MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Choice Study Update: A Year in Review and a Preview of Fiscal Year 2018

Purpose

To provide an update on the work Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has been engaged in to address the Study of Choice and Special Academic Programs and an overview of the planned blueprint for implementing improvements during the 2017–2018 school year.

Background

On March 8, 2016, Metis presented its report to the Board and provided detailed information about the methodology and engagement efforts. Staff was charged with addressing Metis’ key recommendation and immediately began engaging the community in conversation about the findings, the recommendations, and a collective vision of choice within MCPS predicated on equity of access and excellence in teaching and learning.

At the September 26, 2016, Board meeting, staff presented a blueprint for responding to the Choice Study including a timeline for addressing the myriad programs, policies, and structures identified by Metis’ findings (Attachment). The Board discussed the blueprint and prioritized in depth discussion during the 2016–2017 school year. The blueprint identified talent development and the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted, elementary world language programs, and Career and Technology Education (CTE) as the topics for discussion during the 2016–2017 school year. On October 10, 2016, and January 10, 2017, detailed discussions on these topics were held with the Board.

Executive Summary

Throughout this school year, staff has engaged in conversation with the community through community meetings at College Gardens, Maryvale, Oakland Terrace, and Rolling Terrace elementary schools as well as ongoing meetings with representatives from the Latino Student Achievement Action Group, the African American Student Achievement Action Group, the Asian Pacific Student Achievement Action Committee, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Parents Council, and the 1977-II Action Group. In addition to these forums, a Two-Way Immersion Implementation Team, designed to support the implementation of the two-way immersion program at both Brown Station and Washington Grove elementary schools, is a multistakeholder team that
includes, among others, representatives from each of the employee associations. As the Board determined the policy direction for Policy JEE, Student Transfers, much of the community conversation focused on those decisions, however, there was ongoing discussion about creating greater access to programs for students from all backgrounds and all regions of the county. Community members also expressed interest in developing opportunities for students at the secondary school level that leverage the changes proposed for the elementary school level.

As previewed at the September 26, 2016, Board meeting, a field test was conducted using a more proactive recruitment and selection process for the elementary school Center Programs for the Highly Gifted, planning and professional development are under way for Two-Way Immersion implementation, and ongoing work on extending CTE opportunities for all students continue.

Guiding Principles

Unsurprisingly, as a school system as large and diverse as MCPS undertakes system improvement efforts, there is a vast array of opinions, interests, and positions at play. The response to the Metis report has attempted to take the views of the various constituencies into account and develop action plans that improve MCPS’ ability to effectively and efficiently provide a panoply of rich educational opportunities to the greatest number of students. Using information gleaned from the numerous community conversations, the action plans were developed by building on the common themes that emerged across stakeholder groups. There was an almost universal expression of support for the concept that local schools, in every neighborhood, should be excellent and be able to meet the needs of a broad continuum of students, thereby increasing the possibility that most students could be served well in their home school. Although there is support for choice programs, there is a deeply held belief that every local school should represent a viable option.

The historical structure of choice programs in MCPS was predicated on a concept of scarcity, with limited numbers of seats that did not increase as system enrollment grew. As mentioned in the Metis report, seats in many of the most popular programs were limited and the demand far outpaces the supply, thereby creating a hypercompetitive race for those scarce seats. This hypercompetitive environment places undue pressure on students and stress on families. Therefore, in crafting the response to the Metis report and developing action plans, a conceptual framework that eschewed a scarcity model and prioritized the maximization of opportunity was utilized. This approach minimizes competition and places the emphasis on how to meet the needs of students.

Finally, the concept of ensuring equitable access guided the development of the action plans. Developing action plans that both create greater equitable access and provide a variety of possible paths to innovative programing is a priority. This requires carefully examining our selection processes and developing programing options for students with a variety of interests and strengths.

