



Maine School Administrative District No. 75

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M.S.A.D. No. 75 – Gifted and Talented Services Review 2021-2022

Introduction

Just as intelligence is dynamic and continues to grow when nourished, the field of gifted education is constantly evolving based on research. The Evaluation Committee reviewed current practice at M.S.A.D. No. 75 through the lens of academic research, national best practice standards in gifted education and state guidelines for educating gifted students. We gathered varied stakeholder insights about services for gifted students at M.S.A.D. No. 75. This document represents the culmination of this comprehensive process to evaluate gifted and talented services in our district.

Context

Gifted and Talented (G/T) Services is a State-mandated program governed by [Chapter 104](#). Our program complies with State guidelines and is approved for the current academic year.

M.S.A.D. No. 75 is committed to meeting the unique needs of students in grades PreK-12 who excel or have the potential to excel in academics and/or visual and performing arts. We currently have three designated staff members: one District-wide coordinator, one Advanced Math teacher for grades 6-8, and one Educational Technician III who supports enrichment programming for students in grades 3-5. At present, consistent direct teaching is provided only in the area of middle school mathematics.

In addition to classroom differentiation, students in grades 3-5 who are identified for academic support participate in small-group enrichment for approximately one hour each week with the guidance of G/T staff. Students identified for visual arts have weekly opportunities to participate in enrichment art workshops.

Students in grades 6-8 meet for a daily target time with the guidance of gifted and talented staff. During this target time period, Gifted and Talented students and other students excelling in their reading and math standards have opportunities to participate in a variety of enrichment activities appropriate to their proficiency level, such as an enrichment opportunity called

“Genius Hour.” Genius Hour is a workshop-style, inquiry-based program which allows gifted and talented students to pursue an area of interest.

An advanced math class taught by our gifted and talented math teacher is provided for identified students who benefit from learning math at increased depth and pace. Middle school students also have a variety of targeted enrichment opportunities scheduled throughout the year. Students identified for visual arts also have opportunities throughout the year to participate in extended art workshops.

Currently, students in grades 9-12 have Advanced Placement, Honors classes, and, as needed, consultation.

M.S.A.D. No. 75 Gifted and Talented Core Commitments:

1. Opportunities to engage at an appropriate level of challenge,
2. Time with intellectual peers, and
3. Information about giftedness and guidance on programming for students, parents, and educators.

Program Overview

While Gifted and Talented Services identifies needs and provides guidance, advocacy, and programming oversight, it is the job of each school and of the District as a whole to provide every reasonable opportunity possible to meet identified needs.

We recognize that gifted and talented students require all of the following:

- to move at their own rate, regardless of chronological age or grade placement;
- diverse experiences, including a variety of instructional strategies and materials;
- specialized curricula that are advanced, conceptually complex and carefully differentiated, to be provided in lieu of regular curricula;
- instructional settings appropriate to their changing needs as they progress through the grades; and
- for the highly gifted, additional modifications as appropriate.

Gifted and Talented Identification Process

Each year M.S.A.D. No. 75 conducts a process of screening, identification, and/or review of all students to determine eligibility for gifted and talented support services. Following initial review, identification in subsequent years will be focused on those students entering grades 3, 6, and 9.

The annual review process outlined below will serve to ensure that the needs of new students and the changing needs of others are served appropriately in the interim.

Nomination

The screening process begins with a student nomination. While students can be nominated for gifted and talented support services at any point in the school year, the Gifted and Talented Identification Committee follows an annual District-wide screening and review process each spring. A student can be nominated for review by an educational professional, (e.g. teacher, principal, guidance counselor, parent/guardian; or they can self-nominate).

Parents who wish to nominate their child for gifted and talented support services should first consult with their child's teacher. Parent nominations must be submitted in writing to the District Gifted and Talented Coordinator.

