



BUCKS COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT #22

Our Children... Their Future... Bucks County IU

Neshaminy School District

Gifted K-12 Program Quality Review

October 28, 29 and 30, 2014



October 2014

To the Neshaminy School District:

The Gifted K-12 Program Quality Review Team wishes to thank and commend those Neshaminy staff members and teachers who participated in this review process. We greatly appreciate the positive and professional attitude displayed by school staff and administration.

The visiting team found the administration, teachers, staff, and parents to be most cooperative and willing to discuss all aspects of Neshaminy's academic enrichment programs. Graciousness, openness, and hospitality were evident throughout the three-day visit, making our jobs much easier and allowing us to collect useful information.

While conducting more than 150 individual and group interviews and classroom observations in every school in the district, the team collected information in a variety of areas and provided detailed answers to specific questions, along with overall program strengths, needs, and recommendations. Team members identified program needs and made practical recommendations by applying their experience in the field to the on-site data collected, realizing that local conditions will determine local action.

Team members were pleased to have been a key part of this program improvement process. We wish you continued success in what is probably the most significant activity for today and tomorrow – educating our children.

The Evaluation Team

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**Neshaminy School District
Gifted K-12 Program Quality Review
October 28, 29 and 30, 2014**

Prepared by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22

In March 2014, the Neshaminy School District and the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 (BCIU) began to plan a Program Quality Review (PQR) of the school district's academic enrichment program. In September of 2014, BCIU staff met with Neshaminy's senior leadership and stakeholders to identify areas of focus for the PQR and create a set of guiding questions. The guiding questions served as the basis for the data collection activities performed by a visiting team of educators from Bucks County on October 28, 29 and 30, 2014.

Over the past thirty years, the Intermediate Unit has led the review process of over seventy-five school programs. The BCIU PQR process provides a thorough examination of school programs and services by an experienced team of educators and specialists. Through this process, the Intermediate Unit and Bucks County school districts provide continuity and direction for each review. The participating districts currently support the process through released time of their staff to participate. The Bucks County Programs and Services Advisory Council assists in scheduling and providing leadership for this process.

The PQR process differs from a traditional audit in that team members do not approach the task at hand with a "checklist mentality." The visiting teams use a systems approach that recognizes that the whole is more than a sum of the parts. In addition to examining instructional technology and its use in detail, the team's recommendations consider the larger context of the district, with the goal of improving and enhancing student learning.

The program review process is a cost effective process that serves as a significant staff development program for all participants. The visiting team's composition and makeup were intentionally diverse, and team members were recruited based on a match of their expertise and the unique core tasks of Neshaminy's PQR. Teachers and specialists who participated on the team grew and learned from observing programs and collecting and sharing data from classroom observations, interviews, test information, course documents, etc. Neshaminy educators had the opportunity to discuss their programs with others from outside the district.

Using the set of questions and probes developed by Neshaminy staff, the visiting team interviewed district personnel, examined documents, and collected data from a variety of sources, including students, teachers, administrators, and support staff. These data were then used to write this report detailing the team's conclusions about the district's instructional technology program. This report also summarizes strengths, needs and recommendations to be used by Neshaminy for future planning.

This final report is submitted by:

Team Member	Affiliation
Lauren Almlof	Bucks County Technical High School
Kathy Eby	Bucks County Technical High School
Eileen Forsyth	Pottsgrove School District
Elizabeth Glaum-Lathbury	Morrisville School District
Jenna Griffin	Bristol Township School District
Eve LaPier	Bucks County Intermediate Unit
Matthew Levin	Pennsbury School District
*James LoGiudice	Bucks County Intermediate Unit
Alison Majikas	Pennsbury School District
Stephanie Marrone	New Hope-Solebury School District
Lawrence Martin	Bucks County Intermediate Unit
*Michael Masko	Bucks County Intermediate Unit
JoAnn Perotti	Bucks County Intermediate Unit
Robyn Rowlands	Pennsbury School District
Matthew Tomlinson	Centennial School District
Victoria Velazquez	Bensalem Township School District

*Co-Chairpersons

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Overall Strengths

- At the elementary level, students express enthusiasm for their AE (Academic Enrichment) classes, and communicate that they find the AE Program interesting and challenging. They perceive that the AE program provides for open-ended thinking, and involvement in learning and projects that are different from those they experience in the general education classes. Students value learning and sharing ideas with other gifted students, as well as the opportunity to choose how they present projects.
- In the absence of universal standardized assessments, elementary school counselors work hard to conduct screenings. Psychologists and the director of pupil services collaborate to give careful consideration to decisions regarding proceeding with assessments for identification of gifted students. In the elementary schools, psychologists make themselves available to gifted support teachers to discuss students' needs. Teachers at every grade level can access GIEPs (Gifted Individual Education Plan) through eSchool.
- Elementary gifted students use computer labs, smart boards, and iPads. For example, students at one elementary school use the Internet to research candidates for governor of Pennsylvania. The gifted support teachers incorporate challenging higher level thinking and problem solving opportunities in mathematics, while regular education teachers understand how to provide enrichment in reading with flexible groups, using reading materials which are appropriate to each child's reading level. Students in AE classes participate in additional field trips related to an area of study, and take advantage of the resources available in the library/media centers.
- In the middle schools, the school counselors possess expertise and serve as the support system for gifted education. Middle school teachers are resourceful and enact best practices in the choice of teaching strategies, instructional approaches,

