

Watauga County Schools
Local Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) Plan
Effective 2025-2028

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Watauga County Schools has developed this local AIG plan in alignment with the North Carolina AIG Program Standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2024. These statewide standards provide a comprehensive framework to guide Public School Units (PSUs) in the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of effective and thoughtful AIG programs.

The NC AIG Program Standards consist of six core standards, each accompanied by best practices that clarify expectations and describe key elements PSUs should implement. These standards are aligned with North Carolina’s AIG legislation, Article 9B (N.C.G.S. §115C-150.5), and are designed to ensure equitable, high-quality services for gifted learners.

As part of a statewide effort to strengthen AIG services, each PSU—including Watauga County Schools—has engaged in a self-assessment process involving a broad range of stakeholders. The insights gained through this collaborative review have informed the development of the 2025–2028 local AIG plan. This plan has been approved by the local Board of Education and submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for review and comment.

For 2025-2028, Watauga County Schools local AIG plan is as follows:

WCS AIG Program Vision:

The WCS AIG Program empowers gifted learners to reach their fullest potential through advocacy, support, and meaningful challenge.

WCS AIG Program Mission:

In partnership with the entire school community, the WCS AIG Program provides rigorous, engaging, and equitable learning experiences that meet the diverse academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted students. Rooted in the competencies of North Carolina’s Portrait of a Graduate, our program cultivates adaptable, empathetic, and self-directed learners who communicate effectively, collaborate meaningfully, and think critically and creatively. Through these opportunities, gifted students are empowered to become responsible citizens, innovative leaders, and lifelong learners.

Sources of funding for local AIG program (as of 2025)

State Funding	Local Funding	Grant Funding	Other Funding
\$560,992.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

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Standard 1: Student Identification

The LEA's student identification procedures for AIG are clear, equitable, and comprehensive and lead towards appropriate educational services.

Practice A

Develops both screening and referral processes that lead to AIG identification at all grade levels. Provides opportunities, including universal screening, for every student to show their strengths and talents.

District Response

The screening and referral processes of the Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program are designed to reliably and equitably identify gifted students across all grade levels. (See Standard 1, Practice C for more detailed information on how WCS ensures equity in its AIG Program.) The program is grounded in research-based best practices, including the use of universal screening and multiple indicators of giftedness. WCS works to include all students in the AIG identification process, regardless of socioeconomic status, cultural or ethnic background, physical or linguistic ability, or other demographic factors.

WCS also recognizes the presence of twice-exceptional (2e) learners and ensures they are not excluded from consideration. AIG Specialists collaborate with EC staff and other professionals to collect and evaluate both strength-based and support-based data for potential 2e referrals.

In grades K–2, students are generally not formally identified as gifted due to the rapid and variable nature of early development. However, WCS has implemented a talent development model in these grades (described further in Standard 2, Practices A and H), where AIG Specialists regularly engage with students and teachers in classroom settings. Through the use of tools such as the Gifted Behavior Scale and classroom-based observations, teachers and AIG Specialists can identify students exhibiting potentially gifted characteristics. If a K–2 student consistently demonstrates exceptional ability, the classroom teacher or administrator may nominate the student for further review. The AIG Specialist then gathers relevant work samples, observational data, and available test results (e.g. DIBELS) to present to the school's Excel Team. The team may then request an individual aptitude test if the collected evidence warrants further evaluation. There is no stand-alone universal screener administered in K–2.

In grade 3, all students are given the opportunity to participate in universal screening using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). This aptitude test is administered during the fall semester. Parents/guardians may opt out if desired, particularly in cases where a recent Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) score is already on file. Research supports the use of universal screening as a means of increasing equity in AIG identification (Card & Giuliano, 2016, p. 13683). AIG Specialists review assessment results and refer students who score at or above the 90th percentile on the CogAT composite or subtests to the school's Excel Team. Teachers and AIG Specialists may also refer students scoring below the 90th percentile when other supporting evidence of giftedness is present.

In grades 4–8, WCS AIG Specialists continue the search for potential AIG students by reviewing existing local and state data. While every student is not universally re-screened, AIG Specialists examine available data to identify students with indicators of high potential. Additional testing may be requested when needed, such as a CogAT re-administration or a psychologist-administered individual assessment. Data that may prompt referral to the Excel Team includes, but is not limited to:

- Aptitude test scores (e.g. CogAT or WISC)

- Course grades
- End-of-Grade (EOG) scores
- Benchmark or formative assessment results
- Teacher or staff observations documented with the Gifted Behavior Scale
- Student work portfolios

In grades 9–12, while there is no universal screener, a wealth of academic and assessment data is available. The AIG Specialist reviews these records to ensure high-performing students are identified, and when necessary, may initiate a referral to the Excel Team for further evaluation.

Each school’s AIG Specialist conducts annual AIG awareness training at the start of the school year. These sessions cover:

- The definition and characteristics of giftedness
- Service delivery models used in WCS
- Best Search Practices (see Appendix A)
- Screening, referral, and identification procedures

Teachers and administrators at all grade levels (K–12) may refer students for Excel Team review using the Gifted Behavior Scale. Parents or guardians who believe their child may be gifted are encouraged to speak with their child’s teacher(s) and the school’s AIG Specialist. While not every parent request results in a formal referral, it initiates a conversation and data review between the teacher and AIG Specialist.

AIG Specialists collect all available evidence to build a comprehensive learner profile for students referred to the Excel Team. This profile is reviewed collaboratively to support data-informed placement decisions. The District AIG Coordinator monitors screening, referral, and identification demographics across schools using internal data tracking systems to ensure that all processes remain equitable, consistent, and in compliance with district expectations.

Practice B

Establishes a process and criteria for AIG student identification at all grade levels, K-12, that provides multiple opportunities to reveal a student’s aptitude, achievement, or potential to achieve. The criteria may include both qualitative and quantitative data in order to develop a comprehensive learner profile.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) uses a comprehensive and equitable process for identifying gifted students across all grade levels (K–12). This process includes multiple opportunities to reveal a student’s aptitude, achievement, or potential to achieve, and considers both qualitative and quantitative data to develop a full learner profile. The consistent collection and evaluation of these multiple indicators by each school’s Excel Team ensures that decisions are well-informed and grounded in best practices.

As referrals are received throughout the school year, the AIG Specialist gathers any additional data needed, documents this on the Multiple Indicators of Giftedness form, and presents the student’s profile to the school’s Excel Team. The team’s membership is as follows:

- K–8 schools maintain a standing Excel Team composed of the AIG Specialist, the principal (or designee), and classroom teachers representing the grade spans (e.g. K–2, 3–5, 6–8) and/or content

areas. These teams typically include at least five members.

- Watauga High School (WHS) and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) convene Excel Teams on an ad hoc basis. These teams include the AIG Specialist, the principal or assistant principal, the student's assigned counselor, and content-area teacher representatives.

Other professionals—such as the nominating teacher, EC or ML teacher, School Counselor, School Psychologist, or School Social Worker—may participate in Excel Team meetings when relevant. The District AIG Coordinator may attend by request or choose to observe and provide feedback on any team's deliberations.

Led by the AIG Specialist, Excel Teams examine each referred student's learner profile to determine eligibility for gifted identification and services. The criteria for identification vary by category, as outlined below and in Appendix A of the district's AIG plan.

Gifted Identification Categories and Criteria

Academically Gifted (AG, AM, AR) – Grades 3–12

Students may be identified as Academically Gifted (AG), Academically Gifted in Math (AM), or Academically Gifted in Reading (AR) if they demonstrate exceptional academic ability through a combination of the following:

- Aptitude score at or above the 90th percentile in the relevant domain (quantitative for AM, verbal for AR, or both for AG)
- Achievement score at or above the 93rd percentile on the NC EOG/EOC or PreACT/ACT subtests (excluding composite)
- Course grades of 92% or higher in the relevant subject
- Score of 159 or higher on the Gifted Behavior Scale

Intellectually Gifted (IG)

This category is for students who demonstrate high intellectual potential but do not yet show matching academic achievement. IG students often require support that addresses both cognitive strengths and barriers to performance.

- Aptitude scores at or above the 98th percentile on both a group (e.g. CogAT) and an individual (e.g. WISC) assessment
- Average or below-average academic performance based on course grades and EOG/EOC or PreACT/ACT scores
- Gifted Behavior Scale score of 159 or higher

Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI) – Grades 3–12

Students who demonstrate both exceptionally high ability and achievement may be identified as AI in Math, Reading, or both.

- Aptitude scores at or above the 98th percentile on individual assessments
- Achievement scores at or above the 98th percentile on NC EOG/EOC or PreACT/ACT subtests
- Course grades of 95% or higher in the relevant subject

- Gifted Behavior Scale score of 187 or higher

K–2 Identification

While formal identification in K–2 is rare due to developmental variability, exceptionally advanced students may be identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI) if their data clearly support this need. These students must meet modified but rigorous criteria:

- Aptitude scores at or above the 98th percentile on individual assessments
- Achievement levels at least two years above grade level in the relevant subject or three years above for full-grade acceleration, as shown by standardized achievement testing
- Gifted Behavior Scale score of 187 or higher, rated by both the teacher and AIG Specialist
- Strong anecdotal and observational evidence from the AIG Specialist, classroom teacher, and principal
- A portfolio of student work showing advanced synthesis, application, and creative thinking

All K–2 students identified as AI are reevaluated in grade 3 using the universal CogAT screener and additional data to confirm appropriate placement. Adjustments may be made to their identification based on updated results. In the event the Excel Team recommends a change in identification (e.g. AI to AG) and services, the student’s parent/guardian will be notified.

Additional Considerations and Data Sources

Excel Teams may also use supplemental qualitative data, such as:

- Teacher observations of advanced problem-solving, creativity, and motivation
- Recommendations from EC or ML staff (particularly in the case of twice-exceptional students)
- Work samples that demonstrate abstract thinking and conceptual depth

These sources help ensure that students' potential is not overlooked due to nontraditional learning profiles or external factors. The WCS identification process is built to recognize patterns across time and data types, rather than rely on isolated data points.

While no single data point is used to exclude a student, a composite aptitude score at or above the 98th percentile on a current (i.e. less than one year old) aptitude assessment may, in rare cases, be sufficient for identification on its own.

Excel Team Decision Pathways

After reviewing a student’s profile, Excel Teams choose one of three actions:

1. **No Identification:** Student continues in regular education, as current data do not indicate a need for gifted services. The student can be reviewed by the team later on should a new data point trigger a need for review.
2. **Wait-and-Watch:** Additional data will be gathered (e.g. observations, assessments, work samples). The team sets a clear plan and timeline for review.
3. **Identify as Gifted:** Student is identified in one or more gifted categories (AM, AR, AG, IG, or AI) and appropriate services are determined.

The AIG Specialist maintains a record of all referrals, decisions, and parent notifications. Parent involvement is documented for all placements. Services cannot begin without parent/guardian consent. If further testing is needed, written parental consent is requested and obtained.

Parents/guardians may appeal any Excel Team decision, as outlined in Standard 6, Practice I.

Transfer Students

- Students previously identified as gifted by a NC public school, as shown in Infinite Campus, are automatically enrolled in the WCS AIG Program.
- The AIG Specialist may bring the student to the Excel Team to determine the best identification category and services.
- Students from private, homeschool, charter, or out-of-state schools must meet WCS AIG criteria. Excel Teams review documentation and make decisions within 45 school days of the student's enrollment. In this situation, the AIG Specialist will notify the parent/guardian once the Excel Team has reached a decision.

Practice C

Ensures AIG screening, referral, and identification procedures respond to under-represented populations of the gifted and are responsive to LEA demographics. These populations include students who are culturally/ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, multilingual learners, highly gifted, and twice-exceptional.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program is committed to equitable screening, referral, and identification practices that respond to the demographics of the district and seek to address underrepresentation among gifted learners. All educators involved in the AIG Program are expected to understand district demographics and apply research-based, culturally responsive practices that support fair access to AIG services.

As of April 30, 2025, WCS enrolled 3,556 students in grades 3–12, the grade span during which students are typically screened and identified for gifted services. Demographic data for this population is as follows:

- **Gender:** 48.8% Female, 51.2% Male
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 82.1% White, 11.3% Hispanic, <5% Asian, <5% Black or African American, <5% Two or more ethnicities, <5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, <5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- **Subgroups:** 37.7% Economically Disadvantaged, 5.6% Multilingual Learners, 15.3% Exceptional Children (EC) services

In comparison, of the 801 students identified as AIG in April 2025:

- **Gender:** 49.1% Female, 50.9% Male

- **Race/Ethnicity:** 89.4% White, 3.4% Hispanic, <5% Asian, <5% Black or African American, <5% Two or more ethnicities, <5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, <5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- **Subgroups:** 14.7% Economically Disadvantaged, <5% Multilingual Learners, <5% EC services

Data is suppressed to protect personally identifiable information (i.e. the subgroup was less than 5%). However, this comparative data reveals underrepresentation among Hispanic students (11.3% of total vs. <5% of AIG), Multilingual Learners (5.6% vs. <5%), Economically Disadvantaged students (37.7% vs. 14.7%), and students receiving EC services (15.3% vs. <5%).

To address this disproportionality, WCS implements several equity-focused practices:

- **Universal Screening:** All third-grade students are administered a nationally normed aptitude assessment (CogAT). This ensures that every student, regardless of background, has an opportunity to be considered for AIG services. This screener can be administered in other languages, as needed.
- **Use of Nonverbal Measures:** For students whose first language is not English or who may have other barriers, nonverbal assessments are considered and used when appropriate. Assessment directions are also provided in a student's native language when available online.
- **Rolling Referrals:** In addition to fall identification windows, students may be referred at the end of the second and third nine-week grading periods, giving more time for underrepresented students to adjust and demonstrate potential.
- **Excel Team Process:** Excel Teams consider contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and cultural background when evaluating students. EC, ML, counseling, and social work staff are included as needed to ensure a complete understanding of the student's strengths and challenges.
- **Talent Development Services in High-Poverty Schools:** In schools where less than 10% of students are identified as AIG and/or more than 50% qualify for free/reduced lunch, AIG Specialists provide enrichment to students demonstrating high potential, even if they are not formally identified.
- **Support for Twice-Exceptional and Gifted Learners:** AIG Specialists collaborate with EC teachers to ensure students with dual exceptionalities receive appropriate services. When needed, an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) is developed to document and support their educational needs.

The District AIG Coordinator monitors screening, referral, and identification data and collaborates with central office staff, including those in Exceptional Children's services and Multilingual Learner programming to address equity concerns and align efforts across departments. It is also worth noting that race/ethnicity figures might be skewed, in part, because there are known instances of parents/guardians incorrectly reporting this information on enrollment paperwork.

Although WCS transitioned to a new Student Information System (Infinite Campus) in 2024–2025, limiting longitudinal comparisons for now, the district is actively using current-year data to identify areas for continued improvement in equitable identification.

WCS recognizes that further demographic and intersectional analyses are needed and is committed to evaluating practices with attention to the ongoing needs of all learners, particularly those from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

Practice D

Monitors the screening, referral, and identification processes for consistent implementation across the LEA.

District Response

Procedures for screening, referral, and identification of students for gifted services are clearly outlined in the Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Plan, which is approved by the Watauga County Board of Education. The AIG Plan serves as the foundational guide for gifted education across all WCS schools and is implemented consistently through close collaboration between the District AIG Coordinator and school-based AIG Specialists.

In WCS, gifted identifications are made by school-based Excel Teams. At the district's K–8 schools, these are standing committees led by the AIG Specialist. At Watauga High School (WHS) and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA), Excel Teams are formed on an as-needed basis and are also led by the AIG Specialist. To ensure consistency in team practices, the District AIG Coordinator provides initial training to all Excel Team members at the start of each new local AIG Plan cycle—or, for WHS/WIA teams, upon convening. This training includes:

- The intent and scope of the WCS AIG Plan;
- The role and responsibilities of the Excel Team;
- Identification procedures and the AIG Identification Flowchart (see Appendix A);
- Overview of the Array of Services (see Standard 2, Practice A; Standard 3, Practice B; and Appendix C);
- Expectations for maintaining confidentiality of student information; and
- Guidelines for student and program advocacy.

