

## WLCSC High Ability Program Plan

### **I. Program Philosophy**

#### High Ability Program Goals

- Implement an unbiased identification process based upon specific criteria using reliable and valid qualitative and quantitative testing measures
- Create a variety of program options to provide advanced content and differentiated instruction specifically designed to help high ability students achieve maximum student growth
- Provide professional development for educators so they can learn to recognize the characteristics of giftedness and how to meet the unique needs of high ability students
- Inform parents about the high ability program and provide resources for parenting a gifted child
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the high ability program based upon student achievement on an annual basis

#### Definition of Giftedness

The Indiana Department of Education requires school districts to identify high ability students, K-12, and provide them with appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction. The state defines a high ability (gifted) student as one who "performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests.". WLCSC identifies students as high ability in one of the following areas: General Intellectual; Math Only; or Language Arts Only.

#### Program Overview

WLCSC recognizes that we have many high-achieving students in addition to those who meet nationally-recognized criteria for giftedness. Overall, WLCSC students outperform their peers nationally and at the state level. Our students' median scores on a national achievement test (NWEA) are typically well above the national norm. WLCSC student test scores on the ILEARN and SAT/ACT achievement tests of state standards regularly rank us among the top-performing districts in the state. The typical expectations and instructional levels in a WLCSC classroom are already high, and our curriculum is already both enriched and moving at an accelerated pace with differentiation for those above and below grade-level standards.

Our philosophy in WLCSC is to use formative assessment thoughtfully to match appropriately-challenging curriculum and experiences to every child, consistent with his or her abilities and leading to maximum growth. If that should ultimately lead to a high ability designation for a child, that is only one of many avenues to ensuring continuous progress and challenge. We have many others, including using technology as a resource for presenting advanced content grouping for instruction within classrooms, differentiation, additional enrichment projects and resources, leveled and guided reading groups, curriculum compacting, independent learning, student-driven inquiry on projects of choice/interest, and differentiation to meet needs involving other school professionals, adjustment of pace or materials, etc. It is not uncommon for parents to envision that the only way to meet a child's needs is through testing and special placement. In fact, we meet the needs of highly-able students in WLCSC in many different ways as unique as each child who comes to us on a daily basis. In order to meet the needs of those students whose performance is consistent with nationally-recognized criteria for giftedness, we must provide them with advanced experiences beyond grade level curriculum—through acceleration and/or enrichment of the curriculum. We also must provide them with opportunities to interact with their intellectual peers.

In general, a gifted (or high ability) student in WLCSC has received an ability score (commonly called an intelligence score) which is two standard deviations or more above the mean and scores at or above the 96th percentile on NWEA math and/or language arts. Other factors, such as teacher observation, parent observation, and student performance levels are considered during the identification process. The process of identifying students is multi-faceted and takes into account multiple measures. An identification team (experienced teachers, administrators, high ability licensed educators, etc.) considers all factors in a student's profile before making a determination of placement. All students in grades K-7 are eligible yearly for consideration in the process. Students who are identified do not need to re-qualify from year to year unless concerns about performance or best fit arise. Procedures to exit students from the program involve parents, teachers, and school counselors in making the best decision to meet each child's needs.

## **II. Multifaceted Identification**

### Quantitative Measures

- The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT®), the most widely used and trusted intellectual abilities test, measures abilities across the symbol systems that are most highly correlated with fluid reasoning and problem solving. The test uses separate measures of verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal reasoning to provide

multiple perspectives on student ability. The high ability committee uses the 95th percentile as one indicator that a student needs advanced curriculum and/or instruction.

- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) is administered to students in grades KG-6. The NWEA assessments help to determine how a child is performing on state standards and as compared to peers. The test is adjusted to the student's present level automatically and contains a full bank of questions ranging through high school level. Thus, it is a better measure of achievement for high ability students than a grade-level test such as ILEARN. Percentile scores on the NWEA test indicate a child's instructional achievement level in Reading and Math. If a child scores in the 50th percentile, that means that his or her scores are equal to or surpass 50% of all other children in the same grade nationwide taking the test. The 50th percentile is considered average. The committee uses 95th percentile on MAP and 98th percentile on Primary MAP as one indicator that a student needs advanced curriculum and/or instruction. Please remember that having only one indicator does not qualify a child for identification.
- Since assessment scores change so much during elementary years, we consider achievement, ability scores, and teacher observations when making placement recommendations.

### Timeline

- WLCSC identifies students for advanced curriculum in math and/or language arts. In KG, Grade 2, and Grade 5, all students are administered the CoGAT test and NWEA. It is recommended that high ability screening occurs prior to transition years and HEA 1001 requires testing to be administered to students in these grade levels, which is why these particular grade levels are identified for universal screening. We use both qualitative (characteristics) and quantitative measures (test scores) in high ability identification.
- An identification committee, rather than a single person or teacher, makes placement decisions based on a students' needs. The identification committee is made up of administrators and teachers, including teachers with High Ability endorsements.
- The identification process typically takes place during the winter of each school year and takes place over several months' time. Official identification is made in the spring.

### **III. Curriculum and Instructional Strategies**

Students who are identified as high ability are provided with service options including the following:

- **Between Class Ability Grouping by Subject Area** - Depending on the K-6 grade level, this option is built into the schedule at regular intervals with students being grouped at their instructional level with other identified high ability learners in the same group. This is not a self-contained classroom, but instead is a subject-based grouping of students for short periods during the day that provides opportunities for high ability learners from different classrooms to interact with one another while also providing the valuable cross-ability groupings that stimulate high-level critical thinking skills for all learners within the regular classroom.
- **Cluster Grouping** - Students are ability grouped to provide a narrowed range of instruction in the class, and all classes have a group of average learners. For example, one class may have high ability students and a group of average learners. Other classes have some above average students, an average group, and some below average students. Class placement is evaluated annually at the building level with this high ability cluster grouping as one determination of placement for all students.
- **Differentiation in General Education Classrooms** - Teachers use modified HA curriculum and instruction according to content, pacing, and/or product to meet the unique needs of students in the classroom. Levels of depth and complexity are differentiated through carefully planned, coordinated learning experiences that extend the core curriculum, combine the curricular strategies of enrichment and acceleration, and integrate instructional strategies that engage learners at appropriate levels of challenge.
- **Honors** - For grades 7-12 depending on subject area, these higher level classes proceed at a faster pace and cover more material than regular classes.
- **Advanced Placement** - For grades 9-12 depending on the subject area, AP courses are offered that meet criteria established by institutions of higher education and audited by the College Board AP Program. College credit may be earned by obtaining a score of three or higher on an AP exam in specific content areas.
- **Dual Credit** - For grades 9-12 depending on the subject area, students dually enroll in a college course, often for college credit. This allows access to additional academic and technical courses than what is provided at the local level.

Curriculum for high ability is integrated into these groups and classes, and meets the standards for high quality instructional material that is expected in the WLCSC. The standards listed below are found throughout the general education curriculum given the high standards our district holds for students and teachers.

#### High Ability Standards

- Academic content is accelerated and enriched.
- Lessons are written at levels of complexity appropriate for students with higher instructional needs, frequently beyond the enrolled grade level.
- Instruction is focused on the development of critical and creative thinking.
- Collaboration and communication skills are developed through daily group work.

- Students are given opportunities to pursue individual areas of choice.
- Pre-assessment of prior knowledge is vital for the purposes of planning for differentiation of instruction as well as determining growth over time.
- Conceptual focus and interdisciplinary connections are incorporated.
- Metacognitive skills are enhanced through peer and self-evaluation and the use of rubrics.

