

Community Schools of Frankfort High-Ability Program Plan

PHILOSOPHY

All students need opportunities to learn at an appropriate pace and depth. High-ability individuals demonstrate outstanding aptitude well above the mean, and services for these children should include learning events geared to their talents. The aim of high-ability programming within the Community Schools of Frankfort is to cultivate individual potential for becoming independent and self-directed, for thinking critically, and for developing rich understanding. The intellectual and emotional needs of high-ability students may be met by providing acceleration of course content and pace of instruction, deepening study of subjects beyond grade-level expectations, and employing teaching strategies and curriculum suited to their specific abilities.

GOALS

In order for students to utilize their potentials, the goals of specialized high-ability programming include:

- Assisting students as they implement their intellectual and creative aptitudes through a variety of challenging instructional activities.
- Creating an environment that will encourage self-worth, compassion for others and their ideas, and a positive self-image.
- Guiding students in achieving greater independence and effectiveness in learning.
- Providing an opportunity for students with similar abilities, interests, and talents to interact and share ideas.
- Operating a classroom which promotes the development of critical, analytical, divergent, and evaluative thinking skills through differentiated, interdisciplinary, and enriched curriculum.
- Offering a setting for students to utilize their talents, initiatives, self-direction, and originality in developing strategies to deal with problems.

THE CSF DEFINITION OF HIGH-ABILITY

High-ability students are those who perform at or show the potential for performing at a high level of accomplishment when compared to other students of the same age, gender, culture, or environment. These students may be found in all genders, cultures, environments, or ethnic groups. The Community Schools of Frankfort identifies students in the curriculum-specific areas of mathematics and language arts. Some students have talents in both areas (these students are classified as “general intellectual”). All high-ability students require services that go beyond what is offered in the regular classroom to students of the same age or grade level.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

CSF has a variety of components in place to meet the needs of high-ability students. Students are served through the levels of services, where services are matched to unique student needs and are based on the outcomes of a comprehensive identification procedure. The consistent expectation is to provide challenging, differentiated curriculum and instruction during the school day commensurate with the abilities and achievement levels of students identified as high-ability. This occurs by implementing research-based best practices to differentiate instruction and curriculum for language arts and mathematics instruction (flexible grouping, compacting, acceleration, extension of content, use of above grade-level materials, problem-based and project-based learning, and individualized instruction).

Tier I services are for all students. Field trips, convocations, guest presenters, and other events provide all students with opportunities to expand their views of the world. School-wide or grade-specific projects offer students open-ended opportunities for challenge and provide a real world audience. While these opportunities are provided for all students, high-ability students are in a unique position to thrive in this type of task by going beyond typical expectations.

Tier II services are for some students. This level provides for students based on specific characteristics and needs. This varies by grade level but may include grouping by skill level for math and/or reading instruction, between-class grouping, enrichment pull-out, Honors classes, and acceleration of content material

leading to opportunities for Advanced Placement courses in high school. Both in-school and extracurricular opportunities include academic competitions, too.

Tier III services are for a few students who demonstrate a need for even more highly-individualized options. Depending on the student's age, interests, and ability, this may include early entrance, grade advancement, completion of independent research projects, mentorships, off-campus college coursework, and early graduation.

Programming for high-ability students within the Community Schools of Frankfort is an integral part of the general education school day and builds on the basic academic standards present at all grade levels. Here are the specifics of how the education of high-ability students is accomplished at each grade stage:

The Elementary Level:

Within CSF, a “cluster grouping” model is the method of differentiating instruction and serving our high-ability identified students in grades 1-5. Kindergarten students are evaluated at the end of the first semester and receive services for the remainder of the school year within their existing classrooms. Instruction for high-ability students focuses primarily on mathematics and language arts. The activities designed for the children within a cluster classroom are closely aligned with the standard grade-level curriculum, and either mastering accelerated content (mathematics) or generating deeper understandings of existing themes (language arts) is emphasized. In mathematics, content that is on grade level is blended with curriculum from the next higher grade level, and the pacing of this instruction is faster than would be typical. This enables elementary students to adequately prepare for advanced math classes offered at the middle school and beyond. For language arts, the texts introduced are more complex in terms of subject and vocabulary, and the writing extensions call for greater depth of analysis and synthesis. Understanding meaning through open-ended discussion is also emphasized.

There are also some extension experiences available for high-ability students in the area of science starting in second grade. Additional enrichment is provided through project selection, the choices and options offered to the students, and the materials used for instruction. Curriculum for this group of students is extended to develop the depth of understanding of a topic or theme in keeping with the students' strengths and capabilities.

