

WALLINGFORD-SWARTHMORE SCHOOL DISTRICT
200 South Providence Road, Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086
The Office of Curriculum & Education



Gifted and Talented Education Program Evaluation

January 2014

Wallingford-Swarthmore School District

PROCESS

Introduction

This evaluation of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District's Gifted and Enrichment Education is part of an ongoing framework for curriculum review. The evaluation process is a critical part of program review and renewal. Review of a program takes place through the active participation and leadership of a select group of teachers, administrators, and department chairs that form a K-12 vertical team, representative of gifted and enrichment education across the district. The Gifted Vertical Team evaluated the current curriculum for its effectiveness in raising student achievement. The team developed key questions for evaluation. Data was gathered through surveys, informal/formal discussions and focus groups with stakeholders. In addition, alternate, research-based programs and practices were investigated.

Gifted Education Vertical Team

Name	Role
Jennifer Gaudio	Elementary Curriculum Director, Lead Facilitator
Jim LoGiudice	Gifted Education Consultant
Jenny Conahan	Gifted Ed. Coordinator, SRS
Bernadette Kutufaris	Gifted Ed. Coordinator, NPE
Debbie Wile	Gifted Ed. Coordinator, WES
Marc DeJong	Gifted Ed. Coordinator, SHMS
Ellen Yarborough	Gifted Ed. Coordinator, SHHS
Kristin Dunning	Guidance Counselor, SHHS
Kate Jones	Teacher, NPE
Roberta Shapiro	Teacher, SRS
Colette Sabatina	Psychologist, NPE
Jacqlyn Zaraba	Psychologist, WES
Maria Klumpp	Psychologist, SRS
Gina Ross	Special Education Director

Methodology

The Wallingford-Swarthmore School District administration and Gifted Education Vertical Team identified specific questions determined to be integral to the evaluation process. It is through these questions that the evaluation was conducted. Members of the Gifted Education Vertical Team were selected in fall of 2012. The members of the team began the review process which involved the examination of key district curriculum related documents, interviews and surveys of key individuals in the school community, review of classroom instructional practices and district procedures, and the research regarding best practice. It should be noted that implementation of recommendations will be considered in the context of other systemic needs across the district.

Data Sources for the Program Evaluation

Documents

These sources included written board policies, PDE Chapter 16 regulations, implementation requirements, existing curriculum, instructional guidelines, assessments, student performance indicators, standards and guidelines from academic organizations such as PDE, NAGC, PAGE, and other documents related to the focus of the program evaluation.

Stakeholder Input

A parent survey, which contained 18 key response questions, and also provided an opportunity for open-ended comments, was sent to all parents of gifted students. The number of responses to this survey was significant, and provided the study team with important and relevant data. This survey data was reviewed and analyzed by the Gifted Vertical Team, and used to identify and complement already-identified program improvement needs, note existing strengths, and honor parent concerns. Two parent focus group sessions were scheduled and were very well attended. Student focus group sessions were scheduled in every building with randomly selected students across grades. Focus group sessions were conducted by gifted education expert consultant Jim LoGiudice.

Classroom Observations

Informal classroom observations were used to verify data obtained from meetings with parents, staff, focus group sessions and surveys.

Focus of the Evaluation

Core questions that the team examined are listed below.

- **Curriculum**
 - ***How effectively is the WSSD gifted and enrichment curriculum aligned to the National/State standards?***
 - ***Does the WSSD Gifted and Enrichment program demonstrate a clear and guiding vision?***
- **Instruction**
 - ***To what extent are best practices being used to ensure appropriately rigorous instruction in K-12 gifted and enrichment education?***
 - ***In what ways are services for the gifted coordinated and integrated with the regular education curriculum and classroom learning?***
 - ***What professional strategies and staff development are used to keep all teachers up to date and to support differentiation or instruction for the gifted in both their regular and enrichment classes?***

- **Assessment**
 - ***In what ways are assessments being used to evaluate student achievement and drive instruction?***
 - ***What are the clear and defined screening and evaluation criteria and procedures in place for identifying the gifted?***
 - ***How effective are both formative and summative assessments as indicators of student performance?***
 - ***To what extent do we identify accurate present education levels?***
- **Resources/Technology**
 - ***How well do the current materials, resources, and technology meet the needs of the program?***

Procedure: The team convened during the fall of 2012, and worked with consultant Jim LoGiudice to identify focus questions for the review. The team decided on a two-pronged approach. While working on long term program improvement, immediate action would be taken to address priority areas for continuous improvement and student support. After monthly work sessions, regular department meetings, and two meetings with PAGE parent representatives, the team identified certain areas for immediate attention and action while the long term evaluation work continued. The evaluation process concluded in the fall of 2013 with survey and focus group sessions, facilitated by Jim LoGiudice, the results of which corroborated many findings of the team throughout the evaluation process.