Screening

M.S.A.D. No. 75's Identification Committee meets in the spring of each year to review all data on students, to request additional data as needed and to identify students eligible for M.S.A.D. No. 75 gifted and talented services. The identification committee includes a minimum of three qualified professionals, including but not limited to one administrator, one G/T staff member, and one classroom teacher or other professional educator with appropriate expertise.

The responsibilities of this committee are to review the information collected on students who have met the screening criteria, to collect additional information as needed, to identify students eligible for gifted and talented services based upon an in-depth assessment of the collected information, to oversee the annual review of the identification process, and to ensure that the identification process is equitable. Data reviewed may be derived from the CogAT assessment, the district universal screening, state assessment, and any referrals from teachers or parents.

Placement

Parent(s)/guardian(s) are notified in writing of their child's identification status. The parent letter for identified students includes a request for written parental permission for the child to receive gifted and talented services. Written notification of gifted and talented identification is also provided to the student's teacher(s) and principal.

Gifted and Talented Programming

The State of Maine provides [guidelines](#) and support for gifted and talented programming. The Evaluation Committee reviewed these regulations as part of our program evaluation. In addition, the Committee closely studied the [PreK-12 Gifted and Talented Programming Standards](#), which were revised in 2019 by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). These standards provide a structure for identifying best practices for educating gifted and talented students.

NAGC Standards are grounded in theory, research, and practice models, and provide an important base for efforts on behalf of gifted learners at all levels. The Committee spent time delving into these standards, comparing current M.S.A.D. No. 75 programming to national guidelines in an effort to elucidate next steps in our continuing growth toward excellence in gifted education.

Academic Program Philosophy

M.S.A.D. No. 75 believes all students should learn and be taught to their highest potential, including those who excel or have the potential to excel beyond their grade level or age level peers. We recognize that students with especially high task commitment, ability and/or creativity in a specific area often need differentiated opportunities if they are to make adequate yearly progress. As required by Chapter 104, we identify this gifted and talented population as up to 5% of overall enrollment, and recognize the special needs of these students for appropriate and varied forms of acceleration, enrichment, and guidance.

M.S.A.D. No. 75's core commitments to our gifted and talented students and their families are:

4. Opportunities to engage at an appropriate level of challenge,
5. Time with intellectual peers, and
6. Information about giftedness and guidance on programming for students, parents, and educators

To honor these commitments and provide the specialized "in-lieu-of" instruction needed by gifted and talented students as their needs progress from PreK-12th grade, we offer a diverse and dynamic continuum of services which can anticipate and meet these needs. Classroom teachers often provide for these needs in consultation with gifted and talented staff. An essential function of our gifted and talented staff is to work with students and teachers to identify the central strengths, needs and interests of each child, and to then provide both guidance and advocacy to connect each child with appropriate opportunities.

Academic Program Overview

Our program for academically gifted and talented students is based on the principle that all students are to receive an education appropriate to their individual capabilities, interests, and needs, and that students have learning opportunities that help develop their abilities to the highest level. We are committed to ensuring that all gifted and talented identified students receive appropriate resources and support. We provide high-level resources for students, and consult with teachers to help them differentiate instruction within the classroom. We emphasize critical and creative thinking skills as essential elements in producing evidence of learning.

As noted, we identify no more than 5% of our student population as gifted and talented in the

areas of General Intellectual Ability and/or Specific Academic Aptitude. As stated in Chapter 104, we recognize that these students require all of the following:

- To move at their own rate, regardless of chronological age or grade placement;
- Diverse experiences, including a variety of instructional strategies and materials;
- Specialized curricula that are advanced, conceptually complex and carefully differentiated, to be provided in lieu of regular curricula;
- Instructional settings appropriate to their changing needs as they progress through the grades;
- For the highly gifted, additional modifications as appropriate.

In addition to identifying students and providing the necessary guidance and advocacy to ensure that needs are met, the existing gifted and talented program staff collaborates with classroom teachers to provide differentiation support when possible, coordinates enrichment programming, and conducts limited staff development to help regular classroom teachers and others recognize and meet the particular needs of gifted students. This occurs at the elementary level when possible, but due to staffing constraints, this does not occur consistently in grades 6 through 12.