The Middle School Level:

CSF offers accelerated classes in mathematics and advanced classes in literature in all middle school grades. These courses provide a rigorous academic curriculum that promotes stimulating learning experiences and meaningful intellectual challenges. Mathematics content is accelerated along two lines of curriculum. The line offered to most of our high-ability math students offers pre-algebra in sixth grade, algebra in seventh grade, and geometry in eighth grade. The other line of accelerated math content is slightly less aggressive, offering seventh grade math in sixth grade, pre-algebra in seventh grade, and algebra in eighth grade. Both the algebra and geometry classes for middle school students align with our high school math curriculum in those areas and are offered for high school credit.

Advanced curriculum in language arts is available for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. In those classes, the foundational content is the high-ability language arts curriculum that has been developed and endorsed by the Indiana Department of Education. This means that both reading materials and projects differ from those of the standard grade level offerings, and students are expected to do more reading outside of class. These courses require a high level of involvement, effort, and commitment from students. Successful completion of this advanced course in middle school should prepare students for eventual AP experiences in language arts at the high school.

A science-based independent research class is also offered at each grade level to a small group of students with exceptional aptitude for science experimentation. Completion of a rigorous research project for entry into the regional science fair is the outcome from participation in this enrichment opportunity.

The High School Level:

CSF offers a variety of programming options for students identified as high-ability at the high school. Opportunities includes Honors classes, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and dual-credit classes with local institutions of higher learning. In addition, it is expected that all teachers consider the needs of high-ability learners and provide enrichment opportunities for these students within the existing curriculum. Differentiation is practiced throughout the curriculum and course offerings.

In language arts, Honors classes exists for students in grades nine and ten. Subsequent AP classes (AP English and AP Literature) are offered to these students in grades eleven and twelve. In mathematics, accelerated Honors courses are available to high-ability students to continue the progression of advanced

content from middle school. The eventual culmination of this progression is entrance into AP math classes in Calculus and Statistics in grades eleven and twelve. Other AP classes exist at Frankfort High School for high-ability students to take throughout their high school careers in the sciences and social studies, as well.

MULTI-FACETED STUDENT ASSESSMENT

High-ability learners are assessed by the professional staff of the Community Schools of Frankfort to determine appropriate educational services. The identification procedures used by CSF are equitable, comprehensive, and ongoing. They reflect the corporation's definition of high-ability and pay respect to the unique diversity of our student population. Procedures used in the identification process are shared with teachers and parents.

A comprehensive screening takes place once a year (typically in the spring in preparation for the next school year) where all available data is collected and analyzed by the identification team for all students in the corporation. The data includes test results, teacher input (both anecdotal and from observation scales), and parent input (if they choose to provide it). This analysis of students is done separately in the areas of math and language arts. From this process, students are identified for services. Also, students who are already being served are assessed to determine if placement for the following year is still appropriate or if services offered need to be added or reduced. In addition, throughout the year, teachers bring students to the attention of the high-ability coordinator whom they feel are ready for services now (as opposed to waiting for the comprehensive process described above). When this happens, all available data is gathered (along with teacher comments and samples of work), and the identification committee meets to assess if services should be offered immediately in the specific case at hand. In this way, students are identified and served at the point they demonstrate readiness no matter what time it might be in the school year, rather than having to wait until the following grade. All identification decisions are made based upon inspection/discussion of individual data and not by compounding scores in some mathematical fashion and ranking students. CSF moved away from that mathematical ranking approach several years ago and now evaluates students for high-ability services on a case-by-case basis. Students new to the corporation are also screened for high-ability services, as warranted.

Standardized testing, teacher input, classroom performance, and professional judgment are all utilized to identify students who are high-ability in math, language arts, or both (general intellectual). At the middle and high school levels, placement in the Honors/accelerated classes is based on past student performance, standardized test scores, teacher judgment, input from parents, and student choice. No matter the grade level, a student is placed in the level of services that is deemed appropriate to stimulate development while maintaining a manageable classroom workload. This placement is continually monitored by school personnel and may be adjusted as the year moves along.

Once students are placed in a given high-ability service plan, assessment is continuous to determine if this is the best placement for them. At the middle and high school levels, student progress is evaluated at the end of each nine week assessment period. Students experiencing difficulties may be placed into another class after a conference with the student, teachers, parents, guidance personnel, and school administrators.

Identification Appeal Procedures:

Students who are not identified as high-ability through the aforementioned identification process may appeal for a secondary review to the high-ability services coordinator (this step can be initiated by parents, teachers, or the student). The appeal is offered in writing and includes the reasons cited for why the student should be identified as high-ability. The corporation's identification appeal committee (comprised of different members than the original identification committee) reviews the original decision process and data for that student, as well as any new information/data collected for the appeal process and the specifics of the written appeal. Parents are notified of the outcome of the appeal process by the high-ability coordinator.