Outcome: The team drafted a list of findings and recommendations throughout the evaluation process, and in December, 2013, a representative group met with Jim LoGiudice to incorporate his findings from the parent and student focus groups and parent surveys. Findings were categorized according to patterns of priorities that emerged in the feedback process. What follows is a summary of overall findings in five key areas: Curriculum, Staff Development, Communication/Coordination, Identification Procedures/Chapter 16 Compliance, and Vision.

Part I: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

A: Findings

Strengths

- There are high levels of achievement and a variety of enrichment opportunities and practices across the district.
- Grouping practices support differentiation at the elementary and secondary levels.
- There is a wide range of AP courses available at the High School.
- The new flexible grouping model in elementary math provides greater opportunities for students to work at appropriate levels of rigor; teachers have increased the use of pretesting, compacting, and differentiated pacing for advanced groups at the elementary levels.

Strengths *(continued)*

- The new math program, Math in Focus, has provided greater challenge and opportunities for differentiation; students across grade levels indicated high levels of challenge. Students noted the emphasis on problem-solving, not one answer, and even the students recognized they were dealing with advanced concepts.
- Elementary students in the advanced level math group noted the challenge and engagement of the pacing and the enrichment and extension opportunities.
- Elementary pullout opportunities were described as engaging by students: varied activities, field trips, choice of topics, logic challenges and technology integration.
- Students at the elementary level found the new Reading Workshop and Book Club approaches from Teachers College to be challenging and appreciated the leveled approach.
- The district has developed guidelines and procedures for identifying enrichment needs of students performing at high levels of achievement.
- The district has developed guidelines for acceleration at both the Elementary and Secondary level, applicable for making student placement decisions across content areas.
- Improvements have been made to increase connections between gifted education pullout opportunities and grade level curriculum topics and to increase collaboration between regular education teachers and Coordinators of Gifted Education.
- Parent and student survey and focus group comments regarding pullout programs and experiences were positive, citing strengths in the creativity and dedication of teachers, and the opportunities for engagement.
- District leadership has taken steps to improve consistency and equity among elementary seminar programs in terms of time and key instructional practices
- The delivery model for gifted services at the Middle School has changed to more directly connect with regular education instruction and to be regularly scheduled as part of the academic school day schedule.
- The Middle School currently uses differentiated assessments; leadership at the Middle School has increased focus on use of differentiated instruction aligned with the higher level assessments in all classrooms.
- The district has increased Gifted Education services at SHHS by designating a teacher to manage GIEPs and to provide consultation support for regular education teachers and students.
- The district has increased regular education teacher resources for providing enrichment through extension menus, learning contracts, and differentiated readings.
- The district has developed aligned and equitable procedures for identifying and meeting enrichment needs in math across the district.
- Use of an *Understanding by Design* (UbD) approach at the high school.

Needs

1. Both parents and students alike, when surveyed and interviewed, indicated that the pacing and depth of learning in some classrooms, even in advanced level courses, were not rigorous enough to meet their needs.
2. There is a need to set expectations and provide support in order for higher levels of differentiated instruction to occur for gifted students in regular education classrooms.
3. There is not consistency across courses and teachers in promoting real world or cross-curricular applications of learning.
4. There is a need for increased use of assessment data to guide differentiated instruction opportunities across subject areas, especially in unleveled subjects, such as science, social studies, and technology.

B. Recommendations

1. Advanced level courses should offer consistent pacing and depth of learning, within and across classrooms, to meet the needs of advanced students for rigorous enough instruction. Consider increased use of research based models, such as Understanding by Design, in order to structure learning around higher level outcomes and increase alignment between classrooms.
2. Maintain district focus on increasing higher level differentiation for advanced students in regular education classes, especially in unleveled subjects, such as science, social studies, and technology.
3. Increase opportunities for real world or cross-curricular applications of learning for gifted students. Explore increased opportunities for PBL (Problem-Based Learning), Real World inquiry, and cross-curricular STEM applications
4. Classroom differentiation practices across subject areas should include both formative and summative assessment practices in order to determine student present education levels (PLEP), and better support students in need of higher level differentiation and enrichment.

Part II. Staff Development

A. Findings

Strengths

- Building level In-service meetings have taken place at each grade level focused on professional responsibilities for regular education teachers in supporting gifted students under Chapter 16.
- Ongoing training has taken place through Columbia's Teachers College for all teachers in grades 3 through 5 in strategies for differentiation in literacy and integration of higher level thinking skills and novels.
- The district-wide staff development initiatives have focused on instructional practices that provide a rigorous learning experience for all students.

- All teachers have been introduced to extension menus, learning contracts, and individualized projects and readings as models for differentiation. Models are readily available to support teacher planning.