and integration of technology. Middle school students take pride in their learning, and exhibit creativity and skill in problem solving. The students respond enthusiastically to project based learning, collaboration with other gifted students, participation in academic competitions, and the opportunities they have to explore their own interests and speak freely. As in the elementary schools, eSchool provides an efficient means of sharing student documents and data.

- At Neshaminy High School, students have the opportunity to learn as a cohort of gifted students in a dedicated course during each year of high school studies, and the subject areas vary by grade level (Grade 9 English, Grade 10 Chemistry, Grade 11 History, Grade 12, English). The 2014-15 *Course of Study* for Neshaminy High School states: “Neshaminy High School’s Academic Enrichment Program is available to those students identified as Gifted and maintaining a GIEP.”
- AE and general education teachers at all levels recognize the need to learn about and implement curriculum and instruction that increases academic expectations and rigor.
- Parents welcome the closer look at the process the school district is taking to review its curriculum and instruction for gifted and advanced level students; they express great interest and support for efforts to improve and increase academic rigor and performance.
- District leadership and staff acknowledge that the AE Program, across all grade levels, needs a defined purpose, increased leadership and coordination. The Neshaminy School District leadership team deserves praise for initiating and conducting a comprehensive review of their gifted education, grades K-12. This review is recognized as a key and important step toward continued programing improvement for students who are gifted, and for district compliance with Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

AREA 1: GOALS, OBJECTIVES, PHILOSOPHY, & VISION

Key Question: To what extent do a defined vision, purpose, structure and underlying goals drive service delivery for gifted?

Narrative Findings:

The gifted review team was directed to a statement housed on the Neshaminy School District (NSD) website that provides an overview of the intent, composition of learners and program delivery in general terms. This statement can be found under the “Departments” tab, then “Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment,” then “STEM” and then “Academic Enrichment” (www.neshaminy.org/Domain1916) The statement reads:

“The Neshaminy School District recognizes the unique abilities of intellectually gifted students and strives to meet their individual needs. Based on multiple criteria, students with outstanding intellectual ability and creativity and the need for a specialized educational experience are identified to participate in the AE program. AE classes provide opportunities to promote the growth of skills and knowledge necessary for gifted students to achieve their potential and to fulfill their future roles in our ever-changing global society.

To provide for the interests, abilities, and needs of our gifted students, the AE program offers enhancements of curriculum content, instructional methods, student assignments, and learning environments essential to differentiated instruction. The AE teachers are committed to their gifted students, but the responsibility for educating gifted students is shared by all the students' teachers, the students' parents and the students themselves.”

The page also lists several instructional technology resources used in the AE program. The district administration reports that the statement has not been revisited for several years and, as a result, some of the information is not current. When speaking with gifted support teachers, curriculum directors, principals, classroom teachers, parents and others, it is apparent that there is little or no awareness of this statement. The value of this statement lies in its words and intentions. At this time, it is not serving as the driving force for defining and framing Neshaminy’s gifted education program. Given the general

tone of the statement, it does not speak to specifically to programming across grade or content levels.

In addition to the “Academic Enrichment” statement on the district website, there has been at the high school level an attempt to define the AE program in a document entitled “NHS Academic Enrichment Program.” This can be found on the Neshaminy website under the Neshaminy High School tab, then Offices, Principal’s Office and then click under NHS AE Program Presentation (www.neshaminy.k12.us/Page/25036). When speaking with staff and students it is apparent that there is a discrepancy between the program described in the high school overview and the program being delivered in the classroom. One area of departure that is noted by both administration and staff: the goal of homogeneous grouping, while desirable, is not always feasible due to scheduling constraints. It is also been noted that the course requirements for both the AP/Honors classes are nearly identical to those of the AE courses. Lastly, it is apparent in reviewing GIEPs that the goals for the individual learner are rarely addressed.

Despite the enthusiasm and collegiality of the staff, a defined and/or shared philosophy, vision, and goals for the K-12 gifted education are lacking. Additionally, this information needs to be disseminated to all administration, staff, students, parents, and community stakeholders. The philosophy, vision, and goals should be reflective of the overall district’s vision. Numerous staff members voice frustration at the lack of communication of common, overarching vision and plan.