Talent Development

Essential to increasing opportunities for students throughout their MCPS career are intentional efforts to support the fostering of the talents of our youngest students. Efforts have continued to build opportunity for students in areas where they might not have access to enrichment beyond the school day. The talent development work in Title I schools is particularly important to increasing access
to selective programs for our students impacted by poverty. This year, Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) Summer Title I Enrichment Program will be held in 22 Title I Schools. The five-week program, designed to nurture critical and creative thinking skills through engaging, hands-on, rigorous instruction using the infrastructure of the ELO Summer Adventures in Learning program, will take place July 10 through August 11, 2017. Students will receive breakfast, lunch, and transportation to and from school at no cost. This summer will represent a significant increase in the number of students accessing this program.

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<th>Summer 2015</th>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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*Number does not include final number of school advocacies as of April 24, 2017.

In conjunction with summer efforts, MCPS has invested in building the capacity of our Title I schools to identify and nurture the talents of our youngest learners. To this end, The Division of Title I and Early Childhood Programs and Services (DTECPS) provided support for a Primary Talent Development Coach to every Title I school in order to implement the following:

- Implement the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) developed inquiry-based primary talent development modules to all kindergarten students enrolled in a Title I school.
- Coach kindergarten teachers on accessing enrichment opportunities presently in Curriculum 2.0 during individual and collaborative planning.
- Provide professional development and instructional resources related to the MSDE primary talent development modules, and align to the scope and sequence of Curriculum 2.0.
- Monitor student performance data gathered from the primary talent development program using a Readiness, Emergent, Progressing, and Independent Behavioral Continuum scale.

The Primary Talent Development coaches attend six professional development sessions throughout the school year coordinated by the Division of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction, Elementary Integrated Curriculum team, DTECPS, and the Equity Initiatives Unit.

Center Programs for the Highly Gifted

Metis found that “[t]here are significant racial and socioeconomic disparities in the enrollment and acceptance rates to academically selective programs, which suggest a need to revise the criteria and process used to select students for these programs to eliminate barriers to access for highly able students of all backgrounds.” This finding leads to the following two recommendations:

- “Recommendation 3a: Implement modifications to the selection process used for academically competitive programs in MCPS, comprising elementary centers for highly gifted students and secondary magnet programs, to focus these programs on selecting equitably from among those applicants that demonstrate a capacity to thrive in the program, that include use of non-cognitive criteria, group-specific norms that benchmark student performance against school peers with comparable backgrounds, and/or a process that offers automatic
admissions to the programs for students in the top 5-10% of sending elementary or middle schools in the district.”
● “Recommendation 3b: Invest resources to expand and enhance early talent development programs for students of underrepresented groups in order to bolster participation of a broader segment of the MCPS student population in academically selective programs.”

These recommendations were the subject of passionate public comment and there is a significant level of interest in the system’s response to these recommendations. At the October 10, 2016, Board meeting plans to address the Metis report were shared. The major components of the plan were strengthening local school programming, creating a more inclusive and equitable process, and expanding opportunity.

Supporting Local School Programming

In fall, the universal screening report was implemented. The screening report is designed to support elementary schools in their identification and monitoring of students in Grades 3 and 5 for enriched and accelerated instruction in the local school program. Each elementary school was provided with a report that identifies students who have demonstrated the potential to benefit from enriched and accelerated instruction.

This centralized process, coupled with the Student Instructional Program Planning and Implementation process, ensures that schools have more complete information to better determine who should be accessing local enriched programming.

This year, all elementary school principals received this information in mid-October, and in future years, they will receive it at the beginning of each academic year, and will include Grades 3–5. Schools are able to review the centrally generated information in conjunction with the local school data monitoring tools information when planning for enriched instruction.

Field Testing

In an effort to address the concerns raised in the Metis report and evaluate equitable recruitment and selection models, MCPS conducted a field test in the 39 schools that are a part of the catchment areas for the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted at Dr. Charles R. Drew and Fox Chapel elementary schools. The field test used a central review process to surface students building off community commentary about the difficulty some parents/guardians have experienced navigating the application process and the findings of other districts that focus on creating an “applicant pool” model using student data rather than direct parent/guardian interest. The data considered for surfacing included: Grade 3 Measures of Academic Progress-Reading, Measures of Academic Progress-Mathematics, reading level, and student services. Using the student’s services data contextualizes a student’s learning and the access and acquisition of instruction. A composite of the student’s performance data was prepared and students who had met an identified benchmark were included in the pool for consideration for placement in the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted. All of these students were reviewed for consideration, therefore relieving parents/guardians of the burden of submitting an application. Schools and parents/guardians were notified by a letter mailed to the home and families
will have the option to continue in the process, decline consideration for the process, or request to be considered for the process. Approximately 3,894 student records were reviewed, 1,524 students were identified to take the external assessment. An additional 200 families requested that their student be assessed and considered. Only 28 families opted out of the assessment.

