

# MSAD #53 Gifted and Talented Program Handbook



*Children are the world's most valuable resource  
and its best hope for the future.*

-- John F. Kennedy, 35<sup>th</sup> President

## **Program Philosophy**

MSAD #53 pledges to provide a comprehensive educational program that recognizes the unique values, needs, and talents of each student. District personnel recognize that among our student population, some children excel beyond their age peers in general abilities, aptitudes, or specific academic and/or artistic areas, and have the need for advanced critical and creative thinking, research skills, or creative productivity.

In accordance with our district mission and state requirements for the Comprehensive Education Plan, we commit to the identification of gifted and talented students and to the development of extended and/or differentiated programs to meet their needs. Gifted/talented programming is primarily integrated into the regular classroom through differentiated curriculum, materials, and instructional strategies.

## **Program Goals**

Highly productive individuals are characterized by three interconnected traits: above-average (not necessarily superior) ability, task commitment, and creativity, described by Joseph Renzulli (1986) as the “three-ring conception of giftedness.” To foster these traits in our students, the gifted/talented program will focus on the following goals:

- To develop creative/productive thinking abilities and specific subject matter aptitudes in students by providing challenging content and tasks that require the use of higher level thought processes.
- To support students in becoming self-directed and responsible learners by providing choice and opportunities for original thinking and expression, and by fostering perseverance, dedication, endurance, and enthusiasm for learning.
- To guide students in becoming more aware of their gifts and talents so they may develop self-confidence and cope successfully with their giftedness in relation to themselves and others.
- To provide opportunities, resources, and encouragement for the development and application of gifted behaviors.

## **Definition of Gifted and Talented**

“Gifted and talented children” shall mean those children who excel, or have the potential to excel, beyond their age peers in the regular school program, to the extent that they need and can benefit from programs for the gifted and talented. Gifted and talented children shall receive differentiated instruction through classroom programming if they have exceptional ability, aptitude, skill, or creativity in one or more of the following categories:

General Intellectual Ability as shown by demonstrated significant accomplishment above their age peers in all academic areas.

Specific Academic Aptitude as shown by demonstrated significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their age peers in one or more academic areas (reading, writing, math, science, social studies).

Artistic Ability as shown by demonstrated significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their age peers in the visual or performing arts (visual art, theater arts, music).

Children with general intellectual ability and/or exceptional specific academic aptitude usually comprise five percent of the school population. Students with exceptional artistic ability usually comprise five percent of the school population. Children in the top two percent of the school population may be considered highly gifted.

Some gifted or talented children may also exhibit one or more disabilities, such as a specific learning disability, ADHD, Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, speech or language impairment, emotional or behavioral difficulties, or physical disabilities. Particular care must be taken in the identification of and instructional planning for these twice-exceptional children.

### **Behavioral Traits**

Gifted and talented children often have unique characteristics that distinguish them from their age peers. Although the following characteristics generally describe gifted and talented children, not all of these traits will be present in each child.

- **Creativity:** imaginative, versatile, flexible in ideas and actions; possesses strong problem solving ability; original and inventive; gives clever and witty responses.
- **Critical Thinking:** logical and analytical; reasons out complicated problems or ideas; evaluates situations; uses common sense, powers of abstraction, conceptualization, and synthesis; takes pleasure in intellectual activity.
- **Curiosity:** a keen observer; alert, inquisitive nature; questions the how and why of things; eager; pursues many interests in depth.
- **Enjoyment of Reading:** reads a wide range of materials for information and pleasure, including advanced selections; uses reference works effectively at an early age.

