

Middle School Reform Report

Core Area Instruction

All HCPS middle schools are organized around interdisciplinary teacher teams which have daily common planning time. These teams deliver “core area instruction” in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Middle school teachers use the common planning time to meet as teams, grade levels, and/or departments to address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students.

Individual middle schools have the autonomy to create schedules that serve the needs of their student populations and make the best use of their staffs and facilities. Thus, the time dedicated to core area instruction and the scheduling of remediation, intervention, and enrichment are not standard throughout the county. The Middle School Ad Hoc Committee sought to maintain the flexibility for each school to make scheduling decisions, while adding parameters to ensure that time is available for the HCPS-approved remediation and intervention programs to be implemented with fidelity.

The committee agreed that unified arts and physical education are valuable parts of a student’s day, and students should not be pulled from these classes to receive remediation, enrichment, or intervention for core subjects. Schools and interdisciplinary teams will be able to use flexible grouping and scheduling within the 260-minute core block (two-thirds of a middle school day) to ensure students will have physical education and unified arts classes every day, or every other day if they belong to a performing arts group.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 2

Remediation, enrichment and intervention for core area instruction will not occur during unified arts and physical education.

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Rationale:

- All young adolescents need a common core of studies that includes:
 - Advanced mathematics with a strong foundation in algebraic and geometric concepts
 - Science courses steeped in laboratory and technology experiences that demonstrate practical and emerging uses of physical, life, and earth/space science principles
 - Literacy instruction specifically addressing reading skills to understand complex concepts in all content areas
 - Language arts lessons emphasizing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in literature and practice
 - Social studies courses combining deep explorations of history, government, and economics from a global perspective. (National Middle School Association, 2000)
- Middle grades students need enough time and help to meet more rigorous, consistent standards in a curriculum that accelerates achievement for all students. (Southern Regional Education Board, 2003)
- The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) states all four core area subjects be taught each year for all students in grades prekindergarten-8.
- Recent MSA scores show that approximately 21% of HCPS 8th grade students score below proficient on the reading portion of MSA and approximately 35% score below proficient on the mathematics portion. By 2014, all students must score at the proficient or advanced level. (US Department of Education, 2001)
- In February 2008, 1,543 parents, students, community members, administrators, post secondary faculty, central office staff, and middle school faculty were asked the degree to which they support the following statement: “All Harford County middle schools should offer the same classes.” The results of this question showed that 72% of respondents answered “strongly agree or agree.” (Middle School Ad Hoc Committee Stakeholder Feedback, 2008)

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Recommendation 2:

Remediation, enrichment and intervention for core area instruction will not occur during unified arts and physical education.

Rationale:

- The essential purpose of middle school is to prepare students to become good citizens and lifelong learners. Therefore, learning experiences should be rigorous, integrative, and exploratory. Curricula and programs should address substantive issues and skills that are relevant and are geared to the varying levels of understanding. (National Middle School Association, 1998)
- High-ability adolescents may differ from fellow classmates in cognitive skills, interests, modes of learning, and motivation. As a result, their educational needs may also differ in some important ways from those of other young adolescents. Attending to those needs requires informed attention to both equity and excellence in all facets of schooling. (NMSA and NAGC, 2004)
- Current HCPS practice indicates that schools provide intervention, remediation, enrichment, and world language in a variety of ways. Schools “carve” time for these initiatives from core area instruction, unified arts, physical education, and/or the second language arts period.
- In February 2008, 1,543 parents, students, community members, administrators, post secondary faculty, central office staff, and middle school faculty were asked the degree to which they support the following statement: “Interventions, remediation, and enrichment for a particular subject that are delivered during the school day should take place during the time period in which that subject is taught.” The results of this question showed that 68% of respondents answered “strongly agree or agree.” (Middle School Ad Hoc Committee Stakeholder Feedback, 2008)

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Status and Proposed Status of Core Area Instruction in HCPS Middle Schools

Minutes of Core Area Instruction, Intervention, Remediation and Enrichment		2009-2010
School	2008-2009	
AMS	260 minutes	260 minutes of daily instruction to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated language, reading and writing • Mathematics • Science • Social Studies Core area instruction would include intervention, remediation and enrichment; it may include world language instruction.
BAMS	282 minutes	
EMS	270 minutes	
FMS	260 minutes	
HGMS	265 minutes	
MMS	276 minutes	
NHMS	260 minutes	
PMMS	255 minutes	
SMS	260 minutes	

