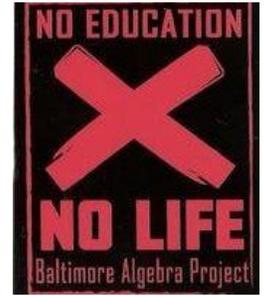


BMORE

Baltimore Movement of
Rank-and-File Educators



Written Curriculum Statement Submitted to the BCPSS Office of Teaching and Learning, Johns Hopkins, and The New Teacher Project

From: BMORE & BAP

Good afternoon,

Thank you for providing space and time for us to be a part of this important process. Many educators around the city were excited to learn of the values guiding the BCPSS Blueprint. Coupling student wholeness with literacy and leadership has the potential to create citizens who are prepared to lead healthy and productive lives. We are extremely eager to partner with the district to audit and revise curriculum. We have similar goals - the district has expressed a desire to see high quality Ethnic Studies and Black History and we similarly feel that this curriculum content is of critical importance. We also share with you a desire to engage teachers, students, and families in this process.

We have several concerns about the current literacy curriculum.

- a. First, in our current curriculum, there are quite frankly too few narratives of African American life that adequately prepare our students to understand their place in the world and in history. All students suffer when an incomplete history or worldview is presented to them. This is not a new concern being brought to this group, and is in fact, this is part of the reason why this process was undertaken.
- b. Secondly: Currently, literacy educators must try to fulfill many different roles without adequate time and resources for each one. Currently the district demands results on writing and grammar/usage/mechanics of Standard American English, as opposed to African American Vernacular English. However, the curriculum lacks the allotted time and resources to teach this to students. This content and the time to teach it need to actually be embedded within the curriculum. If writing is a priority, it needs to be implemented with consistency, coherence and vertical alignment.
- c. Finally: Content is important, but we are also concerned about the pedagogy and training that goes with it. Currently many of the books in our curriculum feature African American or otherwise multicultural themes, but teachers are not given any training on how to appropriately and meaningfully teach content that addresses identity or difference. This audit should consider pedagogy as well as content.

While we have concerns about the current curriculum, we also have concerns about the process of the audit.

- The district has not communicated a clear explanation of what the entire audit process looks like from beginning to end. Specifically, we would like to know when and where students and teachers can give feedback and recommendations. We also want to know which people and teams will be issuing recommendations, and who they are accountable to. Finally, we are wondering where there is space for teachers, students and families to participate in the eventual revisions of curriculum.
- As a group of educators and students who are passionately engaged on this topic, and we had difficulty getting information about this meeting. Can you please explain how you will communicate and publicize meetings? For those who cannot attend, how will you report to the wider community what happened at the meetings and who attended?
- Culture and race are currently missing from topics to be discussed during this literacy review. Without explicitly mentioning these topics, there is a great danger for them to be omitted or not given sufficient time and thoughtfulness.
- Focus groups are not the best way to revise and craft policy. Different people come each time, which means that the conversations don't always build to a consensus of commonly shared ideas that represent all voices accurately. Moreover, in focus groups, people are only giving feedback on policies, not helping to craft them. An initiative is more likely to be accepted and successful with meaningful stakeholder input and a focus group only gathers opinions at a shallow level. Feedback is insufficient if parents/teachers/students aren't also at the table where decisions are made. We need longer term task forces that are open to the public for deeper dives into the issues, and build education and capacity for the public.
- We have concerns about how these auditors were chosen. Both Johns Hopkins (as an entire institution) and alternative teacher certification programs like TNTP have a poor historical track record that includes outright harm and destabilization of the Black community in Baltimore. Why then, are they being chosen to evaluate and audit the curriculum? What expertise and experience do they bring when it comes to cultural competency?

Out of our concerns arise several demands:

- First we ask that the district undertake this process with a dedicated task force of stakeholders from multiple constituencies, but critically with teachers and students. Do not use focus groups to do this work.
- We ask that you begin with the goal of a definition of ethnic studies specifically for Baltimore City Schools, generated by Baltimoreans
- We ask that you create a iterative and continual process of yearly feedback, review, and revision with student and teacher input at all steps
- We ask that the task force be educated by finance and budgeting officials, and be given the power to make not just instructional, but funding recommendations. In order for this initiative to live up to its potential, the resources that this type of curriculum requires must be fully funded. These resources include materials, teacher time, and new technology that is dedicated to instruction, not testing
- We ask that curriculum content relate to Black empowerment, not just narratives of oppression & include local Maryland and Baltimore history.
- We ask that curriculum include applied courses geared to 21st century life skills, ex: entrepreneurship as applied math, computer science as applied technology, etc.
- We ask that curriculum include community resources and experiences that take place outside of the traditional classroom.
- We ask that the classroom be reimaged as a space where students experience authentic, hands on practice in civic engagement
- We ask that courses that claim to prepare students for college undergo more rigorous oversight through peer review and support.

- We ask that narratives of Black history begin before 1600 and are given substantially more attention. We ask that health, nutrition, and agriculture be integrated into the curriculum.
- We ask for a curriculum that combats the white supremacy that is in the air we breathe and the water we drink. We need a curriculum that addresses self-Image and affirm the identity of students

The educators and students here today care deeply about how the young people of Baltimore City are developed. We are excited at the opportunity to be a part of this process, because there is enormous potential here to reimagine how and what our students are taught. We are energetic partners with the district who will not give up and will not tire. The liberation of African Americans is an ongoing struggle. Our liberation depends on all students all students (not just black students) getting an education that challenges and changes the structures of systemic racism.