery objective is what students should know and be able to do in terms of the academic curriculum at the end of a teaching block of time. The teacher should have determined how he/she knows the students know the content of the mastery objective. (In planning, a teacher asks him/herself: *What do I want my students to know and be able to do when the lesson is over? How will I know they know it and can do it?*)

Lesson Itineraries: The lesson itinerary is the list of activities the students will be doing during that block of time in order to achieve the mastery objective.

Expectations

The expectations for the use of these components are identified below:

1. The planning for lessons should be derived from two primary sources: the appropriate MCPS curriculum grade level/course expectations or indicators AND the assessed needs of students. Teachers should be using the enduring understandings and essential questions from the curriculum guides to develop their lessons. As the curriculum materials were developed, it was not the intent that enduring understandings and essential questions be posted. It is important, however, that the teachers make clear connections between essential questions and instruction on an ongoing basis.
2. After the teacher has planned the lesson using the enduring understandings, essential questions, and indicators, a mastery objective is developed and should be clearly communicated to students. Teachers can communicate this in statement or question form, and it should be stated in language that provides for measurable outcomes for each lesson. Note that some essential questions may span more than one lesson, but the mastery objective is for that day and that time. Teachers and school administrators should collaborate in agreeing upon the method of communication that best fits their school's classrooms. This can include posting on the board, using overheads, flipcharts, or PowerPoints, or providing the information on handouts.
3. At the beginning and throughout the instructional period, the teacher should refer, as appropriate, to the mastery objective to set or reset goals, to check for understanding, and to determine student mastery.

4. Teachers should have a lesson itinerary for the lesson plan for student review. This itinerary should clearly indicate the outline of the plan for the day.

Resources

It is essential that you work with your staff to ensure that lessons are aligned with MCPS curriculum in order to provide students with clear information about what they are expected to know and be able to do. Below are some tools and support systems if you need resources to implement these expectations:

- Elementary mathematics and reading/language arts videotapes have been provided for the curriculum rollout training.
- Elementary and secondary curriculum and course documents are based on these expectations.
- Staff from the Office of Staff Development and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs can assist you in training and developing your staff on any of these planning tools.
- Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) and the SST course work provide detailed implementation for these expectations.
- Your community superintendent and director of school performance can help you access curricular support.

Thank you for your continuing work in implementing the MCPS curriculum by ensuring that students are clear about what they are expected to know and be able to do. Please feel free to contact any of us for further support.

Copy to:

Executive Staff
Directors of School Performance
Mrs. Collins
Dr. Harvey
Mr. Bartels
Mrs. Donnellon

Approved:

Larry A. Bowers, Chief Operating Officer

Gregory E. Thornton, Deputy Superintendent