- **Ability to Generalize:** perceives abstract ideas; sees relationships; grasps underlying principles; makes valid assumptions about people, events, and things; integrates areas of knowledge and love of truth.
- **Independence:** tendency to challenge and question indiscreetly; resists conformity; preference for individualized work; self-reliance; need for freedom of movement and action.
- **Perfectionism:** feelings of inadequacy; unrealistic expectations or perceived failure derived from the high expectations of self and adults.
- **Rapidity of Learning:** quickly masters facts; retains and applies information; needs minimal instruction in routine tasks.
- **Responsibility:** works independently; needs few directions; understands and accepts guidelines; organizes talks, peers, and events; often serves as a leader; respected by peers.
- **Resourcefulness:** produces original or unusual ideas or products; a prolific and creative author; generates new ideas and viewpoints; proposes novel solutions to peer conflicts.
- **Social Awareness:** sensitive and intuitive; empathizes with others; flexible and open in manner; concerned with values and ideals.
- **Special Ability:** possesses unusual interest and aptitude in academic area; has exceptional mechanical ability; demonstrates talent or potential in one of the performing arts; sensitive to aesthetic qualities and to the intrinsic beauty of things; versatility; many hobbies.
- **Perseverance:** demonstrates persistent goal-directed behavior; has long attention span; ignores distractions; not easily discouraged by setbacks; self-motivated.
- **Verbal Proficiency:** possesses an advanced vocabulary; expresses him/herself fluently; communicates precisely and accurately; expresses his/her own opinions freely; shows humor; asks probing questions.

### **Self Concept**

It is not uncommon for gifted/talented children to lose their motivation to learn over time, or to be working below their potential. Only in classrooms where individual differences in learning behaviors are recognized and accepted will gifted

students' self-esteem and motivation truly flourish. This recognition and acceptance of unique learning needs is the foundation for differentiated instruction.

### **Identification**

Multiple criteria are considered when identifying students as gifted/talented. To ensure that the process is fair, transparent, and flexible, referrals may be made by teachers, administrators, and parents/guardians, and will be evaluated by a committee of district personnel. Criteria will include objective and subjective assessments (see Appendix A). Although annual universal screening for gifted/talented will occur, referrals may be made at any time during the school year.

Identification is made in accordance with state requirements for the following subject areas offered in the regular curriculum:

- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Visual Art
- Music
- Theater Arts (grades 5-8)

Identified students will be assessed annually to document growth and to determine continued participation in the gifted/talented program. Young children develop at varying rates and no identification tool or assessment is a guaranteed measure of giftedness. Occasionally, the classroom teacher and G/T identification committee may determine that a previously identified child may no longer meet the criteria for gifted/talented. Identification may also be discontinued based on a pattern of low achievement or motivation.

### **Programming**

The primary means of addressing the needs of gifted/talented students in MSAD #53 is through differentiated instruction in the regular classroom. Teachers will help students to become aware of their strengths and interests as learners and will be responsive to student needs. Differentiation means that everyone does not always need to read the same book, answer the same questions, receive the same kind of help, or create the same product. To the extent that resources are available, enrichment or advancement opportunities may be offered to identified gifted/talented students.

In the fall following gifted/talented identification, and annually thereafter, a team comprised of the classroom teacher, building principal, G/T Coordinator,

parents/guardians, and student will meet to create a plan for the identified student. The purpose of the plan is to create goals specific to the strengths, needs, and interests of the child within the context of the regular classroom.

### **Transfer**

Transfer students who enroll in MSAD #53 will be referred to the identification committee for consideration utilizing MSAD #53's identification criteria if:

- Accompanying data in the student record indicates possible eligibility for the program.
- The student has participated in a G/T program in a previous school district.
- A teacher or parent recommendation occurs.

### **Management**

MSAD #53 is committed to the provision of appropriate identification and programming for gifted/talented students. To assure this process, the following management components, as approved by the Superintendent of Schools, are in place:

#### **Program Administrator**

A Gifted/Talented Program Coordinator oversees the program and supervises staff to assure compliance with all applicable state or other legal requirements for the establishment, approval, and funding of programs.

#### **Program Personnel**

Personnel employed in the program will be active in the areas of identification, teaching, consulting, and activity facilitation. They may be G/T endorsed, provisional or professional level teachers, auxiliary personnel, or independent providers and/or consultants.

### **Afterward**

The contents of this handbook reflect the MSAD #53 Gifted and Talented program to date, but flexibility and a growing body of knowledge by staff will afford changes and improvement to the system in years to come.

## Glossary of Terms

Some of the vocabulary associated with Gifted/Talented programming is listed below.

