

Executive Summary of the Middle School Ad Hoc Committee Report June 2008

Introduction

The middle school movement in the United States began over forty years ago to establish an appropriate and effective education for young adolescents. The move away from the junior high school structure gained popularity because there was a need to create an educational setting which intentionally attended to the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs of the pre-adolescent child.

As Harford County Public Schools embraced the middle school concept in the 1960's and 1970's, the system adopted several aspects of schooling that would guide the development and implementation of middle school education. Students and teachers were organized as "teams", which provided opportunities for getting to know students, collaborative planning, fostering collegiality among teachers, and establishing a community of learners. Also embraced was the idea that young adolescents should spend part of the school day in elective courses in which they could discover and explore various topics. The original exploratory courses were art, home economics, industrial arts, and music. HCPS made a commitment to design, build, and equip middle schools to be conducive to both teaming and exploratory programs.

Although there are currently many similarities among HCPS middle schools as to their organization and course offerings, there are also many differences. As school-based decision-making gave a degree of autonomy to schools, each middle school evolved to meet the needs of the students and individual communities, while best utilizing staff allocations and the physical building and campus facilities. As a result, programs, course offerings, and schedules became varied at the middle school level.

In recent years, a wide variety of factors have impacted middle schools and resulted in the need to reform middle school education in Harford County Public Schools. Listed below are examples of some of the factors that have impacted and highlighted the need for the reform of middle school education:

- Maryland School Assessments (MSA) in reading, mathematics, and science
- Increasing reliance on technology in school and the workplace
- Societal changes, such as the emergence of a global economy
- Federal mandates, such as the *No Child Left Behind* legislation and wellness legislation
- The Comprehensive Secondary School Reform Plan

Under the guidance of the Superintendent of Schools, the General Curriculum Committee was asked to develop a charge for a committee to attend to middle school education.

Process

The Middle School Ad Hoc Committee was formed in December 2006 to address the middle school components of Comprehensive Secondary School Reform. The committee membership included nine teachers, two parents/community members, six middle school administrators, a high school principal, an elementary school principal, eleven central office administrators, and the president of the teachers' union.

The committee held fourteen day-long meetings from February 2007 to May 2008. Dr. Gerald Scarborough, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction oversaw the committee and its work. Mrs. Kaye Blome, Principal, Fallston Middle School, and Mr. George Toepfer, Supervisor of Social Studies, the committee's chairpersons, served as advisors to the committee and presented periodic updates to the Board of Education, as well as to principals and supervisory personnel. Mrs. Barbara DeRose, Teacher Specialist, Office of Curriculum and Instruction served as the committee facilitator.

Committee members began by researching middle school education in general and then moved into subcommittees to research topics specific to the charge: core area instruction, world languages, technology, special education, support services, and unified arts/physical education.

Recommendations were brought forward by the subcommittees to the committee-at-large, which deliberated and came to consensus through a formal consensus process. (Appendix A)

An online survey to obtain feedback from stakeholders was developed by the committee, and posted on the HCPS website in January 2008. Responses were received from 1,543 HCPS employees, students, parents, and community members. (Appendix B)

Committee members came to consensus on fifteen recommendations. After reviewing feedback from the Middle School Survey and Superintendent Haas, and after accepting the parameters of the middle school time schedule, the committee revised and/or eliminated some of the original recommendations.

Nine recommendations were sent forward to the Board of Education for approval. Each has a detailed implementation plan which provides a timeline, goals, persons responsible, and strategies to reach the goals. Evaluation plans to determine the effects on student achievement are also included.

In an effort to keep the Harford County school community informed of the rationale, impact, and progress of the recommendations, a communication plan was developed. Through this plan, a systemic process of informing stakeholders is described. Also included is the creation of "implementation briefs", one-page documents to summarize a particular recommendation topic. The implementation briefs will be distributed systemwide and made available to the general public through the HCPS website.

Upon the Board of Education's approval of the proposed recommendations, a Middle School Reform Implementation Group will be formed. The group will manage the Communication Plan and monitor the implementation and evaluation plans through reports from the project managers.

Recommendations

1. All middle schools will provide 260 minutes of daily core area instruction to include:

- Integrated language, reading and writing
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies

Core area instruction would include intervention, remediation, and enrichment; it may include world language instruction.

2. Remediation, enrichment and intervention for core area instruction will not occur during unified arts and physical education.
3. All middle school students in HCPS will participate in a world language program.
4. The languages taught in the middle schools will be limited to commonly taught languages such as Spanish, French, and German because of ease of acquisition.
5. All middle schools will provide a level one articulated and sequential world language program.
6. All middle schools will provide a unified arts program utilizing a nine week rotation. Students will take art and health in grades 6, 7, and 8; family and consumer sciences in grades 6 and 7; technology education in grades 6 and 8; and general music in grades 7 and 8. Grade 8 students not in a Level I world language course will complete a world language exploratory course in lieu of one of the unified arts courses offered in grade 8.
7. All middle schools will provide physical education every day, for every student, except band, chorus and orchestra students, who will attend every other day.
8. All middle schools will embed technology literacy in all curricular area instruction, which includes providing students with opportunities to learn to use technology tools to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information, and providing staff with instructional technology support.
9. All middle schools will provide meaningful activities that are a part of a transition plan as students move from elementary school to middle school, through middle school, and from middle school to high school.