At present, there is a great interest in and receptivity to improving the quality of the district’s programming for the gifted. Administrators, curriculum leaders, teachers, students, and parents express readiness to attend to the needs of the gifted, the need for overall program direction and leadership, and agreement that focus and purpose for this program should be made clear.

Need #1: To define a shared philosophy, vision, and goals for the K-12 gifted education.

Recommendations:

- Initiate a planning process whose goal is to write a philosophy (mission), vision and goals that align to Chapter 16 guidelines and the district's other strategic mission and goals. The planning process should involve a wide range of stakeholders including parents. Ensure that the philosophy (mission), vision, and goals are approved by district governance.
- After a vision, goal and objectives for the program have been defined, develop a communication plan so that they will be clear and accessible to all administration, teaching and support staff and the community (See Area 3, Need #1). Make the philosophy (mission), vision and goals easy to find on the NSD website.

Need #2: To initiate a process that systematically addresses the structure and delivery of K-12 gifted programming congruent with district's revised mission and vision.

Recommendations:

- Develop a plan that integrates AE with the regular education classroom and assures the instructional process/resources to meet the needs of the gifted learner. To do this, the plan must clearly identify vertical articulation of the gifted curriculum, its programming objectives and the students' GIEPs.
- Initiate a planning process whose goal would be to delineate the structure and delivery for a K-12 gifted programming plan. This plan should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in implementation of the plan. A key staffing need is the identification and appointment of a leader who possesses the experience, knowledge, and authority to direct the ongoing implementation of the plan. In addition, the plan should establish an ongoing review process that assures compliance with the design and Chapter 16 regulations.

Components of the plan should include:

- A reporting and accountability structure
- Staffing
- Professional development
- Technology
- Curriculum development, integration, and instructional design
- Funding
- Partnerships
- Communication
- Screening, identification and placement
- Alignment with Chapter 16 and the PDE Gifted Guidelines

AREA 2: SCREENING, IDENTIFICATION, AND PLACEMENT

Key Question: To what extent are screening, assessment, identification, and placement procedures for the gifted effective, efficient, and appropriate?

Narrative Findings:

Screening procedures take place for first, second, third, and fourth/fifth (combined) grade students. The computerized Measures of Academic Progress (MAP/NWEA) is administered district-wide (starting in grade one) to elementary students. The MAP continues to be administered to students in the middle schools, on a limited basis when students move into the district or are recommended for assessment by parents or teachers. Students who score a 95% or higher on the MAP for reading and math continue on with the process. The classroom teacher is asked to complete a Gifted Evaluation Scale, Third Edition (GES-3), and if criteria are met, the school counselor gives the student a brief cognitive measure (Kaufman Brief Cognitive Measure, Second Edition/KBIT-II). If the student profiles with a standard score of a 125 or higher on the KBIT II, parents are informed of the process, and are sent a Parent Inventory form to complete. This form was created by Neshaminy staff and serves to collect parental input.

Once all scores are reported, and if needed criteria are met, this preliminary screening data is submitted to the Pupil Services department. A review occurs between the Special Education Director and a school psychologist. Appropriate paperwork will then be issued to the parent including a form requesting parents to agree to further testing. A school psychologist conducts cognitive testing and a Gifted Written Report (GWR) is generated. District psychologists make use of reported confidence intervals when reporting the Full Scale IQ. Students who test on the WISC-IV can qualify for support services if their IQ is a 126 (96th percentile rank) or higher. The General Ability Index (GAI) is factored in, when called for, based on procedures outlined in the WISC-IV technical manual. The school psychologist provides feedback to the parent.

For fourth and fifth grade students, the PSSA data is factored in along with the standardized MAP score.

“Multiple Criteria” are not consistently defined, they include: MAP/NWEA testing, PSSA results (grade specific), teacher ratings on the GES-3 rating scale, KBIT-II, and input provided by the parent on a Parent Inventory form. It is noted that criteria, other than the IQ and other assessment scores, which indicate gifted ability but are not limited to demonstrated achievement, early skill development, or other intervening factors masking giftedness, are not addressed as part of District’s identification matrix.

A universal screening for ability, the Cognitive Abilities Test (CoGAT), was formerly administered at the elementary level. This instrument is no longer used. The only standardized measure of ability given to students prior to individualized IQ score testing by the school psychologist is a KBIT II.

Pre-Referral Process

For internal referrals, the process seems to start once MAP/NWEA results are completed at each grade level. The school counselor uses MAP data to initiate referrals for further screening and testing. Referrals may also be initiated by classroom teachers and parents.

