



DISTRICT 196
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DISTRICT 196 • 2026–27

Talent Development in Our Elementary Schools

A guide for families and community members to how District 196 identifies and grows student strengths in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Every child arrives at school with something they are ready to go further in. Some show it right away. Others show it only when the right opportunity is put in front of them. Talent development is our commitment to finding those strengths wherever they are and then giving students the instruction, challenge, and encouragement to build on them.

This is a shift in how we think about advanced learning. Rather than sorting students into a fixed group and serving only that group, we look continuously across all students for signs of strength, and we build talent over time. A student who is ready for more in fourth grade math may not have looked that way in first grade. Our job is to keep watching, keep offering, and keep the door open.

What we mean by talent development

Talent development treats ability as something that grows rather than something a student either has or does not have. Our goal is not to label children. It is to notice potential early, nurture it deliberately, and give every student a genuine path toward doing challenging work well.

Who does this work in your child's school

Each elementary school is served by an Advanced Learning Teacher, or ALT, a licensed teacher whose focus is advanced and emerging talent. ALTs work across two schools, and their time in each building is scheduled and protected so that families can count on it.

An Advanced Learning Teacher works in two ways. Sometimes they teach students directly, in small groups or one on one. Just as often, they work alongside classroom teachers; planning together, reviewing student data, suggesting ways to extend a lesson, and occasionally teaching side by side in the classroom. Both are equally important. The second kind of work is what makes advanced learning part of the regular school day rather than something that only happens down the hall.



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Our four priority areas

Across all District 196 elementary schools, Advanced Learning Teachers concentrate their time in four areas. These are consistent from building to building, so families across the district can expect the same commitments.

KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2

Primary Support and Talent Spotting

OUR GOAL

To notice strengths early, including in students who might otherwise be overlooked and to help primary teachers build challenge into everyday instruction.

What this looks like in your school

- The Advanced Learning Teacher spends regular time in K–2 classrooms, observing how students think and respond during normal lessons
- Teachers receive extension ideas and materials they can use with the whole class or a small group
- The ALT joins grade-level team meetings to look at student work and talk through who is ready for more
- Support grows over the year, from observation in the fall toward teaching alongside the classroom teacher

What families can expect

- Your child stays with their classroom teacher. This support comes to them
- There is no test to prepare for and no group to apply to
- Strengths in curiosity, reasoning, and persistence count, not only reading and math scores
- Early observations follow your child forward as they move up through the grades



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GRADES 3 – 5

Literacy Extension During WIN

OUR GOAL

To give students who are ready for more in reading and writing consistent, small-group instruction that stretches them beyond grade-level work.

What this looks like in your school

- Every school has a WIN block (What I Need) set aside for students to get the instruction that fits them
- During WIN, the Advanced Learning Teacher leads small groups in literacy extension
- Groups are formed from student data and are revisited through the year as students grow
- Instruction emphasizes deeper thinking, complex text, and stronger writing, not simply more reading

What families can expect

- WIN is part of the regular school day; students do not miss core instruction to attend
- Group membership can change as your child's needs change
- Progress is monitored, and instruction is adjusted when it is not working
- Your child's classroom teacher and the ALT share what they are seeing

GRADES 4 – 5

Mathematics Acceleration

OUR GOAL

To make sure students who have already mastered grade-level mathematics keep moving forward, with real challenge rather than more of the same.

What this looks like in your school

- The Advanced Learning Teacher works with 4th and 5th grade math teachers to plan for advanced learners
- Small, flexible groups are formed from math data and adjusted every few weeks
- The ALT may teach these groups directly or support the classroom teacher in doing so

What families can expect

- Groups are flexible, a student who is ready mid-year can join mid-year
- Acceleration means new mathematics, not extra worksheets
- Students who need a different pace than a group can offer may be considered for full subject acceleration in grade 5



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- The ALT joins math team meetings to review data and plan extensions together

- Placement decisions rest on multiple sources of evidence, not a single score and change by unit, based on mastery.