#### **IV. Social-Emotional Learning**

Each child, regardless of ability, has their own personality characteristics that lead to certain social and emotional needs as well as needs that arise because of the situation or environment in which they live. Children with high abilities may have additional affective needs resulting from their increased capacity to think beyond their years, greater intensity in response, combinations of unique interests, personality characteristics, and conflicts that are different from those of their age mates.

Physical, cognitive, and emotional development may also be at different levels within the same child that may present a number of problems for the child with exceptional abilities. Adults, accustomed to advanced verbal reasoning from the child, may fail to understand emotional outbursts more typical of their chronological age. In general, the greater the level of ability, the greater the potential for discrepancies.

High ability students may place unrealistically high standards for performance on themselves which may result in anxiety, frustration, or self-blame for less-than-perfect performance. Often they:

- Feel as though others (parents or teachers) have unrealistically high expectations. This may result in fear of failure, avoidance of challenges, depression, and connection of self-worth to performance.
- Develop unrealistically high standards for the performance of others. High ability students may experience difficulty constructing their identities, which may lead to lowered self-esteem. Difficulty with identity development may result from any of the following:
  - Lack of understanding of higher abilities and their implications
  - Feeling different from one's same-age peers
  - Behaviors inconsistent with gender role expectations (e.g., sensitivity in gifted boys, assertiveness in gifted girls)
  - Being identified as twice-exceptional (learning disabled as well as having high abilities)
  - Differences resulting from cultural, linguistic, or SES differences.

WLCSC Counselors and Administrators participate in training to understand and meet the needs of all students. They are also equipped with a variety of resources to help students and parents navigate the educational experience.

Additional Resources Available:

- The IDOE High Ability website has a variety of resources for [social emotional learning](#) as well as resources for [additional learning](#) outside of the classroom.
- The Indiana Association for the Gifted provides resources for high ability coordinators and parents and teachers of high ability students. Visit [www.iag-online.org](http://www.iag-online.org).
- The organization SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted) has resources for addressing the social and emotional needs of high ability students. Visit [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org).

## V. Professional Development Plan

WLCSC provides professional development corporation-wide annually based on the needs of our staff and an evaluation of district-level needs. Additionally, resources and professional development at each building is determined by the school's administrators. Professional development resources and opportunities are listed below for each group of high ability stakeholders:

- **All Teachers/Administrators assisting with assessment** - All teachers and administrators who assist with identification assessments (NWEA, CoGAT, etc.) are provided with training as recommended by these organizations.
- **New teachers (1st or 2nd year)** - Individual training at the building level includes an overview of the district's high ability plan and information/resources from the high ability committee.
- **Teachers without a High Ability endorsement** - Each year, the high ability committee provides resources for high ability curriculum, instructional strategies, and social emotional learning regularly to any teacher without a high ability endorsement.
- **AP and Honors Teachers** - Teachers receive AP training and support as recommended for these programs.
- **School Counselors** - School counselors participate in individual professional development through state and local organizations related to social emotional learning, including for high ability students. School counselors also arrange for social emotional learning resources to be distributed regularly to all teachers.
- **Parents** - Parents are notified annually of high ability identification, including links to resources for enrichment, social-emotional learning, etc.

## VI. Systematic Program Evaluation

The high ability committee conducts a self-study annually and presents the findings of that study to the administrative team. Each annual review will include an evaluation of the program alignment to the [IDOE Checklist of High Ability Program Elements](#). In addition, the program evaluation will review each aspect of this High Ability program plan. Program elements will be compared to best practices for overall program effectiveness.

In addition, the high ability committee will provide data analysis to the administrative team including the following:

- PSAT performance of identified students
- AP participation and performance of identified students
- CoGAT assessment results
- NWEA growth of identified students in the area of identification
- ILEARN growth of identified students in the area of identification
- Summaries of interviews with key stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, building administrators, counselors

The committee will analyze data, summarize strengths and areas of concern as well as brainstorming possibly steps for improvement. Recommendations for changes to the program and/or this plan will be presented to the administrative team.

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