In non-plan-implementation years, AIG Specialists are strongly encouraged to ensure that any newly assigned Excel Team members receive training from the District AIG Coordinator before their first meeting.

Each school's AIG Specialist also provides an annual AIG awareness session to all staff to ensure continuity and clarity of gifted practices at the school level. These sessions include:

- A review of the legal basis for gifted education (Article 9B) and the definition of giftedness;
- An overview of the current WCS AIG Plan;
- Identification of gifted characteristics and needs, especially for students from underrepresented populations (see Standard 1, Practice C);
- Best Search Practices for referring students (see Appendix A); and
- A refresher on screening, referral, and identification procedures (see Standard 1, Practices A and B).

The District AIG Coordinator plays an active and ongoing role in monitoring implementation. When a new AIG Specialist joins WCS, the District Coordinator works directly with them to prepare for their first Excel Team meeting by assisting with data collection, co-developing the meeting agenda, modeling identification procedures, attending the meeting, and guiding post-meeting documentation. The District AIG Coordinator

may also attend Excel Team meetings by request or on a rotating basis to observe and support consistent practices.

Additionally, the AIG Specialist Team engages in periodic collaborative case studies of student files across schools to promote inter-school consistency in identification decisions. The District AIG Coordinator also conducts annual audits of student AIG files to confirm fidelity to identification procedures.

To further support equitable and consistent implementation, the District AIG Coordinator collects and monitors demographic data related to screening, referral, and identification. These data are analyzed regularly and shared in monthly or quarterly updates with school principals and central office personnel to inform continuous improvement efforts and uphold systemwide equity and consistency.

Practice E

Disseminates information regarding the screening, referral, and identification processes to school personnel, parents/guardians, students, and the community-at-large.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program ensures that all stakeholders—including school personnel, families, students, and the broader community—have access to clear and accurate information regarding screening, referral, and identification processes. Multiple platforms and strategies are used to ensure transparency, accessibility, and consistent messaging.

As outlined in Standard 4, Practice B, AIG Specialists provide annual training for school staff on all aspects of the AIG Program, including an overview of screening, referral, and identification procedures. These orientations promote clarity and consistency in gifted referral practices across all WCS schools. Throughout the school year, AIG Specialists—often in collaboration with School Counselors, School Psychologists, or other support personnel—may also lead additional professional learning sessions related to gifted education. At the middle and high school levels, AIG information is often shared during subject-area or grade-level collaborative team meetings, fostering ongoing awareness among instructional staff.

The District AIG Coordinator regularly communicates with district leadership through monthly, quarterly, or ad-hoc updates—both written and verbal—regarding program updates, demographics, and process fidelity. These updates may lead to follow-up conversations with specific department leaders such as the Chief Academic Officer, the Director of Exceptional Children’s Programs, the Coordinator for Multilingual Learner teachers, or the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs.

AIG Specialists serve as the primary point of contact for families and students at the school level. They communicate program information through school websites, newsletters, email groups, school orientations, and open house events. AIG Specialists are visible and accessible within their schools, and classroom teachers, administrators, or other staff regularly refer families and students to them for detailed conversations regarding gifted services, including the screening and identification process.

At the district level, the WCS AIG website is a central communication tool. It provides public access to the full WCS AIG Plan, relevant documents, informational brochures, presentations, contact information for school-based AIG Specialists, and responses to frequently asked questions. The site also offers opportunities for families and community members to provide feedback on the gifted program.

The District AIG Coordinator also shares information through public channels, including meetings of the AIG Advisory Council and public presentations to the Watauga County Board of Education. These forums offer community stakeholders the opportunity to learn about and engage with the AIG Program’s policies, practices, and outcomes. Additionally, any parent, staff member, or community stakeholder may contact the District AIG Coordinator directly for information or assistance related to the AIG Program.

Practice F

Documents the evidence gathered and analyzed to support an AIG identification decision. This documentation is reviewed with parents/guardians and maintained in student records.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) ensures that all AIG identification decisions are supported by documented evidence and communicated clearly to parents/guardians through structured, formalized processes. Documentation is maintained in student records and updated regularly to reflect each student’s evolving academic profile and service needs.

For each identified student, the AIG Specialist—collaborating with classroom teachers, support staff, and other WCS professionals—creates a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or, when necessary, an Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP). These plans are developed based on the student’s specific academic strengths and learning needs and reflect the array of services available across the district.

In grades K–8, the AIG Specialist convenes an initial placement conference with the parent/guardian to review and sign the DEP/IDEP. Services do not begin without a signed plan. Each year, the AIG Specialist meets again with the parent/guardian to review, revise, or rewrite the plan based on updated data and performance. Parents receive a copy of the initial placement form and the DEP/IDEP during these meetings.

At the high school level (grades 9–12), in lieu of a formal DEP, the AIG Specialist works with students, families, and school counselors, to maintain and adjust each student’s four-year academic plan, aligning course selections with postsecondary goals. For students identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI), an IDEP is created and maintained. The AIG Specialist is responsible for updating, securing, and preserving all documentation in accordance with district and state guidelines.

Each spring, AIG Specialists conduct a Yearly Performance Review for every student with a DEP or IDEP. Evidence considered during the review may include:

- Teacher and support staff feedback;
- Progress reports and/or report cards;
- Notes from parent/guardian conferences;
- Summative assessment data (e.g. EOGs, EOCs, etc.);
- Student work samples.

If the student is meeting expectations in their service option(s), the AIG Specialist notifies the parent/guardian using the Yearly Performance Review form.

WCS’s AIG Program operates within the district’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework (See Appendix D). This model supports continuous data-informed collaboration across educators to plan academic, behavioral, attendance, and social-emotional interventions or enrichments for students. Within this structure, gifted learners—like all students—are understood to have evolving needs (e.g. asynchronous

development). The MTSS process provides an effective platform to address and document shifts in student progress and to revise services as appropriate.

If a student on a DEP is not making satisfactory progress:

- The AIG Specialist, with input from stakeholders (e.g. principal, classroom teacher, school counselor), develops an IDEP to provide more individualized support.
- The parent/guardian participates in a conference to review and approve the IDEP.

If a student already on an IDEP continues to struggle, the AIG Specialist collaborates with additional specialists (e.g. School Counselor, School Psychologist, Social Worker) and/or the school's intervention team to revise the plan. The District AIG Coordinator is included in the problem-solving process when appropriate.

In some cases, school-based intervention teams may independently identify gifted students in need of academic, behavioral, or social-emotional support. These teams coordinate with AIG Specialists to develop or revise service delivery plans, which are reflected in updated DEP/IDEP documentation.

Importantly, WCS does not remove AIG identification or services based on academic performance. Giftedness is considered an enduring part of a student's learning profile and identity. When students struggle, the response is to adjust the level or type of services—not to revoke them. The district maintains a commitment to continuous support, growth, and advocacy for each identified student.

Practice G

Develops and documents a student plan that articulates the differentiated curriculum and instruction services that match the identified needs of the K-12 AIG student, such as a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP). This document is developed and reviewed annually with parents/ guardians to ensure effective programming, provide a continuum of services, and support school transitions.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) uses a standardized Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) and, when needed, an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) to document and guide services for all identified AIG students. These documents are developed annually through a collaborative process that includes the student's AIG Specialist, classroom teachers, support staff, and families. Plans are based on the most recent available data (see Standard 3, Practice E) and are designed to match the student's academic, intellectual, and social-emotional strengths and needs with differentiated services.

Services documented in the DEP/IDEP are aligned with grade-level and subject-area standards and instructional opportunities (see Standard 2, Practice A). AIG Specialists invite families to meet at the beginning of each school year to review the plan, collaborate on its contents, and sign the document. AIG Specialists remain available throughout the year to discuss or revise the plan based on student progress or evolving needs.

To ensure ongoing alignment between services and student needs, AIG Specialists conduct a Yearly Performance Review for each student with a DEP/IDEP (outlined in Standard 1, Practice F). This review process evaluates student performance data, work samples, and feedback from teachers, parents, and the student. Based on this information, plans may be revised to ensure that services remain appropriately matched to the student's development.

In addition to regular monitoring at the school level, the District AIG Coordinator conducts an annual audit of AIG student records to ensure compliance with DEP/IDEP processes and fidelity of implementation across all schools.

For students transitioning to Watauga High School (WHS) or the Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA), documentation is transferred to the receiving AIG Specialist. That specialist compiles and shares a list of AIG students with relevant administrators and counselors to support awareness of gifted learners and their individual needs. The District AIG Coordinator and the WHS/WIA AIG Specialist work collaboratively to ensure that high school faculty are aware of which students are identified as AIG and understand best practices for differentiated instruction at the secondary level.

To support visibility and service coordination, each identified student has a purple “AIG” flag next to their name in Infinite Campus. At the high school level, the DEP is represented by each student’s four-year plan and course selections, which are developed with input from the student, parents/guardians, grade-level counselor, and/or AIG Specialist. Students are encouraged to enroll in the most rigorous coursework available to meet their academic potential and goals.

Counselors also play an essential role by providing information and support regarding the unique social, emotional, and behavioral needs of AIG students, including access to school-based counseling services as needed.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By December 2025, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the AIG Advisory Council, will develop an updated AIG Parent/Guardian Handbook and/or Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for families.
2. By June 2026, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will participate in professional learning on giftedness in historically underrepresented populations and develop plans to train staff on this topic.
3. By December 2026, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop a plan to partner with the Exceptional Children’s department to communicate with various stakeholder groups about district policies, practices, and resources in order to build awareness of and intent to reach and teach students who are twice-exceptional.
4. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop targeted plans for enhancing equitable screening, referral, and identification practices among Hispanic and Multilingual Learner students.
5. By December 2028, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop a rigorous, well-defined, research-based process for using student work portfolios in gifted referral and identification.

Sources of Evidence

1. Updated AIG Handbook or FAQ document for parents/guardians on the district website
2. Giftedness in historically underrepresented populations professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
3. Documentation of meeting discussing collaboration with EC department; combined EC/AIG event
4. Clear, detailed plan for equitable screening, referral, and identification practices responsive to Hispanic and Multilingual Learner students
5. Clear, detailed documentation of a research-based process for assembling and evaluating student work portfolios

Standard 2: Comprehensive Planning within a Total School Community

The LEA provides a K-12 AIG program with an array of services by the total school community to meet the diverse academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners. These services will develop students' strengths through intentional learning experiences in various domains that are not dependent on the students' demographic background or economic means.

Practice A

Delivers an AIG program with comprehensive services that address the academic and intellectual needs of AIG students across all grade levels, K-12, and learning environments, through collaboration with a variety of personnel. Services are aligned to students' advanced learning needs and AIG identification.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program designs effective gifted education experiences through an intentional combination of services and settings that vary in kind, degree, and duration to meet each student's unique academic, intellectual, and social-emotional strengths and needs. WCS also recognizes the role of gifted education within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and uses this framework to guide the services provided to gifted students and the settings in which they occur. (See Appendix D for more on the WCS AIG Program within an MTSS.)

The array of services described in this section (and summarized in Appendix C) ranges from developing gifted potential (detailed in Standard 2, Practice H) to supporting the advanced learning needs of identified students.

Once a student is identified by the Excel Team, the AIG Specialist consults with the student, parents, classroom teachers, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. EC or ML teachers, school counselors, social workers) to develop a service delivery plan matched to the student's identification area—academically gifted in reading, math, or both; intellectually gifted; or academically and intellectually gifted. (See Standard 1, Practice B for more information on identification areas.) In K–8 schools, all relevant stakeholders receive a copy of the DEP/IDEP annually. At the high school level (grades 9–12), in lieu of a formal DEP, the AIG Specialist works with students, families, and school counselors, to maintain and adjust each student's four-year academic plan, aligning course selections with postsecondary goals.

To ensure that each student receives services aligned to their demonstrated needs and area(s) of identification, AIG Specialists develop Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) or Individualized Differentiated Education Plans (IDEPs) that are customized to reflect the student's strengths and specific gifted profile. The matching process involves analyzing assessment data, classroom performance, and teacher observations to determine the most appropriate service options from the district's array of services (See Appendix C). For example:

- Students identified as Academically Gifted in Math (AM) may be placed in advanced or accelerated math courses, provided with enrichment opportunities in mathematical reasoning, or supported through online courses.
- Students identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI) may receive cross-curricular enrichment emphasizing critical and creative thinking, abstract reasoning, and problem-solving.
- Students with dual identification in reading and math (AG) may receive a blend of services tailored to each subject area, coordinated across different content settings.

These services are documented in the DEP/IDEP and are reviewed and modified annually to adapt to the student's evolving academic profile. Services cannot begin without a parent/guardian signature on the current DEP/IDEP. (See Standard 1, Practice G for more on service documentation and review.)

Service delivery settings vary depending on student need, staffing, scheduling, and school-specific factors. These may include:

- General education classrooms (inclusion)
- AIG Specialist classrooms (pull-out)
- Designated enrichment/intervention blocks (e.g. "I/E Time," "FLEX Time")
- Other school-based or virtual settings as needed

Service Delivery Options by Grade Span

Kindergarten through Grade 2:

In recognition of the developmental needs of young learners, WCS generally does not formally identify students as gifted before Grade 3. Instead, all K–2 students receive talent development services from the AIG Specialist in the general education setting. These services help foster gifted behaviors and provide early observation opportunities. (See Standard 2, Practice H.) In rare cases where compelling evidence exists, students may be formally identified before third grade. (See Standard 1, Practice B.)

Identified K–2 students may receive services in flexible and/or heterogeneous groups and may be accelerated in subject or grade level when appropriate. Services may include, but are not limited to:

- Classroom interest centers
- Guest speakers and cultural arts programs
- Interest-based clubs and competitions (e.g. art and writing contests, math/science fairs)
- Community resource programs
- Summer enrichment programs (offered by WCS, universities, or community organizations)

Grades 3 through 5:

Identified students in Grades 3–5 may receive services in a range of settings, including those used in K–2, as well as:

- Online coursework (e.g. NC Virtual Public School)

Service options for Grades 3–5 may include, but are not limited to:

- Academic competitions and clubs (e.g. Elementary Battle of the Books, Geography Bee, Junior Beta Club, Robotics)
- Student Council, Stock Market Game
- Mentorships

AIG Specialists collaborate with teachers to match students' interests and readiness to appropriate services and ensure differentiation occurs both in and out of the classroom.

Grades 6–8

Service settings and options continue to expand with increased access to:

- Advanced coursework (e.g. Pre-Math I, Math I)
- Competitions (e.g. Future City, MathCounts, Model UN, Mock Trial, Middle School Battle of the Books)
- Exploratory courses (e.g. Yearbook, Journalism, Coding)

Grades 9 through 12:

In high school, students may receive services in settings used in earlier grades, as well as:

- Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) courses
- Early graduation or college admission opportunities
- Residential schools (e.g. NCSSM, UNCOSA; offered outside WCS at the family's expense)
- Governor's School

High school students also have access to enrichment opportunities such as:

- Academic clubs and competitions (e.g. Key Club, CTE competitions, Battle of the Books)
- Apprenticeships, internships, or job shadowing
- Independent studies and mentorships
- Elective courses
- Community service projects

Interest-based enrichment is further supported by activities described in Standard 2, Practice J. AIG Specialists collaborate with educators to connect students with relevant opportunities that foster critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and leadership.

Support for Implementation

While AIG Specialists provide direct services, most instruction takes place in the general education setting. Therefore, Specialists also offer coaching, consultation, content acceleration, professional development, and instructional resources to support differentiation for gifted learners.

WCS affirms that giftedness is a part of a student's identity and not something that can be removed. Services are essential for growth—not a reward or privilege. If a student's performance on the DEP/IDEP is unsatisfactory, it signals a need to adjust services rather than revoke identification. The AIG Specialist, in collaboration with the District AIG Coordinator and other stakeholders, will revise the DEP/IDEP to better meet the student's needs. (See Standard 1, Practice F.)