Although there are AE referral forms designed for students from first through fifth grade, there have been instances in which kindergarten students have been screened and ultimately assessed by a school psychologist. Students have been screened and assessed at the secondary level as well, although not to the same degree as their elementary level peers.

Parents have expressed (via interviews and surveys) that they are not aware of public notice about the gifted screening process. Concerns and questions arose from parent interviews about how to initiate and better understand the district’s screening and identification process. Awareness activities designed to reach parents for students who are thought to be gifted, and about the district’s procedures for gifted services placement, are not made clearly known, or conducted on an annual basis.

Some counselors referred to, and seem to use, an outdated pre-referral process form and a grade specific referral checklist. A large number of school counselors have expressed the following screening/identification concerns:

- Screening and identification procedures are not consistent across buildings and grade levels.
- The use of the MAP is not an accurate and reliable measure or predictor of gifted ability and performance.
- There appears to be some consensus that the Cognitive Abilities Test (CoGAT) was a more reliable and efficient instrument to consider rather than the time consuming KBIT II.
- General education teachers in the buildings are not conversant with the procedures for nominating or recommending students for AE placement/screenings. Teachers have inconsistent understanding of the learning and social behaviors that characterize a gifted student, and as a result are often misdirecting students for screenings/placements.
- The use of multiple criteria, as outlined and required in Chapter 16, is not always adhered to, or even referenced, in the district's gifted placement/protocol procedures.
- To incorporate the use of nonverbal ability assessments to help screen students who are English Language learners, or have disabilities, or when cultural factors may mask gifted abilities.

The use of parent inventories is not consistent across building levels; when the GES 3 is administered to parents, it is an inappropriate use of this instrument. Feedback provided by general education teachers on the GES 3 are that the form is difficult to fully complete and does not accurately encapsulate student performance and strengths witnessed in the classroom setting.

GIEP Present Educational Levels

A review of select GIEP present educational levels across various buildings and grade levels notes some inconsistencies with data, and also the amount of data reported. Formal curriculum based assessment data (i.e., current reading levels, formal writing assessments, math unit assessments), were not reported in all of the IEP's that were reviewed. Student performance data is not always current, or used to frame and develop

present levels of Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPS), and then serve as the basis for GIEP goals and outcomes.

Need #1: To improve the screening, identification and placement procedures to align with Chapter 16 requirements.

Recommendations:

- Take steps to review current procedures for screening and identification of gifted students. This process should assure that the Chapter 16 regulations for the identification and placement are being met. These procedures, once reviewed and a revision has taken place, should be followed in a consistent manner across all schools and grade levels. These procedures for referral, identification and final placement need to be communicated to all staff and parents.
- Provide professional development opportunities for staff to help identify characteristics of a gifted learner. A helpful tool to accomplish this is the use of: *Understanding and Challenging the Gifted, An Introduction for Teachers* available at either PSEA or PAGE websites for no-fee downloading.
- Review various universal screening instruments and assessments that can be used at all grade levels to assist with student identification and placement in programs for the gifted.
- Use the MAP to help guide instruction and for differentiation. Less emphasis should be used on the MAP for gifted screenings.
- The GES 3 school form seems to be a challenge to complete and may not convey the full scope of a teacher's observations and recommendations. Give consideration to exploring alternate standardized rating scales that help explore giftedness. Perhaps incorporating a scale that uses home and school ratings, such as the Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS), should be explored further at this time.
- Review the use of a universal cognitive screening tool, such as the CoGAT, in order to determine and implement a more appropriate tool for screening of student ability.

- Obtain signed parent consent prior to conducting individualized tests of ability (e.g., KBIT II).

Need #2: To increase awareness of gifted screening/identification and placement procedures among parents, staff and administrators.

Recommendations:

- Create a gifted program overview pamphlet to include detailed information about the district's referral, screening, and identification procedures for placement of and programming for gifted students. Make this information available in all school buildings as well as on the district and school websites, and at other relevant school events. Make information on the website more readily accessible and easy to find.
- Establish a parent resource section on the district website that features research-based characteristics of a gifted child, as well as links to websites and literature, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Education's gifted resources, and the Pennsylvania Association of Gifted Education.
- Provide training to staff on procedures regarding screening and identification of gifted students. This should be done across buildings and grade levels to ensure consistency.

Need #3: To increase the use of multiple criteria for both screening and identification.

Recommendations:

- Select and use a nonverbal/language free test of ability, to help screen students who are English Language Learners, and are suspected of having gifted ability.
- Develop and use a parent input form to help document potential intervening factors, such as social/emotional functioning, diagnosed health conditions, and environmental stressors that affect student learning performance.

