

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DATE: May 27, 2003

TO: **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

FROM: Dr. Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent

SUBJECT: **Middle School Task Force Recommendations**

ORIGINATOR: Christine M. Johns, Deputy Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

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INFORMATION

The recommendations of the Middle School Task Force Report will provide a blueprint to improve the education and achievement of Baltimore County Public Schools' middle grades students.

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The Middle School Task Force Executive Summary

All students must have the knowledge and skills to be prepared for the demands of a dynamic and global marketplace. To meet these demands, schools must do more to prepare our young people for the realities of the 21st century. This is especially true of the middle grades students as the high school improvement program, and its rigorous assessments, require more of our middle schools than ever before. With this in mind, the purpose of The Middle School Task Force was to examine and assess the state of middle schools in Baltimore County Public Schools and suggest structural and programmatic changes to improve middle school achievement.

The middle years refer to students from ages 11 through 14 in grades six through eight. In Baltimore County Public Schools, approximately 26,000 of the 108,000 students are middle grades students. Students in the middle grades are in early adolescence, the second greatest stage of human development, and have complex physical, emotional, and intellectual needs unique to their developmental stage.

Research on improving student achievement for middle level students supports:

Middle schools that are academically excellent emphasizing rigorous academic curricula aligned with state standards providing students with opportunities to apply knowledge to real-world problems.

Middle schools that are developmentally responsible, understanding, and accommodating the needs unique to the developmental changes of middle grades students.

Middle schools that are socially equitable implementing the characteristics of being both academically excellent and developmentally responsive.

The recommendations of this report provide a blueprint for improving education and achievement of Baltimore County's middle grades students. The recommendations are:

Recommendation I

All Baltimore County Middle Schools will have consistent vision, mission, and belief statements focused on providing challenging and engaging work for every child and aligned with *The Blueprint for Progress, No Child Left Behind Act 2001*, and *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Education Act* and *The Maryland Visionary Panel for Better Schools: Achievement Matters Most*.

Recommendation II

All Baltimore County Middle Schools will offer consistent and rigorous content strands/curricula aligned with the Maryland State Learning Outcomes, Learning Goals, and The Essential Curriculum inclusive of the Reading Screening, Special Education, and Guidance Program Proposals.

Recommendation III

Middle schools will have in place a schedule that allows students time to experience the minimum proposed content hours outlined in Recommendation II of this document. Four seven-period-day schedules are listed. The Task Force recommends that principals select from one of the four seven-period-day models or use them as models in creating new or modifying existing schedules. Schedule A and A2 allow students time to experience the recommended content hours.

Middle schools will schedule time (possibly in homeroom) twice per quarter to link all students with an in-school adult/teacher mentor/advisor to assist students and parents with monitoring student achievement and planning for future courses in middle school and into high school (CollegeEd).

Middle schools will schedule after-school and/or weekend extra help sessions, focused on improving students' skills and providing students with enrichment opportunities that will move them to higher levels of understanding and student mastery, and prepare students to enter into more rigorous challenging courses. Accelerated curricula taught by highly qualified teachers will increase student achievement.

Recommendation IV

All students will be taught by highly qualified teachers with emphasis on increasing each year the number of certified math teachers at the middle level. Initiatives are outlined by the Office of Mathematics.

Recommendation V

Baltimore County Middle Schools will implement CollegeEd in seventh grade infusing the 12 lessons in the content strands of family studies and technology education with a guidance support component. This program provides students and their families with early college awareness and a five-year educational plan.

Middle School Task Force

2002-2003

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focused on Quality;
Committed to Excellence



Baltimore County Public Schools

Middle Grades Matter

Our schools aim to provide all students with the knowledge and skills that spell success in the global, dynamic marketplace of the 21st century. The task is monumental – our society, our world, is in constant flux. To meet this challenge, educators must continually re-examine and refine their standards, goals, and methods.

Middle Grades Matter

Maryland schools must do more, beginning in the early grades and continuing through the middle and higher grades, to prepare our young people for the realities of the new century. This is an especially critical time for middle schools, as the high school improvement program, and its accompanying rigorous assessments, will demand more of our middle schools than ever.