Practice B

Delivers an AIG program with comprehensive services that address the social and emotional needs of AIG students across all grade levels, K-12, and learning environments, through collaboration with a variety of personnel based on student needs.

District Response

AIG Specialists facilitate collaboration among a variety of school-based and district-level teams to develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of each AIG student and to effectively support their social and emotional needs across all grade levels, K-12. Each year, AIG Specialists lead staff presentations that build awareness of the unique social and emotional characteristics and needs of gifted learners. These

presentations include research-based strategies, highlight common challenges (such as perfectionism or asynchronous development), and emphasize the importance of a whole-child approach. Additional targeted professional development is provided as needed throughout the year. AIG Specialists also conduct formal and informal check-ins with classroom teachers through collaborative teams, grade-level meetings, and one-on-one conversations to ensure students' social-emotional needs are being recognized and addressed.

Collaboration extends beyond the classroom. AIG Specialists work closely with school counselors, social workers, and other members of the Student Services team to ensure wraparound supports are available for gifted students. School counselors provide individual and small group counseling sessions for referred AIG students, and they also meet with each rising ninth grader to assist with course planning and the transition to high school. (See Standard 2, Practice F for more on transition support.) When appropriate, AIG Specialists attend professional development sessions alongside counselors and teachers to develop shared language and strategies for addressing gifted students' social-emotional growth.

Formal student planning processes further ensure support is intentional and individualized. During annual reviews of Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) and Individualized Differentiated Education Plans (IDEPs), AIG Specialists consider both academic and social-emotional development. Relevant personnel—such as EC/ML teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers—are included as needed in the planning process. These meetings also offer families an opportunity to share insights, review progress, and collaborate on supports. Specific social-emotional goals may be embedded within the DEP/IDEP and shared with families and relevant staff. For twice-exceptional students, AIG Specialists contribute to 504 or IEP meetings to help develop a more complete understanding of student needs and align services accordingly.

Social-emotional support is also embedded in schoolwide systems. Within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, grade-level and content-area collaborative teams routinely review academic and social-emotional data—including behavioral observations, attendance trends, and SEL screeners—to inform instruction and interventions. When needed, concerns are elevated to school-level MTSS Teams for more targeted support. AIG Specialists and school counselors participate actively in these conversations, ensuring gifted students are considered in problem-solving processes.

At the district level, the WCS AIG Program works in partnership with the Central Services Team, Curriculum and Instruction Team, and District Leadership Team to maintain alignment and awareness of AIG students' social-emotional needs. The District AIG Coordinator also collaborates with the AIG Advisory Council to share updates and gather stakeholder input. Additionally, efforts are made to ensure that supports are inclusive and culturally responsive, addressing the varied experiences and needs of underrepresented gifted learners.

Finally, student voice is an important part of our approach. AIG Specialists gather informal feedback from students during classroom visits and check-ins, and some schools use student interest inventories or reflection tools to better understand their social-emotional needs and strengths. These efforts help tailor services and ensure students feel seen and supported.

Practice C

Integrates and connects the AIG program and services with the district's priorities and resources through policy and practice.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to meeting the diverse needs of gifted learners while advancing the district's mission of preparing all students for productive citizenship and lifelong learning. Gifted education

in WCS is not a siloed program; rather, it is deeply embedded in district-wide policy, planning, and instructional structures. Through intentional alignment with the district's strategic priorities and efficient use of resources, the WCS AIG Program is well-integrated into the total educational framework.

At the district level, the District AIG Coordinator seeks opportunities to meet with core leadership and planning teams to ensure that gifted education remains a vital part of the instructional agenda. These collaborative structures include:

- District Leadership Team – Composed of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, directors of all central office departments, and all school principals.
- District Media and Technology Advisory Committee – Includes teacher, administrator, parent, and School Library Media Coordinator representatives from each school, along with central office leadership and a Board of Education member.
- District Curriculum and Instruction Team – Chief Academic Officer, directors of all central office departments, and other personnel invited depending on the set agenda.

These teams serve as platforms through which the AIG Program is consistently considered in broader instructional decisions, and aligned with district-wide goals.

The District AIG Coordinator also participates in Board of Education meetings when possible and is engaged in district policy development. Policy updates relevant to gifted education or curriculum more broadly are reviewed and revised with input from the District AIG Coordinator, in collaboration with the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs, who facilitates the policy revision process with the North Carolina School Boards Association.

At the school and district levels, AIG Specialists participate in a variety of teams that shape instructional planning and school culture, such as:

- Calendar Committee
- Grade-Level Teams
- Media and Technology Advisory Committee

In individual schools, AIG Specialists also engage with:

- Collaborative Content or Grade-Level Teams
- Data Teams
- School Improvement Teams (SITs)
- School Improvement Team subcommittees (e.g. Compassionate Care, Equity, Behavior)

Through these collaborative roles, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists serve as consistent advocates for gifted learners, ensuring that their needs are considered in all school and district-level planning. These engagements foster reciprocal communication: AIG personnel disseminate information about the program while simultaneously gathering insights from various stakeholders. These ongoing dialogues guide how district resources are allocated and ensure that policy and practice align with the goals and implementation of the WCS AIG Plan.

Practice D

Develops procedures for intentional, flexible grouping practices to facilitate the achievement and growth of AIG and other students with advanced learning needs.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) recognizes flexible grouping as a critical component of effective instruction for AIG students and all learners with advanced academic needs. In alignment with research-based best practices (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Tomlinson & Allen, 2000), AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers to implement intentional, data-driven grouping strategies within both AIG services and general education settings.

Flexible grouping configurations are based on a variety of factors, including students' readiness levels, interests, learning profiles, and current assessment data. These configurations may include:

- One-on-one instruction with the teacher;
- Small, homogeneous groups targeting specific strengths or areas of need;
- Heterogeneous groups to encourage peer interaction and shared learning;
- Whole-class activities that support differentiated access to content.

Groups are dynamic and responsive, frequently shifting based on ongoing assessment and instructional goals. Instruction within these groupings is differentiated in terms of content, process, and product to promote engagement and maximize growth.

At the school level, flexible grouping is further supported through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. Teachers engage in regular data-driven planning within collaborative teams organized by grade level, subject area, or grade span. These teams analyze formative and summative data to inform instructional grouping and are supported by scheduled periods for intervention and enrichment (e.g. "I/E Time," "FLEX Time"). During these times, AIG Specialists and other support staff work with groups to meet academic, social-emotional, or behavioral needs.

AIG Specialists and other instructional leaders provide ongoing professional learning to classroom teachers on effective grouping practices. Support may include workshops, co-planning, modeling, and coaching to ensure high-quality, flexible implementation across classrooms.

At the district level, the District AIG Coordinator regularly reviews AIG student data, including academic achievement (e.g. EOG/EOC results, ACT, AP), growth (e.g. EVAAS), and behavioral indicators (e.g. attendance, discipline referrals). These findings are shared annually with district leadership teams to inform strategic planning for course offerings, student scheduling, and instructional grouping.

Through intentional design, collaboration, and continuous data analysis, WCS ensures that flexible grouping practices are effectively implemented to promote the achievement and growth of gifted and advanced learners across the K–12 continuum.

Practice E

Informs all teachers, school administrators, and support staff about delivery of differentiated services and instruction for AIG students, regulations related to gifted education, and the local AIG program and plan.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to ensuring that all teachers, administrators, and support staff are informed and equipped to effectively support AIG students. The WCS AIG Program communicates gifted

education regulations, procedures, and program expectations through multiple platforms and ongoing professional development.

All stakeholders can access the approved local AIG Plan—including its appendices, resources, and contact information for the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists—on the WCS district website. The site also features a “Frequently Asked Questions” section, the WCS AIG Program brochure in both English and Spanish, and Appendix A: Identification Flowchart and Criteria, which provides a concise overview of AIG identification and services. An AIG Specialist Handbook, maintained by the District AIG Coordinator, further clarifies goals, policies, and procedures for AIG Specialists.

Key methods of disseminating information include:

- Annual district wide training, collaboratively developed and delivered by the AIG team, for teachers, administrators, and support staff on key topics such as gifted education law, use of multiple criteria for identification, and service delivery models.
- Specialized training for Excel Team members, delivered annually by the District AIG Coordinator, focusing on state AIG standards, local identification procedures, and relevant updates to the AIG Plan.
- Ongoing review of identification procedures at Excel Team meetings, led by the AIG Specialist at each school.
- Regular updates at grade-level meetings or subject-area collaborative meetings, led by AIG Specialists to promote awareness and dialogue around student services.
- Systematic communication from the District AIG Coordinator to central teams such as the AIG Specialist Team, Curriculum and Instruction Team, and District Leadership Team.
- Updates to the Watauga County Board of Education, provided by the District AIG Coordinator upon request.

At the school level, AIG Specialists ensure that all relevant staff—including classroom teachers, Exceptional Children (EC) teachers, and Multilingual Learner (ML) teachers—receive copies of and guidance on implementing students’ DEPs or IDEPs. In grades 9–12, the AIG Specialist works closely with school counselors and building administrators to:

- Share and update AIG student rosters with teachers;
- Train staff on locating AIG information in the student information system (Infinite Campus);
- Provide targeted professional learning opportunities on differentiation strategies and gifted learner needs.

Through this multi-tiered and sustained approach, WCS ensures that all school personnel are consistently informed and engaged in supporting AIG students across the K–12 continuum.

Practice F

Communicates among and between teachers and schools to ensure an effective continuation of K-12 services, especially at key transition points.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) prioritizes open and consistent communication among all stakeholders to ensure the effective continuation of AIG services throughout a student’s K–12 educational experience. The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists serve as liaisons between teachers, schools, and other

educational professionals to maintain continuity in gifted services—particularly at key academic transition points.

AIG Specialists collaborate closely with classroom teachers to develop and implement Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) or Individualized Differentiated Education Plans (IDEPs). These plans are reviewed and shared annually with classroom teachers and other relevant staff. Formal and informal meetings throughout the year support shared understanding of each student’s academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs. In the K–8 school model used by WCS, proximity of grade levels fosters regular communication and collaboration between elementary and middle grade teachers, easing transitions and promoting consistent support for AIG students. These grade levels generally share one, consistent AIG Specialist as well.

To support the transition from middle grades to high school, eighth-grade school counselors meet individually with students and their families during the spring semester to discuss high school course options and extracurricular activities. Although the AIG Specialist may not attend all registration meetings, they regularly consult with school counselors, students, and families to ensure that high school course selections align with each student’s strengths and goals.

At the end of each school year, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists compile a list of rising ninth-grade AIG students, detailing the services each received at their K–8 school. This information, along with AIG student files, is submitted to the District AIG Coordinator before the final teacher workday. The Coordinator then transfers these files to the Watauga High School (WHS) / Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) AIG Specialist, who works in collaboration with WHS/WIA school counselors to support students in choosing appropriately challenging coursework for their individual learning profiles.

AIG Specialists are responsible for maintaining accurate student records and ensuring the smooth transfer of AIG files when students move between WCS schools. When students transfer out of the district, the AIG Specialist includes a copy of the AIG portfolio with the cumulative transfer file while retaining the original for potential re-enrollment. These inactive files are securely stored at the school for five years beyond the student’s projected graduation date, after which they are destroyed according to district policy (see Standard 6, Practice I).

To support the transition to high school, each K–8 school participates in an orientation meeting at WHS for rising ninth-grade students and their families. This event includes a facility tour, a presentation on academic and extracurricular opportunities, and guidance on course registration. In the spring semester of each school year, a dedicated session for AIG students and families is led by the District AIG Coordinator, WHS/WIA AIG Specialist, WHS/WIA staff. This session highlights how the academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of gifted students are met in the high school setting and provides a foundation for ongoing support.

Practice G

Develops policies and procedures for a variety of acceleration opportunities, including compacted content, Credit by Demonstrated Mastery, dual enrollment, subject and/or grade acceleration.

District Response

A well-planned array of service delivery options (as described in Standard 2, Practice A and Appendix C) provides most gifted students with opportunities for enrichment and extension. However, some students require more advanced differentiation strategies and/or placements. The Watauga County Schools AIG Plan, aligned with the Watauga County Board of Education Policy Manual, outlines the ways students may access accelerated instruction when appropriate. These options include early entrance to kindergarten, subject or

grade acceleration, Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM), dual enrollment, attendance at residential schools, early college or university admission, and independent study. All options described in this section must be deemed appropriate by the AIG Specialist, Excel Team, and school principal. Parents and guardians interested in these options are encouraged to begin by consulting with the school's AIG Specialist or principal to explore available pathways and next steps.

Curriculum Compacting

Watauga County Schools supports the use of curriculum compacting as an instructional strategy to ensure that AIG students are consistently challenged and engaged in their learning. Curriculum compacting is a process by which students who demonstrate mastery of grade-level standards—typically through pre-assessment or formative measures—are allowed to move more quickly through already mastered content in order to engage in enrichment, extension, or acceleration opportunities. In collaboration with general education teachers, AIG Specialists may assist in identifying students for compacted curriculum and in designing alternative learning tasks that promote higher-order thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinary connections. This approach allows students to spend more time exploring advanced content aligned with their strengths and interests while ensuring continued alignment with North Carolina standards. Curriculum compacting can take place within the regular classroom setting, through small group instruction, or as part of personalized learning pathways documented in the DEP or IDEP.

Early Entrance to Kindergarten

Parents interested in early kindergarten enrollment should contact the District AIG Coordinator, Chief Academic Officer, or school principal. Children must meet eligibility requirements as defined in Watauga County Board of Education Policy 4100 and related state policies (N.C.G.S. §115C-364 and SBE policy KNEC-001). Criteria include:

- The child must be four years old on or before April 16;
- Enrollment request must be submitted no later than the end of the first month of school;
- Documentation must be provided within 30 calendar days of the instructional year and include:
 - A score at or above the 98th percentile on an individual aptitude test administered by a certified psychologist;
 - Achievement two to three years beyond peers, evidenced by a 98th percentile score on a standardized achievement test;
 - Work samples demonstrating advanced performance “well above age peers as evidenced by behaviors in one or more areas such as independent reading, problem solving skills, advanced vocabulary, and some writing fluency” (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999b);
 - Letters of recommendation with documented social and physical maturity.

The school principal, with support from the Excel Team, conducts a case-by-case review, including interviews with the child and family. A decision is issued within three weeks, with the possibility of a conditional 90-day enrollment period to evaluate adjustment.

Early entrance does not constitute AIG identification. However, after 90 calendar days, AIG Specialists may review these students' records for potential nomination, following procedures described in Standard 1, Practice B.

Subject Acceleration

Subject acceleration may be considered when it is an appropriate service match for an identified student. AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers to evaluate readiness based on:

- Academic performance and interest in the subject;
- Grades and achievement data (e.g. EOG/EOC scores, summative assessments);
- Evidence of prior knowledge using released items or local assessments.

Students must demonstrate sufficient content mastery for success in the accelerated course. If not, curriculum compacting or enrichment may be used instead when appropriate.

Social-emotional considerations are part of the decision-making process. The district acknowledges the substantial body of research showing that acceleration is generally beneficial for gifted learners, both academically and socially (Cross, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2015; Robinson, 2004; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Rogers, 2015). Ultimately, the Excel Team decides whether or not subject acceleration is the appropriate service match for a gifted student.

In middle school, subject acceleration in mathematics may include Pre-Math I in grade 7 and Math I in grade 8, with additional advanced options provided as needed. These placements are based on EOG scores, classroom performance, student interest, motivation, and the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test.

North Carolina legislation (Chapter 115C, Article 8, Part 1) requires that advanced math courses be offered when practicable to students in grades 3 and above. Students scoring a Level 5 on a Math EOG or EOC must be placed in the next advanced course. While this does not automatically result in AIG identification, qualifying students receive advanced instruction accordingly:

- Grades 3–5: Advanced content through flexible grouping within the general classroom;
- Grade 6: Compacted math when available;
- Grades 7–8: Pre-Math I or Math I based on readiness;
- Grade 9: Placement in Honors Math I or higher, as appropriate.

Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM)

CDM provides a pathway for whole-course acceleration. Under NCSBE policy CCRE-001, students may earn credit without seat time by demonstrating mastery through a two-phase process:

- **Phase One:** A course exam (EOC or local assessment); students must meet state-established benchmarks.
- **Phase Two:** A performance-based artifact assessed by a CDM Review Panel, which includes content experts, a principal (or designee), and an AIG or Curriculum Specialist.

CDM is open to students in grades 9–12 and to middle schoolers enrolled in high school-level courses. Some courses are excluded, including those with clinical or field components (e.g. internships, Nursing Fundamentals, AP, IB, etc.).

The CDM process follows DPI-defined testing windows (fall, spring, summer), posted on the WCS website. Appeals processes are communicated before Phase Two begins. Students who successfully complete the CDM process will be awarded with a “Pass” grade for the course. As a result, there are no GPA points awarded.

Grade Acceleration

Grade acceleration is considered when data indicate that the student's needs cannot be met within their current grade level. Parents and guardians should initiate conversations with the AIG Specialist, current teacher, and principal. Evaluation includes:

- Academic data across all subjects;
- Classroom performance, motivation, and maturity;
- Achievement scores and content mastery for the target grade.

Grade acceleration should not be provided for students who do not have a sufficient level of prior knowledge to enable success in the accelerated grade; in these cases, curriculum compacting and/or enrichment may be more suitable service delivery options. If grade acceleration is recommended by the Excel Team, the school principal convenes a conference with the student's teachers, counselor, psychologist, and parents/guardians. The superintendent or designee reviews the recommendation. Final placement decisions rest with the school principal, per board policy and state guidelines.

Social-emotional wellbeing remains a central consideration, and the district recognizes extensive research supporting the benefits of acceleration when data support the match.

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment allows students to participate in coursework at more than one educational level. This may include:

- Middle school students taking high school courses;
- High school students enrolled in post-secondary courses from Caldwell Community College;
- Distance learning through platforms like North Carolina Virtual Public School.

Students must meet the criteria outlined in Board Policy 3101, Dual Enrollment, and all placements must comply with state statutes. Specifically, students must be identified as gifted in Reading and Math (AG) in order to access dual enrollment options as a Freshman or Sophomore. Interested AIG students and families should reach out to the AIG Specialist and school counselors for support in identifying and accessing these opportunities.

Residential Schools

The North Carolina School of Science and Math (NCSSM) and University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA) provide residential options for highly gifted students. Additionally, some students may qualify for early college or university admission.

The WHS/WIA AIG Specialist and school counselors assist with identifying and supporting students through these application processes. Students pursuing early graduation or college placement must meet graduation requirements per Policy 3460.

Independent Study

Independent studies offer highly gifted students opportunities to explore advanced content aligned with their interests. These may include:

- Mentorships;
- Job shadowing;
- Independent projects or research.

These experiences are supervised by AIG Specialists, classroom teachers, or counselors and are tailored to each student's needs.

Practice H

Cultivates and develops the potential of young (K-3) students with early intervention and talent development opportunities through purposeful and intentional programming.

District Response

AIG Specialists provide talent development services to all K-2 students to help nurture their potential and identify early indicators of giftedness. These services may include enrichment and extension activities focused on lateral thinking and creative problem-solving (e.g. using the *Primary Education Thinking Skills* curriculum), as well as explicit instruction on social-emotional topics such as:

- Setting realistic academic expectations;
- Developing persistence and a growth mindset;
- Building a healthy self-concept and positive peer relationships.

AIG Specialists design and deliver lessons that promote creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking while also developing communication, collaboration, and leadership skills in young learners. In many cases, Specialists work with entire classes and collaborate with classroom teachers to form flexible small groups based on student strengths and interests.

AIG Specialists also observe and consult with K-2 teachers to identify students who may benefit from early formal identification and individualized services. When warranted, students may be referred for AIG identification in accordance with procedures outlined in Standard 1. Students who are formally identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI) receive an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) outlining appropriate services.

To ensure appropriate support for early learners, the District AIG Coordinator reviews school rosters and Specialists' schedules to verify that sufficient time is allocated for both talent development and individualized services for Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI) K-2 students.

AIG Specialists meet monthly to receive updates, share strategies, and discuss curriculum, including best practices for the K-2 setting. As needed, the District AIG Coordinator provides staff development for AIG Specialists and K-2 classroom teachers, focusing on the characteristics and needs of young gifted learners and effective differentiation strategies. AIG funds (at both the school and district level) are used to purchase and implement supplemental resources specifically designed for nurturing talent in early grades.

Talent development services in Grade 3 are less common in Watauga County Schools, as traditional gifted identification and formal service delivery typically begin in third grade. The AIG Specialist will make an attempt to provide some nurturing services in Grade 3, prior to fall placements, if his or her schedule allows for this to occur.

Practice I

Develops mindsets, policies, and practices to promote equity and excellence by broadening access to advanced learning opportunities through a variety of talent development efforts, including frontloading, in grades 4-12.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program provides service delivery options for traditionally underrepresented AIG populations. Each elementary school includes a talent development component for students in Kindergarten through second grade (as outlined in Standard 2, Practice H) that seeks to nurture gifted potential in all students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds. AIG Specialists may also collaborate with classroom teachers in grades 3 and above to identify potentially gifted students from underrepresented groups, offer strategies for differentiated instruction, and provide direct talent development services when feasible.

These services often include frontloading—intentional exposure to advanced vocabulary, concepts, and critical thinking skills—to better prepare students for future success in advanced learning environments. This proactive approach supports the equitable development of academic potential and increases access to rigorous curriculum and gifted programming.

As discussed in Standard 1, Practice C, WCS AIG Program data indicate underrepresentation among Hispanic students, Multilingual Learners, economically disadvantaged students, and twice-exceptional students. The AIG District Coordinator will pursue further demographic analysis to explore intersectionality within and across these groups. This process will involve collaboration with district leaders, including the Director of the Exceptional Children’s Program, the Director of Student Services, and the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs.

Every effort is made to ensure the referral and identification processes reflect the diversity of the school population. In their annual staff presentations, AIG Specialists emphasize the importance of recognizing gifted potential in students from traditionally underrepresented populations. These presentations include perspectives on how gifted traits may manifest in different cultural contexts and how to interpret these behaviors appropriately. Alternative assessments—such as nonverbal testing—may be used when traditional assessments do not accurately capture student potential. When gifted nominations for students from underrepresented populations are reviewed, Specialists serving those groups (e.g. school counselors, social workers, EC or ML teachers) serve as ad-hoc Excel Team members to ensure a well-rounded review of each candidate. The AIG District Coordinator monitors demographics of the screening, referral, and identification processes to promote consistency and equity across the district.

Through collaboration with various school personnel, the WCS AIG Program offers comprehensive support to traditionally underrepresented students. AIG Specialists partner with support staff (e.g. school counselors, social workers, EC and ML teachers) to develop and implement services that foster students' intellectual growth while meeting their individual needs. AIG Specialists also ensure that materials used in gifted instruction are inclusive and culturally responsive. These educators raise awareness among classroom teachers and advocate for funding to support the purchase of such resources.

An essential component of this effort is regular, proactive communication between AIG Specialists and the families of gifted or potentially gifted students from underrepresented groups. Communication—sometimes requiring interpreter support—helps families feel valued as educational partners, provides them with strategies to support their children at home, and assists them in navigating gifted education systems and postsecondary pathways. As noted by Robinson, Shore, and Enersen (2007, pp. 251–252), these conversations help shift stakeholder mindsets and lay the foundation for more equitable policies and practices.

The equitable identification and support of underrepresented gifted learners is also informed by systematic data review. As detailed in Standard 6, Practice E, WCS uses ongoing data analysis to monitor representation,

performance, and retention of underrepresented students in the AIG Program. This includes examining demographic trends in access to advanced coursework, acceleration, residential school admission, and dual enrollment. Performance data from these services are reviewed by the AIG District Coordinator, AIG Specialists, School Counselors, and administrators to identify where targeted support is needed and where progress is being made toward equity.

Practice J

Enhances and further develops the talents and interests of AIG students through extra-curricular programming during and outside of the school day.

District Response

Providing services for advanced learners is a collaborative school effort, shared by all school personnel, and extends beyond the traditional classroom. In addition to core academic services, AIG Specialists and classroom teachers offer a variety of extra-curricular opportunities designed to enrich, challenge, and develop students' individual strengths, interests, and talents. These programs support the growth of gifted learners by allowing them to explore areas of personal passion, deepen critical and creative thinking skills, develop leadership and collaboration abilities, and apply their learning in authentic, real-world contexts.

These opportunities may include mentoring programs, job shadowing, cooperative education, internships, apprenticeships, clubs, competitions, and camps. Examples of specific activities include (but are not limited to):

- Battle of the Books – fosters advanced reading comprehension and literary analysis;
- Chess Club – enhances logical reasoning, strategic thinking, and problem-solving;
- Geography and Spelling Bees – build content mastery, memorization strategies, and poise under pressure;
- MathCounts – develop abstract reasoning, perseverance, and collaboration in problem solving;
- Mock Trial and Model UN – encourage public speaking, persuasive writing, and understanding of complex systems;
- Robotics Club and Science Competitions – strengthen engineering design, innovation, and scientific inquiry;
- Summer enrichment camps – provide extended opportunities for exploration and advanced study in areas of student interest;
- Yearbook – cultivates creativity, responsibility, and teamwork through real-world publication work.

These offerings help meet the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of AIG students by providing meaningful outlets for curiosity, passion, and peer interaction with similarly motivated students. They also encourage risk-taking, persistence, and self-reflection—key components in developing a growth mindset and building resilience in gifted learners.

Specific offerings may vary between schools and school years based on staff availability, student interest, and scheduling. Additional support and leadership may be provided by School Library Media Coordinators, cultural arts teachers, and community partners.

Providing extra-curricular programs and events is viewed as a responsibility of the full school community. The District AIG Coordinator collaborates with the Curriculum and Instruction Team, the District Leadership Team, and the AIG Advisory Council to remain informed about districtwide offerings and to promote expanded opportunities. AIG Specialists and school counselors regularly partner with parents/guardians and community

members to identify, promote, and enhance the availability of enrichment activities for gifted students. Parents/guardians are encouraged to suggest ideas or volunteer to co-facilitate programs to strengthen these offerings and support student engagement.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By June 2026, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will continue to analyze demographic data to identify specific underrepresented populations in WCS, including data from talent development, and develop specific plans for programming responsive to these groups.
2. By June 2026, the District AIG Coordinator will arrange professional learning on the social-emotional needs of gifted learners for all AIG Specialists, School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers.
3. By December 2026, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop guidance documents on the processes for subject and grade acceleration decision making.
4. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop and enact plans for professional learning related to culturally-responsive pedagogy.
5. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator will create a task force to review/create policies and practices when serving twice-exceptional children and Multilingual Learners.

Sources of Evidence

1. Demographic analysis and planning document(s)
2. Social-emotional needs of gifted learners professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
3. Completed subject and grade acceleration guidance documents
4. Culturally-responsive pedagogy professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
5. Documentation of meetings with EC and EL departments; completed guidance documents on policies

Standard 3: Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction

The LEA employs challenging, rigorous, and relevant curriculum and instruction to accommodate a range of academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of K-12 gifted learners.

Practice A

Adapts the NC Standard Course of Study (SCOS) K-12 to address a range of advanced ability levels in language arts, mathematics, and other content areas as appropriate by differentiating curriculum and instruction, including enrichment, extension, and acceleration strategies.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to ensuring that all educators differentiate instruction to meet the needs of advanced learners by adapting the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (SCOS) through enrichment, extension, and acceleration strategies. This commitment is grounded in district-wide expectations that all instruction be based on the SCOS and intentionally differentiated by content, process, and product according to student readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

Differentiation in the General Education Classroom (K–12)

At all grade levels, general education teachers are responsible for providing students with opportunities to move beyond mastered content by:

- Exploring concepts in greater depth or through alternate perspectives;
- Applying knowledge to new or real-world contexts;
- Progressing to more complex or advanced standards.

Differentiation strategies commonly used include:

- Flexible grouping by interest, ability, or readiness;
- Use of higher-level reading materials and digital resources;
- Tiered assignments and open-ended tasks that promote critical and creative thinking;
- Project-based learning and student choice in demonstrating mastery.

The district's 1:1 technology initiative further supports differentiated learning by enabling individualized instruction and access to a variety of enrichment tools and platforms.

Collaboration and Support from AIG Specialists (K–8)

In grades K–8, AIG Specialists work in collaboration with classroom teachers to provide an additional layer of support for gifted learners. Through regular participation in grade-level and subject-area meetings, AIG Specialists remain aligned with the SCOS pacing and content being taught in general education classrooms. Their services complement and extend classroom instruction by:

- Offering enrichment and extension through thematic, interdisciplinary units and interest-based learning experiences;
- Facilitating long-term projects that challenge students to think critically and creatively;
- Compacting grade-level content for students who have already mastered it and preparing them for more advanced standards;

- Supporting decisions regarding subject or grade acceleration when appropriate.

AIG Specialists may also co-teach with classroom teachers or model best practices in differentiation, helping to embed these approaches across instructional settings. Instructional schedules may be flexibly designed to allow for extended, interdisciplinary experiences that deepen learning across subjects.

Differentiation in High School (Grades 9–12)

In high school, differentiation begins with intentional course selection, guided by collaboration among students, school counselors, and the WHS/WIA AIG Specialist. Advanced options such as Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses provide access to rigorous content and promote higher-order thinking. However, course placement alone is not sufficient differentiation. Within these advanced courses, teachers are expected to continue adapting instruction using:

- Flexible grouping strategies;
- Advanced readings and learning resources;
- Opportunities for students to design, lead, and reflect on rigorous, meaningful products.

The District AIG Coordinator and WHS AIG Specialist collaborate with high school administrators to provide professional learning and coaching to ensure all secondary teachers understand and implement effective differentiation practices for gifted learners.

Cross-Content and Interdisciplinary Connections

Though students may be formally identified as gifted in Reading or Mathematics, high-quality differentiation practices extend to all subject areas. Classroom teachers and AIG Specialists are encouraged to highlight connections across disciplines, such as:

- Using writing and speaking skills to explain mathematical reasoning;
- Identifying literary metaphors rooted in mathematical or scientific ideas;
- Examining how historical events shape and are shaped by impactful writing or innovation.

These interdisciplinary approaches enrich students' learning experiences, increase retention through contextual reinforcement, and allow students to leverage their strengths in one area to support growth in another.

Practice B

Uses students' identified abilities, readiness, and interests to address a range of learning needs K-12.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to using students' identified abilities, readiness levels, and interests to drive instructional decisions and ensure appropriate, personalized learning experiences for gifted students across K–12. AIG Specialists, in collaboration with classroom teachers, use a wide range of student data (see Standard 1, Practice B) to determine the best instructional match and select differentiated services that promote challenge, engagement, and growth.

Using research-based differentiation strategies (Tomlinson & Allen, 2000), educators adapt:

- Content – what students learn;
- Process – how students learn it;
- Product – how students demonstrate understanding.

These adaptations are designed to help gifted learners:

- Connect previously mastered content to new knowledge;
- Engage in abstract, complex, and real-world problem solving;
- Apply learning in interdisciplinary and meaningful contexts.

Examples of Differentiation Strategies

WCS educators use a broad repertoire of strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of gifted students. These include, but are not limited to:

- Alternative course delivery methods (e.g. online, independent study);
- Curriculum compacting to eliminate repetition and allow for advancement;
- Project-, problem-, and inquiry-based learning;
- Individual and small group investigations;
- Paideia or Socratic seminars to promote deep discussion;
- Learning contracts and choice boards;
- Tiered assignments to challenge varying readiness levels;
- Thematic and interdisciplinary units;
- Enrichment events and technology-enhanced learning;
- Use of varied texts and digital content to match student interest and ability;
- Mentorships, apprenticeships, and internships (where appropriate).

These strategies are further detailed in Appendix C.

