

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are the requirements of the Indiana law on high ability?

- Identify high ability students in the general intellectual and specific academic domains, K-12. At New Castle, we identify students in three categories: general intellectual, language arts, and math.
- Use multifaceted assessments (ID) that include high ability students from poverty, limited English proficiency, and all ethnic groups
- Appropriately differentiate our curriculum and instruction for students with high ability
- Provide professional development to teachers and counselors on the specific needs of high ability students
- Periodically conduct a systematic program assessment
- Create a guidance and counseling plan
- Report on our program effectiveness, specific use of funds, and student achievement

What is the definition of a high ability student?

A "high ability student" is one who: "performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation or interests" (as defined by Indiana Code).

Nationally, the terms academically talented, gifted/talented, and gifted are all used to describe gifted students. At NCCSC, we refer to students who are gifted as "high ability" because that is the term used by the Indiana Department of Education.

How are high ability students identified in New Castle Schools?

Multifaceted Student Identification Plan

- We identify students for high ability potential in math and/or language arts beginning during the kindergarten year.
- We use both qualitative measures (characteristics) and quantitative measures (test scores) in identification.
- We follow national best practice guidelines by using at least three types of measures.

Who decides? When does identification take place?

- An identification committee, rather than a single person, makes placement decisions based upon students' needs.

- The identification committee is made up of high ability teachers, the high ability identification team, and the high ability coordinator.
- Elementary identification processes begin during the winter of each school year and take place over several months' time. Kindergarten students are officially identified in May. All other students are considered during the January-May time frame.
- Formal identification takes place in kindergarten, second grade, and sixth grade (math only). At the secondary level, the PSAT, the NWEA and other standardized exams are used to identify and serve students.

What about already-identified HA students? Are they re-identified each year?

Already-identified students are automatically identified for the next school year so long as they have been successful in the HA placement. Students who are identified as math-only or language arts-only are automatically considered each spring for identification in the non-HA area. Teachers and principals are notified in late May and again in early August of which high ability students will be in their buildings each year.

Quantitative Measures

- Ability Measures
 - Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt) is used to test all kindergartners and second graders
 - Orleans Hanna Algebra Prognosis test is used to test identified 6th grade math students.
- Achievement Measure
 - iReady Diagnostic exams
 - Used to test students who scored between 80-94% on the CogAt.

Qualitative Measures

- Grades K-6: Scales for Identifying Gifted Students/additional narrative feedback - completed by teacher
- Student portfolio

What are the characteristics of a high ability (gifted) child?

Because gifted children are so diverse, not all exhibit all characteristics all of the time. However, there are common characteristics that many gifted individuals share:

- Unusual alertness, even in infancy
- Rapid learner; puts thoughts together quickly
- Excellent memory
- Unusually large vocabulary and complex sentence structure for age
- Advanced comprehension of word nuances, metaphors and abstract ideas
- Enjoys solving problems, especially with numbers and puzzles
- Often self-taught reading and writing skills as preschooler
- Deep, intense feelings and reactions

- Highly sensitive
- Thinking is abstract, complex, logical, and insightful
- Idealism and sense of justice at early age
- Concern with social and political issues and injustices
- Longer attention span and intense concentration
- Preoccupied with own thoughts - daydreamer
- Learn basic skills quickly and with little practice
- Ask probing questions
- Wide range of interests (or extreme focus in one area)
- Highly developed curiosity
- Interest in experimenting and doing things differently
- Puts idea or things together that are not typical
- Keen and/or unusual sense of humor
- Desire to organize people/things through games or complex schemas
- Vivid imaginations (and imaginary playmates when in preschool)

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What are some negatively perceived characteristics sometimes associated with a gifted child?

- Self-critical; impatient with failures
- Critical of others or of the teacher
- Overreacts
- Domineers
- Gets angry or cries if things go wrong
- Hands in messy work
- More concerned with concepts than the details
- Refuses to accept authority
- Refuses to do rote homework
- Bored with routine tasks
- Makes jokes or puns at inappropriate times
- Disagrees vocally with others or with the teacher about ideas and values
- Nonconforming/stubborn
- Reluctant to move onto another topic

What's the difference between a high-achieving child and a high ability, or gifted, child?

"Identification of gifted students is clouded when concerned adults misinterpret high achievement as giftedness. High-achieving students are noticed for their on-time, neat, well-developed, and correct learning products. Adults comment on these students' consistent high grades and note how well they acclimate to class procedures and discussions. Some

adults assume these students are gifted because their school-appropriate behaviors and products surface above the typical responses of grade-level students. Educators with expertise in gifted education are frustrated trying to help other educators and parents understand that while high achievers are valuable participants whose high-level modeling is welcomed in classes, they learn differently from gifted learners. In situations in which they are respected and encouraged, gifted students' thinking is more complex with abstract inferences and more diverse perceptions than is typical of high achievers. Articulating those differences to educators and parents can be difficult."

(from High Achiever, Gifted Learner, Creative Thinker, Bertie Kingore, Ph.D)

What if my child is new to New Castle Schools?

For children enrolling at a NCCSC elementary school:

- Has your child already qualified in another school district as a High Ability student? Any documentation showing this placement, student work, or test scores are necessary in determining their placement here at NCCSC. Further assessment may be necessary to place your child in the most appropriate situation. Placement in another district does NOT guarantee placement at NCCSC.
- If not, then you will simply enroll your child in his/her home elementary school, contact the high ability coordinator to discuss the possibility of further evaluation. In the spring of the school year, your child may be considered with all others for possible high ability placement.