- Determine how to align and embed Chapter 16 requirements for the use of multiple criteria into the District’s procedures and matrix for screening and identifying students as gifted. These five multiple criteria are:
 - Grade level achievement assessment data in one or more subject areas that indicate high level of performance.
 - An observed or measured rate of acquisition and retention of new academic content or skills that reflect gifted ability.
 - Demonstrated performance or expertise in one or more academic area as evidence of products, portfolio, or research projects.
 - Early skill development.
 - Intervening factors masking giftedness. (22 Pa. Code §16.7(b)).

Need #4: To improve and increase the use of screening and assessment data for GIEP present levels of educational performance.

Recommendations:

- Take steps to ensure that the GIEP of each student reflects individual needs and strengths, and that the Present Levels of Educational Performance to determine the needs are based on multiple measures of assessment and other profile data. Other data should include individual achievement scores, grades, curriculum based assessment data, interest surveys, evidence of student work and the results from IQ testing. The goals and outcomes from these measures and assessments must be ongoing, kept current, and be the basis for the GIEP annual goals and short-term outcomes. The specially designed instruction that flows from this data includes modifications to the general curriculum, and must be delivered through both acceleration and/or enrichment.
- Design and use a teacher narrative form to be completed by a general education teacher to gather further student profile data, prior to the development of a student’s annual GIEP. This should be a key component of framing present

educational levels (PLEP). This form can include narrative information as well as assessment data that are current.

AREA 3: COMMUNICATION

Key Question: To what extent is there coordination and communication within and about the gifted program and the specifics of GIEP delivery?

Narrative Findings:

Overall, communication among AE teachers, general education teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and parents regarding gifted programming and services is limited. A brief written description of the AE program can be found on the Neshaminy SD website (see Key Question 1 narrative findings). In general, staff was unable to identify a person who was in charge of gifted programming or to articulate a vision or understanding of the structure for programming for the gifted. Evidence showed that the AE teachers themselves have little or no time to communicate and share. The pattern that emerged from interviews with staff indicates that there is little time to collaborate and share among regular education teachers and AE staff across the district. The lack of communication among teachers of the gifted is also reflected in limited coordination horizontally among AE teachers at the same level, vertically across levels, and the infrequent and inconsistent individualization for AE students in the regular education classroom.

The role of the GIEP as a key component for describing the learning needs of the gifted student and for instructional differentiation seems to be understood only in a narrow fashion by regular and AE teachers, counselors, parents, and even students themselves. A review of several GIEPs and interviews with parents and teachers makes evident that the GIEP information about students and their present levels of educational performance does not go further than the written document itself with its general goals. The GIEP does not appear to be a tool for planning a student's individualized instruction in the classroom.

Communication of GIEP information to the teachers occurs through the eSchool management system. There is little evidence of a process to inform and educate parents about the AE program, and the purpose, uses, and the role of the GIEP for instructional planning. Also, parents, teachers and administrators indicate a limited familiarity with

Chapter 16 guidelines. There was no systemic process in place to disseminate GIEP and progress monitoring information to the general education teachers.

Need #1: To improve communication throughout the school district and among stakeholders

Recommendations:

- Identify or assign a district level administrator to develop and coordinate communication and inform staff about current developments in district, state, and national programming for the gifted.
- Develop and implement a communication plan. The plan will establish a protocol for communication among stakeholders. This communication plan should include the dissemination of the K-12 AE program's mission, goals, guidelines, and objectives; information dealing with curriculum and curriculum integration; GIEPs; and Chapter 16 guidelines. The plan should also include the development of sustained communication among stakeholders and across the school district.
- Establish a district wide procedure for communicating progress on GIEP goals and outcomes.
- Distribute, use, and implement written guidelines for gifted programming and Chapter 16 to all administrators and teaching staff.
- Ensure district wide understanding of the identification process by providing awareness activities designed to reach parents of students enrolled in the school district. These activities shall be conducted annually and include information in local newspapers, other media, student handbooks and on the school district website. (22 Pa. Code §16.21(b))
- Enhance the AE programming's presence on the district wide website and in other publications to ensure communication about all aspects of the school district's programming for the gifted.

- Schedule monthly meetings and professional development activities with AE teachers and supervisors to improve consistency and collaboration across all levels, vertically and horizontally (both as whole group and by school level).

AREA 4: RESOURCES & TECHNOLOGY

Key Question: To what extent does instruction of the gifted include the use of differentiated learning, varied resources, and technology?

Narrative Findings:

The faculty and administration at the Neshaminy School District are committed to students and to their academic progress by providing a challenging and engaging curriculum. To further these ends, attention needs to be paid to the important role of technology in supporting an engaging and differentiated learning environment. The recent Technology Program Quality Review stresses the importance of collaboration between the Information Technology and Curriculum and Instruction Departments, while identifying the addition equipment and infrastructure necessary to allow effective technology integration within the curriculum.

