

Criteria For Excellence: Gifted and Talented Education Program Guidelines

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I. FOREWORD

All students in Maryland's schools must be provided educational opportunities appropriate to their individual abilities which will enable them to reach their maximum potential. Gifted and talented students are one group which has unique abilities and needs. Gifted and talented students are found in youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (Maryland Annotated Code, §8-202). This publication is designed to help educators develop appropriate programs and services to meet these students' needs and to challenge their unique abilities.

The original *Criteria for Excellence: Gifted and Talented Program Guidelines (1983)* was developed as a collaborative effort by the staff of the Maryland State Department of Education and personnel having responsibilities for gifted and talented programs and services in the local school systems. This document was updated in 2015.

It is hoped that educators in Maryland will find this document of value in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and services for gifted and talented students.

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II. INTRODUCTION

The Maryland State Department of Education recognizes the importance of providing all children and youth an educational program which provides all children and youth with opportunities to develop their abilities to the maximum. Gifted and talented students, like other special groups in the school population, possess unique abilities, interests, and needs which can be addressed only through differentiating the regular curriculum and designing specialized programs and services.

This publication sets forth the criteria for excellence in programs and services for gifted and talented students. Six major program components have been addressed:

1. Identification of Students
2. Instructional Program
3. Professionally Qualified Teachers
4. Professional Learning
5. Program Management
6. Evaluation

The criteria which establish optimal practices are listed for each program component. They define "what should be" in excellent programs and services for gifted and talented students. The criteria provide direction to school systems and individual schools as they plan, develop, and implement new programs and services. They are also intended as a tool for schools to use in assessing and improving their current offerings.

The Annotated Code of Maryland §8-201 defines a gifted and talented student as "an elementary or secondary student who is identified by professionally qualified individuals as having outstanding talent and performing, or showing the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with other students of a similar age, experience or environment." A gifted and talented student is one who

- Exhibits high performance capability in intellectual, creative, or artistic areas;
- Possesses an unusual leadership capacity; or
- Excels in specific academic fields.

A gifted and talented student needs different services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to develop the student's potential (Annotated Code of Maryland §8-202). By virtue of this definition, Maryland subscribes to the multidimensionality of giftedness, seeking to develop programs and services that serve students who are intellectually gifted or excel in specific academic fields and also those students who excel in creativity, the arts, or leadership.

The goal of gifted education in Maryland is to identify and serve gifted and talented students in youth "from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (§8-202)." While the number of gifted and talented students who need a differentiated program will vary, they exist in every school setting.

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III. CRITERIA

1.0 Identification of Students

An identification process should ensure that all gifted and talented students are recognized so they can be appropriately served. It is important that the process identify students performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment as well as those who are showing the potential for performing at remarkably high levels when compared with other students of a similar age, experience, or environment (§ 8 – 201). Appropriate procedures and criteria for giftedness should be developed for each of the various areas: general intellectual capability, creative, or artistic areas; unusual leadership capacity, and specific academic fields. Information about a student’s specific abilities and program needs obtained through the identification process should serve as a basis for planning the student’s instructional program. In this way, the identification process is an integral part of the overall instructional program and should enhance the responsiveness of the school to the needs of all students.

1.1 The Process of Identification

The process of identifying students with demonstrated or potential giftedness includes:

- 1.1.1** A broad-based screening of the total school population to ensure that all potentially gifted and talented students have an opportunity to be considered;
- 1.1.2** An in-depth assessment of those students meeting the initial screening criteria to gather additional information concerning their specific aptitudes and educational needs; and
- 1.1.3** Provision of appropriate programs and services.

1.2 The identification procedures and criteria are clearly stated and consistently implemented throughout the school system and annually reported to all stakeholders.

1.3 Identification procedures and criteria are specific to the different areas of giftedness being assessed and are directly related to the specific programs and services which are provided.

1.4 A school-based committee consisting of teachers, the principal or assistant principal, and other professional staff members collect and analyze data, maintain appropriate records, and make professional decisions about appropriate programs and services for students.

1.5 The identification process uses multiple indicators of giftedness with information obtained through a balance of valid and reliable qualitative and quantitative assessment methods from a variety of sources.

1.5.1 Procedures for obtaining information about students include quantitative or objective assessment methods such as verbal and nonverbal tests of general intellectual ability, achievement, specific aptitudes, and creativity.