Arts Program Philosophy

M.S.A.D. No. 75 believes all students should learn and be taught to their highest potential, including those who have shown exceptional creativity and artistic ability as demonstrated by significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their peers in the visual and/or performing arts. Similar to the academic program, as required by Chapter 104, we identify this gifted and talented arts population as up to 5% of overall enrollment, and recognize the special needs of these students for appropriate and varied forms of enrichment, and guidance.

Arts Program Overview

MSAD 75 provides a continuum of learning opportunities for identified students in grades PreK-12 including but not limited to the following: differentiated classroom curriculum, enrichment, and mentoring support. M.S.A.D. No. 75 partners with community resources whenever possible to enrich students' arts education. Gifted and talented staff works with students in grades PreK-12, teachers, and parents to identify the strengths, needs and interests of each identified student, and then provides advocacy to connect each child with appropriate opportunities.

Gifted and Talented Student Demographics

Figure 1: Populations School Year 2019-2020

School Year 2019-2020				
Populations				
Grade Level	General Population	Gifted and Talented Academic	Gifted and Talented Visual and Performing Arts	Percentage of Population
K-2	549	N/A	N/A	0%
3-5	598	23	11	5.7%
6-8	542	35	31	12.2%
9-12	732	34	14	6.6%
Total	2421	92	56	6.1%

Figure 2: Populations School Year 2020-2021

School Year 2020-2021				
Populations				
Grade Level	General Population	Gifted and Talented Academic	Gifted and Talented Visual and Performing Arts	Percentage of Population
K-2	527	N/A	N/A	0%
3-5	554	36	3	7.0%
6-8	571	42	26	11.9%
9-12	731	36	13	6.7%
Total	2383	114	42	6.5%

State Assessment Data Review

Due to school closures during the 2019-2020 school year and a change in the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) from Measured Progress to Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), the Review Committee used data from the State of Maine NWEA 2021 Fall assessment for grades 3-8 and third year of high school. The following section summarizing a data review refers to the NWEA normed data and is reported as a percentile ranking. For example, a student who scores in the 70th percentile performed as well or better than seventy percent of other test takers of the same age or grade level.

High School Data

Based on 2021 Fall NWEA State Assessment data, scores of our identified Gifted and Talented students at the high school were averaged and reported in the following percentiles:

(Figure 3: High School Fall 2021 NWEA data)

	Math	Reading	Language Usage
3rd Year High School	92nd	87th	89th

Middle School Data (grades 6th through 8th grade)

Based on 2021 Fall NWEA data at the middle level, scores of our identified Gifted and Talented students were averaged and reported in percentiles:

(Figure 4: 6th-8th grade Fall 2021 NWEA data)

	Math	Reading	Language Usage
6th Graders	85 th	85 th	85 th
7th Graders	90 th	95 th	95 th
8th Graders	91 st	93 rd	93 rd

Elementary Data (grades 3rd through 5th grade)

Based on 2020 Fall NWEA data at the elementary level, scores of our identified Gifted and Talented students were averaged and reported in the following percentiles:

(Figure 5: 3rd-5th grade Fall 2021 NWEA data)

	Math	Reading	Language Usage
3rd Graders	91 st	95 th	94 th
4th Graders	97 th	95 th	97 th
5th Graders	87 th	92 nd	91 st

Findings and Proposals

Academic Programming

Through our comprehensive review process we found strengths in our current gifted and talented programming model as well as areas in which we have room to grow. The goal of gifted programming should reflect that of any other educational program: to engage students with appropriately challenging curricula and instruction on a daily basis and in all relevant content areas so that they can make continual academic growth. Rigorous programming for G/T students needs to be embedded into all learning opportunities. Our review elucidated the need to enhance programming for G/T and high ability learners through an increased focus on embedding G/T programming into daily classroom instruction and learning opportunities within the school day.

