

Gifted Programming Service Evaluation Process

Overview

The **Program for Academic Challenge and Enrichment (PACE)** is Park City School District's model for identifying and serving academically advanced learners. PACE operates within a **school-wide enrichment framework** that provides differentiated opportunities for students who demonstrate exceptional ability compared to their same-grade peers within the district.

The PACE framework aligns with the district's **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** to ensure equitable access to advanced learning opportunities at every level. Tier III services are provided **only at the elementary level** and represent the highest level of academic enrichment within the PACE continuum. For more information on the full continuum of services across grade levels, please refer to our **Tiered Model Flyer**.

Domains of Identification

General Intellectual Ability (Tier III)

Students demonstrate exceptional cognitive capability across domains such as reasoning, memory, problem-solving, rate of learning, and spatial understanding. These students show the ability to manipulate abstract ideas, make complex connections, and understand advanced concepts beyond grade-level expectations.

Specific Academic Aptitude and/or Achievement

Students exhibit outstanding capability in one or more academic content areas, such as mathematics, language arts, or science. They demonstrate advanced mastery, insight, and the ability to engage deeply with complex material.

At the **middle school level**, the district uses a **cluster enrichment model** that integrates both general intellectual ability and specific academic aptitude to ensure each student receives instruction at an appropriate challenge level.

Assessment Procedures

Park City School District uses multiple measures to identify students for gifted and enrichment services. These assessments are nationally recognized, research-based, and aligned with district programming goals.

Results are analyzed using **local norms** whenever possible, allowing for accurate comparison within Park City's high-achieving student population.

Identification Process

The Tier III identification process uses several components to compare and rank students district-wide. This approach ensures that placement decisions are fair, consistent, and data-driven.

- **Testing Windows:** Assessments occur in **fall** and **spring** each year.
- **Eligibility Range:** Students whose performance ranks in the **top 5–8% locally** qualify for Tier III services.
- **New Students:** Students entering grades 3–5 are screened upon enrollment to determine whether additional evaluation is needed.

Cognitive Ability Assessments

Cognitive ability assessments measure reasoning, problem-solving, and learning potential. Park City may use above-grade-level versions of these assessments to eliminate “ceiling effects” and provide a broader range of scores for comparison.

- All students are screened in the spring of second grade.
- Students scoring at or above the 80th percentile locally move on to additional evaluations.
- All students are reassessed in fifth grade to ensure accurate placement prior to middle school transition.

District Benchmark and Diagnostic Assessments

Students’ most recent district benchmark data in mathematics and English language arts are included in the overall ranking.

When local norms are not available, national norms are used as a secondary comparison.

Scales for Identifying Gifted Students-SIGS (Second Grade Only)

The **(SIGS)** is a standardized, norm-referenced tool completed by teachers or PACE specialists. It measures observable characteristics of giftedness and provides percentile rankings across several domains.

SIGS data are combined with cognitive and achievement measures to provide a more complete profile of each student’s potential.

Placement Process

Assessments produce a variety of data types, including **scaled** scores, percentile ranks, and standard scores. All assessments are nationally recognized and statistically reliable.

In accordance with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Guidelines, Park City School District uses local demographic data to ensure that identification reflects the needs of students within our high-achieving population—not just national averages.

Use of Scaled Scores and Z-Scores

Park City School District uses scaled scores from district and cognitive assessments as the foundation for identification.

Scaled scores are statistically reliable because they adjust for variations in test form and difficulty, allowing for consistent comparison across testing periods. Raw scores are not used for identification because they vary from test to test and cannot be compared meaningfully.

The district then calculates z-scores from these scaled scores to create a consistent statistical comparison within the local population. A z-score indicates how far a student's performance differs from the local mean, measured in standard deviation units.

This method allows the district to:

- Compare results across different tests and subjects,
- Rank students accurately within the local population, and
- Identify the top-performing students using a standardized, data-driven approach.

The PACE Department reviews individual subtest results, analyzes the weighted z-score rankings, and determines final placement.

Students whose composite rankings fall within the top 5–8% locally qualify for Tier III services.

When local norms are unavailable, national norms are applied. In those cases, students must perform at or above the 98th percentile nationally across all domains to qualify for Tier III placement.

Appeals

Families may submit an appeal within **10 days** of receiving the placement letter. Appeal forms may be requested from the **Program Director**, Gina Mason (gmason@pcschoools.us).

Private evaluations are optional and may be included as supporting evidence. While private assessments cannot be used directly for placement, they may inform whether additional district-approved testing is warranted.

Only one private report may be submitted every 12 months, and it must:

- Be signed by a **licensed psychologist**,
- Be sent directly from the psychologist to the PACE Director, and
- Include the psychologist's license number.

The PACE Department reviews all appeal materials as part of the student's total body of evidence before making a final decision.

New Students to Park City School District

- **Grades 3–4:** All new students take a cognitive screener during the fall testing window.
- **Grade 5:** New students participate in the district-wide fifth-grade cognitive assessment.
- Students transferring from another district's gifted program may be re-evaluated using Park City's identification criteria to ensure consistency and equity.

Middle School Programming

Ecker Hill Middle School follows an enrichment cluster model rather than a Tier III system. New students who provide testing results showing performance at or above the 98th percentile nationally on two separate measures in the same academic area are clustered for enrichment in that domain.

If this criterion is not met, the student's district benchmark data are reviewed after fall diagnostics. Students scoring at or above the 98th percentile nationally on beginning-of-year data may also qualify for enrichment services.

Withdrawal from Tier III Services

Student placement is reviewed periodically to ensure alignment with individual needs. Changes to placement may occur if:

1. A parent or guardian requests removal.
2. A student's classroom performance or productivity consistently falls below expectations (considering individual circumstances).
3. The student is not performing at the level required for Tier III participation.
4. Re-evaluation data no longer support continued placement.

Families will be notified of any concerns. Students may be placed on **probationary status** or withdrawn from Tier III services at the discretion of the **PACE Specialist, PACE Coordinator, and/or classroom teacher**.

Commitment to Student Success

Our goal is for every student to thrive in an environment that matches their learning pace and potential. The PACE Department remains committed to using research-based, data-driven, and equitable practices to identify and serve students with advanced learning needs throughout Park City School District.