Professional Learning and Collaboration

WCS supports ongoing professional learning for teachers to effectively use differentiation based on student needs. This includes:

- Training provided by AIG Specialists, Exceptional Children’s staff, Multilingual Learner teachers, and, when available, external providers;
- Topics such as differentiation techniques, data-informed instruction, and brain-based strategies;
- Embedded support through modeling, co-teaching, and coaching during classroom instruction;
- Ongoing collaboration through grade-level and content-area meetings focused on planning, implementing, and refining differentiated instruction.

Differentiation is also a foundational component of WCS’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and school- and district-level problem-solving teams contribute to staff development and follow-up support in this area.

Ongoing Data Use and Instructional Adjustments

Throughout the school year, AIG Specialists and classroom teachers regularly analyze student data from multiple sources (e.g. NC Check-Ins, iReady, mCLASS) to assess progress and ensure instruction remains appropriately matched to student needs. Educators recognize that readiness levels and interests may change over time, requiring thoughtful and responsive adjustments to instructional strategies.

Practice C

Incorporates a variety of evidence-based resources that address the range of academic, intellectual, and social and emotional needs of AIG students.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to incorporating a wide range of evidence-based resources that address the academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of gifted learners. This commitment is reflected in both the core instructional materials selected by the district and the supplementary resources integrated by the AIG team.

Academic and Intellectual Resources

During the district's regular cycle of evaluating and adopting core instructional materials, consideration is given to how these resources can support the needs of advanced learners within the general education classroom. In addition, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists routinely augment the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (SCOS) with high-quality, research-based materials designed specifically for gifted students. Examples include:

- NC DPI resources: Advanced Learning Labs, Portrait of a Graduate
- Gifted education tools: Byrdseed, Junior Great Books, William and Mary Center for Gifted Education units, Wordly Wise, P.E.T.S. (Primary Education Thinking Skills), and Partners for Mathematics Learning

These resources are carefully selected based on:

- Alignment with student readiness, interests, and learning profiles
- Supporting research and field-proven effectiveness
- Quality and flexibility of use within various instructional settings

The AIG team meets monthly to share best practices, review newly available resources (e.g. those presented at state/national conferences or featured in current gifted education literature), and engage in professional learning related to effective resource implementation. When a unique student need arises that is not addressed by existing materials, AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers to locate or design appropriate alternatives.

All enrichment and extension resources are aligned to current SCOS standards and district pacing guides. This ensures consistency and integration between differentiated instruction and the core

curriculum, allowing AIG students to deepen their learning in meaningful and contextually appropriate ways.

Social and Emotional Supports

WCS recognizes that gifted students often have unique social-emotional characteristics and needs (e.g. heightened sensitivity, perfectionism, asynchronous development). In grades K–8, each school has a dedicated school counselor who delivers social-emotional learning (SEL) programming to all students, with additional attention and access provided to those with identified needs, including gifted learners.

AIG Specialists and classroom teachers are encouraged to collaborate with school counselors to support gifted students who may be experiencing challenges such as anxiety, peer issues, or stress related to academic expectations. Referrals may be made to school counselors for individual or small-group interventions, as needed.

In addition, AIG Specialists are mindful of these needs when selecting instructional materials and designing learning environments. When possible, resources that address both cognitive challenge and emotional development—such as literature exploring themes of identity, resilience, or ethical dilemmas—are incorporated to provide a holistic learning experience.

Practice D

Fosters the development of durable skills and mindsets which support post-secondary success. These skills include adaptability, collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking, empathy, learner’s mindset, and personal responsibility.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to fostering the development of durable skills and mindsets in AIG students to support their post-secondary success. These include adaptability, collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking, empathy, a learner’s mindset, and personal responsibility. AIG Specialists play a central role in cultivating these competencies through intentionally designed learning experiences that go beyond content mastery.

Instructional Strategies for Developing Durable Skills

AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers and other instructional partners (such as School Library Media Coordinators) to plan and implement rigorous, real-world learning experiences that build durable skills. These experiences include:

- Project- and problem-based learning (e.g. solving authentic challenges across subject areas)
- Interdisciplinary and thematic units
- Leadership development and service learning opportunities
- Apprenticeships and mentorships
- Research-based writing and inquiry-driven investigations
- Flexible, student-driven group work
- Public presentations of learning and competitions

These experiences allow AIG students to engage in creative problem solving, collaborative learning, and effective communication while also building perseverance, empathy, and responsibility.

Technology as a Supportive Tool

While durable skills are not technology-dependent, WCS leverages its robust digital infrastructure to further support their development. Through 1:1 student devices, the Canvas learning management system, Google Apps for Education, and other digital tools, students access rich, diverse content and engage with authentic audiences. Teachers use these tools to differentiate instruction, facilitate communication and collaboration, and foster student agency and accountability in learning. School Library Media Coordinators and other support staff regularly co-plan and co-teach to integrate relevant, thought-provoking media and instructional strategies.

K–8 Development of Mindsets

In elementary and middle schools, students are explicitly taught the importance of a growth mindset—the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and perseverance. School counselors and teachers reinforce this mindset through lessons, classroom discussions, and modeling. These foundational mindsets help build confidence, resilience, and independence—critical for gifted students as they encounter academic and emotional challenges.

High School Preparation for Post-Secondary Success

At Watauga High School (WHS) / Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA), durable skills are emphasized through participation in Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and other advanced coursework. These courses demand not only academic rigor but also personal responsibility, including time management, goal-setting, and sustained effort. Students balance these expectations with extracurricular activities such as athletics, clubs, and employment, further preparing them for the complex demands of college and careers.

Alignment with District Mission

The integration of durable skill development within AIG programming directly supports the mission of Watauga County Schools: to prepare all students—including those who are academically and/or intellectually gifted—for healthy, productive citizenship and lifelong learning. Through enriched content, personalized instruction, and strategic collaboration, WCS ensures that gifted learners are equipped with the tools they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Practice E

Uses ongoing assessment, both formative and summative, to differentiate classroom curriculum and instruction.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) employs a comprehensive system of ongoing assessment—formative, interim, and summative—to inform differentiated curriculum and instruction for all students, including those identified as academically or intellectually gifted (AIG). This system ensures that instruction remains responsive to students’ evolving needs, readiness levels, and academic growth.

Assessment Types and Purpose

Teachers and AIG Specialists use a variety of assessments throughout the year to identify student strengths, monitor progress, and guide instructional decisions:

- Formative assessments: exit tickets, student work samples, checklists, pre-tests, teacher observations, and classroom discussions help guide daily instruction and differentiation.
- Interim assessments: diagnostic tools, Common Formative Assessments (CFAs), NC Check-Ins, and benchmark assessments provide insight into progress toward proficiency and inform grouping and pacing decisions.
- Summative assessments: teacher-created unit tests, locally developed final exams, Advanced Placement exams, and NC End-of-Grade and End-of-Course tests provide cumulative data that guide program planning and placement decisions.

Data Systems for Analysis and Differentiation

WCS integrates digital platforms to manage and analyze assessment data in support of differentiated instruction:

- EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System): provides growth data that helps educators assess whether AIG students are sufficiently challenged.
- ECATS (Every Child Accountability and Tracking System): combines academic, attendance, behavior, and SEL data into student learner profiles, supporting holistic planning within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- Educators Handbook: tracks behavior data, which may inform flexible grouping and personalized supports.

Collaborative Data-Driven Decision Making

Ongoing assessment informs differentiation not only at the classroom level but also through collaborative structures:

- Grade-level and content-area Data Teams and other collaborative meetings bring together classroom teachers, AIG Specialists, and support staff to examine assessment results using structured protocols.
- These teams evaluate instructional effectiveness, identify trends and gaps, and plan responsive differentiation strategies—including flexible grouping, curriculum compacting, and enrichment.
- AIG Specialists contribute specialized expertise in interpreting assessment results for gifted learners and recommending targeted instructional strategies based on readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

Link to Differentiated Services

Assessment data directly informs access to AIG service options, as detailed in:

- Standard 2, Practice A (Array of Services)
- Standard 2, Practice D (Flexible Grouping)
- Standard 2, Practice G (Advanced Coursework and Acceleration)

- Appendix C (Differentiation Best Practices)

Services such as curriculum compacting, independent study, and advanced coursework are implemented when assessment data indicates mastery or readiness for acceleration. Groupings and instructional strategies are regularly adjusted based on new data to ensure continued growth and engagement.

Professional Learning and Capacity Building

To sustain this data-informed approach, WCS provides ongoing professional development focused on:

- Designing effective formative assessments
- Analyzing and interpreting data
- Implementing differentiated instructional strategies in response to data
- AIG Specialists, instructional coaches, and MTSS teams provide modeling, coaching, and follow-up support to ensure classroom teachers use assessment data effectively to meet the needs of gifted learners.

Practice F

Collaborates with a variety of personnel, based on student needs, to implement differentiated curriculum and instruction.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to collaborative practices that ensure the effective implementation of differentiated curriculum and instruction for gifted learners. Across all schools, AIG Specialists regularly partner with classroom teachers and a variety of school personnel to meet students' academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs.

Collaboration at the School Level

In K–8 schools, AIG Specialists:

- Collaborate with classroom teachers, Multilingual Learner and Exceptional Children's teachers, School Library Media Coordinators (SLMCs), and other support staff through scheduled grade-level or content-area meetings, one-on-one planning, and digital platforms (e.g. Google Drive, Google Meet, Canvas).
- Model differentiated strategies and/or co-teach to demonstrate effective instructional approaches for gifted students.
- Integrate into existing team structures (e.g. collaborative meetings) to streamline planning and avoid adding meetings.

At Watauga High School / Watauga Innovation Academy, the AIG Specialist and administrators collaborate with teachers of Honors and AP courses to:

- Use the NC DPI Honors Level Coursework Development and Evaluation Tool to design and revise rigorous coursework that meets the needs of advanced learners.

- Support differentiation, acceleration, enrichment, and complexity within the framework of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

Broader Collaborative Roles of AIG Specialists

In addition to instructional planning, AIG Specialists also:

- Advocate for AIG students in grade-level or team meetings by guiding reflective discussions about their needs (e.g. acceleration, engagement).
- Lead annual orientations on the AIG Plan to school staff (see Standard 4, Practice B).
- Participate, as needed, in transition meetings at key academic stages (2nd to 3rd grade, 5th to 6th, 8th grade to high school) to support smooth adjustments to new learning environments (see Standard 2, Practice F).
- Deliver talent development services to all K–2 students and to underrepresented students in grades 3–8 (see Standard 2I).
- Publicize enrichment opportunities through newsletters, websites, parent events, and direct communication (see Standard 2, Practice J).

District-Level Collaboration

The District AIG Coordinator supports implementation and advocacy for differentiated curriculum and instruction by:

- Engaging in regular collaboration with district-level teams such as the Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and directors of Student Services and Exceptional Children’s Programs.
- Facilitating monthly meetings with AIG Specialists to:
 - Share updates on policies, practices, and state guidance;
 - Review and refine differentiation strategies;
 - Clarify service delivery questions;
- Coordinating communication and program evaluation through the AIG Advisory Council.

The AIG team stays current on gifted education best practices through active participation in:

- Regional and state meetings, including the NCAGT conference;
- Professional development opportunities offered by DPI and other educational organizations.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will collaboratively develop a consistent set of resources for K-2 talent development and plan for their use, including professional learning for K-2 classroom teachers on this topic.
2. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will collaboratively develop a repository of resources for AIG differentiation (e.g. model lessons and units), make these available to all WCS teachers, and provide professional learning on this topic.
3. By June 2028, the District AIG Coordinator, AIG Specialists, and WHS/WIA Student Services Department will collaboratively develop a consistent set of social-emotional learning resources and plan for their use with AIG students at all grade levels.
4. By June 2028, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will explore and create an “AIG Program Progress Report” to be used in conjunction with regular report cards at each marking period.

Sources of Evidence

1. Clear, detailed plan for use of specific K-2 talent development resources
2. Completed repository of AIG differentiation resources accessible to any WCS educator
3. Clear, detailed plan for use of specific AIG social-emotional learning resources
4. Creation of an “AIG Program Progress Report” for AIG Specialist to use for identified K-8 students

Standard 4: Personnel and Professional Development

The LEA recruits and retains highly qualified professionals and provides relevant and effective professional development concerning the diverse needs of gifted learners that is ongoing and comprehensive.

Practice A

Employs an AIG-licensed educator as lead coordinator to guide, plan, develop, implement, revise, and monitor the local AIG program and plan.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) employs a District AIG Coordinator who is AIG-licensed and has prior experience as an AIG Specialist. This ensures that the AIG Program is led by an individual with both the credentials and practical expertise required to guide, develop, implement, monitor, and revise the local AIG Plan with fidelity and effectiveness.

The District AIG Coordinator leads the program by collaborating closely with licensed AIG Specialists in each school, colleagues across the region and state, and the Office of Advanced Learning and Gifted Education (OALGE) at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). Through this network, the Coordinator stays informed on trends, research, policy changes, and instructional best practices in gifted education.

Responsibilities of the District AIG Coordinator

The Coordinator ensures high-quality implementation of the WCS AIG Plan through the following key responsibilities:

- **Leadership and Oversight**
 - Lead the implementation, monitoring, and revision of the local AIG Plan.
 - Coordinate and facilitate the work of the AIG Advisory Council (see Standard 5, Practice C).
 - Communicate regularly with stakeholders, including Central Services, Curriculum and Instruction, and District Leadership teams, as well as the Watauga County Board of Education.

- **Instructional Support and Professional Development**
 - Meet monthly with AIG Specialists to share updates and instructional strategies.
 - Observe AIG Specialists in their instructional settings and provide feedback.
 - Coordinate AIG-related professional learning for educators.
 - Consult monthly with AIG Specialists to ensure appropriate alignment between their schedules and student needs.

- **Student Identification and Program Services**
 - Collaborate with the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs to oversee the identification process and coordinate countywide assessments.
 - Periodically observe Excel Team meetings and serve as an ad hoc member as needed.
 - Review and audit AIG student records and documentation each summer for accuracy and completeness.

- **Data Management and Reporting**
 - Enter and maintain AIG student data in Infinite Campus.
 - Monitor headcount reports and ensure accurate submission in collaboration with the district Data Manager.

- **Program Evaluation and Planning**
 - Lead the revision and evaluation of the AIG Plan.
 - Coordinate the annual evaluation of program effectiveness using multiple data sources.
 - Advocate for and manage the AIG budget, including funding for resources and professional development.

- **Community and Statewide Collaboration**
 - Represent WCS in regional and state-level AIG Coordinator meetings.
 - Participate in professional organizations such as the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented (NCAGT).
 - Share program successes and updates through meetings, conferences, and media outlets.

Additional details about the roles and responsibilities of the District AIG Coordinator are outlined in Appendix E: Personnel Roles and Responsibilities of the WCS AIG Plan.

Practice B

Engages AIG-licensed specialists in tasks that explicitly address the academic, intellectual, and social and emotional needs of K-12 AIG students and supports the implementation of the local AIG program and plan.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) employs AIG Specialists who are fully certified in gifted education through a master's degree, graduate certificate, or regional endorsement via the Northwest Regional Educational Service Alliance (NWRESA). This specialized training equips them to implement best practices in gifted education and meet the diverse academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of K–12 AIG students. As part of maintaining program quality, WCS requires all AIG Specialists to uphold current teaching licensure and AIG endorsement in accordance with NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) guidelines.

Personnel Assignments (Beginning 2025–2026):

- Hardin Park School – One AIG Specialist; one shared with WHS/WIA
- Cove Creek School – Two AIG Specialists (with additional teaching duties)
- Blowing Rock, Green Valley, Parkway, and Valle Crucis Schools – One AIG Specialist each
- Bethel and Mabel Schools – Share one AIG Specialist
- Watauga High School/Watauga Innovation Academy – Share one AIG Specialist with Hardin Park

These assignments are reviewed annually and may be adjusted based on caseloads, funding, staffing, and school needs. In some cases, AIG Specialists may also teach additional subjects (e.g. Math I, Social Studies).