Elementary Schools

Students in grades 3-5 who are identified for academic support participate in small-group enrichment for approximately one hour each week with the guidance of G/T staff. While our review found the small-group enrichment offerings to be effective, we are proposing the following program extensions and additions to enhance programming at the elementary level:

- Inclusion of G/T students in the District-Wide Response to Intervention (RtI) process to monitor progress and the effectiveness of learning supports. This will integrate interventions for high ability learners into an RTI framework, increase collaboration between G/T support staff and classroom teaching professionals, and better meet the needs of our identified learners.

- Provide ongoing, District-wide staff development focused on increasing rigor, understanding the gifted learner, and supporting high quality research based instruction for G/T learners.
- Increase opportunities to learn with peers by using technology to connect learners across the District.
- Increase G/T support services in grades PreK-2. An addition of G/T staff at the middle school and high school levels will allow us to increase classroom supports for our PreK-2 learners and enhance existing supports at the 3-5 levels.

Mt. Ararat Middle School

Mt. Ararat Middle School is committed to meeting the needs of all students by offering engaging, relevant, and dynamic instruction at the level of rigor appropriate to challenge each individual student. Gifted and Talented students, like any identified population, have unique intellectual attributes and diverse academic needs. However, unlike other identified populations, resources to support these learners are often limited to differentiation within the mainstream classroom—an approach that often amounts to students simply reading more challenging materials and does not typically include changes to assignments, increased course pacing, or customized instruction.

Currently, Mt. Ararat Middle School offers an advanced math program for grades six through eight, which serves G/T students, as well as other students ready to engage in mathematics beyond their scheduled grade level, and an enrichment opportunity called “Genius Hour,” a workshop-style, inquiry-based program which allows G/T students to pursue an area of interest. These courses, taught by the same individual teacher, are the only stand-alone opportunities for middle school G/T students. All other enrichment activities occur outside the school day (example: visiting artist program for G/T visual/performing arts students or the science club extracurricular activity) or on top of a student’s scheduled programming (example: participation in The Telling Room). While beneficial, the message that a G/T student must extend their school day or do additional work in order to access appropriate programming is contrary to our school’s mission and counter to our district’s commitment to adequately meet these unique students’ academic needs.

In order to meet the academic needs of G/T students as well as to increase engagement for all others, proposals include the the following program extensions and additions:

- Advanced ELA program for grades six through eight, serving both G/T and advanced reading populations (pull-out class in place of grade level ELA)
 - Rationale: To provide appropriate rigor to advanced reading students and to reduce class size for students remaining on-team for ELA

- Additional “Genius Hour” enrichment sessions for grades six through eight (targeted enrichment opportunity)
 - Rationale: Increase capacity of “Genius Hour” enrichment to accommodate additional students.
- Spanish I and French I program for grade eight, allowing successful students to move to Spanish II or French II in grade nine (Exploratory Language Pathway)
 - Rationale: To offer a program comparable to area middle schools; to increase rigorous academic opportunities; to increase the number of students accessing Advanced Placement courses at the high school level
- Art/Stem/Computer Science/Science targeted enrichment sessions for grades six through eight **and** offer electives specific for eighth grade students to include an Exploratory STEAM Pathway.
 - Rationale: To create opportunities within the school day for G/T Visual and Performing Arts and advanced science/math students
- Band/Chorus electives for grade eight (Exploratory Music Pathway)
 - Rationale: To create opportunities within the school day for G/T Visual and Performing Arts and advanced music students

These changes will not only allow Gifted and Talented students to pursue coursework geared towards their unique interests and abilities, but will also positively impact the general population with more engaging course options and increased opportunity to choose interest-based areas of study.