The team noted several initiatives the district has undertaken to enhance the integration of technology. Examples include:

- The district has increased the number of mobile learning devices at all levels.
- Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) opportunities are offered in the secondary schools are well supported.
- Online information systems allow teachers to access relevant student data using eSchool.
- The Instructional Media Specialists are excellent resources and have expressed interest in and the desire to work collaboratively with the AE teachers.
- School librarians have adequate materials to support the gifted learner in the form of leveled books and online databases.
- Elementary school teachers report that there are curricular materials available to extend learning.

The team finds that technology is not deployed in the most effective manner. We had numerous reports of non-functioning computers in labs and on carts. This limits a teacher's ability to use technology effectively. At the elementary level, the AE

classrooms are not uniformly equipped with Smart Boards, which are standard in regular education classrooms. Given that Smart Boards are an excellent tool for integrating technologies and student engagement, this presents a serious challenge in the AE classroom. In addition, High School access to computers in order to write the GIEPs is limited to Instructional Planning Centers.

There was little evidence of systemic support for differentiation for gifted learners. We noted few opportunities for collaboration between and among Academic Enrichment teachers at the elementary, middle school, or high school level. Further, this pattern obtains more importance when looking at opportunities for collaboration among AE teachers and teachers in the regular education classroom. Beyond the issue of collaboration, limited opportunities for professional development focusing on technology integration and related best practice are available.

Need #1: To provide Regular Education teachers with tools and strategies for differentiating instruction in order to meet individual student needs.

Recommendations:

- Take steps to increase partnering with the library media specialists in order to collaborate with regular education and AE teachers and to develop meaningful extension activities.
- Develop a toolkit of differentiated instructional strategies and provide these to the regular education teachers. Examine Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (<http://www.ascd.org>) and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) suggestions and resources in order to share with staff.
- Consider the quality of extension activities for the gifted and high ability learners when making decisions about packaged curriculum.
- Include opportunities for differentiation in the unit planning templates for each subject area.

Need #2: To effectively use technology to enhance differentiation and higher levels of learning for gifted students.

Recommendation:

- Provide to both AE and regular classroom teachers the requisite computer hardware and software to implement true integration for enhanced learning. Consideration should be given to equipping all classrooms with several mobile computers (e.g., iPads or laptops) so that teachers are not dependent on using the mobile carts.
- Equip rooms designated for AE in the elementary room with technology that is provided in the regular education classrooms.
- Increase inventories of mobile devices and online services for students and teachers. Consider providing dedicated mobile labs to the AE classrooms K-8.
- Define a baseline of equitable and acceptable technology at all schools.
- Establish a common database of resources, preferably online, available to all staff and parents.
- Create and employ a calendar for updating the inventory of instructional hardware and software.

Need #3: To provide ongoing support in the effective use of Instructional Technology.

Recommendation:

- Use a model or framework such as Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) for evaluating the degree to which technology is increasingly used in the AE program.
- Implement the adoption of online and on-demand technology webinars.
- Provide time for Librarian/Instructional Media Specialists to work collaboratively with Academic Enrichment teachers in the effective use of library research

databases, exploration of high quality apps for the iPad that foster creativity, and use of web resources such as Google apps for collaborative work.

- Consider sending Academic Enrichment teachers to the annual Pennsylvania Educational Technology Conference. Require attendees to share their learning with colleagues in their schools as a professional development leadership opportunity.

AREA 5: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Key Question: What staff development is provided to enable teachers to plan for and meet the needs and challenges of gifted students?

Narrative Findings:

A district-wide plan for staff development as related to gifted education is not evident. There are few external opportunities for staff development about education of the gifted and how to differentiate instruction at the advanced level for gifted student. Knowledge of Chapter 16 and the GIEP process is lacking at both the administrative and staff levels, in part due to the limitations of professional development opportunities. Teachers of the AE program currently have only limited professional development or mentorship support from the district. Regular education and AE teachers report that they had little or no training for the development of the writing of student GIEP goals, outcomes, differentiated instruction plans and for assisting with classroom implementation.

Because of the numerous recent changes in district level leadership, teachers have not benefitted from deliberate and sustained professional development focusing on gifted instruction. Staffing and scheduling constraints seem to drive delivery of service, which has often led to inadequately trained teachers serving the gifted population. There is also a high turnover rate of gifted staff members, specifically at the middle school level, who come to this task about the scant knowledge about the gifted and how to differentiate content and instruction for high levels of challenge. Evidence of staff development to describe the AE programming options only exists through the new teacher induction program. There is no cyclical training to address the needs or development of the gifted student. Although limited collaboration may occur among AE teachers, there is no clear structure for providing the time and resources for this to take place in a similar manner in different schools and grade levels.