Responsibilities of K–8 AIG Specialists

AIG Specialists at the elementary and middle levels play a central role in supporting the implementation of the local AIG Plan and directly addressing the needs of AIG learners through a wide range of responsibilities, including:

- Program Implementation & Compliance
 - Conduct annual orientations on screening, identification, and placement procedures for staff and parents
 - Chair the school's Excel Team and maintain accurate records of placement and nomination decisions
 - Maintain comprehensive AIG student files, including updated testing data, DEPs/IDEPs, and Yearly Performance Reviews (YPRs)
 - Monitor "wait and watch" students and review qualifications on a regular basis
- Instructional Services
 - Implement DEPs/IDEPs through both direct (e.g. small group instruction) and indirect services (e.g. classroom collaboration)
 - Collaborate with K–2 teachers for talent development and with 3–8 teachers for differentiated instruction
 - Deliver services using flexible models such as inclusion, pull-out, exploratory blocks, or interest-based groups
- Collaboration & Professional Growth
 - Partner with support staff (e.g. ML teachers, EC staff, counselors) to support special populations
 - Provide professional development to school staff on gifted education strategies
 - Attend monthly AIG Specialist meetings to share best practices and receive program updates
 - Engage in ongoing local, regional, and state professional learning opportunities
- Enrichment & Communication
 - Sponsor academic competitions and enrichment clubs (e.g. Chess Club, Robotics, Model UN) as feasible
 - Communicate regularly with families through newsletters, school websites, and/or parent events
 - Hold annual DEP/IDEP meetings with families to review student progress and program alignment
 - Submit required documentation and headcount data to the District AIG Coordinator

Responsibilities of the 9–12 AIG Specialist

Due to the nature of high school programming and the split assignment, the 9–12 AIG Specialist serving Watauga High School and Watauga Innovation Academy focuses on administrative and advisory responsibilities, including:

- Scheduling and Planning
 - Assist in academic scheduling to align with AIG student needs and aspirations
- Student Support
 - Maintain accurate and updated AIG student files (specifically IDEPs for AI students)
 - Communicate student status and needs with classroom teachers
 - Serve as a point of contact for AIG students needing academic guidance or support
- Information Dissemination
 - Share relevant enrichment opportunities (e.g. summer programs, scholarships, internships) with students and families
 - Collaborate with school counselors and administrators to ensure that AIG students' academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs are addressed

Additional details about AIG Specialist responsibilities can be found in Appendix E: Personnel Roles and Responsibilities of the WCS AIG Plan.

Practice C

Establishes specific and appropriate professional development requirements for all personnel involved in AIG programs and services, including classroom teachers, instructional specialists, student services personnel, and school administrators.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) recognizes that sustained, high-quality professional development is critical to the successful implementation of its AIG Plan and the equitable support of gifted learners. All personnel involved in AIG programming—including classroom teachers, instructional specialists, student services staff, and school administrators—are offered professional learning opportunities that reflect the district's commitment to best practices in gifted education.

While topics vary based on role and need, professional development offerings across WCS are guided by three primary goals:

- To foster awareness of and positive attitudes toward the unique characteristics and needs of gifted students;
- To enhance educators' capacity to implement differentiated instruction and appropriate supports for gifted learners;
- To strengthen the overall school community in its ability to support and advocate for AIG students.

Professional Learning Design and Needs Assessment

The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists collaboratively plan and deliver professional development as needed throughout the school year. Topics and formats are determined through both formal and informal needs assessments, including:

- Stakeholder surveys (e.g. WCS AIG Program Surveys, NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey);
- Analysis of End-of-Grade/End-of-Course data and AIG identification trends;

- Ongoing conversations with administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders.

This responsive approach ensures that professional development is relevant, targeted, and meaningful to the specific responsibilities of different educators. The following outlines the district’s professional development priorities by role.

All Educators Receive Training On:

- Article 9B, the legal foundation for AIG services in NC, and the implementation of NC AIG Program Standards through the local AIG Plan;
- Nomination, identification, and service delivery processes, including strategies for identifying gifted students from underrepresented populations;
- The philosophy and purpose of talent development as a means of promoting equity and broadening access to advanced learning opportunities (see Standard 2, Practice H);
- The integration of gifted education within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.

Classroom Teachers May Receive Additional Training On:

- Differentiation strategies for gifted learners, including curriculum compacting, tiered assignments, and project-based learning (see Standard 3, Practice B);
- Collaboration and co-teaching models with AIG Specialists;
- Effective use of instructional resources and enrichment materials designed for advanced learners;
- Supporting the social and emotional needs of gifted students in the classroom, such as addressing perfectionism, underachievement, and self-concept development (see Standard 2, Practice B).

Teachers Serving Special Populations (e.g. EC, ML, Interventionists) May Receive Additional Training On:

- Recognizing the potential for giftedness in all students, including those with disabilities and multilingual learners;
- Advocating for gifted identification and services for students within their respective populations;
- Collaborating effectively with AIG Specialists to meet the needs of twice-exceptional and other underrepresented gifted learners;
- Utilizing appropriate instructional strategies and materials tailored to these learners.

Student Services Personnel (e.g. School Counselors, Psychologists, Social Workers) May Receive Additional Training On:

- Identifying and understanding the social-emotional needs of gifted students;
- Supporting those needs through school-wide practices, interventions, and home-school collaboration.

School Administrators and District Leaders May Receive Training On:

- The critical role of gifted education in supporting student achievement and equity;

- Their responsibilities in ensuring full implementation of the WCS AIG Plan;
- Strategies for structuring school environments that support collaboration among AIG personnel and general educators;
- Advocating for AIG programming within schools and the broader community.

Advanced Training and Endorsement Opportunities

As a member of the Northwest Regional Educational Services Alliance (NWRESA), WCS supports local cohorts of elementary, middle, and high school educators to complete coursework toward a regional AIG endorsement. Participation in these free, cohort-based opportunities is highly encouraged, and cohort participants often go on to support AIG Specialists in leading school-based professional learning and advocacy efforts.

Ongoing Professional Development for AIG Personnel

The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists collaboratively identify professional learning goals based on:

- Student outcome data;
- Program evaluation findings;
- State licensure renewal requirements;
- Individual growth plans.

AIG personnel are encouraged to attend the annual North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented (NCAGT) Conference, as well as other relevant offerings (e.g. NCTIES, NCCAT). When possible, the district allocates AIG funds to support attendance. Principals are also encouraged to support their AIG Specialists' participation in gifted-related professional development using school-level funds.

Practice D

Provides general education services by personnel who have earned an AIG add-on license or have met the LEA requirements for that position.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) ensures that general education services for gifted learners are delivered by personnel who are either AIG-licensed or have met district-level qualifications aligned with state expectations. This commitment is reflected in three core priorities:

1. Maintain AIG-licensed Specialists in every school;
2. Hire teachers who are highly qualified in their subject areas as defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI);
3. Whenever possible, cluster identified AIG students with AIG-licensed or endorsement-qualified classroom teachers in grades K-12.

While not all general education teachers possess formal AIG licensure, their designation as highly qualified reflects strong pedagogical foundations. The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists build on this

foundation through job-embedded professional learning designed to deepen teachers' knowledge of gifted education strategies (see Standard 4, Practice C).

Collaboration and Service Delivery

Ongoing collaboration between highly qualified classroom teachers and AIG-licensed Specialists supports the effective implementation of the AIG Plan. This collaboration is evident in:

- Co-planning and co-teaching models;
- Curriculum modification and instructional differentiation;
- Flexible service delivery models such as inclusion, pull-out resource, and cluster grouping.

AIG Specialists play a critical role in supporting classroom teachers with instructional strategies that address the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted learners. When gifted students are served by general education teachers who do not hold AIG licensure, these teachers receive targeted support from AIG Specialists to ensure appropriate instructional rigor and support.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Educator teams—including grade-span and subject-area collaborative teams, School Improvement Teams, and the District Leadership Team—regularly review multiple sources of data to evaluate the effectiveness of general education services provided to AIG students. These data sources include:

- Formative, interim, and summative assessments;
- Student growth data, including reports from the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS);
- Stakeholder feedback and classroom observations.

This analysis informs the strategic clustering and scheduling of AIG students, ensuring they are placed with the most appropriate educators. It also guides professional development efforts and instructional coaching support to strengthen gifted education practices across the district.

This approach ensures that all educators who serve gifted learners are equipped to provide high-quality instruction that meets their academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs—whether or not they hold formal AIG licensure.

Practice E

Develops strategies for the recruitment and retention of AIG-licensed professionals, including those of diverse backgrounds.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to recruiting and retaining AIG-licensed professionals who are highly qualified and reflective of the diverse backgrounds of the students we serve. We recognize that the strength of our AIG program depends not only on the credentials of our educators but also on their ability to connect with and support gifted learners from varied cultures, communities, and experiences.

Recruitment Strategies

When an AIG Specialist position becomes available, it is publicly posted on the WCS district website and widely advertised through multiple platforms, including:

- State and regional education job boards,
- Professional organizations,
- Social media outlets,
- Local and regional higher education institutions.

The goal of this outreach is to attract a broad and diverse applicant pool. Open positions remain posted for a minimum of ten days to allow time for qualified candidates to apply. The review and hiring process is collaborative and includes:

- The District AIG Coordinator,
- The Director of Human Resources (or designee),
- The school's site-based administrator,
- A grade-level teacher.

Interview protocols include questions that assess candidates' understanding of and responsiveness to the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners. For general education positions, questions related to differentiation are standard to ensure alignment with gifted education practices across all instructional roles.

Considerations and Challenges

Watauga County's location in the scenic northwestern mountains of North Carolina offers a unique and appealing environment to many; however, it can pose challenges for recruitment. Limited affordable housing and a colder climate may be deterrents for some candidates, particularly early-career educators. Despite these factors, WCS remains dedicated to interviewing all qualified applicants and hiring those who are both well-prepared and a strong fit for our community and schools.

Pathways to Licensure

To build and strengthen our AIG-certified workforce, WCS supports the following licensure pathways:

- Provisionally licensed hires have up to two years to complete full AIG licensure.
- Options include a master's degree, graduate certificate, or regional endorsement through the Northwest Regional Educational Service Alliance (NWRESA).
- The regional endorsement is offered at no cost to the new hire.
- The district provides financial assistance for the Praxis Gifted Education Test through AIG program funds.
- Teachers hired with existing AIG licensure are responsible for maintaining their credentials in compliance with DPI and local AIG Plan guidelines.

Retention Strategies

Watauga County Schools strives to be the best place to learn and work in North Carolina. To support the retention of AIG-licensed professionals, the District AIG Coordinator implements several targeted strategies:

- Allocates budget for conference attendance (e.g. NCAGT, NCTIES) and other professional learning experiences;
- Reimburses AIG Specialists for the cost of the Praxis Test when required;
- Establishes a “celebrations” agenda item at monthly AIG Specialist team meetings to recognize achievements and foster collegiality;
- Invites AIG Specialists to school board meetings related to gifted education for visibility and recognition;
- Publicly acknowledges AIG Specialists at board meetings preceding AIG Plan presentations;
- Utilizes data from the WCS AIG Program stakeholder survey to identify and respond to professional climate needs and working conditions.

These efforts reflect WCS’s ongoing commitment to supporting gifted education professionals throughout their career lifecycle—from recruitment through recognition—and ensuring that every gifted learner has access to high-quality, responsive instruction.

Practice F

Provides focused professional learning opportunities to realize equity and excellence in gifted education including changing mindsets, policies, and practices.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to realizing equity and excellence in gifted education by engaging educators in focused, reflective professional learning that challenges existing mindsets, policies, and practices. Recognizing that systemic inequities can limit access to advanced learning opportunities, the district takes intentional steps to ensure that its AIG program is inclusive, data-driven, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Ongoing Reflection and Alignment with State Guidance

Each year, AIG Specialists and the District AIG Coordinator collaboratively examine key documents such as *Call to Action: Critical Actions to Realize Equity and Excellence in Gifted Education* from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). This publication provides a framework for shifting beliefs, refining practices, and revising policies to improve identification and services for underrepresented student groups. These reflective sessions are designed to:

- Deepen awareness of equity-related challenges in gifted education;
- Analyze how current practices align with state recommendations;
- Generate local action steps to strengthen equity in the WCS AIG Plan.

Discussions are data-informed and focused on systemic change, leading to revisions of identification procedures, service models, and professional development priorities.

Data-Driven Equity Focus

As described in Standard 1, Practice C, WCS has identified disproportionality within its AIG student demographics. Specifically:

- Data reveals underrepresentation among Hispanic students, Multilingual Learners, Economically Disadvantaged students, and students receiving EC services.

In response, the District AIG Coordinator is expanding the district's demographic analysis to explore intersectionality within these groups. This effort will involve collaboration with district leadership, including:

- The Director of Exceptional Children's Programs,
- The Director of Student Services,
- The Director of Accountability and Federal Programs.

Together, these leaders will identify trends, root causes, and leverage points for intervention.

Equity-Focused Professional Learning

Professional learning is tailored to address the specific equity challenges identified through data and dialogue. The District AIG Coordinator works with other district directors to integrate equity efforts across departments and to support the following outcomes:

- Increasing educator capacity to recognize and nurture potential in underrepresented populations;
- Reducing barriers to access and representation in AIG programming;
- Embedding equity into schoolwide practices, including Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS);
- Supporting the identification and service of twice-exceptional and Multilingual Learner students;
- Cultivating a mindset of shared responsibility for equitable gifted education across all professional roles.

Professional learning opportunities may include district-wide workshops, targeted sessions for specific educator groups, book studies, data dialogues, and participation in regional/state equity initiatives. These opportunities are designed to be iterative, collaborative, and action-oriented.

This approach reflects WCS's belief that equity and excellence are not competing priorities but are mutually reinforcing commitments essential to high-quality gifted education.

Practice G

Aligns professional development opportunities with local AIG program goals, other district initiatives, and best practices in gifted education with opportunities to refine applications of professional learning.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to aligning professional development in gifted education with district goals, AIG program priorities, and best practices in the field. This alignment ensures educators receive timely, relevant learning experiences that are connected to their daily work and that support the ongoing refinement of instructional strategies for gifted learners.

District-Wide Alignment and Integration

Professional learning on gifted education is embedded in and aligned with broader district initiatives and instructional priorities. The WCS Curriculum and Instruction Team collaboratively plans professional development based on:

- Student proficiency and growth data;
- Staff and student feedback (e.g. the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, locally developed surveys);
- District and school initiatives, including the WCS Strategic Plan, the WCS AIG Plan, and individual School Improvement Plans;
- Current educational trends and research-based best practices;
- Professional standards and expectations outlined in the North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES);
- Formal and informal needs assessments.

The Curriculum and Instruction Team uses this data to establish annual district-wide professional development goals. Professional learning is offered on designated days and throughout the school year via in-person and virtual sessions. Regular team meetings provide opportunities for ongoing evaluation and refinement of offerings.

Collaboration and Integration of AIG Expertise

The District AIG Coordinator works closely with the Curriculum and Instruction Team to ensure that gifted education is integrated into district-wide professional learning. This includes advocating for the inclusion of AIG Specialists in district trainings—especially those related to new curriculum initiatives and instructional frameworks.

At the school level, AIG Specialists are also included in site-based professional learning tailored to the unique instructional needs of each school. This ensures that learning opportunities for staff are contextually relevant and aligned with both the WCS AIG Plan and broader instructional goals.

Current Focus Areas: MTSS, Data Teams, and Differentiation

WCS has prioritized the implementation of a robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, with a focus on:

- Strengthening core instruction through high-quality differentiation;
- Building effective data teams and collaborative practices;
- Ensuring equitable access to services, including for AIG students.

These focus areas directly align with AIG program goals in the following ways:

- Differentiation ensures AIG students are challenged and supported within the regular classroom.
- Collaborative data meetings support the identification, progress monitoring, and service planning for gifted learners.
- MTSS structures create schoolwide systems that address the academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of AIG students.