Purpose

The Task Force will examine and assess the state of middle schools in Baltimore County Public Schools and suggest structural and programmatic changes to improve middle school achievement.

Task Force Members - 31

Middle School Principals

Curriculum Coordinators & Supervisors

Parents and Community Members

Teachers

Part A - Status of Baltimore County Public Middle Schools

- BCPS Middle School Data 1998-2002
 - CTBS
 - MFT and Writing
 - Attendance
- Parent and Teacher Surveys
- Middle School Programs

- Middle School Course of Study
- World Language & Reading Programs
- Southern Regional Education Board Research Brief (SREB) on Middle Grades to High

Middle School Data Indications

- Student performance discrepancies exist by Area, School, Ethnicity, Special Education, Poverty, and for English Language Learners in the areas of:
 - Math
 - Writing
 - Reading

Parent and Teacher Surveys Indications

Continued focus on:

- Academic Assistance
- Academic Rigor
- Career Choices
- Conflict Resolution/Social Skills
- Quality Staff

Middle School Course of Study Middle School Programs World Language/Reading Programs Indications

- Content and program discrepancies.
 - Some programs were infused into several content strands.
 - Some programs were not offered at all/not offered at all grade levels.
- Different middle school philosophies

Southern Regional Educational Board Research (SREB) on Middle Schools Indications

“We continue to place large numbers of students in lower-level courses where they have little or no chance of gaining the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.”

SREB/Recommendations

- Students must be challenged to perform at high levels.
- Students must be prepared before they enter ninth grade to meet these challenges.
- Students must be given the extra help and extra time they need to succeed.

The Middle School Task Force Recommendations (7) Categories (5)

- I. Vision, Mission, and Belief Statements
- II. Content Strands/Curricula
- III. School Schedules
- IV. Highly Qualified Teachers/Math Teachers
- V. CollegeEd

R Recommendation I Vision, Mission, Belief Statements

All Baltimore County Middle Schools will have consistent vision, mission, and belief statements focused on providing challenging and engaging work for every child and aligned with *The Blueprint for Progress, No Child Left Behind Act 2001*, and *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Education Act* and *The Maryland Visionary Panel for Better Schools: Achievement Matters Most*.

Alignment to the Blueprint for Progress: BCPS

Vision

Baltimore County Public Schools' graduates will have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to reach their potential as responsible, productive citizens in a global economy and multicultural society.

Mission

BCPS

The Baltimore County Public Schools' mission is to provide a quality education that develops the content knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable all students to reach their maximum potential as responsible, life-long learners and productive citizens.

Middle School Vision, Mission, and Belief Statements

Global Vision:

Baltimore County Public Middle Schools will provide a challenging and engaging academic program for every child. The middle schools will work in partnership with families and communities to prepare students to be good citizens and productive members of society.

Middle School Mission:

The mission of the middle school is to prepare each student with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for a successful learning experience in middle school and into high school.

Belief Statements:

- We believe all students will learn and achieve.
- We believe middle schools will challenge students to meet rigorous academic standards emphasizing real world connections and applications of content.

- We believe that teacher quality, preparedness, and continual professional development are critical to quality and engaging instruction.
- We believe middle schools will be academically excellent, responsive, and socially equitable, providing students with age appropriate supports.

- We believe in meaningful school-family connections promoting parent involvement in his/her child's education both at home and at school.

Alignment to the *Blueprint for Progress:*

Belief Statements

R Recommendation II Content Strands/Curricula Rigor/Relevance

All Baltimore County Middle Schools will offer consistent rigorous content strands/curricula aligned with the Maryland State Learning Outcomes, Learning Goals, and The Essential Curriculum inclusive of the Reading Screening, Special Education, and Guidance Program Proposals.

Definition of Rigor

Rigor and Relevance – Curriculum aligned with the Maryland Content Standards and Core Learning Goals, articulating a clear set of goals for student learning requiring application of knowledge to real-world situations. (COMAR).