ALL GRADES, BASED ON NEED

Intensive and Twice-Exceptional Support

OUR GOAL

To serve students whose needs are well beyond what small-group extension can meet, including students who are both highly able and have a disability.

What this looks like in your school

- Students receive direct, scheduled service from the Advanced Learning Teacher
- Each student has an Individual Advanced Learning Plan describing their goals and how progress will be tracked
- Plans address the whole student; academic growth as well as confidence, persistence, and belonging
- For twice-exceptional students, the ALT coordinates with the special education team so that strengths and support needs are addressed together

What families can expect

- Families are part of building the plan and are updated on progress
- A disability and exceptional ability can exist in the same child; one does not rule out the other
- Services are based on demonstrated need and are reviewed regularly
- Talk with your child's teacher or principal if you believe this may fit your child

What support looks like by grade

The table below summarizes where support is focused at each grade level. Individual schedules vary by building, since each school builds its own daily schedule around these commitments.

GRADE	LITERACY	MATH	ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
K-1	Classroom teacher, with an Advanced Learning Teacher observing and coaching alongside them	Classroom teacher, with extension ideas supplied by the ALT	Talent spotting ; watching for strengths before they show up on a test Some will get Tier 3 services (98% and above)



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GRADE	LITERACY	MATH	ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
Grade 2	Classroom teacher; ALT push-in support as the schedule allows	Classroom teacher, with extension ideas supplied by the ALT	Talent spotting continues Some will get Tier 3 services (98% and above)
Grade 3	Small-group literacy extension with the ALT during WIN	Classroom teacher with extension materials	Some will get Tier 3 services (98% and above)
Grades 4–5	Small-group literacy extension with the ALT during WIN	Accelerated math groups; co-planning and push-in support with the math teacher	Some will get Tier 3 services (98% and above)
Any grade	Individualized advanced learning plan	Individualized advanced learning plan	Tier 3 and twice-exceptional services, based on need

How students are identified

There is no single test that opens a door, and no single score that closes one. We look at classroom performance, district and classroom assessments, student work, and what teachers observe day to day. Because talent development assumes that readiness emerges at different times for different children, we revisit these decisions throughout the year rather than settling them once.

This matters most for students whose strengths have not yet had a chance to show. A child still learning English, a child with a disability, a child who has not had enrichment outside of school; each may be ready for a challenge that a single assessment would miss. Watching for those students is a deliberate part of the work, not an afterthought.

If you have a question about your child

If you believe your child is ready for more challenge, start with their classroom teacher. Teachers can bring your observations to their grade-level team and to the Advanced Learning Teacher. You are also welcome to contact your building principal.



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Terms you may hear

Schools use shorthand. Here is what some of it means.

TERM	WHAT IT MEANS
Talent development	An approach that treats ability as something to be grown rather than a fixed label. The focus is on developing potential in as many students as possible.
Advanced Learning Teacher (ALT)	A licensed teacher who focuses on advanced and emerging learners. Each ALT serves two elementary schools.
WIN	What I Need: a block in the daily schedule when students receive instruction matched to their needs, whether that is support or extension.
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports- the framework Minnesota schools use to organize instruction in layers, from what every student receives to more intensive, individualized service.
Extension	Work that takes a student deeper into grade-level content, asking for more complex thinking rather than more assignments.
Acceleration	Moving a student into more advanced content or a faster pace because they have already mastered what their grade level covers.
Twice-exceptional (2e)	A student who is both highly able in one or more areas and has a disability. These students need both challenge and support at the same time.
Individual Advanced Learning Plan	A written plan for a student receiving intensive services, describing their goals and how progress will be monitored.

Working together

Talent development is a partnership. Teachers see your child in one setting; you see them in another. When families share what they notice at home; the questions a child asks, what they build, what they will not put down...etc.... it helps us see the whole learner. We welcome that conversation at any point in the year.

Questions about elementary talent development in District 196?



Begin with your child's classroom teacher or building principal, who can connect you with your school's Advanced Learning Teacher.