Professional learning in these areas equips teachers with the knowledge and tools to meet the diverse needs of gifted learners and is intentionally designed to complement the work of AIG Specialists.

Feedback and Implementation from the Field

The District AIG Coordinator relies on regular feedback from AIG Specialists to identify emerging needs and refine professional learning offerings. In turn, this feedback is shared with district leadership to ensure responsive planning.

AIG Specialists implement their professional learning in multiple collaborative ways, including:

- Monthly meetings with the District AIG Coordinator to review initiatives and clarify implementation strategies;
- Participation in collaborative, grade-level, and content-area meetings;
- Co-planning and co-teaching with general education teachers;
- Modeling and coaching on gifted education best practices;
- Sharing resources via digital platforms such as Google Drive and Canvas.

These structures foster a collaborative culture in which AIG Specialists are recognized as instructional leaders who support continuous professional growth across the district.

Sustaining and Refining Professional Learning

To support the implementation and refinement of professional learning:

- AIG Specialists deliver embedded support and coaching to general educators;
- Administrators collaborate with the District AIG Coordinator to examine AIG Specialist roles and ensure time is allocated for implementation;
- When possible, AIG program funds are allocated to support attendance at state and regional conferences and workshops to deepen professional expertise.

This ongoing cycle of planning, implementation, feedback, and refinement ensures that professional development remains dynamic, relevant, and impactful—ultimately leading to improved outcomes for gifted learners across Watauga County Schools.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By October 2025, create an “AIG 101” professional learning opportunity that covers gifted characteristics, supporting gifted students socially and emotionally, and differentiation techniques for gifted students.

2. By January 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will develop a specific AIG professional learning plan tailored to various professional roles that includes face-to-face offerings and self-paced digital modules based on the AIG Booster Shots series.
3. By June 2027, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Team and school principals, will explore the development of local AIG professional learning requirements for classroom teachers.

Sources of Evidence

1. Documentation of an “AIG 101” course, potentially online, for general education teachers
2. Clear, detailed AIG professional learning plan with specific materials and resources
3. Documentation of meetings discussing local AIG professional learning requirements and/or, if possible, an outline of these requirements

Standard 5: Partnerships

The LEA ensures ongoing and meaningful participation of stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the local AIG program to develop strong partnerships.

Practice A

Develops intentional, two-way partnerships with parents/guardians to support the following needs of AIG students:

- academic and intellectual
- social and emotional

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) prioritizes intentional, two-way partnerships with parents and guardians to support the full spectrum of AIG student needs—academic, intellectual, social, and emotional. These partnerships are grounded in consistent communication, active collaboration, and shared decision-making.

School-Level Engagement

At each school, AIG Specialists act as primary liaisons to families and promote sustained engagement through a variety of structures:

- Annual DEP/IDEP meetings that include family input on academic goals and social-emotional supports. These meetings ensure services are tailored and responsive.
- Ongoing collaboration with classroom teachers, who communicate student progress via conferences, phone calls, emails, report cards, and newsletters.
- Presence at school events, such as Open House and PTO meetings, where AIG Specialists are available for informal conversations and questions.
- Accessible information, including school-based AIG webpages and printed/digital brochures that explain services and share upcoming opportunities.
- Event outreach, such as notifications about enrichment opportunities (e.g. Scholars Weekend, summer camps).
- Feedback mechanisms, including parent surveys and informal conversations that inform service delivery and help identify emerging needs, such as perfectionism, anxiety, or underachievement.
- Two-way communication tracking, with regular phone calls, email updates, and meetings that allow space for family concerns, questions, and suggestions.

Parent Participation in Enrichment

WCS encourages parents and guardians to actively contribute to the AIG experience by:

- Serving as mentors or guest speakers for career and enrichment programs.
- Supporting and attending student-centered events, such as academic competitions (e.g. Battle of the Books, Mathcounts, Math Fair, Mock Trial, Science Fair, Spelling Bee), arts performances (e.g. Band, Orchestra, Theatre), and public showcases—helping build student confidence and ownership.

- Observing student presentations, providing an authentic audience that values student work and growth.

District-Level Outreach

At the district level, the AIG Coordinator works to strengthen and elevate parent partnerships through:

- Regular communication via local media and social media, sharing student successes and program highlights.
- Maintenance of a public-facing AIG website, housing the AIG Plan and supplemental resources.
- Support for school-based improvement efforts, encouraging the inclusion of AIG goals in School Improvement Plans.
- Leadership of the AIG Advisory Council, which includes parent representatives from each school and serves as a guiding voice for program development (see Standard 5, Practice C).
- Ongoing feedback collection, used to shape programming and ensure parent perspectives are central to planning.
- Hosting parent workshops and info sessions, especially around social-emotional development of gifted learners.
- Advocacy efforts, promoting awareness and understanding of gifted education throughout the Watauga County community.

Together, these practices reflect a comprehensive, responsive approach to cultivating family partnerships that honor the whole child. By creating structured avenues for dialogue and involvement, WCS ensures that families are not just informed—but empowered collaborators in their child’s gifted education.

Practice B

Partners with community stakeholders, such as institutions of higher education, local business and industry partners, and others to enhance and support the local AIG program and services.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to cultivating meaningful partnerships with community stakeholders to expand and enrich services for academically and intellectually gifted students. These partnerships provide students with access to advanced learning opportunities, mentorship, and real-world experiences that support both academic and personal development.

The WCS AIG Program benefits from the collective efforts of the entire school community—including the Board of Education, district leadership, school administrators, AIG Specialists, classroom teachers, families, and students—to build and sustain strategic relationships with local organizations. The District AIG Coordinator plays a central role in coordinating and nurturing these partnerships.

Key Community Partners

Significant collaboration occurs with:

- Appalachian State University (App State) – A longstanding partner through the Public School Partnership, offering professional development for staff, enrichment activities for students, and access to university resources.

- Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) – Partnering through dual enrollment and career-oriented coursework.
- Local businesses and industries – Supporting student experiences through mentorships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and guest speaking engagements.
- Nonprofit and community organizations, including the Watauga Education Foundation and Bright Ideas Grants, which fund innovative classroom projects and enrichment initiatives.

Expanded Learning Opportunities

Through these partnerships, AIG students gain access to a variety of authentic, rigorous, and engaging learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction, including:

- Mentorships and apprenticeships aligned with career interests
- Job shadowing and internship experiences
- Advanced studies through Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways
- Dual enrollment and early college opportunities
- Participation in statewide programs such as:
 - Governor’s School
 - Summer Ventures in Science and Mathematics
 - NC School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM)
 - NC School of the Arts
- College visits and field trips
- Online and distance learning options
- Leadership development programs, including Mountain Alliance, Link Crew, and Pioneer Ambassadors

These partnerships not only enrich the academic experience for AIG students but also foster college and career readiness, enhance social-emotional growth, and build bridges between school and the broader community.

By continuously seeking new avenues of collaboration and reinforcing existing relationships, WCS ensures that AIG students are supported by a network of community stakeholders who are invested in their growth, potential, and future success.

Practice C

Establishes and utilizes an advisory group to develop, implement, monitor, and revise the local AIG program and plan. This advisory group is representative of the diverse populations of the district and is at least comprised of community members, AIG parents/ guardians, AIG teachers, and other instructional and support staff.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) maintains a committed AIG Advisory Council to support the development, implementation, monitoring, and revision of the district’s AIG Program and Plan. The Council plays a vital role in advancing equitable and high-quality services for gifted learners, while also serving as a conduit for community engagement and shared decision-making.

Composition and Representation

The AIG Advisory Council is led by the District AIG Coordinator and meets quarterly. Membership includes:

- AIG Specialists from each school
- Parent/guardian representatives from every school in the district
- Community partners (e.g. parents employed at Appalachian State University or other local organizations)
- Individuals representing diverse backgrounds and the unique needs of WCS students, including parents of twice-exceptional students and those from culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse populations
- Open invitations extended to school principals, central office directors, and Board of Education members

This diverse representation ensures that the Council reflects the voices, experiences, and priorities of the WCS community.

Role and Responsibilities

The Council fulfills several critical functions:

- **Development and Revision of the AIG Plan:** Members actively participate in reviewing, discussing, and suggesting improvements to the WCS AIG Plan. Each section of the plan is examined for effectiveness, equity, and alignment to the NC AIG Program Standards.
- **Monitoring Program Implementation:** The District AIG Coordinator provides regular updates on AIG programming. Council members analyze implementation progress, provide feedback, and offer recommendations for refinement.
- **Data Review and Continuous Improvement:** The Council reviews disaggregated stakeholder feedback from annual surveys administered to AIG students, parents/guardians, classroom teachers, and principals. AIG Specialists also complete self-assessments based on NC standards. This data is shared with the Council to guide conversations around goal-setting and program adjustments.
- **Promoting Enrichment and Partnerships:** The Council supports enrichment opportunities and community partnerships, helping to identify local resources that align with program goals (as described in Standard 5, Practice B).

Operations and Accessibility

To ensure accessibility and broad participation:

- Meetings are typically held at a central location—Watauga High School’s media center.
- A virtual participation option (via Google Meet) is considered when needed, such as during inclement weather.

Feedback Loop and Transparency

Recommendations made by the AIG Advisory Council are reviewed by the District AIG Coordinator and the Chief Academic Officer and may be referred to other district leadership teams for further consideration or action. Publicly shareable survey data and meeting updates are posted on the WCS AIG Program website to maintain transparency and encourage wider stakeholder engagement.

Practice D

Informs all students, parents/guardians, and the community of the following:

- Local AIG Plan
- Local AIG program services
- Policies and procedures relating to advanced learning and gifted education
- Ways to access advanced learning opportunities

Communication is ongoing and responds to the diverse language and other needs of the community.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to clear, consistent, and accessible communication about its AIG Plan, services, policies, and advanced learning opportunities. Efforts are made to ensure that all students, parents/guardians, and community members—regardless of language or background—are informed and engaged.

Transparency of the AIG Plan and Services

The WCS AIG Program operates with transparency and ongoing stakeholder engagement. Key avenues for sharing information include:

- District Website: The local AIG Plan, appendices, contact information, presentations, stakeholder survey results, and documentation of progress toward program goals are posted on the district website.
- Print Copies: Hard copies of the AIG Plan are available upon request.
- Public Presentations and Events: Information is shared regularly at school events such as Open Houses, Parent Nights, and PTO meetings.
- Board of Education Presentations: Updates are provided as needed at Board meetings by the District AIG Coordinator.
- Newsletters and Brochures: Distributed in print (upon request) and digitally (email) to provide accessible, family-friendly overviews of services and opportunities.

The AIG Specialists serve as the primary point of contact at each school, ensuring that families receive timely updates and personalized communication, particularly during annual DEP/IDEP meetings.

Communication of Policies and Procedures

The WCS AIG Program ensures that all stakeholders are aware of policies and procedures related to gifted education and advanced learning, including:

- Annual Professional Updates: School staff receive yearly reviews of AIG policies and procedures. AIG Specialists attend as many grade-level or area meetings as possible to ensure integration of services.
- Stakeholder Meetings: AIG Specialists and the District AIG Coordinator maintain an open-door policy, encouraging meetings with parents, staff, and other stakeholders as needed.
- Advisory Council Engagement: The AIG Advisory Council supports communication and dissemination of program information within the community.

Stakeholders are directed to Standard 2, Practice A of the local AIG Plan for specific procedures related to advanced learning and gifted education.

Multilingual and Inclusive Communication

WCS recognizes the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive communication. To meet the needs of diverse families:

- Family Resource Coordinator: Collaborates with the District AIG Coordinator to connect with families from multilingual and diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Translation and Interpretation:
 - AIG materials are translated into Spanish when necessary.
 - Spanish interpretation is available for live meetings through the Family Resource Coordinator.
 - For other languages, the AIG Coordinator partners with the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs to secure translation or interpretation for our Multilingual Learner families.
 - AI-powered tools may also be used for rapid, preliminary translations to facilitate timely communication.

Support for Multilingual Learners (ML)

AIG Specialists are encouraged to work in partnership with ML teachers to ensure equitable identification and support for gifted Multilingual Learners. Practices include:

- Collaboration on Referrals: Specialists and ML teachers meet to discuss potential AIG candidates. The ML teacher may also provide assistance during Excel Team meetings.
- Joint Instruction: Collaborative lessons may be planned by the AIG Specialist and the ML teacher, as needed.

Community Engagement and Recognition

To highlight student success and foster community pride in the AIG Program:

- Media Outreach: AIG Specialists share student and program achievements with the Director of Communications and Community Relations, who promotes them via district social media and local media outlets.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By September 2025, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists will review AIG Advisory Council membership to ensure diverse representation from WCS personnel, external community partners, and all demographic groups.
2. By October 2025, the District AIG Coordinator will create a district AIG parent/guardian and community list-serve to foster electronic communication regarding AIG opportunities.
3. By December 2025, The AIG District Coordinator and specialists will develop an abbreviated version of the AIG plan to be more readily accessible for parents in both English and Spanish languages.
4. By January 2026, the WHS/WIA AIG Specialist and School Counselors will develop a webpage designed specifically for AIG students in grades 9-12.
5. By June 2026, the District AIG Coordinator will analyze district demographics in order to identify other languages for translation and arrange for translation of the AIG Plan and supplementary materials into these languages.

Sources of Evidence

1. AIG Advisory Council roster with description of each member's role
2. Completed list-serve of AIG parent/guardians and community members across the district
3. English and Spanish versions of an abbreviated version of the local AIG plan
4. Completed WHS/WIA AIG webpage
5. Other non-English versions of WCS AIG Program documents, as needed

Standard 6: Program Accountability

The LEA implements, monitors, and evaluates the local AIG program and plan to ensure that all programs and services are effective in meeting the diverse academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

Practice A

Develops a written AIG plan to describe the local AIG program, in accordance with state legislation and SBE policy (N.C.G.S. § 115C-150.5-.8 [Article 9B]), based on a comprehensive program evaluation. This Local AIG Plan has been approved by the local board of education and sent to SBE/DPI for review and comment.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools AIG Program operates under a locally developed AIG Plan that has been approved by the Watauga County Board of Education and submitted to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the State Board of Education (SBE) for review and comment. This plan is written in accordance with North Carolina legislation (N.C.G.S. § 115C-150.5-.8 [Article 9B]), meets criteria established by the State Board of Education and DPI, and aligns with the North Carolina AIG Program Standards.

In compliance with DPI expectations, the AIG Plan—including the program's vision and goals—is revised and resubmitted every three years. Stakeholder input is gathered annually to inform the revision process, as described in Standard 5, Practice C. Input is collected through a comprehensive program evaluation that includes both qualitative and quantitative data sources, such as:

- Student academic performance and growth data (e.g. formative assessments, course grades, End-of-Grade/End-of-Course results, Educator Value-Added Assessment System reports)
- Annual AIG feedback surveys from students, families, teachers, and administrators
- AIG Specialist self-assessments and annual performance reviews
- Feedback from AIG-related professional development
- Input from school and district leadership teams, AIG Specialists, and the AIG Advisory Council
- Updates from regional, state, and national gifted education meetings and conferences
- The NC AIG Program Standards Unpacking Document

The District AIG Coordinator ensures ongoing alignment with state policy by attending regional and statewide DPI meetings and promptly communicating updates to AIG Specialists, school administrators, and other stakeholders. Stakeholders receive periodic updates on the AIG Plan's development and implementation, including reports to the local Board of Education when requested.

Program goals, aligned with the "Ideas for Strengthening the Standard" and "Sources of Evidence" sections of the WCS AIG Plan, are used by the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists to guide continuous improvement. These goals are reviewed and revised in collaboration with district leadership, the AIG Advisory Council, and other key partners. Data is analyzed across academic years and student cohorts to identify trends and inform decision-making.

Following the comprehensive review process, the revised AIG Plan is submitted for local Board approval and sent to the Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education for comment. If revisions are required—such as feedback from DPI indicating a practice is "not evident"—the District AIG Coordinator will make necessary updates and resubmit the plan within 60 days. All approved changes are communicated to

the Board of Education, school and district administrators, the AIG Advisory Council, and other stakeholders. Plan revisions may also occur between cycles if new data indicates a need for change.