- **Ability Grouping** – Certain students are brought together according to one or more common characteristics.
- **Acceleration** – A student advances through the curriculum – or a part of the curriculum -- more rapidly than his/her age peers.
- **Aptitude** – A specific ability in one or more areas that indicates high potential for future performance in that area.
- **Cognitive Development** – A growth in the understanding of facts, principles and concepts, and the acquisition of skills in specific aptitude areas.
- **Content** – The subject matter being studied.
- **Critical Thinking** – The process of forming and using criteria in making decisions or evaluations.
- **Curriculum Compacting** – The changing of the regular curriculum to eliminate repetition of previously learned materials. This process increases the challenge of the regular curriculum and provides time for appropriate enrichment and/or acceleration activities, while ensuring mastery of basic skills.
- **Differentiated Curriculum** – Curriculum that is specifically matched with the needs of students.
- **Enrichment** – The addition of content not usually found in the regular curriculum. Enrichment studies can allow students to deepen their knowledge of a specific topic of interest.
- **Independent Study** – A learning program which enables a self-directed learner to pursue a project on his/her own with as much or little teacher direction as needed. Often accompanied by a contract specifying the goals, timeframe, and outcome of the independent work.
- **Mentor** – A person who guides and shares his/her expertise with gifted students who are interested in the mentor's field. A mentor can be an older student, a retired person, parent, and/or a practicing professional.
- **Norm-referenced** -- A test where the results are interpreted in relation to the performance of a comparison group. Norm-referenced interpretations tell how the scores of each student or group of students compare to the scores of the original (norm) group that took the test.
- **Process** – The method by which the student learns the material or the teacher instructs.
- **Products** – The varied, observable results of the child's learning.
- **Pull-out** – Students leave the regular classroom for a specified amount of time for special instruction and then return.
- **Seminar** – a group where discussion (usually of single topic) is the primary focus.

For more terminology and common acronyms, visit Hoagie's Gifted Page at <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/acronyms.htm> . For a list of assessments often used in schools and with gifted students, visit <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/tests.htm> .

## Appendix A

The following tools are used in MSAD #53 for identification of students for gifted/talented. Identification begins with a teacher referral and completion of applicable Renzulli Hartman checklists. At least two objective measures are required to complete identification.

### **Objective Tools**

**AIMSweb MCAP** (Math Concepts and Applications) – a norm referenced assessment of math concept knowledge given to all district students in grades 2-8 three-four times per year.

**AIMSweb MCOMP** (Math Computation) – a norm referenced assessment of math computation skill (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) given to all district students three times per year in grades 1-4.

**AIMSweb TEN** (Tests of Early Numeracy) – norm referenced assessments of early math knowledge and skill, used for screening gifted students in grades K-2.

**DIBELS** (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy) – a group of tests that assess early literacy skills, given three times per year to all students, K-4.

**DRA2** (Developmental Reading Assessment) – a test of reading comprehension given to all students twice a year in grades K-4.

**DSA** (Developmental Spelling Assessment) – a measure of student knowledge and application of spelling rules/conventions and word parts; an indicator of reading and writing achievement. Given to all district students K-8 1-2 times per year.

**MEA** (Maine Educational Assessment) – state required achievement test for all students in grades 5 and 8 for science; administered each May.

**NECAP** (New England Common Assessment Program) – state required achievement tests for all students in grades 3-8 for reading and math; grades 5 and 8 for writing, administered in October each year.

**NWEA** (Northwest Evaluation Association) – norm referenced achievement and readiness tests for reading, math, science, and language usage given to all students in grades 5-8 two times per year.

**OLSAT** (Otis Lennon School Ability Test) – A group/class administered intelligence test given in the fall of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in MSAD #53.

**Selmer Music Guidance Survey** – an assessment of student knowledge of rhythm, pitch, and melody, used by district music teachers to gauge musical aptitude.

## **Subjective Tools**

**DGEL** (Developmental Guide to Early Literacy) – a rubric describing writing components used to assess all district students K-8 two-three times per year.

**Renzulli Hartman Rating Scales** -- Rating scales used by teachers to help identify student strengths in the areas of learning, motivation, creativity, leadership, art, music, dramatics, planning, communication, and content areas.

**Student Interest Surveys** – checklists completed by students to assess interest in and motivation for a particular content area or visual/performing arts.

**Student performances** – May include formal and informal performance such as classroom demonstrations, audio or video recordings of such performances, or assessments of formal auditions.

**Student products** – May include a portfolio of work, an exhibition (such as a Science Fair), written pieces, classroom assessments, and other products generated in the classroom or independently.

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