*Alignment to the
Blueprint for Progress:*

Performance Goal 1

By 2007, all students will reach high standards, as established by the Baltimore County Public Schools and State proficiency levels in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Performance Goal 2

By 2007, all English Language Learners will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Performance Goal 5

All students will graduate from high school.

Summary of Content Strands - 13

All students will experience:

A rigorous and relevant core curriculum aligned with state standards.

English Language Arts Curriculum

Strand Five 45-minute periods at grades 6-8

An Enrichment Language Arts course for grade 8 and then grade 7 will be developed to prepare students for movement into more rigorous courses.

Enrichment

Programs and courses intended to supplement and add value to the regular academic curriculum increasing depth or variety of subject matter.

World Languages Curriculum Strand

Five 45-minute periods at grades 7/8
upon existing grade 6/7 reading

Reading Screening Program

Grade 6/7 exit from reading to world
language or continuation of reading

Social Studies Curriculum Strand

Five 45-minute periods at grades 6-8

Science Curriculum Strand

Life, physical, and earth sciences at grades 6-8 for 45 minutes per day

Mathematics Curriculum Strand

By grade 8 - prealgebra, algebra I, or algebra II with the availability of star math 6 and 7 for students in stanines 1 and 2 for 45 minutes per day

Special Education Program

Transition, support, and full participation programs

Physical Education Curriculum Strand

Four days of physical education at grades 6-8 for 35-45 minutes

Health Curriculum Strand

40-45 health lessons/hours in
grades 6-8 for 45 minutes each

Visual and Performing Arts (Dance, Theater, Visual Arts, Music)

Sequential year-long program of
study in grades 6-8

Technology Education Curriculum Strand

35 periods at grades 6-8/CollegeEd

Information & Computer Technology Curriculum Strand

Incorporated into technology
education at grades 6-8
(NCLB Requirement)

Family Studies Curriculum Strand

35 periods at grades 6-8/CollegeEd

Guidance and Counseling Program

Student experiences will include:

Grade 6

Orientation to grade six expectations
and behaviors that lead to school
success

Grade 7

Career exploration, CollegeEd, and development of a five-year plan of study

Grade 8

Transition to high school skills

Grades 6, 7 & 8

Registration and Special Programs based on student needs

“Students taking a core curriculum outperformed non-core takers on average.” (ACT Math and Science Research Brief).

R

Recommendation III School Schedules

- Middle Schools will have in place a schedule that allows students time to experience the minimum proposed content hours outlined in recommendation II of this document. Four seven-period day schedules are listed. The Task Force recommends that principals select from one of the four seven period-day models or use them as models in creating new or modifying existing schedules. Schedules A and A2 are most desirable.
- How to fit 13 content strands into 7 periods?

R

- Middle Schools will schedule time (possibly in homeroom and in small groups) twice per quarter to link all students with an in-school adult/teacher mentor/advisor to assist students and parents with monitoring student achievement and planning for future courses in middle school and into high school (CollegeEd).

R

- Middle Schools will schedule after-school and/or weekend extra help sessions focused on improving students' skills and providing students with enrichment opportunities that will move them to higher levels of understanding and student mastery and prepare students to enter into more rigorous challenging courses. Accelerated curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers will increase student achievement.

Alignment to the Blueprint for Progress:

Performance Goal 1

By 2007, all students will reach high standards as established by the Baltimore County Public Schools and State proficiency levels in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Performance Goal 3

By 2005-2006, all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.

Performance Goal 4

All students will be educated in school environments that are safe and conducive to learning.

Schedule A

7- period day

AB Weeks Semester

Semester 1 - A week

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
English	English	English	English	English
Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading/W.L.
Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
PE	PE	Health	PE	PE
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Music	Art	Music	TE	TE/FS
Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
SS	SS	SS	SS	SS

- Schedule A is a seven-period day, alternating A and B weeks, with five of the periods allotted to year-long courses (English reading/world language, social studies, science, and math) which meet every day.
- PE is a year-long course which meets four times a week. Health is a 40-hour course, which in this schedule, meets once a week for the year.