This model removes the onus from parents/guardians to identify highly able potential and advocate for their student. The process is centralized and designed to identify potential Grade 3 students to be considered for the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted using current Grade 3 performance at the conclusion of semester one. It is not entry into the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted, rather it is entry into the pool for consideration. Students identified and whose parents/guardians did not opt out took an online assessment and completed an open-ended, non-scored student questionnaire in February 2017. This information, along with a students’ school assessment and report cards, was used in the selection process.

Additionally, grounded in the primary purpose of the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted, instructional need was considered. The Center Programs are designed for students whose needs could not easily be met in their home school because they lack a peer group. Therefore, whether or not students were outliers in their home school was a consideration. Schools with significant numbers of highly able students will receive support from staff in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs on programing for students who need enriched or accelerated instruction. All 39 schools in the field test will receive information about the programmatic needs of their students with additional support being given to schools that evidenced significant numbers of students who could benefit from enriched and accelerated instruction. This effort will strengthen and expand local schools’ capacity to meet the needs of the full continuum of learners in their buildings.

Lessons from the Field Test

- Proactively recruiting students yields a significantly larger pool of possible candidates.
- The larger pool of possible candidates is more diverse than the traditional pool.
- A more equitable process cannot compensate for lack of opportunities for enrichment and acceleration.

Expansion

Moving from a framework of scarcity to one where the focus is on meeting needs of students requires a reevaluation of how the Center Program curriculum is delivered. The need to provide additional seats combined with the resounding community sentiment to strengthen local school programing lead to the plan to expand access to the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted by creating additional seats. Currently, there are seven centers (eight sites). For school year 2017–2018, three additional center programs will be implemented—at Spark M. Matsunaga, Piney Branch, and Stonegate elementary schools—each with a class of 28 to serve identified home school students. Students offered a seat in the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted, for whom Spark M. Matsunaga, Piney Branch, and Stonegate elementary schools are their home schools, will attend the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted located in those schools, forming home school cohorts for Grades 4 and 5 students. Trend data indicate that Spark M. Matsunaga, Piney Branch, and Stonegate elementary
schools have had cohorts of academically highly able peers, creating a sufficient number for a class located in the school community. MCPS is committed to ensuring all students are considered for local enriched and accelerated programming and for the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted.

The 2017–2018 School Year Centers for Enriched Studies

Beginning July 1, 2017, the Center Programs for the Highly Gifted now will be called the Centers for Enriched Studies, labeling curriculum and not students. There will be both regional centers at Lucy V. Barnsley, Clearspring, Cold Spring, Dr. Charles R. Drew, Fox Chapel, Oak View, and Pine Crest elementary schools; and local centers at Spark M. Matsunaga, Piney Branch, and Stonegate elementary schools. Based on lessons learned from the field test, next year families will not have to apply to center programs, rather based on a review of their student’s data, students will be recommended to take an assessment and be considered. Parents/guardians will retain the option of requesting that their students be assessed and considered. This aspect of the field test was universally considered a significant upgrade.

Although preliminary work has begun to benchmark models at both the middle and high school levels, a field test model has not yet been finalized. It is anticipated that a field test will be conducted during the 2017–2018 school year selection process. Learnings from both the elementary school model and the middle school field test will determine any programmatic changes considered for the 2018–2019 school year, looking first at the middle schools and then at the high schools. Staff will continue to consult with experts and practitioners to identify best practices, effective models, and possible obstacles. This work will continue to build toward a coherent articulation model that supports students from elementary school through graduation.

