

**MCPS K – 12 Mathematics Work Group
Feedback Summary Sheet**

Ritchie Park Elementary School PTA

MCCPTA Delegate/PTA Vice President: Cheryl Moss Herman (301-610-6634; hermanfour@msn.com)

• What aspects of the MCPS mathematics program do you consider to be strengths and do you want to see continue?

Many parents expressed support for Ritchie Park's interest in trying to keep motivated students challenged, as well as closing any gaps in achievement, although concerns about some of the specifics were also voiced (and are reflected in the answers to the questions below). Specifically, there was strong support for access to accelerated material and mixed interest in specific curriculum targets. On the latter, some felt that they were needed for consistency, while others challenged the premise regarding the need to achieve a specific milestone by a certain grade.

There was also support for regular reports to parents that demonstrate grade level and accelerated mastery, although it appears that these reports are not issued consistently across classes and grade levels. It was also noted that there is not a full understanding of the curriculum by parents or students.

• What aspects of the MCPS mathematics program would you like to see changed, improved, and/or enhanced?

Many parents expressed concerns that the spiral curriculum has created a situation where the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts are introduced in grades 1-3, but that there is not enough attention paid to mastery of these critical facts. This concern is heightened in situations where a student is accelerated from one grade level to the next. In the later grades, there were concerns expressed that when students move to Math 7 and algebra, that important Math 6 concepts like decimals and fractions may not be mastered fully.

It was also felt that there is too much emphasis on exposing students to a wide range of concepts but without the depth of knowledge needed to understand the concepts fully. Some parents felt that a significant amount of time is spent each year having a student re-learn some concepts due to the lack of mastery of the subject prior to moving on to the next concept within a grade level.

Parents at Ritchie Park feel strongly that we would like to see the use of mathematics textbooks or -- at a minimum -- workbooks, so that these materials can be used to reinforce the concepts that are being taught. These materials would assist older students in studying independently and allow parents to assist where needed and in the lower grades. The use of these educational tools would provide parents with a bigger picture of where the curriculum is heading, which may also enable parents to assist their children more effectively. The current use of single worksheets is not sufficient.

Parents also expressed a strong and consistent desire to see math integrated with other aspects of the curriculum, notably science and language arts.

• Do you feel that your child is prepared with the mathematical knowledge he or she needs for his/her next steps? Next course? Why or why not? Explain.

Our parents repeatedly expressed concerns that basic concepts are overlooked, particularly when a child is accelerated from one grade level to another. Whether a result of acceleration or the “spiral” curriculum itself, concerns were expressed by many parents that not enough time and effort was spent on mastering (not just being introduced to) the basics upon which the other concepts build.

A few parents commented that the challenges faced by those who did not master the basics (but may have done well in math) come to a head in middle school.

• What experiences has your child had, or what experiences do you wish your child had, that have made or would make your child stronger in mathematics?

Consistently, there were requests for more focus and time spent on mastery of subjects rather than acceleration. However, there was an appreciation for acceleration and enrichment as a means of challenging students, but in conjunction with mastery of the basics.

In addition, there were significant concerns expressed regarding math class sizes of 31 or 32 students and a single teacher. Resources that support smaller math classes would support our childrens’ mathematics experience and learning. This would allow for greater individual attention towards enrichment for those who have mastered the concepts presented as well as greater support for those who need extra attention. Some parents commented that partially as a result of large class sizes, review papers are sometimes graded by peers and have had errors that remain uncorrected as the student studies for a unit assessment.

Also, the lack of textbooks, sufficient reference sheets and teacher/class notes makes home study challenging, if not impossible. The lack of a textbook hinders a student’s ability to review a concept on their own or with their parents. If a student does not get a concept in class, there are few resources that a parent can rely upon without contacting the teacher directly.

Finally, situations have arisen where in order to accelerate students to the appropriate math level, the children are taking math in a higher grade classroom in the morning while their peers are studying language arts and other subjects. When the students return to their grade level in the afternoon, the few accelerated math peers are sent to the hallway to learn independently or with a paraeducator. Thus, in order to find a math class that suits these talented students appropriately, there are significant sacrifices to other important parts of the academic experience.

• What suggestions do you have to offer for the improvement of the MCPS mathematics teaching and learning program?

- A re-engineering of the math program to ensure that mastery of the basics becomes a priority, even if this means that fewer concepts are covered each year.
- The provision of textbooks, workbooks and reference sheets along with teacher or class notes so that individual reference and home support can be provided.
- The provision of sufficient resources to enable smaller class sizes.
- Integration of the math curriculum with other subjects, notably science and the language arts curriculum.
- Requiring math teachers in grades 4 and 5 to have a stronger background in secondary mathematics beyond what is currently required for Elementary certification.
- Better communication about the math curriculum and its grade level objectives to both parents and students.
- From kindergarten onwards, there should be an emphasis on making math fun, appropriate and meaningful to students in order to develop their confidence in the subject and hold their interest for continued learning.