- The remaining period is shared by art, music, technology education, and family studies. Art and music are year-long courses which meet on alternate days and offer approximately 60 hours of instruction.
- Technology education and family studies are semester courses which meet twice a week and offer approximately 40 hours of instruction. In grade 7, CollegeEd (12 lessons) will be delivered through technology education and family studies.
- Schedule A2 - 75 hours for music and art
25-30 hours for tech. Ed./FS

7 period day**Schedule B****Shared Period****WEEK 1****Year-Long Schedule**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
English	English	English	English	English
Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading/WL
Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
PE	PE	*	PE	PE
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Music	Art	Health	TE	FS
Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
SS	SS	SS	SS	SS

Week 2, 3, and 4 SAME

- Schedule B is a seven-period day with six of the periods allotted to year-long courses (English, reading/world language, social studies, science math, and physical education).
- The remaining period is shared by art music, health, technology education, and family studies. Each class will meet approximately 36 times in a year. In a month, each class will meet 4 times.
- The open PE period could be utilized to supplement/enhance the minimum suggested hours in these content strands.

Quarter Schedule

Grade 6

7 period day

Schedule C

Quarter 1

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
English	English	English	English	English
Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
PE	PE	Music	PE	PE
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
TE	TE	TE	TE	TE-Art/Health/FS
Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
SS	SS	SS	SS	SS

CollegeEd in Family Studies & Technology Education in grade 7

- Schedule C is a quarterly rotation of the special areas of art health family studies, and technology education. Music is a year-long course for one day a week.
- Music and art are recommended to be year-long courses in the middle school.
- Special Areas meet for approximately 40 times per year.

R Recommendation IV Highly Qualified Teachers

All students will be taught by highly qualified teachers with emphasis on increasing each year the number of certified math teachers at the middle level.

Standards-based training will be offered for non-certified math teachers in grades 3-7

Training	June 23-July 2, 2003
Practicum	July 7-July 25, 2003
Follow-Up	2003-2004 school year

Alignment with the Blueprint for Progress:

Performance Goal 3

*By 2005-2006, all students will be
taught by highly qualified teachers.*

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Recommendation V CollegeEd

Baltimore County Middle Schools will implement CollegeEd in seventh grade infusing the 12 lessons in the content strands of family studies and technology education with a guidance support component. This program provides students and their families with early college awareness and a five-year educational plan.

Alignment with the Blueprint for Progress:

Performance Goal 5

All students will graduate from High School.

Alignment with the Blueprint for Progress:

Performance Goal 6

Engage parents/guardians, business, and community members in the educational process.

Alignment with the Blueprint for Progress:

Performance Goal 7

Involve principals, teachers, staff, stakeholders, and parents/guardians in the decision-making process.

Middle Level SREB
Recommended Actions Aligned
to Task Force
Recommendations (TFR)

Middle grades schools can:

- A. Change the mathematics curriculum so that all students complete either pre-algebra or **algebra I** successfully by the end of eighth grade;
- B. Expect all students to **read 25 books** or the equivalent across the curriculum;

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation II -
Content Strand/Math

Recommendation II - All
Content Strands/More
Rigor

Middle grades schools can:

- C. Identify students by grade seven who may have difficulty completing a **challenging curriculum** in grade nine, and take steps to increase their instructional time in reading English, and mathematics;
- D. Place struggling students in **accelerated curriculum** with the best teachers;

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation II -
Content Strand/Reading
Screening Process/Math

Recommendation III - School
Schedules

Middle grades schools can:

- E. Take steps to provide all middle grades students in grades seven and eight with **teachers** who have at least a minor (preferably a major) in the content area(s); and
- F. Work with students and families to educate them about which courses lead to greater achievement and success, and help students and their families develop a **five-year educational plan.**

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation IV -
Highly Qualified Teachers With
Emphasis On Math

Recommendation V –
CollegeEd

Recommendation III – School
Schedules/Mentors

Middle Level SREB Key Findings
Aligned to Task Force
Recommendations (TFR)

Key Findings

- A. Many students who expect to go to college are not taking the **necessary courses** in high school.
- B. Some schools enroll many more students in **college-preparatory courses** than others. The difference is not explained by differences in students or demographics.