Elementary Language Programs

Metis found that “[t]he district’s implementation of some provisions in the current Board Policy JEE, Student Transfers, does not fully align with MCPS’ goal to provide equitable access to choice and special academic programs.” They recommended that MCPS “[c]onsider revisions to Policy JEE, Student Transfers, to clarify that the sibling link for immersion and other choice programs is not automatic; while siblings of applicants should be able to attend the same school where the special academic program is located provided that there are available seats, those siblings should be required to participate in the application process, such as the lottery for immersion programs to earn a seat in the program.” After extensive public comment the Board revised Policy JEE, Student Transfers.

Metis also found that “[t]he overall demand for choice and special academic programs in MCPS exceeds the supply of seats in the programs,” and recommended that if MCPS expands seats, it should consider using additional models such as the Dual Language Model. This recommendation dovetails with work MCPS had begun by reviewing the sole dual language program within the school system located at Kemp Mill Elementary School. The work at Kemp Mill Elementary School with the Center for Applied Linguistics is informing the development of a long-term vision for language programing at the elementary school level.
Based on the work with the Two-Way Immersion program at Kemp Mill Elementary School, and research that identifies Two-Way Immersion as a proven way to close the opportunity gap for English Language Learners, two additional Two-Way Immersion sites will be opened in the 2017–2018 school year. Brown Station and Washington Grove elementary schools will begin converting to Spanish Two-Way Immersion schools with the entering kindergarten class. The program will expand a grade level yearly until both schools are full Two-Way Immersion schools.

The Two-Way Immersion model will be expanded to additional sites in the coming years. In addition to Spanish, the French Two-Way Immersion model is in the planning stages. Implementing the Two-Way Immersion model as a home school model requires engagement with school and local communities. It is a significant communications challenge to engage with parents/guardians of kindergarteners, many of whom have no contact with the school system until kindergarten orientation. In order to learn from the work of the leaders in this field, staff has met Two-Way Immersion leaders from the states of Delaware and Utah, both states with major investments in two-way immersion programming, as well as visiting neighboring jurisdictions, such as Fairfax County, Virginia, with long-standing programs. These meetings have built staff knowledge around the challenges of staff recruitment and retention.

The 2017–2018 School Year

Additional sites will be identified for expansion of the Two-Way Immersion model, including the identification of a site for the French Two-Way Immersion program. During the 2017–2018 school year, staff will continue reviewing and benchmarking existing programs in neighboring counties, considering effective ways to expand access and opportunity to world languages through traditional and innovative delivery systems. It is anticipated that a model or models will be ready for field testing in the 2018–2019 school year. In addition, staff will continue to explore the possibility of a world language K–8 campus.

CTE Interest Based Transfers

The Metis report recommended that “[t]o the extent that the district considers revisions to Policy JEE, Student Transfers, to alter the automatic articulation from middle school to high school within the cluster feeder pattern or consider approvals for programmatic requests, MCPS should analyze the impact on both school capacity and its efforts to promote diversity and avoid racial isolation.” In order to maintain the integrity of local schools, the current transfer process is primarily limited to hardship transfers. This recommendation calls upon MCPS to consider a possible role for programmatic requests. Staff has identified CTE as an area for exploration.

At the January 10, 2017, Board meeting, staff presented on the Career Readiness Improvement Plan. The components of the plan are:

1. Enlist the employer community as a lead partner in defining the pathways and skills most essential in today’s economy.
2. Set a higher bar for the quality of career preparation programs, enabling all students to earn a meaningful postsecondary degree or credential.
3. Make career readiness matter to schools and students by prioritizing it in accountability systems.
An essential part of the effort will be to conduct the external review of CTE programs of study. The review will provide the school system with the necessary insights and guidance to ensure our plan is on the right path and that our programs of study are sufficiently rigorous and truly meet the needs of students. The review was initiated in late January 2017 and will be completed during summer 2017. Once the review is completed and shared with the Board, an overall response plan will be created, and a model will be developed that clearly defines CTE’s role in MCPS’ choice continuum.