For children enrolling at a NCCSC middle school or high school:

- You will simply enroll your child in school and provide past educational records. The counselors at the school will review your child's records and make a determination of the most appropriate course schedule. This may or may not include placement in high ability classes.

What happens if my child qualifies as a High Ability student? What services or curriculum are different?

-Classroom placement: Research shows that gifted students need to be placed with their intellectual peers, so we cluster group our high ability students in grades 1 and 2. This means that we place small groups of identified high ability students together with other students of mixed ability in one or more classrooms. In grades 3 and 4, HA students that qualify through the identification process are invited and then placed in a self-contained classroom. These students have very specifically designed curriculum, yet still have ample time during each day with their grade-level specific peers.

-In middle school and high school, these groups become larger, and typically the entire class will consist of high achieving to high ability students.

-The grade level math curriculum is differentiated to provide broader and deeper experiences with more choices and options for kindergarten through 6th grade. Beginning in 7th grade, the math curriculum is accelerated. Mathematics instruction focuses on inductive/deductive reasoning skills, work with algebra and geometry concepts, and applied problem solving. Instruction is faster-paced with fewer repetitions.

-Language arts is differentiated for all elementary students in New Castle Schools. Beginning in kindergarten, we assess each elementary child's reading level and then monitor his or her growth multiple times during the year. Our teachers use the leveled reading approach to help each child learn to read at his or her instructional level.

-High ability elementary and middle school language arts students do more complex analysis of text requiring higher level thinking and reasoning, in-depth study of advanced vocabulary/grammar concepts, and writing and inquiry/research projects adjusted for their level and abilities.

-High ability teachers make use of compacting material, faster pacing, and extension activities to allow time for critical and creative thinking. Student choice and independent project work are often part of the classroom experience. Projects tend to have higher complexity, depth, or breadth than in the general curriculum and may be assessed differently.

Once a student qualified for the high ability program, does he or she have to re-qualify every year?

Provided that he or she continues to be successful in the high ability curriculum, there is no need to re-qualify from year to year.

What happens if my high achieving child does not qualify as a high ability student?

In considering data about children's achievement, we recognize that in New Castle Schools, we have many students who score strongly (perhaps occasionally in the 95th percentile range and above) in math and/or reading on ISTEP, iReady or classroom grades but who are not identified as high ability or placed in the high ability classroom. These students are certainly high achievers, but may not meet New Castle's criteria for gifted identification when multiple data points are considered.

Our philosophy at NCCSC is to use formative assessment thoughtfully and often to match appropriately-challenging curriculum and experiences to every child, consistent with his or her abilities and leading to maximum growth. If that should ultimately lead to a high ability designation for a child, that is only one of many avenues to ensuring continuous progress and challenge so that we do not put ceilings on any child's learning. We have many ways to meet student needs for acceleration including, but not inclusive to:

* subject-skipping,

- *grade-skipping,
- *using technology as a resource for presenting advanced content,
- *grouping for instruction within classrooms, regrouping for instruction across classrooms or grade levels,
- *providing additional enrichment projects and resources,
- *using leveled and guided reading groups,
- *using curriculum compacting and contracts for various units,
- *creating options for independent learning,
- *using student-driven inquiry on projects of choice/interest, involving other school professionals
- *adjusting pace/expectations/materials,

It is not uncommon for parents to envision that the only way to meet a child's needs is through testing and high ability placement. In fact, we meet the needs of highly-able students in the New Castle on a daily basis in many different ways unique to each child.

Classroom Placement: high achieving students are placed in clusters with other high achieving students in classrooms with teachers who are trained in differentiation. The grade level curriculum is often differentiated to provide deeper and broader experiences for these more advanced learners. In elementary schools, high achieving students are clustered in the classrooms that do not already have a cluster of high ability students, which has shown to increase their opportunities for leadership skills and curriculum differentiation at their level.

Can my child be exited from the high ability program? If so, what is the procedure?

Parents can always request an exit from the program. Please contact your child's teacher and/or principal for assistance. In some cases, the HA placement may not be successful for a child. Our procedures in these situations are to involve parents, teacher, counselor, and - if necessary - the HA Coordinator to consider school-based interventions which may improve the child's chances for success, to monitor responses to these interventions, and - if necessary - to change the student's placement.

Can my child start kindergarten or first grade early?

If you believe your child is advanced socially, academically, and emotionally and would benefit from early entrance to kindergarten, please contact GAIL EDWARDS at the CEC. Early Entrance decisions do not constitute a high ability placement. Assessing for Early Entrance occurs in early March.

My child did not attend kindergarten New Castle. Can he/she be tested to qualify for high ability programming as a first grader?

Students coming to first grade at NCCSC are not tested and identified as they enter first grade here. That is because our identification process for NCCSC kindergarten students is multifaceted, takes several months, and includes multiple tests. It simply can't be replicated for incoming students who weren't there for it. Thus, for incoming first graders coming from other school districts, private kindergarten programs, area preschools or home, we simply assess their needs in the first few weeks of school and adapt curriculum and instruction to meet them during the school year. These children are included in our annual HA identification process during the spring of their second grade year for official identification as third graders. Please note that this does not mean their needs for acceleration will not be met during their first grade year if they arise.

More questions?

Please read all of the information elsewhere on this page. Chances are, your answer can be found there. Please direct your building-specific questions to your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal. Please direct any other questions to the high ability coordinator, Mary Jane Dye. Mrs. Dye can be reached at dyem@ncweb.me.