1.5.2 Procedures for obtaining information about students include qualitative or subjective assessment methods such as nominations, observations, student product evaluations, auditions, checklists or rating scales, biographical data, and interviews.

1.5.3 Information about students is obtained from multiple sources who have first-hand knowledge of the student’s performance or potential including teachers, counselors, peers, parents, community members, subject area experts, and the students themselves.

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1.5.4 Instruments and procedures used in the identification process are as non-biased as possible with respect to race, cultural, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, religion, national origin, gender, or handicapping condition.

1.6 Decisions regarding placement in gifted and talented education programs and services are based upon multiple criteria. A single criterion (i.e. test score or other measurement, teacher recommendation, or nomination) should not determine these decisions. Students should be recommended for programs and services based on demonstrated performance or potential.

1.7 Identification of gifted and talented students is an on-going process extending from school entry through grade 12.

1.7.1 Opportunities are provided for students to be considered for gifted and talented education programs and services throughout their school experience.

1.7.2 The progress of students receiving gifted and talented education programs and services is assessed annually and services are reviewed for appropriateness.

1.8 Implementation of the identification process includes training for school staff in characteristics of gifted and talented students including underserved populations, the identification procedures and criteria, and the instruments and techniques used to identify gifted and talented students.

1.9 Gifted and talented student identification and participation data are collected systemically and disaggregated by subgroup in order to assess the extent to which there is equitable representation.

2.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction must challenge the advanced academic needs of gifted and talented students. The regular instructional program must be differentiated to meet the unique learning styles, learning rates, interests, abilities, and needs of gifted and talented students. The differentiated instructional program includes both elements that are different from and elements that are similar to those in the regular program for their chronological peers. While some aspects of the regular curriculum can be adapted, others will need to be added which may be unique to the gifted and talented students.

Appropriate programs and services for gifted and talented students reflect the differentiation of content (what is taught and when it is taught- sequence and pacing), instructional strategies (how content is taught), products (opportunities to demonstrate and apply learning) and the learning environment (the context in which learning occurs).

CONTENT

2.1 The instructional program provides opportunities for gifted and talented students to demonstrate proficiency in the concepts and skills of the regular curriculum.

2.1.1 A pre-assessment is made to determine what students already know, and provisions are made for rapid, efficient learning of concepts and skills not yet acquired.

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2.1.2 Extended learning experiences are provided for more in-depth examination of topics present in the regular curriculum and the examination of topics related to, but not included in, the regular curriculum.

2.2 Content of the curriculum focuses on the major concepts and processes central to the given discipline.

2.3 Greater emphasis is placed on development and application of creative and critical thinking skills.

2.4 Curriculum content includes interdisciplinary studies requiring the integration of both concepts and methodology from different disciplines.

2.5 Opportunities are provided for the acquisition of a broad base of knowledge through a study of a wide range of subjects.

2.6 A wide variety of appropriate resources are used, including primary sources, specialized reference materials, technology, and experts in the field.

2.7 A variety of acceleration opportunities are available, including early entrance to school, subject acceleration, grade acceleration, and dual enrollment in college.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

2.8 Instructional strategies for gifted and talented students provide greater learner involvement in educational decision making. These include:

- Choice of materials, activities, and/or content;
- Development of criteria for self-assessment;
- Self-evaluation of products and processes;
- Provision of diverse opportunities to create and invent in areas of individual interest;
- Choice of strategies and modalities to approach content; and
- Choice of outcomes and /or forms of products.

2.9 Instructional strategies for gifted and talented students are selected to promote an earlier development of the individual student as an independent learner. These include involving the student in:

- Methodology for primary and secondary research;
- Problem solving;
- The use of predetermined evaluation criteria by student and teacher;
- The use of productivity expectations in the assignment of tasks; and
- The creation of original products that demonstrate and apply understanding at an advanced level.

2.10 Instructional strategies for gifted and talented students are selected to elicit the students' use of higher level critical and creative thinking skills at an earlier age and in greater depth.

These strategies include involving the student in:

- Convergent and divergent production;
- Questioning strategies which focus on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation;

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- Problem seeking as well as problem solving;
- Predicting, hypothesizing, collecting and verifying data, and forming supportable conclusions; and
- Complex and abstract reasoning.