Needs

- There is a need to increase teachers' knowledge about Chapter 16 GIEP requirements and the role teachers play in GIEP implementation.
- There is a need to increase staff knowledge about the learning characteristics and needs of the gifted student to provide best instructional practices in differentiation for the gifted.
- There is a need to ensure that classroom teachers, within and across classrooms, adequately employ strategies for differentiating instruction to support appropriate levels of rigor for all students.

B. Recommendations

- Support staff development and resources for teachers to increase understanding of the needs of gifted learners and to implement best practices in instruction for the gifted.
- Continued professional learning is needed to ensure all teachers are knowledgeable about the requirements of Chapter 16.
- Maintain training focus in higher level strategies associated with Teachers College practices and Math in Focus approaches.
- Continue a long-term professional development focus on improving teacher effectiveness in differentiating instruction and providing appropriately rigorous and engaging learning opportunities for advanced students.
- Collaborative professional development opportunities would support course alignment and teachers' continued focus on developing curriculum adaptations for advanced learners.

Part III: Communication and Coordination

A. Findings

Strengths

- Internal communication and coordination of gifted programming has improved with increased district leadership focus; both central office and building leadership have taken a more active role in implementation of gifted education services.
- The Vertical Team included members from across all building levels and in a variety of roles, including Gifted Education Coordinators from each building, school psychologists, administrators, and teachers.
- The Vertical Team Evaluation Process included opportunities for leadership to meet with PAGE representatives as well as parents and students.

- The district has drafted a parent brochure, Frequently Asked Questions guide, and an Overview of WSSD Gifted Education for parent information, as well as internal procedural and staff guidelines for gifted education services.
- The district conducted a comprehensive parent survey to assess parent concern and needs for programming in gifted education.

Needs

- There is a need to increase communication to parents and staff about the procedures for identification and placement of students who are thought to be gifted.
- There is a need for increased district communication about the range of gifted programming and placement options and classroom enrichment opportunities available across grade levels.

B. Recommendations

- Increase communication about gifted education through the district website and print resources.
- Clearly articulate classroom enrichment practices and opportunities to parents and/or within the GIEP as appropriate.
- Increase parent awareness of procedures for identification and placement of gifted students.
- Maintain leadership focus on continuous gifted education improvement and on increased communication to staff and parents about gifted education services and enrichment opportunities.

Identification Procedures and Chapter 16 Compliance

Part 1: Findings

Strengths

- Special Education leadership has focused on improvements in the writing of the GIEP document: Present Levels of Education Performance reflect greater input from regular education teachers and include more specific data about student performance. GIEP goals are related to areas of student strengths and demonstrate increased measurability.
- Improvements have been made to develop a stronger team approach during the GIEP process.
- The district has taken steps to increase staff knowledge of professional responsibilities as required by Chapter 16.
- The district has created a high school gifted coordinator position to manage GIEPs and provide faculty support in differentiation for advanced learners.
- The district expanded the middle school gifted resources position and incorporated a seminar schedule in addition to increased teacher resources support.

Needs

- The district GIEP goals need to more closely match the present levels of achievement and students performance.
- The district assessment procedures need to be examined to ensure use of best practices in meeting Chapter 16 requirements for identification of students thought to be gifted.
- The district needs to meet Chapter 16 requirements regarding required procedures for re-evaluation of students upon change of placement.

Part 2: Recommendations

- Identify and implement best practices in identification and evaluation procedures. Identification and evaluation practices related to gifted eligibility through multiple criteria should be reviewed to ensure eligibility requirements are met; screening should attend to consideration of students at risk for under-identification.
- Gifted Education Coordinators should more closely match GIEP goals and outcomes to the present levels of achievement and student performance, and other assessment data.
- Involve greater regular education participation in developing enrichment opportunities for highly achieving advanced students with and without GIEPs.
- Procedures should be established to ensure students in advanced classes are appropriately placed.
- Establish procedures for re-evaluation of students.

Vision and Purpose of Gifted Education

Part 1: Findings

Strengths

- There is strong commitment among Coordinators of Gifted Education to providing equitable access to challenge opportunities for all advanced learners.
- There is strong commitment by all stakeholders – parents, teachers, staff, and administration – to the development of gifted, talented, and advanced students.

Needs

- There is a need to increase understanding and awareness among regular education teachers of their role in supporting the development of the gifted learner and of implementation of the student's GIEP.
- Not all parents or teachers have a clear understanding of the role of regular education in supporting the development of the advanced learner.

Part 2: Recommendations

- Develop expectations about the roles of the regular education teacher, and the Coordinator of Gifted Education in supporting the needs of gifted learners through a variety of gifted services.
- Develop and communicate the vision for differentiated services for gifted students, along with a guiding vision for gifted education in the district. Disseminate information across stakeholder groups