

Montgomery County Public Schools is Not Eliminating Gifted Programs Questions and Answers

What is the current process for gifted and talented identification?

Gifted and talented identification occurs primarily in spring of Grade 2 through a process called global screening. As part of the process, a variety of student data are collected including parent, teacher, and staff surveys; students' reading and mathematics instructional levels; and results of cognitive assessments including the Raven Test of Standard Progressive Matrices and the Analogies and Quantitative Reasoning subtests of the CTB/McGraw-Hill In View. Following the collection of data, each school's Accelerated and Enriched Instruction (AEI) Committee analyzes the data to make recommendations for instructional services for each student. After making recommendations for instruction, the AEI Committee uses the multiple criteria to identify students as gifted and talented. Decisions not to identify cannot bar any student from receiving accelerated and enriched instruction. All students are either identified as "gifted and talented," recommended for rescreening, or not identified. If identified, a "GT" label is attached to the individual student record. At the end of the process, parents received a report and explanation of their child's test scores. Students new to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and those designated for rescreening are screened in fall of Grades 3, 4, and 5, as needed.

Every school also conducts an articulation process to decide what courses and class placement best fits each student. This process usually includes teacher recommendations, review of past performance data, parent input, and recommendations from the global screening process. Schools are expected to review student data in an ongoing basis to ensure that every student is receiving the appropriate level of instruction.

What plans are under development to change the global screening process?

Contrary to information in a recent Washington Post article, there are no plans to discontinue labeling of students for this school year. Other than providing parents with a more detailed report of the school AEI committee work, the global screening process will continue in the same manner as previous years. Two schools, Georgian Forest and Burning Tree elementary schools, have participated in a pilot program for several years where all steps of the global screening process are followed except for the final identification and labeling of students.

MCPS has been engaging parent and community stakeholders in a robust discussion about the system's policy on gifted and talented education and will continue to do so. This discussion and parental input will be important as the Board of Education's Policy Committee considers revisions to the policy some time during 2009.

Among the options that will be considered is eliminating labeling in favor of a services-based model. In this model, students are still screened for their readiness for advanced work and

parents are provided the recommendations from the screening so that they are fully informed of their children's readiness to excel at a higher level. Students are then provided advanced work based on the results of the screening process, consultation with parents, and the ongoing assessment of students' needs.

The Board of Education's Policy Committee will consider this and any other changes to Policy IOA, *Gifted and Talented Education*, as part of its work. Parents and other stakeholders will be provided ample time for comment before any action takes place by the Board of Education.

In addition, MCPS staff have considered combining the global screening process with the annual articulation process. Articulation is the process schools use to recommend course and class placements for students from one grade level to the next. This would move the discussion about appropriate levels of instruction for advanced students to an ongoing basis rather than the singular Grade 2 experience.

The overall goal of these changes is to provide more students more opportunities to work at the highest level. There are no plans to discontinue programs that serve students working above grade level or those working far above grade level.

How would this new screening/articulation process work?

Rather than a one time screening that results in a label, a systematized, ongoing process of screening would be implemented. Beginning in Grade 2 students would be recommended for advanced level work in reading language arts and mathematics based on a similar set of data as currently used in the global screening process. Unlike the current global screening process, a system verifying delivery of recommended services would be implemented at each grade level. The formal process would be repeated at the end of Grade 5, in preparation for middle school services, and at the end of Grade 8, for high school courses. The screening/articulation process may not result in a label but it will result in an individual parent report recommending what services a child should receive, and a process for ensuring that children receive accelerated and enriched services.

Will MCPS continue to have gifted and talented programs?

Yes. Current policy and all discussions related to changes in policy have set the expectation that there will be a continuum of services to meet students' needs, including those working, or ready to work, above grade level and far above grade level. Reducing programs that serve students ready for challenging coursework would be counterproductive to the MCPS strategic plan's goals to increase the number of students successfully performing at high levels and has never been under consideration. MCPS is committed to ensuring that students receive the services they need.

What is the timeline for any changes and how will public input be gathered?

A timeline has not been developed for the process of combining school processes such as global screening and the articulation process. The process for determining if MCPS will continue to label students is part of the public process of policy revision. The Board of Education's Policy Committee is expected to consider revisions to Policy IOA some time during 2009. Parent and community input will be gathered as part of the policy review process before any final board action is taken on this issue.

Board Statement about Gifted Student Identification

December 16, 2008

Board of Education Issues Statement in Response to Washington Post Story, 'Montgomery Erasing Gifted Label'

Statement from Shirley Brandman, President of the Montgomery County Board of Education, and Patricia O'Neill, Vice President of the Board and Chair of the Policy Committee

"The Washington Post published a story today entitled 'Montgomery Erasing Gifted Label' that creates the impression that the Montgomery County Board of Education has already made the decision to stop identifying students as gifted and talented. This is incorrect. The global screening process, as required by Policy IOA, Gifted and Talented Education, will be conducted for all second graders this year as it has in past years.

"It is correct that Montgomery County Public Schools is conducting a pilot program in two elementary schools—Burning Tree and Georgian Forest—that provides gifted and talented services to students without labeling students. The screening process at these schools—including assessments, staff surveys and parent surveys—is still conducted, but staff does not label students at the end of the process. Students in these two schools still receive the same opportunity for accelerated and enriched instruction as students in schools where the label is still used.

"MCPS has been engaging parent and community stakeholders in a robust discussion about the system's policy on gifted and talented education and will continue to do so. This discussion and parental input will be important as the Board of Education's Policy Committee considers revisions to the policy some time during 2009.

"It is true that among the options that will be considered is eliminating labeling in favor of a services-based model. In this model, students are still screened for their readiness for advanced work and parents are provided the recommendations from the screening so that they are fully informed of their children's readiness to excel at a higher level. Students are then provided advanced work based on the results of the screening process, consultation with parents, and the ongoing assessment of students' needs.

"The Board of Education's Policy Committee will consider this and any other changes to Policy IOA as part its work. Parents and other stakeholders will be provided ample time for comment before any action takes place by the Board of Education."