Exit Plan:

Occasionally, students may be removed from high-ability services if they are not performing up to reasonable expectations. Upon review, if a given high-ability service is not benefiting the educational advancement of the student, action will be taken to re-evaluate the placement. This includes communication with parents about performance and expectations, conferencing with the teacher to resolve any student-specific conflicts, and reviewing all available data to determine if an alternative placement is in the students' best interest. If desired by the parent, a conference will be held that includes the student, parents, teachers, the principal, guidance, and the high-ability services coordinator to discuss student achievement in the high-ability setting, minimum expectations of production, and reasons for

any decline in performance. Decisions about exiting a student are made with input from multiple stakeholders.

Any student removed from the high-ability programming will have the opportunity to be re-evaluated in a timely manner. Being identified as high-ability does not mean the student carries this designation indefinitely. However, exiting a student from high-ability programming is to be the last option of all possible solutions to low performance.

COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

CSF recognizes that high-ability learners have unique needs socially, emotionally, and academically. As such, counseling and guidance services must be in place to help this specific population. Our school corporation supports the unique emotional needs of high-ability students. All school counselors and social workers receive training regarding the characteristics of students with high-ability and their unique needs. They disseminate this information to parents, teachers, and administrators as needed to provide for the needs of high-ability students. Counselors make themselves readily available for personal counseling, as well. When appropriate, suggestions are made to help students with concerns encountered either at school or outside the school environment. Students can be referred for services by self, other students, parents, or teachers.

To provide for personal/social development, career development, and academic development for high-ability students, counseling personnel may implement the following interventions as needed: classroom guidance lessons, counseling groups, individual counseling, parent/teacher meetings, and referrals to community agencies. High-ability students may also be provided with college/career exploration and development experiences earlier than their same age peers and consistent with their strengths to fully develop their academic potentials. At the middle and high school levels, counseling is also directed at college/career opportunities and academic options during high school to prepare for post-secondary education years (AP classes and dual-credit opportunities). Sources of additional information that might be helpful to parents of high-ability learners are shared as appropriate at all grade levels.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

High-ability learners in the Community Schools of Frankfort should be served by professionals who are involved with ongoing professional development in the areas of differentiated content and instructional methods. The teachers of these students should be developing expertise in appropriate and differentiated content and instructional methods. As a result, opportunities are provided for on-going professional development, and all school staff members receives information related to understanding and recognizing the needs of high-ability learners.

CSF provides opportunities to reach teachers with instructional strategies and organizational techniques to allow them to challenge all students yet meet the needs of highly-able individuals. Guidance counselors are encouraged to attend workshops on social and emotional needs of high-ability students. The corporation encourages and provides support for professional development in high-ability education including workshops, conferences, and AP training sessions.

High-ability teachers participate in periodic meetings with the high-ability services coordinator specific to their responsibilities. Professional development tasks are undertaken in this forum to help teachers develop the capacity to address the unique needs of high-ability students. To meet the expectation for having staff licensed in high-ability, corporation funding is set aside for stipends to teachers willing to take coursework towards a high-ability endorsement. To the extent possible, licensing and training in high-ability education are encouraged and considered when deciding teaching assignments that involve high-ability students. The CSF high-ability coordinator, who has the responsibility for overseeing all programs in the corporation for high-ability learners, must have the proper education, licensing, training, and expertise in the academic, social, and emotional needs of high-ability learners.

SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The Community Schools of Frankfort has a program design and leadership in place to support the consistent offering of services for high-ability learners. Program evaluation is continuous in order to monitor and improve the effectiveness of these services. A written plan detailing program design, services, curriculum goals, identification procedures, and student support services is in place and is monitored

and adjusted on a regular basis with input from staff, parents, principals, and the Broad Based Planning Committee (BBPC). The BBPC, consisting of educators, parents, students, community members, and other stakeholders, meets at least once per year to review the state of current high-ability programs and make recommendations about future enhancements to services for high-ability students.

Internal evaluations of high-ability programs occur on an annual basis at all grade levels with building principals and school improvement teams taking an active role in this process. Considerations include programming, student identification and placement, and tracking student growth/performance. Regular consultations occur between the various school principals and the high-ability services coordinator to examine the most efficient way to meet the needs of high-ability students daily within CSF.

Principals, guidance counselors, and the high-ability services coordinator monitor test scores and student grades on an on-going basis throughout the school year. Some indicators of the success of high-ability programming include performance on tests administered at the national (AP), state (ISTEP), district (NWEA), and classroom (benchmarks, common formative assessments) levels. When appropriate, surveys are used to obtain additional information from parents about the effectiveness of service options for high-ability students.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Any questions regarding the contents of this document or high-ability services within the Community Schools of Frankfort can be directed here:

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