



# Lower Merion School District

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## Memorandum

**To:** Parents of Gifted Students in the Lower Merion School District

**From:** Dr. Kristina Ayers Paul, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Program Evaluation

**Re:** Gifted Services Program Evaluation

**Date:** January 25, 2017

Shortly after arriving in LMSD, Superintendent Copeland restructured the central office and created a new position to oversee research and evaluation for the District. When offered the position, I gladly accepted and began in mid-March of last spring. One of my primary job responsibilities is to systematically evaluate District programs, as assigned by Mr. Copeland, to provide useful, evidence-based information that District administrators and educators can use to ensure high-quality programming for LMSD students.

My first program evaluation is focused on the gifted education service program. A new supervisor, Dr. Percell Whittaker, was appointed to oversee the gifted program starting last summer, so it was a logical time to initiate an evaluation. Dr. Whittaker, Ms. Kimberly Fraser, Director of Student Services, and I presented our evaluation plan to the Board of Directors in October, and shortly thereafter the evaluation began. I have been busy pulling and analyzing existing student data, reviewing program documentation, and interviewing key stakeholders to gather their experiences with the program. Outlined below are the key evaluation strategies that will occur in the coming months.

### Data Collection Activities with Students and Parents

In the coming months I will be visiting each of the ten schools in our district to see the gifted program in action. I will be talking with teachers, administrators, students, and parents, as well as observing the instructional activities that are offered through the gifted program. While I won't have the chance to talk personally with each and every student and their parents, there will be other opportunities for all students and parents associated with the gifted program to have input:

- **A survey** will be distributed to all students who have an active GIEP (grades 2-12), as well as students at the high school level (grades 9-12) who had a GIEP at one point in time but are no longer participating in gifted services. The survey will be available in electronic form for high school and middle school students, and elementary students will be asked to complete a paper version. The survey will take about 8-10 minutes to complete.
- **A survey** will be distributed to all parents of gifted students with current GIEPs, as well as other parents who have engaged in different stages of the screening and identification process and those who have discontinued their child's gifted services. An email notice will be sent with a link to an electronic version of the survey, and paper versions will be available at your school's front office and at the District Administration Building. Surveys will be available February 1 and must be submitted by February 15. The survey will take between 10-15 minutes to complete.
- **A [Digital Suggestion Box](http://www.lmsd.org/OPESurveys)** is available for anyone to use. This provides a method for anyone to confidentially submit information for me to consider in my evaluation of the program. I welcome all information that will shed light on the experiences that you and/or your gifted children have had in LMSD. The Digital Suggestion Box is always available via the Office of Program Evaluation Website at [www.lmsd.org/OPESurveys](http://www.lmsd.org/OPESurveys)

- **Invitations to participate in student and parent focus groups** will be sent individually to randomly selected students and parents. The selection process is taking place through the Office of Program Evaluation, but invitations to participate will be distributed by your school's principal or assistant principal.

#### **Other Data Collection Strategies**

- **An electronic survey** will be distributed to all LMSD educators;
- **One-on-one interviews** with program leaders, central office administrators, and other key individuals;
- **Continued analysis of existing student data** including, but not limited to, universal screening, standardized tests, benchmark tests, etc.; and
- **Continued review of documentation**, including public information, internal program documents, policies, randomly selected GIEPs and GWRs, etc.

#### **Presentation of Findings and Recommendations**

We are scheduled to present findings and recommendations to the Education Committee of the Board on Monday, May 10, 2017. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 8:00 p.m. in the Board Room at the District Administration Office and is open to the public. I invite you to mark your calendar for this date. Within the weeks that follow, an Evaluation Use Committee will convene to develop responses to my findings and recommendations. The committee will include represents from each of the gifted program stakeholder groups and will be led by Dr. Percell Whittaker and Ms. Kimberly Fraser. Their responses and recommended actions will be presented to the Superintendent, Board of Directors, and the public in September of 2017.

#### **More Information**

If you are interested in reading more about the gifted program evaluation, you may access materials through the LMSD Office of Program Evaluation website at [www.lmsd.org/departments/program-evaluation](http://www.lmsd.org/departments/program-evaluation). Please also consider using the Digital Suggestion Box to share your insights, experiences, and other types of information that would be valuable for me to know in the course of this program evaluation. Finally, I welcome your questions and comments via email at [paulk@lmsd.org](mailto:paulk@lmsd.org) or by phone at 610-645-1941.