Mt. Ararat High School

Mt. Ararat High School addresses the needs of Gifted and Talented students by offering a variety of advanced courses and enrichment opportunities. Students have the chance to pursue Advanced and/or Advanced Placement (AP) courses in English, social studies, mathematics, science, world languages, and visual and performing arts throughout their high school career. Juniors and seniors may also opt to take dual-enrollment courses with Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) in English and social studies to earn college credit. Over the past several years, an increasing number of students have engaged in online early-college programs to extend their learning beyond MTA. In addition, a smaller number of highly motivated students often pursues independent study in collaboration with a faculty supervisor.

Along with their academic pursuits, G/T students may choose from a range of extracurricular opportunities, including various clubs (Math Club, Science Club, Art Club, the Outing Club, Anime, etc.) and contests (Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, Maine Music Educators’

Association District III, Sea Perch, Poetry Out Loud, Envirothon, etc.).

Since the last District-wide review, MTA has expanded advanced course offerings and enrichment opportunities for all interested students. For example, the English Department added an advanced freshman course for qualified students: and very recently the school launched the Community Pathways program to facilitate community-based learning opportunities, such as internships, job shadowing, volunteer training, and independent study. This program required the creation of a new full-time position to coordinate connections between the school and community members; and the position is currently funded by Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSERF 3) through the 2022-2023 school year only.

While the high school has expanded advanced curricular and extracurricular programming, stakeholders have expressed a desire for additional services. Traditionally, G/T students meet twice annually with the District Coordinator, which satisfies the needs of many identified students. Some students, however, are unaware of their G/T identification and available services. Others express a need for more frequent communication and enrichment opportunities. A majority of high school staff also express a desire for clearer communication regarding G/T identified students and available support services.

Thus, in order to meet the academic needs of G/T students as well as to increase engagement for all others, Mt. Ararat High School is proposing the following program extensions and additions:

- A G/T teaching position to coordinate additional academic and enrichment programming, professional development, and support for under-achieving G/T students. This position can also provide staffing to run AP courses with low enrollment and staffing to launch the AP Capstone program, including both AP Seminar and AP Research.
- Explore scheduling options that will allow for increased flexibility in the high school schedule, including the addition of an eighth block for the school schedule and flexible use of Academic Support Time (AST).
- Support collaborative opportunities between academic disciplines and the Community Pathways program, so as to provide enriching learning opportunities for G/T students outside the school's walls and schedules.

These changes will not only allow G/T students at the high school to pursue coursework geared towards their unique interests and abilities, but will also positively impact **all** students by providing more engaging course options and additional opportunities to pursue interest-based areas of study.

Other Proposals

- **Increased focus on professional development at all levels:** Provide ongoing staff development related to the characteristics of gifted learners and implementation of

research based best practice for educating gifted learners in order to aid educators in identifying students and designing learning opportunities for gifted students.

- **Increased focus on social/emotional support for learners:** The Committee recognizes the need to help G/T students embrace their unique talent.
- **Communication:** In addition to participation in parent/teacher conferences and decimation of programing information through the G/T website (mainegateways.org), increase communication through newsletters, staff development and parent involvement
- **Explore integrating intervention for high ability learners into the RTI process:**
 - Team approach to the RTI approach. This includes communication to parents and teachers.
- **Enact clear acceleration guidelines:** support students moving seamlessly through the curricula based on their individual level of learning development.

The Committee Review Team appreciated the opportunity to discuss G/T programming and praises all our staff for their commitment to individual learning and rigorous standards. Next steps will include communicating findings to the M.S.A.D. No. 75 Board of Directors and staff, planning for the expressed need for professional development opportunities for all staff, and working with district leaders to integrate proposals into the districts plan for continuous improvement.

Review Committee Membership

Rick Dedek - Woodside Elementary Principal

Kim Emerson - District Gifted and Talented Coordinator

Megan Hayes Teague - Mt. Ararat Middle School Principal

Amanda Hersey, Ed.D. - Assistant Superintendent

Chris Hoffman - Mt. Ararat High School Principal

Chris Lajoie - Bowdoinham Community School Principal

Sarah Morrill - Art Teacher

Emily Vail - Mt. Ararat High School English Teacher