

Lower Merion School District



Gifted Services Program Evaluation

Interim Progress Report

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Curriculum Committee of the Board of Directors
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Progress Update

This report is an update on program evaluation progress and a snapshot of several preliminary findings and recommendations that can be shared at this time. This is not a comprehensive report of findings.

The evaluation study is ongoing, and additional data will be collected and analyzed. A final report of findings and recommendations will be available in September 2017.

The following is a summary of the key data sources collected to date:

- Program documentation
- 45+ Interviews with administrators, gifted support teachers, and other stakeholders
- 50+ observations of gifted support classes (Challenge and Seminar)
- 25 student focus groups
- 5 parent focus groups



Timeline

	Original Date	New Date
Interim Report of Findings and Recommendations	.	May 31 CCOB Meeting
Evaluation Use Committee	May-August 2017	June-December 2017
Final Report of Findings and Recommendations	May 2017	September 2017

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Finding #1: LMSD lacks a unified vision of gifted education

LMSD needs a clearly articulated vision for gifted education services that honors state policy, aligns with the NAGC Programming Standards, and reflects the core values of the District. This vision should be articulated in a mission statement that fosters collective understanding of the need for gifted education services and the ways in which the District is committed to responding to the needs of students with gifts and talents.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Recommendation #1: Collaboratively shape a vision for gifted education in LMSD.

Convene a committee of stakeholders to study, reflect, and develop an actionable vision for gifted education in LMSD. Produce a mission statement and recommendations for the adoption of an evidence-based program model and continuum of service options that would fulfill that vision.

Recommended readings:

- Paradigms of Gifted Education (Dai & Chen, 2014).
- Selections from Systems and Models for Developing Programs for the Gifted and Talented (Renzulli, Gubbins, McMillen, Eckert, & Little, 2009).

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Finding #2: The learning needs of gifted students are not satisfied by the core curriculum and the way that it is typically delivered to students, particularly at the elementary and middle school level.

Students with high cognitive ability need a differentiated approach to engaging with curriculum. They learn faster and retain information more quickly than most of their grade-level peers. Students and parents report frustration with the pace at which they experience the general education curriculum and the options that are provided to them as differentiated experiences, if at all, particularly at the elementary and middle level.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Recommendation #2: Develop resources and provide professional development for responding to the needs of high ability students within the general education curriculum.

Develop a systematic approach to curriculum development and professional learning to increase the knowledge and skills of general education teachers, as well as the curricular resources and supports available to them, in regard to a different approach to engaging high-end learners with general curricular experiences.

Ideas to consider:

- Engage curriculum supervisors in developing a systematic plan.
- Consider ways that gifted support teachers and other supports might be used to develop materials and resources to support differentiation.
- Develop an easily accessible digital repository of materials and ideas for extending the general curriculum.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Finding #3: Gifted students appreciate their Challenge experience, but wish for more opportunities to develop their individual strengths and interests.

Students value their opportunities to learn about interesting topics and try new things along with intellectual peers in an ungraded environment. However, students would also value more opportunities to focus on their individual strengths and interests within that setting. Many of them have passions and interests that don't fit within the enrichment curriculum provided in Challenge, and they wish to, at times, break free from the curriculum.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Recommendation #3: Rethink the Challenge experience to incorporate more opportunities for students to explore strengths and interests.

Embed more opportunities for student-driven learning choices throughout the Challenge program. Support students in exploring their passions and interests, and incorporate a wider variety of student project options.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Finding #4: Gifted students need strategies for coping with social situations and personal struggles that are commonly experienced by people with high ability, high potential, or intense passions.

Gifted students routinely shared their concerns about situations and struggles that are referred to in gifted education literature as “social/emotional” or “affective” needs.

Specifically, LMSD gifted students shared their uncomfortable experiences with:

- answering other students’ questions about their “giftedness,”
- addressing awkward cooperative learning situations,
- living up to expectations that other students and teachers have for them to be “perfect” or good at everything,
- developing genuine friendships, and
- struggling to understand what it means to be a good leader.

Emerging Findings & Recommendations



Recommendation #4: Develop a systematic approach for addressing the affective needs of gifted students and assisting them with developing the skills needed to foster healthy social and emotional lives within their trajectories of talent development.

Recommended Tasks:

- Develop an affective scope-and-sequence aligned with the NAGC Programming Standards
- Acquire high-quality resources for supporting the social and emotional lives of gifted students
- Involve the counseling staff and others responsible for student wellness



Next Steps

1. Complete data collection and analysis.
2. Initiate the work of the Evaluation Use Committee for summer study and reflection.
3. Deliver final report in September 2017.
4. Deliver results of the Evaluation Use Committee in December 2017.