Schools that currently have more than the recommended 260 minutes of core area instruction have one or more of the following situations:

- Unified arts classes and/or physical education classes are less than 50 minutes long.
- Lunch is less than the suggested 25 minutes.
- The HCPS Administrative Handbook states a middle school day should consist of 390 minutes. However, due to the number of buses a school may use, and the lack of traffic congestion in certain communities, some schools are able to start the instructional day a few minutes earlier and/or extend the day by a few minutes because of the time the buses arrive at school.

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Implementation Plan for Core Area Instruction Recommendations (1, 2)

Project Manager: Principal						
Timeline	Step/Goal	Persons Responsible	Stakeholders	Strategies	Budget Implications	Indicators of Implementation
April – June Yearly	Identify students who are in performing arts groups to schedule PE, UA , music programs, and teacher planning time	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	Music, PE, UA teachers	Hold meetings with stakeholders and principal/scheduling committee	Time to meet	PE, UA, and music programs inserted into the master schedule
April – June Yearly	Schedule remediation and intervention for language arts and mathematics to ensure time is allotted in master schedule	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	Students identified in need of intervention and special education	Allow recommended time for HCPS approved intervention programs	Cost of possible additional identified HCPS intervention programs	Remediation and intervention for ILA and mathematics inserted into the master schedule
April – June Yearly	Assign special educators to remediation and intervention programs to ensure that all special education students have access to a special educator	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	Special Educators, Instructional Assistants, Inclusion Helpers	Ensure that students identified for direct special education services have special education teacher assigned	None	Special educator, instructional assistant, inclusion helper schedules inserted into the master schedule
April – June Yearly	Schedule 8 th grade students for world language to ensure that every 8 th grader has a world language experience	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	8 th grade students Language arts teachers Unified arts teachers World language teachers	Use world language criteria to identify 8 th grade students for Level I or FLEX Schedule as identified	None	World language inserted into master schedule for 8 th grade students
April – June Yearly	Schedule core area classes to group students appropriately	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	Core area teachers and students	Place students in each core subject using INFORM data and teacher recommendations	None	All core areas inserted into master schedule
April – June Yearly	Ensure team common planning time to ensure that teams of teachers have time as a team to meet	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	Team Teachers	Review master schedule to ensure team common planning time is available to teams	None	Team common planning time identified in master schedule Master schedule completed
June Yearly	Share master schedule with entire staff to ensure that everyone understands school and individual schedules	Principal and/or principal designated scheduling committee	School Staff	Share schedule with staff by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total group • By team • By department 	None	Each staff member has a copy of individual staff schedule for upcoming school year

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Evaluation Plan for Core Area Instruction Recommendations (1, 2)

Project Manager: Principal	
Data Point	
Indicators of Success	
MSA	<p>Increase in the percentage of all groups of students who meet the state academic standards and score at proficient and advanced levels in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The goal is to reach 100%.</p> <p>Elimination of the achievement gaps of disaggregated groups</p>
Algebra HSA	Increase in the percentage of students enrolled in Algebra I in middle school who meet the state academic standards and score at proficient and advanced levels on the Algebra I HSA
Reading Levels	Assessments indicate students are on or above grade level in reading
Grade Point Averages	<p>Increase in the number of students who reach honor roll status (3.0 GPA)</p> <p>Increase in the GPA of all students</p>
Grade Retention	Decrease in the number of students retained
Student participation rate in coursework/programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level I World Language • Algebra I by the end of grade 7 • Algebra I by the end of grade 8 • Geometry • Intervention & remediation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of 8th graders who pass the Level I world language course • Increase in the percentage of students completing Algebra I by the end of grade seven • Increase in the percentage of students completing Algebra I by the end of grade eight • Increase in the percentage of students completing geometry by the end of grade eight • Decrease in the number of students in need of intervention and remediation
Schools' master schedules	Middle school master schedules that adhere to Recommendations 1 & 2 of Middle School Reform

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Bibliography for Core Area Instruction Recommendations (1, 2)

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