AE teachers across the district report they once had joint staff development and planning opportunities in past years where they were able to work with the regular education teachers on best practices on gifted education. This time has been eliminated due to an increase in teacher caseloads and because gifted support teachers' schedules

leave minimal time for them to interact with general classroom teachers. Also, there is a lack of professional development common release time, which severely limits the opportunity for AE teachers to collaborate.

Need #1: To train all administration and instructional staff on a regular and ongoing basis in the knowledge of Chapter 16 regulations, the identification process, GIEP writing, specially designed instruction, and implementation of best practices for the gifted student.

Recommendations:

- Identify and select trainers who are knowledgeable about Chapter 16 and gifted education to train instructional staff.
- Plan for professional development on Chapter 16 Gifted Education regulations and Chapter 4 regulations, as the school district reviews its staff development offerings and plans for increased professional development and support. Chapter 16 regulations require that each school district provide in-service training to gifted support and regular classroom teachers, principals, administrators, and support staff responsible for gifted education. Chapter 4 requires: "...each school district shall develop and implement a gifted education plan every 6 years as required under § 16.4 relating to strategic plans). A school district shall make its gifted education plan available for public inspection and comment for a minimum of 28 days prior to approval of the plan by the school district's board of directors" (Chapter 4 regulations, amended March 1, 2014).
- Examine the district-wide staff development program to provide training on a cyclical schedule for new and experience teachers about the needs of the gifted students.
- Develop and implement a plan on how to identify students with the characteristics of gifted learners to be used in a consistent and comprehensive identification process.

- Identify a trainer(s) to provide workshops on learning styles and needs of the gifted child; on implementing GIEPs collaboratively in regular classrooms; and how to differentiate instruction related to core content and standards.
- Develop workshops that will rely on the established and successful frameworks such as those available from the National Association for Gifted Children, the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Learning Forward and Understanding by Design.

Need #2: To provide leadership, instruction, and support to all AE teachers.

- Identify (an) individual(s) who will develop and conduct training for AE teachers.
- Develop and provide a sequence of training for the AE teachers to include: Chapter 16 regulations; development of effective GIEPs; and implementing goals across the curriculum
- Provide time for the AE teachers to collaborate district-wide on an ongoing basis. Examine scheduling options that may permit them to plan and deliver lessons collaboratively with other teachers.
- Identify an individual to serve as a mentor for newly identified AE teachers.
- Encourage and permit AE teachers to attend conferences or workshops outside the district that are aimed at providing these teachers with current best practice information, and with the technical know-how they can use to support the other teachers' differentiated instruction.

AREA 6: CURRICULUM/INTEGRATION

Key Question: To what extent does the design and delivery of the district's programming for the gifted meet the identified and assessed needs of each gifted student?

Narrative Findings:

The evaluation team used a variety of sources to evaluate the design and delivery of the district's gifted program. These include site visits and observations; interviews with multiple stakeholder groups; review of staff, parent, and student surveys; sample GIEPs; program document provided by the district; and Chapter 16 regulations.

Evidence of appropriate and effective/best instructional practices for the gifted is lacking. Differentiation in the classrooms across the district occurs sporadically and is not specific to AE student needs. The planning, design, and delivery of the gifted program lacks structure at and across the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Although students self report satisfaction with the program, we find the AE curriculum often fails to address the students' individual special needs as described in the PLEPs. Faculty surveys support this finding: 20% agree that the current academic enrichment/gifted program is meeting the needs of the gifted students, 40% disagreed and felt the program is not meeting current student needs, and 40% were unsure.

The Future Problem Solving Program (FPS) and competition is reported to play a major, and somewhat narrowly focused, role at the 6th grade program delivery. In interviews parents and students raised concerns because the FPS Program does not always adequately meet a larger range of creative and critical thinking skills, and fails to address varied subject-specific topics. Staff interviews also indicate some dissatisfaction with the program. Although higher-level concepts are built into the program, its success in improved student outcomes is dependent upon teacher delivery, professional development, knowledge, and experience.

Elementary grade level AE teachers have access to and know about the district's AE framework (NSD Elementary School Curriculum for the Academic Enrichment Program 2014-2015). However, the everyday program delivery and classroom program

structure and delivery differ from school to school, often reflecting an individual principal's point of view and expectations, experience or lack of it on the part of the AE teacher, and lack of direction at the school district level.

Interviews with teachers consistently revealed that the curriculum in the academic enrichment (AE) program does not connect to and complement the grade level content. AE students indicate that they often receive "extra work or worksheets" rather than enrichment activities. At the high school level, teachers report that AE and honors classes have the same curriculum maps, resulting in limited or no instructional differentiation between these leveled classes. Teachers note that there is no available planning or professional development time to discuss programming with the AE or regular education teachers.

