

**BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY**  
**INFORMATIONAL REPORT**

**Expansion of Middle School Writing Curriculum**

**May 8, 2023**

**Background Information:**

Elementary schools in Harford County have implemented the Units of Study in Writing curriculum in grades kindergarten through five since the 2017-2018 school year. While writing instruction is integrated into the middle school Reading, English, and Language Arts (RELA) program within the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt *Collections* anthology, it is not a comprehensive writing curricular program. Collaboration between the RELA office, the Secondary Education Services Office, and middle school Principals identified a need for greater support in the curriculum for the teaching of writing in middle school as well as greater consistency in approach from the elementary to the middle grades.

Students benefit from a consistent writing curriculum implemented across multiple grade levels. Consistency in approach, pedagogy, and routines builds a strong foundation upon which to build increasing rigor and new learning. A consistent curriculum also allows achievement and growth in writing to be monitored across grade levels using a coherent progression of standards and the same rubrics. Performance goals and expectations are clearly and intentionally aligned and scaffolded from year to year in a consistent program in order to decrease a student's learning curve and learning loss. Vertical alignment helps individual teachers, grade level teams, and schools make sure that students are meeting or exceeding grade level standards and are prepared for the next grade. Teachers also benefit from a consistent program that promotes stronger collaboration and clearer articulation from elementary to middle school and from grade to grade.

The Units of Study in Writing provides elements of the most effective writing curriculum. For example, this program includes explicit, standards-aligned daily lessons focused on a skill, strategy or convention that writers utilize. The program includes models and examples of effective writing, scoring rubrics and student writing checklists aligned to standards, student writing samples and exemplars, small group suggestions and one-to-one conferring support, as well as unit anchor charts for student reference and guidance.

The Units of Study in Writing also provides elements of research-based writing instruction best practices including:

- An emphasis on the process of writing
- Explicit instruction regarding process, strategies, skills, and conventions
- Writing models and modeling by the teacher
- Ample opportunities to apply and practice strategies and skills
- Incorporation of writer self-reflection and goal setting

- Opportunities for frequent feedback to writers
- Contextual teaching of grammar and conventions
- Choice and authentic purposes for writing

Four middle schools have served as early adopters for the Units of Study Writing curriculum in grades six and seven since the 2019-2020 school year. Qualitative survey data collected from teachers and students indicate promising growth in student writing confidence, stamina, and engagement. Quantitative data collected from student writing shows significant gains in pre and post assessment results. The RELA Office will continue to monitor the impact of this curricular program on students by gathering teacher survey feedback, pre and post student writing assessment data, MCAP writing sub-scores, focus group feedback, and results from instructional walk throughs at all middle schools. To ensure teachers are confident and effective in implementing this curriculum, the RELA Office will provide on-going support to teachers across all middle schools. Support will include participating in instructional planning, providing demonstration lessons, co-teaching with classroom teachers, and utilizing an instructional coaching model. Professional development will also be included during pre-school meetings, department meetings, countywide professional development days, and within school-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

### **Discussion:**

At their April 18, 2023 meeting, the General Curriculum Committee approved the request from the RELA Office to approve the expansion of the Units of Study in Writing curriculum to all remaining 7<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms at Aberdeen Middle, Fallston Middle, Havre de Grace Middle, Southampton Middle, and Swan Creek School for the 2023-2024 school year. Receiving this initial approval, the Reading, English, and Language Arts Office sought a cost estimate for the necessary purchase of materials. The total cost for 2023-2024 school year is \$7,941.60 which would provide necessary teacher and student resources at all five remaining middle schools.

### **Superintendent's Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Schools recommends that the Board of Education approve the expansion of the Units of Study Writing Curriculum to all 7th grade language arts classrooms in all middle schools for the 23-24 school year.