2.11 Instructional strategies for gifted and talented students require the teacher to become a facilitator of learning and a manager of resources. Teachers should:

- Provide a structure in which students are active participants;
- Use a balance of expository and inquiry approaches;
- Demonstrate a continuing development of their own knowledge base;
- Provide a climate which encourages creativity and appropriate intellectual risk taking.
- Employ and allow students to employ technology as appropriate.

2.12 Instructional strategies selected promote gifted and talented students' in-depth understanding of self and society. These include:

- Analyzing the self as an individual and as a member of a group;
- Learning how to work constructively and cooperatively with others;
- Learning how to modify personal and group behavior; and
- Learning how to make productive contributions to society.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

2.13 A variety of instructional groupings based upon individual program components and their objectives, number and needs of gifted and talented students, and available resources are used to facilitate differentiated instruction. Appropriate groupings may include:

- Homogeneous grouping of identified gifted and talented students for a specific content area;
- Flexible homogeneous grouping based on pre-assessment;
- Homogeneous cluster grouping within heterogeneous classes;
- Cross grade-level grouping; and
- Independent study.

2.14 Various administrative arrangements are used to promote interaction among gifted and talented students and their chronological peers as well as among their intellectual or artistic/creative peers.

2.15 Resources beyond the school setting are used to provide appropriate educational experiences for gifted and talented students. These educational experiences may include collaboration with:

- Community agencies;
- Cultural institutions;
- Businesses;
- Colleges and universities; and
- Experts in various fields.

Appropriate services for gifted and talented students may include:

- Mentorships;
- Community service;

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- Summer learning experiences;
- Internships;
- On-line courses; and
- Dual enrollment at a local college.

3.0 Professionally Qualified Teachers

3.1 A process to ensure the selection of professionally qualified teachers for gifted and talented students is established and clearly articulated.

Qualifications may include:

- Evidence of specific training in gifted education;
- Successful teaching experience;
- Genuine interest in and desire to work with gifted and talented students;
- Demonstrated evidence of advanced content competence.

3.2 Criteria for the selection of teachers are based on a set of competencies and characteristics supported by research as being important to effective teaching of gifted and talented students. Included in this set are:

- An awareness of the cognitive and affective needs of gifted and talented students and a desire to teach them;
- Expertise in content and instructional methods;
- Expertise in the use of technology to support instruction;
- Ability to impart intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for learning to students;
- High level of energy, enthusiasm, confidence, and resourcefulness;
- Ability to organize and manage instruction to provide for a balance of structure and flexibility;
- Openness to innovation and acceptance of divergent, creative thinking;
- Security in dealing with intellectual precocity;
- Ability to facilitate students' independence and development of personal responsibility for their own learning;
- Willingness to pursue training for needed professional understanding and competencies; and
- Expertise in the collection, management, and analysis of student assessment data.

4.0 Professional Learning and Professional development

Rapidly increasing knowledge about the developmental patterns and learning styles of gifted and talented students and about appropriate programs and services necessitate ongoing, high quality professional learning and professional development as components of a successful program.

4.1 Professional development and professional learning in gifted and talented education are provided for all school staff and central office staff involved in the education of gifted and talented students. This includes teachers of gifted and talented students, other teachers, school administrators, student services personnel, supervisors, content specialists, and other central office staff.

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4.2 Professional development and professional learning in gifted and talented education are provided, which includes a background of general knowledge about the characteristics of giftedness and implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Specific content includes:

- Characteristics and identification of gifted and talented students;
- Psychology and developmental needs;
- Need for and concept of differentiated services;
- Development of appropriate curriculum;
- Differentiated teaching strategies and assessments for gifted and talented students, which include acceleration;
- Strategies for identifying and serving student groups historically underrepresented in gifted and talented education, including students who live in poverty, those who are culturally or linguistically diverse, and students with disabilities;
- Strategies for teaching and working with twice exceptional students;
- Administrative alternatives and program options to support acceleration and enrichment; and
- Program implementation, evaluation, and revision

4.3 Professional development is differentiated based on the participants' levels of expertise in gifted education, current assignments and professional responsibilities, content area specializations, and system-wide goals. Professional learning opportunities need to be based on the needs expressed by the staff member with guidance provided by the administration and Central Office Supervisor.

4.3.1 All teaching staff, school administrators, central office staff, and pupil service personnel should receive training in the characteristics and needs of gifted and talented students, the procedures and criteria used to identify students, the meaning of differentiation, the design of the school system's program and services, the criteria for professionally qualified teachers of gifted and talented students, and the resources available for professional development in gifted and talented education.

