

FY 2008 QUESTION NUMBER: 35

QUESTION:

Provide data on the impact of 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies, algebra lead teachers, and literacy coaches on student performance.

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: NA

ANSWER:

9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ACADEMIES

Ninth grade academies were developed and implemented in conjunction with Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grants in eight MCPS high schools to support student transition from middle school and to facilitate academic success in high school.<sup>1</sup> These academies have included a combination of various strategies across the schools, e.g., student-teacher teams, the *Connections* course, advisories, mentors, and algebra and literacy supports for selected students. While MCPS has not conducted a study of the impact of 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies on student performance, relevant data have been collected as part of evaluations of the SLC grants awarded to six of eight schools—four Downcounty Consortium high schools (Blair, Einstein, Kennedy and Wheaton) from 2002-03 through 2004-05, and Gaithersburg and Seneca Valley High Schools from 2003-04 through 2005-06.<sup>2</sup> Within the scope of both SLC grant evaluations, student performance was monitored on two indicators that should reflect the impact of 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies: freshman eligibility rates and AP/Honors course enrollment. While trends in these indicators cannot be directly attributed to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies, these trends are still worth noting as we consider these academies and would perhaps benefit from further study. All six SLC high schools have thus far experienced slight upward trends in eligibility rates among first-time 9<sup>th</sup> graders from 2005-06 to 2006-07. In addition, five of these six schools have seen positive trends in the percentage of students enrolled in at least one honors or AP course from 2002-03 to 2005-06 (ranging from 2.1 to 12.2 percentage points, compared to 4.9 percentage point increase countywide).

ALGEBRA LEAD TEACHERS

Algebra lead teacher positions were created in several high school clusters to support student success in algebra, with a focus on Math C in middle school and additional algebra supports for students who need them in 9th grade. While MCPS has not conducted a study of the impact of algebra lead teachers on student performance, the school system does monitor indicators that reflect student success in algebra, including passing rates on the algebra HSA and algebra completion by Grade 9. While trends in these indicators cannot be directly attributed to the algebra lead teacher positions, these trends are still important as we consider these positions and suggest further study. For example, six SLC high schools were served by an algebra lead

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<sup>1</sup> Some other MCPS high schools also have implemented some form of 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies.

<sup>2</sup> SLC grants were also awarded to Blake and Paint Branch High Schools in July 2005. The grant evaluation recently got underway in November 2006.

teacher for the last 3-4 years,<sup>3</sup> and experienced increases in the percentage of students passing the algebra HSA, especially from 2005 to 2006 (ranging from 19 to 41 percentage points, compared to a countrywide increase of 11 percentage points). Three of the six SLC schools have also seen an increase in the percentage of students successfully completing algebra or a higher level math by the end of Grade 9 since 2000-01 (the baseline year for such data).

## LITERACY COACHES

The high school literacy coach program is new for FY 2007. The goal of the high school literacy coach program is to raise the literacy skills and knowledge of teachers, therefore increasing student achievement. The program has only been in existence since July 2006 and therefore there is no data that would indicate the impact of literacy coaches on student performance. An evaluation component of the program is planned.

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<sup>3</sup> Algebra lead teachers have also been assigned to a few other high school clusters in recent years.