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation V -
CollegeEd

Recommendation V –
CollegeEd

Key Findings

- C. Enrollment in more **demanding courses** does not result in more failures. In fact, the evidence suggests that challenging content results in lower failure rates. It appears that many students in all kinds of schools can handle more challenging intellectual assignments than schools are willing to give them.

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation I -
Vision, Mission, Belief
Statement

Recommendation II - Content
Strands

Recommendation III - School
Schedules

Key Findings

- D. Taking **algebra** or pre-algebra in the middle grades leads to enrollment in higher-level mathematics courses in high school and does not increase failure rates.

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation II - Content Strands

Recommendation V - CollegeEd

Key Findings

- E. Middle grades schools that successfully prepare students for college-preparatory courses in ninth grade **provide extra help and** link students with an **adult. Mentor.** Successful schools come in many sizes, and their students vary by ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation III -
School Schedules/.Adult
Mentors

Key Findings

- F. Teachers matter enormously; middle grades students who have **teachers as advisers** are more likely to have educational goals and plans for high school.
- G. There are **simple steps** that middle grades and high schools can take to make sure almost all students will be successful in college-preparatory courses.

Alignment to TFR

Recommendation III -
School Schedules/Adult
Mentors

Recommendation V - CollegeEd

Recommendations I, II, III,
IV, and V

Middle School Task Force Planning and Implementation Schedule

Categories & Recommendation	Planning	Implement- ation	Budget/Staffing
I. Vision, Mission, Belief Statements	2003-04 Alignment with existing school documents	2004-05	None
II. Content Strands Reading Screening Special Ed. Guidance Program	2003-04 Informational and planning meetings with curriculum, special education, and guidance staffs and principals.	2004-05	Possible reallocation of reading/world languages teachers. Budget request for reading acceleration programs TBD during 2003-04

Categories & Recommendation	Planning	Implementation	Budget/Staffing
III. School Schedules	2003-04 Selection/modification of school schedules to include the minimum proposed content hours.	2004-05	Possible reallocation of teachers in FS, TE, Music, Art, PE, and Health
Mentorship/Advisory	2003-04 Refocus/change advisory to include mentorships for the purpose of monitoring and advising parents and students on student achievement	2004-05	None – use existing staff to mentor students

Categories & Recommendation	Planning	Implement- tation	Budget/Staffing
After School And/Or Saturday Enrichment And Accelerated Programs	2003-04 Refocus exist- ing afterschool/ Saturday pro- grams to enrichment not remediation centers. Curri- culum coordi- nators will assist schools with selecting implementing, and writing programs/ curricula.	2004-05	None – use existing staff, school oprating budget, and grant funds

Categories & Recommendation	Planning	Implementation	Budget/Staffing
IV. Highly Qualified Teachers/.Math	2003-04 Training throughout the year provided by the offices of Elementary and Secondary Math.	2003-04 2004-05	Grants, operating budget, and collaborative efforts with colleges and universities.

Categories & Recommendation	Planning	Implementation	Budget/Staffing
V. CollegeEd College Readiness	February – June 2003 Pilot Program – 8 schools. August training 2003 for implementation in 2003-04	2003-04 Incorporated into family studies and technology education in grade 7	1 st year \$94,600 in student and teacher materials 2 nd year \$65,000 for student materials

The Middle School Recommendations are aligned with the current research (SREB), *The Blueprint for Progress*, parent, community, and teacher insights and curricular mandates and experiences that will prepare students for the world they will live in as adults. Every child will:

- Have rigorous, relevant academic programs.
- Be challenged to perform at high levels.
- Be prepared before they enter ninth grade with a five-year plan.
- Be given the extra help and extra time they need to succeed.

All Students can achieve!