4.3.2 Teachers, school administrators, and supervisory staff with direct responsibility for development and delivery of instructional programs and services for gifted and talented should receive additional training which addresses specific ways to differentiate instruction and to develop and deliver curriculum appropriate for gifted and talented students.

4.3.3 Teachers working directly with gifted and talented students require intensive and ongoing professional development and professional learning in the educational implications of giftedness and appropriate teaching/learning strategies for gifted and talented students.

4.3.4 School-level administrators and central office staff responsible for the management and administration of gifted and talented programs and services should be prepared to develop goals, objectives, and strategies regarding the performance of gifted and talented students, effective program alternatives and options, and a system for ongoing program evaluation.

4.4 Professional development in gifted and talented education provides a variety of professional learning opportunities. These might include:

- Workshops, institutes or academies;
- University and graduate courses;
- Conferences and professional meetings;

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- Job-embedded activities such as study groups, peer coaching, structured observation with feedback and follow-up, and action research; and
- Accredited teacher preparation programs in gifted and talented education.

4.5 Procedures are established for ongoing evaluation and improvement of the professional development and professional learning programs.

4.6 Local school systems should include talent identification, development, pedagogy, gifted education strategies, and twice exceptionality topics as part of both pre-service and in-service training for all staff.

4.7 Professional development and professional learning planning should follow the accepted tenets as outlined in the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) standards and other relevant standards documents.

5.0 Program Management

5.1 A management structure exists which clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities for gifted and talented programs and services at the system and school levels to ensure the development and maintenance of program excellence. This can be accomplished by:

- Developing a long term action plan outlining identification procedures, professional development and professional learning efforts, guidelines for program design and delivery, allocation of fiscal and human resources, and evaluation processes for K-12 gifted and talented students in content areas;
- Establishing an advisory council that reflects the diversity of the school system's population;
- Establishing a full-time coordinator for Gifted and Talented Education;
- Providing for a range of educational options for gifted and talented students, including twice exceptional students at each grade level;
- Coordinating the development of challenging curriculum and instruction to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students; and
- Collecting and analyzing disaggregated enrollment and performance data for gifted and talented students as a special population.

5.2 The local school system provides general program direction. This includes:

- A statement of program mission and goals;
- Definition of the target population to include students from all student groups and across all strata;
- Criteria and procedures for student identification;
- Administrative design;
- Guidelines for program implementation in the schools;
- On-going parent communication including the dissemination of policies and practices in gifted education;
- Coordination to ensure continuity of and access to programs and services for gifted students as they progress through school;
- On-going professional development and professional learning opportunities for all staff;
- Development of accurate student data collection procedures; and

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- Design for program evaluation that is implemented regularly, the data from which is used in designing professional development, professional learning, and school improvement.

5.3 Building-level administrators support program implementation within the school system's guidelines. They are responsible for:

- Setting goals and objectives for gifted and talented students in the school improvement plan;
- Coordinating services for gifted and talented students in the school;
- Developing staff expertise;
- Allocating resources; and
- Providing effective communication with staff, students, parents and the community.

6.0 Evaluation

6.1 The evaluation process is based on data and provides accurate, timely, and relevant information to decision makers and stakeholders for program, staff, and school improvement.

6.2 A systematic plan for ongoing evaluation is part of program planning and implementation.

6.3 Evaluation should be conducted by persons having expertise in gifted and talented education and should assess processes and products of each component of the gifted and talented program. These include:

- Identification, participation, and retention;
- Instructional program;
- Professional development;
- Teacher qualifications;
- Program management;
- Community outreach; and
- The evaluation process.

6.4 The evaluation process focuses on whether the goals, objectives, and strategies for gifted and talented students have been reached. The quantity, quality, and appropriateness of the programs and services provided for gifted and talented students are assessed and data are disaggregated and made public.

6.5 Attention is given to the assessment of student progress using multiple indicators that measure mastery of content, demonstration of higher level thinking skills, achievement in the specific program area(s), and affective growth.

6.6 Data for evaluation is obtained from a variety of valid and reliable instruments, procedures, and information sources as appropriate.

6.7 Evaluation results are communicated in a timely and meaningful way to program decision makers at the system and/or school level and as appropriate, to students, parents, and the public