Practice B

Monitors the implementation of the local AIG program and plan in accordance with current legislation and state policies to ensure fidelity of implementation for all AIG program components.

District Response

The AIG Plan for Watauga County Schools is implemented in accordance with North Carolina’s AIG legislation (Article 9B) and the North Carolina AIG Program Standards. The District AIG Coordinator—working closely with district directors, school administrators, and AIG Specialists—monitors the implementation of the plan to ensure fidelity across all program components.

To promote consistent, equitable implementation and ensure stakeholder awareness, the District AIG Coordinator engages in a variety of monitoring activities, including:

- Collaborating with AIG Specialists to develop and deliver AIG Plan awareness sessions
- Providing annual updates on AIG program outcomes—including academic proficiency, student growth data, and social-emotional learning practices—to the WCS Board of Education, District Leadership Team, AIG Advisory Council, and AIG Specialist Team
- Ensuring AIG Specialists maintain equitable service schedules that align with school-level expectations
- Conducting site visits alongside AIG Specialists and engaging in implementation conversations with school administrators
- Discussing administrator observations of AIG service delivery, as needed
- Facilitating regular meetings of the AIG Specialist Team and AIG Advisory Council to review program implementation
- Addressing gifted education topics at Curriculum and Instruction and District Leadership Team meetings
- Leading the development, dissemination, and analysis of AIG stakeholder feedback surveys (as detailed in Standard 5, Practice C)
- Conducting an annual internal audit of AIG records to review services, student data, and program compliance

These ongoing monitoring efforts ensure that AIG services in Watauga County Schools are implemented with fidelity and aligned with both local goals and state expectations. The feedback gathered is used to inform program adjustments and support continuous improvement for all gifted learners.

Practice C

Develops and monitors a budget using allotted state funds, and local funds if applicable, to address the needs of the Local AIG Plan in accordance with state policy.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools AIG budget is driven by the belief that every school should have access to a certified AIG Specialist, ensuring high-quality services for gifted students and meaningful support for the school community as a whole. Accordingly, the largest annual expenditure in the AIG budget is allocated to

salaries and benefits for AIG Specialists. This investment is made possible through the appropriate conversion of state AIG funds from Program Report Code (PRC) 34 to PRC 10.

In addition to personnel costs, the AIG budget supports the implementation of the WCS AIG Plan by funding professional learning opportunities (e.g. contracted speakers, state and national conferences) and supplemental instructional resources. All expenditures are guided by the principles of purposeful gifted instruction, alignment with student needs, and fidelity to the North Carolina AIG Program Standards.

The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists engage in regular discussions—during monthly meetings and annual self-assessments—to evaluate the effectiveness and alignment of budgeted expenses. The AIG Coordinator receives financial reports upon request and collaborates with the Chief Financial Officer to ensure compliance with all relevant policies and guidelines.

To further support program goals, the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists actively pursue grant opportunities through organizations such as the Appalachian State University Public School Partnership, Bright Ideas, and the Watauga Education Foundation. Any grants awarded are aligned with the WCS AIG Plan, and their implementation is monitored to ensure both programmatic alignment and fiscal accountability.

Through careful planning, monitoring, and strategic resource allocation, Watauga County Schools ensures that all AIG funds—state and supplemental—are used effectively to support equitable, high-quality gifted education across the district.

Practice D

Maintains and analyzes multiple sources of student achievement and growth data, as well as annual dropout data for AIG students. Data is disaggregated to recognize patterns and trends over time and inform mindsets, policies, and practices for equity and excellence.

District Response

Watauga County Schools is committed to ensuring equitable identification and services for all gifted learners, regardless of background or identity. To that end, the district collects, analyzes, and reports on a wide range of student achievement and growth data to recognize patterns and trends and to inform equitable and effective AIG policies and practices.

Data Sources and Disaggregation

The District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the Director of Accountability and School Improvement, conduct annual reviews of student performance. These reviews include standardized assessments (EOG, EOC, AP, ACT, SAT), growth measures (EVAAS), and participation in opportunities such as internships, dual enrollment, AP course completion, college acceptance, and CTE credentialing. All data is disaggregated by school, grade level, teacher, and student subgroup (e.g. students with disabilities, Multilingual Learners, racial/ethnic groups) to assess whether the academic needs of all students are being met equitably.

Monitoring and Early Intervention

Throughout the school year, AIG Specialists and the District AIG Coordinator use systems such as Every Child Accountability Tracking System (ECATS) to identify students at risk based on indicators like attendance, behavior, and academic performance. These early warning systems allow for timely interventions, service adjustments, and collaborative problem-solving across school teams.

Dropout Data Analysis

At the high school level, the WHS/WIA AIG Specialist collaborates with school administrators, counselors, and the Director of Student Services to monitor dropout data. The AIG Specialist annually cross-references dropout information with the AIG roster, participates in or reviews exit interviews, and works proactively with staff to prevent future dropouts of identified students.

Stakeholder Reporting and Confidentiality

Findings from data reviews are shared annually with the Board of Education, Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and AIG Advisory Council. AIG Specialists also present relevant data to School Improvement and School Data Teams. All data handling is compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to protect student confidentiality.

Practice E

Maintains and analyzes multiple data sources focused on the referral, identification, services, and retention of students within the local AIG program to ensure that students' racial, ethnic, economic, or other demographic factors, including other exceptionalities and language differences, do not reduce their likelihood of access to and participation in gifted education.

District Response

Watauga County Schools maintains and analyzes multiple data sources to ensure that race, ethnicity, economic status, language background, and other factors do not inhibit access to or participation in gifted education.

Identification and Demographic Analysis

The AIG headcounts conducted each November and April offer key insights into the demographics of the identified AIG population. AIG Specialists collaborate with the District AIG Coordinator to ensure accurate rosters in the district's student information system (Infinite Campus). Headcount reports, which include data on gender, race/ethnicity, disabilities, and other relevant demographic indicators, are submitted to DPI. The District AIG Coordinator then compares the subgroup ratios within the AIG population to those of the overall Watauga County Schools student body and analyzes historical data to identify trends or shifts over time.

Referral, Services, and Retention Monitoring

In addition to demographic headcounts, the District AIG Coordinator and Specialists monitor referral patterns, service participation, and retention of AIG students across subgroups. Data on student referrals—whether from teachers, parents, or screening tools—is disaggregated and reviewed for equity. Service delivery and participation (e.g. in enrichment programs or differentiated instruction) are also monitored to ensure that once students are identified, they remain engaged and supported.

Academic Performance and Growth Trends

As detailed in Standard 6, Practice D, AIG Specialists and the District AIG Coordinator also track the academic performance of underrepresented populations using benchmark assessments, course grades, universal screening data, and standardized test scores. These metrics are disaggregated and reviewed for each subgroup annually, and patterns are compared across school years to inform program improvements.

Stakeholder Engagement and Equity Response

Findings from all equity-related analyses are shared with the AIG Advisory Council, Curriculum and

Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and other relevant groups. These insights guide strategic conversations about equity in identification, programming, and service delivery. Additionally, results may prompt other departments to evaluate and adjust their practices to ensure district-wide alignment with equity goals.

Practice F

Maintains and utilizes current data regarding the credentials of personnel serving K-12 AIG students to align with the goals and strategies outlined in the Local AIG Plan.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools Human Resources Department maintains up-to-date licensure information for all certified staff through the Human Resource Management System (HRMS). Each teacher hired as an AIG Specialist is required to hold a current North Carolina AIG licensure or develop a time-bound plan—typically within two years—to obtain the required certification. This plan is developed collaboratively with the Assistant Superintendent and District AIG Coordinator and may include completing add-on licensure coursework through an accredited institution, passing the Gifted Education Praxis Test, or earning a regional endorsement (e.g. through the Northwest Region Educational Services Alliance). While the regional endorsement provides valuable professional learning, it does not fulfill the formal licensure requirement in North Carolina.

The District AIG Coordinator collaborates with school administrators to review personnel credentials in the context of school-level gifted placements, identified student needs, and district-wide AIG program goals. This information informs staffing decisions, support planning, and professional development to ensure high-quality, equitable service delivery in alignment with the Local AIG Plan and the North Carolina AIG Program Standards.

Practice G

Elicits regular feedback from students, parents/ guardians, families, teachers, and other stakeholders regarding the ongoing implementation and effectiveness of the local AIG program to support continuous program improvement.

District Response

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program systematically gathers feedback from a range of stakeholders—including AIG students, their parents/guardians, teachers, principals, and AIG Specialists—to support continuous program improvement. Annual surveys aligned with the North Carolina AIG Program Standards are administered to each group, and AIG Specialists complete an annual AIG Performance Review and self-assessment, submitted with supporting documentation to the District AIG Coordinator by June 10 each year.

Survey results are analyzed collaboratively by the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists to identify trends, assess implementation fidelity, and guide decision-making. Key findings are shared with relevant stakeholders such as school and district leadership, the AIG Advisory Council, and the WCS Board of Education. Publicly appropriate data is posted on the district's AIG website to maintain transparency.

Beyond surveys, the AIG Program gathers feedback through additional avenues. Parents and guardians can provide verbal or written input during annual DEP/IDEP conferences, and AIG Specialists maintain consistent communication throughout the school year via in-person meetings, phone calls, virtual conferences, and email. Teacher feedback is routinely gathered through grade-level, subject-area, and School Improvement

Team meetings. The District AIG Coordinator also receives input through regular collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and the AIG Advisory Council.

All feedback is used to inform real-time instructional adjustments and long-term program planning. If feedback indicates a need for programmatic changes, the District AIG Coordinator presents recommendations to the Board of Education and communicates approved revisions to all stakeholders. While most changes occur during the standard three-year plan renewal cycle, significant findings may prompt mid-cycle updates when necessary.

Practice H

Shares local AIG program evaluation data with school and district personnel, students, parents/guardians, families, and other community stakeholders.

District Response

The District AIG Coordinator and Specialists are committed to ensuring transparency in the operation of the Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program. A central component of this transparency is the WCS AIG Program [website](#), which serves as a comprehensive public resource. The website includes:

- The current AIG Plan and its appendices
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Contact information for the District AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists
- Information on current goals and initiatives of the WCS AIG Program
- Annual program evaluation data
- Resources for supporting gifted students and their families

All website content is available in print upon request, and any stakeholder may request a translation into another language by contacting the District AIG Coordinator or the District Family Resource Coordinator.

To ensure ongoing communication, the District AIG Coordinator presents evaluation findings and progress toward program goals to multiple internal and external stakeholders, including AIG Specialists, school administrators, district directors, the AIG Advisory Council, and the Watauga County Board of Education. Evaluation data is aggregated to ensure the confidentiality of individual survey respondents.

In addition to the website, program updates and evaluation highlights are periodically shared through newsletters, school events, and parent-teacher meetings to increase outreach and community awareness. Local media outlets may also publish relevant updates as provided through the district's Testing and Accountability office.

Efforts are made to engage students and families directly, ensuring they understand how program evaluations shape future goals and services. Stakeholder feedback is reviewed annually and has contributed to refinements in service delivery, professional development, and communication strategies.

All stakeholders are encouraged to contact the District AIG Coordinator with follow-up questions, suggestions, or requests for additional data. This open-door policy reflects the district's commitment to collaborative improvement and community partnership.

Practice I

Safeguards the rights of all AIG students and their parents/guardians through established written policies, procedures, and practices. The LEA plan includes: informed consent regarding identification and placement, reassessment procedures, transfers from other LEAs, and procedures for resolving disagreements.

District Response

Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to safeguarding the rights of all AIG students and their parents/guardians through clearly defined and accessible policies, procedures, and practices. These safeguards are grounded in local, state, and federal law—including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 115C, Article 9B—and are communicated through the publicly posted AIG Plan, school-based communications, and direct interaction with AIG Specialists.

Informed Consent Regarding Identification and Services

Families are encouraged to initiate conversations about potential giftedness with their child’s classroom teacher and school AIG Specialist. When appropriate, these educators meet with families to review student data, explain the WCS AIG Plan, and discuss possible referral to the school-based Excel Team.

If a student is identified as gifted, the AIG Specialist develops a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) aligned with the identification. The parent/guardian is invited to a placement meeting to review and sign both the Student Placement Form and DEP/IDEP. Parents/guardians also participate in annual DEP/IDEP reviews and may provide input or opt out of services at any time. This decision is documented and honored by the AIG Specialist. Ongoing communication with the AIG Specialist and District AIG Coordinator is welcomed and encouraged.

Reassessment Procedures

During the screening and referral process, Excel Teams may determine that additional assessments are needed. This may involve administering new or alternative measures, provided within permissible guidelines. For any assessments beyond the district’s universal third-grade CogAT screening, the AIG Specialist obtains prior written parental consent using the Consent for Evaluation form. While the specific test may vary, the form clearly outlines the general type of data to be collected.

Testing does not proceed without written consent. If additional data does not support identification, the AIG Specialist informs the family and offers next steps, including the option to pursue the district’s Procedures for Resolving Disagreements outlined later in this section.

Transfers from Other LEAs

Students transferring into WCS from other North Carolina public schools with an existing AIG identification (verified in Infinite Campus) are automatically placed in the WCS AIG Program. The AIG Specialist may bring the student to the Excel Team to determine the most appropriate identification category and service delivery model, with parental input required.

For students transferring from charter schools, private schools, homeschools, or schools outside North Carolina, the student must meet WCS identification criteria as outlined in the AIG Plan. The Excel

Team will make a determination within 45 school days of receiving complete documentation, and the AIG Specialist will notify families of the outcome.

Procedures for Resolving Disagreements

To ensure that families have a clear path for resolving concerns regarding search and nomination, student identification, or service options, WCS has a four-level dispute resolution process:

- **Level I: School Site Review** – Parents/guardians submit a written request for a meeting with the principal and AIG Specialist. Other personnel may be requested to attend this meeting as deemed appropriate. This meeting occurs within 10 days of the written request.
- **Level II: Administrative Review** – If unresolved, the parent/guardian may appeal in writing to the District AIG Coordinator within 10 days of the school site decision. The District AIG Coordinator and the Superintendent or his/her designee will review the case and a written response will be issued within 10 days of the appeal.
- **Level III: School Board Review** – If unresolved, the parent/guardian may appeal in writing to the Watauga County Board of Education within 10 days of the administrative review decision. The Board will issue a final decision to the parents/guardians, the principal, the District AIG Coordinator, and the Superintendent (or designee) within 30 days.
- **Level IV: Administrative Law Hearing** – As stated in North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 115C, Article 9B, 115C-150.8 (Review of Disagreements), if mediation fails to resolve the disagreement satisfactorily, the parents/guardians may file a petition for a contested case hearing under Article 3 of Chapter 150B of the North Carolina General Statutes. The scope of the hearing will be limited to consideration of:
 - Whether the local school administrative unit improperly failed to identify the child as an academically/intellectually gifted student, or
 - Whether the local plan of services for the student has been implemented appropriately.

Following the hearing, the administrative law judge will make a decision based on the findings of fact and conclusions of law. The decision of the administrative law judge becomes final, is binding on all parties, and is not subject to further review under Article 4 of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. Attorney fees are the responsibility of the parents/guardians.

Destruction of Records

WCS maintains the confidentiality of AIG student records in accordance with FERPA and Board Policy 3580. Records are retained for at least five years after a student graduates, exits the program, or relocates. Annually, the Director of Accountability and Federal Programs or the Director of Communications and Community Relations provide public notice of scheduled record destruction at least 90 days in advance via local media and the district website. Families may request copies of records before destruction or request early destruction, which the Coordinator will facilitate promptly.

Ideas to Strengthen the Standard

1. By December 2025, the District AIG Coordinator will update the district AIG website with program goals, evaluation data, shared presentation slides, and other informative ancillary materials.
2. By April 2026, the District AIG Coordinator and Specialists will develop an AIG Student Bill of Rights.

Sources of Evidence

1. Updated district AIG website
2. Completed AIG Student Bill of Rights