At the same time this model is developed, MCPS will continue efforts to improve the quality of CTE programs and be responsive to the needs of students and the local business community. The recommendations from external review will greatly help strengthen CTE programs across the county. Importantly, work will continue to increase student awareness of the robust offerings already in place and encouraging more students to complete CTE pathways.

**Conclusion**

Work is well under way to capitalize on the opportunity the Metis report afforded MCPS to take an in-depth look at how students are offered various programmatic opportunities and how processes and opportunities align with the system’s core values. The various strands emanating from the Metis report represent areas for experimentation and innovation. These efforts will be grounded in a framework that rejects the scarcity model and embraces the opportunity to explore an array of possible ways to meet the varied and complex needs of all students. The complexity and breadth of the undertaking requires a multiyear approach that accepts and understands transformative change is rarely neat and requires long-term commitment for long-term gain. This first year of MCPS’ response to the Metis report has yielded a number of important lessons that will inform the work of ensuring that programs, processes, and procedures are designed and implemented to ensure equitable access and excellence for all MCPS students.

JRS: MVN: lcw

Attachment
### CHOICE STUDY IMPLICATIONS—YEAR 1  2016–2017

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<td>Talent Development</td>
<td>Provided Title I schools with a part-time Primary Talent coach position</td>
<td>Targeted YSP recruitment</td>
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<td>Community Outreach</td>
<td>Update on the input of Primary Talent coaches</td>
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<td>Implemented second year of ELO STEP program Provided Title I schools with the option of staffing talent development position</td>
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<td>Program Flags</td>
<td>Principal memo outlining flagging protocol</td>
<td>Audit flagging in elementary programs</td>
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<td>Review results of the audits and determine upgrades for 2017–2018</td>
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<td>Drafted memos to schools outlining flagging process and expectations</td>
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<td>July Policy Committee meeting</td>
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### IMMERSION PROGRAMS
- Work for the 2016–2017 school year focuses on revisions to Policy JEE, Student Transfers, and the sibling link issue (outlining grandfathering options).
- Beginning in the 2017–2018 school year, staff will begin exploring programmatic implications of the Choice Study.

### INTEREST BASED TRANSFERS
- Work for the 2016–2017 school year focuses on revisions to Policy JEE, Student Transfers, and programmatic transfers and the long term planning for CTE.
- The I3 grant application is linked to the long term planning for CTE.

### CENTER PROGRAMS FOR HIGHLY GIFTED
- Work for the 2016–2017 school year focuses on the development of a long term plan creating greater access to the program and field testing the model.
- Beginning in the 2017–2018 school year, implementation of revised process, creating both greater access and expansion in the number of seats.

### PROGRAM FLAGS
- For the 2016–2017 school year work will focus on implementing and monitoring processes to ensure consistency.

### DUAL LANGUAGE
- Work for the 2016–2017 school year will focus on learning from the model at Kemp Mill Elementary School and considering expansion options.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS
- Work for the 2016–2017 will focus on revising Policy JEE, Student Transfers (outlining grandfathering options).
- Additional policies for future consideration include Policies ACD, Quality Integrated Education and IDA, Gifted and Talented Education.

### TALENT DEVELOPMENT
- Work for the 2016–2017 school year will focus on two main areas:
  - Increasing support in select Title I schools for primary talent development
  - Developing the structures and supports that allow more schools to access the Highly Gifted curriculum
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<tr>
<td>Immersion Programs</td>
<td>Implementation team meetings</td>
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<td>Complete language standards by grade level</td>
<td>Complete Immersion Program Guidelines</td>
<td>Begin targeted professional development and training</td>
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<td>• Students register for courses and programs of study • Students and families complete applications and COSA Forms • Perkins grant developed to include Upcounty and Countywide regions</td>
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<td>Consulted with experts, identified to reflect on pilot results</td>
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<td>Secondary Magnets: High School</td>
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<td>Explore Pre-K–5 Language Programs</td>
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<td>Research programs</td>
<td>Site visit—observe program in Howard Co.</td>
<td>Select 1-2 pilot schools</td>
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<td>Work with the Board Policy Committee to develop annual work plan</td>
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**YEAR 3 and beyond 2019—** • Consortia • Secondary Language Pathways