Interviews indicate that some teachers do have the resources and understanding that enable them to adapt the regular education curriculum to the needs of gifted students, while some do not. A large number of teachers indicated an interest in learning more about both the AE program and how they can increase challenge in their classes. Teachers and other staff often cite the need for leadership of and district focus on the AE program.

GIEP goals are general. At upper grade levels, goals are designed as group goals with little or no differentiation based on student abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. The GIEPs are often written using the same template for all students. Assessment results and student present education levels are not regularly considered or used to develop unique goals for students. Staff involved in the identification and screening of students indicate dissatisfaction with using the MAP for initial identification for the AE program. Finally, multiple staff report that at times, due to technology issues, they had trouble accessing the data on AE students.

Need #1: To investigate, design, and implement a district-wide AE curriculum

Recommendations:

- Investigate staff understanding of the current AE curriculum.

- Organize the AE curriculum to include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, key concepts, themes that integrate knowledge within and across disciplines. (Chapter 16)
- Plan for extensions of core learning, using both acceleration and enrichment strategies.
- Develop specially designed instruction that includes process, products and assessments related to specific student needs.
- Identify and visit districts with established gifted programs and plans, and use these as possible models. Refer to the PDE Gifted Guidelines as an excellent resource for GIEP, curriculum, and program revision and development.

Need # 2: To coordinate communication (see Area 3) and establish a universal protocol for communication among stakeholders.

Recommendations:

- Develop a communication plan that will ensure ongoing and consistent communication and collaboration among all stakeholders related to the AE program.
- Provide transparent and ongoing communication from the district level to all district stakeholders regarding the AE program.
- Develop an articulated K-12 gifted program mission statement, goals, guidelines and objectives.
- Establish a district wide procedure for communicating progress on GIEP goals and outcomes.

Need # 3: To increase academic challenge and rigor at all levels and in all content areas.

Recommendations:

- Implement professional development for staff that ensures AE student needs are met in challenging and rigorous ways (see Area 5 recommendations).

- Ensure the curriculum is aligned to high levels of challenge and rigor and PA Common Core Standards.
- Focus attention at the high school level on reviewing both the structure and key components of the range of advanced classes and other academic options. This review should result in actions that assure that these classes provide significantly differentiated instruction and are an appropriate placement for the gifted.

At the high school, there is a range of varied advanced placement courses, honors, and AE classes. To a large extent, these offerings meet the need of many gifted students. However, both students and parents told the review team members that some of the classes need to establish higher academic expectations and provide instruction with increased academic rigor.

- Ask key questions about honors and advanced classes meeting student needs. For example:
 - Are the content and curriculum substantive, presented in a conceptual, rather than a strictly factual manner, and allow for rich extensions and connections to other learning and skills?
 - Are students asked to demonstrate their learning through intellectually demanding assessments and performances, ones that call for complex, creative thinking and problem solving—not simply fill in the bubble or blank tests?
 - Do instruction and assignments provide for students of high ability, or those who have already mastered course content understandings, to move at a faster and different pace, and allow for in-depth topic examination and projects?
 - To what extent is the class centered mainly or only on teacher-centered instruction, where little or minimal high-level student-directed and small group engagement is taking place?
- As part of this closer look or review of the high school's course and programming options for the gifted, attend to the structure and implementation of student GIEPs. Alternatives need to be explored regarding the managing of GIEPs and

meeting with parents in group settings. Action should be taken to deliver meaningful GIEPs that are individualized when required in the presence of the existing high school course of study and Present Levels of Educational Performance. Also, the district needs to examine the legal and regulatory requirements or exceptions that may allow for the maintenance and delivery of GIEPs only for those who may be identified as gifted and in need of specially designed instruction, beyond the full spectrum of existing high level courses and flexible learning options.

Need # 4: To develop an administrative plan to oversee, monitor, and direct the AE program at the district and building levels.

Recommendations:

- Provide district level direction and supervision for the AE program. Of the many recommendations contained in this report, leadership in programming and instruction for the gifted education should be given primary consideration. The need to establish strong, knowledgeable leadership was identified by the evaluation team for Area # 6: Curriculum/Integration. The same need surfaced in the recommendations in Area # 1: Goals, Objectives, Philosophy, & Vision, Need # 2; Area # 3: Communication, Need # 1; and Area # 5: Staff Development, Needs # 1 and #2. Hence, it is evident that strong leadership will provide the foundation for ongoing development and improvement.
- Implement consistent building level formal and informal supervision and observations to monitor teacher effectiveness, classroom practices, and district AE curriculum initiatives.
- Train and monitor administrative supervisors to appropriately adapt the Danielson Framework for Teaching to foster the professional growth of teachers. A valuable resource is “Possible Examples of How the Framework For Teaching Could Apply to Gifted Education Teachers,” available on the PDE SAS website www.pdesas.org.