

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

April 24, 2018

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Choice Study: Expanding Opportunity, Unleashing Potential, Middle School Field Test

Based on the findings and recommendations of the Metis Report, Montgomery County Public Schools has engaged in systemically reforming how students may access enriched and accelerated instruction. This effort significantly has increased the number of students accessing enriched, accelerated instruction at the elementary level.

This year, the effort has included work at the middle school level, as to with how to identify and nurture highly able learners. The selection process field test for the Takoma Park Middle School Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science Magnet and the Eastern Middle School Humanities and Communication Magnet is the first component of this effort at the middle school level. The field test included an examination of the educational records of every Grade 5 student in the catchment area for the two magnet programs. This represented 80 elementary schools and approximately 8,164 students. This global review of our Grade 5 students offers valuable information for programming at the middle school level well beyond magnet program placement. There were 4,057 students assessed using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)* from the 80 schools. This is in stark contrast with prior practice when approximately 700 to 800 students applied to the 2 programs. In addition, an important consideration when selecting students to participate in the magnet programs was whether or not a student had an academic peer group at his or her home middle school.

Preliminary results reflect increases in selected Hispanic/Latino students, and students receiving Free and Reduced-price Meals System services. There appears to also be a slight increase for Black or African American students. Additionally, the vast majority of the 80 elementary schools in the field test have students selected for the magnet programs. This is significantly different from past years where students from a few elementary schools dominated the admission process. Overall, the gender balance in both programs improved, and the 4,057 assessed students are reflective of the student population of the catchment area. The process revealed a large number of highly able cohorts at a number of local middle schools. Given the universal nature of the process and the appreciable increase in student participation, staff anticipated that there would be a greater number of appeals as well as varied acceptance rates.

* Parents/guardians of Grade 5 students received a detailed summary report for their child prepared by the publisher.

As with the elementary school expansion, the intent of the new middle school process is to build the infrastructure to meet the needs of highly able students in multiple locations and mitigate the perception that middle school students only receive enriched and accelerated instruction through a magnet program. Given there are a number of highly able cohorts remaining in their local middle schools, staff at all schools in the catchment area will receive support and training on enriched and accelerated programming. It is important to note that the existence of these cohorts at local middle schools are not new this year; what is new is the explicit support provided for programming for highly able students.

Enriched and Accelerated Middle School Courses

Building upon the magnet curriculum, staff in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs is developing two enriched and accelerated courses for highly able cohorts at local middle schools in the catchment area for implementation in the 2018–2019 school year. Course descriptions follow.

Applied Investigations into Mathematics (IM) 6

This Grade 6 course is designed to extend students' understanding of mathematical concepts aligned with Common Core State Standards, accelerating the pace of instruction while diving deeper into concepts. This course offers access to academic competitions and the opportunity to conduct applied fieldwork. Students work with an academic cohort to conduct independent inquiries using mathematics, computer science, and the scientific process to solve real-world problems. Upon successful completion, students will matriculate to an accelerated and enriched Algebra 1 course in Grade 7 and Geometry in Grade 8.

Historical Inquiry into Global Humanities 6

This course is built around the core Grade 6 social studies curriculum; however, it is enriched with additional content, exploration of deeper connections to today, investigative inquiry to strengthen writing through Document Based Questions, and connections through literature.

Middle school principals were notified of the student cohort assigned to the course or courses in early April. For scheduling purposes, students identified in the highly able cohorts will be grouped together in sections of the course or courses. As seats are available, local school principals will identify additional students who demonstrate need for accelerated and enriched instruction for placement in the course or courses.

All middle schools that feed into the two magnets will implement one or both courses in the coming school year, depending on the size of the cohort in mathematics and humanities, respectively, with the exception of Argyle, A. Mario Loiederman, and Parkland middle schools, the three Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) schools. This is because MSMC schools are whole-school magnets with enrichment and acceleration opportunities embedded in the programs. Schools also will receive professional development, consultation on master scheduling, and focused support during implementation.

The catchment area schools are: Benjamin Banneker, Briggs Chaney, Cabin John, William H. Farquhar, Robert Frost, Herbert Hoover, Francis Scott Key, Col. E. Brooke Lee, Newport Mill, North Bethesda, Rosa M. Parks, Thomas W. Pyle, Silver Creek, Silver Spring International, Sligo, Tilden, Julius West, Westland, White Oak, and Earle B. Wood middle schools. Additionally, both Eastern and Takoma Park Middle schools will offer one course. It is anticipated that based on lessons learned from the field test, the process will be refined next year and expanded countywide.

The Metis Report has been a catalyst for work reimagining a systemic approach to ensuring equitable access to enriched and accelerated instruction. The work has focused not only on special programs; it also identified how local schools meet the needs of all students, including highly able learners. The data gathered from the work also reinforces the belief that there are highly able students in every school, from every neighborhood and background.

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