K-12 High Ability Program Evaluation for Southwest Allen County Schools

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Overview of High Ability Program Evaluation

Purpose and Focus

Southwest Allen County Schools has a rich history of educational programming for high ability students including the magnet program at the elementary level, accelerated math options and honors offerings in middle school, and honors, AP, and dual credit offerings at the high school. Historically, additional academic competitions and programs such as We the People, Future Citizen, and Science Fair also have provided gifted students with the opportunity for hands-on, enriching experiences allowing them to practice skills of communication, collaboration, and critical and creative thinking. The program has always been strongly supported by the community.

In recent years, the district has implemented changes in its high ability programming that have generated unease among some members of the community and faculty. Examples of these changes include a shift away from thematic-based curricular units at the magnet school; the addition of a “neighborhood ALPHA” program at each of the elementary buildings; the merging of the honors and ALPHA courses at the middle school; and the elimination or reconceptualization of some of the popular academic competitions and programs. These changes have been met with mixed reactions among stakeholders and have culminated in a perception that the administration is no longer as supportive of high ability programming.

In an effort to address the concerns of stakeholder groups and to determine the efficacy of its programming for high ability students, the district contacted two experts in gifted education to conduct a comprehensive, formal evaluation of Southwest Allen County Schools K-12 program for high ability students.¹ The experts reviewed the program for its alignment with best practice in gifted education, alignment to the Indiana mandate for high ability education, and its overall effectiveness. The information will be used to guide program improvement for high ability students, K-12, throughout the district.

For the purpose of analysis and discussion of findings, the high ability program was divided into six key areas: Identification, Program Design, Curriculum and Instruction, Affective Needs and Self-Regulatory Skills, Professional Development, and Program Effectiveness.

These areas correspond to Indiana requirements for programs and services for students with high ability. For each program area, the report includes the data sources used for the analysis, the findings, a summary, and targeted recommendations for future positive development.

**Evaluation Process**

The evaluation process for the consultants was as follows:

*Onsite*

- Two full days and two half days of structured interviews and visits to 3 elementary buildings, 2 middle school buildings, and the high school. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, literacy coaches, parents, a counselor, a high school student, the superintendent, the high ability coordinator (assistant superintendent), and a school board member. A schedule of persons interviewed and buildings visited can be found in Appendix A.

*Off-site*

- Development of a plan for the evaluation with input and approval from district
- Construction of survey items and preparation of interview questions
- Document review
- Review and analysis of student identification data, policies, procedures, and placements
- Review of classroom instruction, including classroom videos and lesson plans
- Review of curriculum materials and offerings
- Analysis of responses to surveys from program parents, program students, and program faculty.
- Review and analysis of interviews with a student, administrators, faculty, and parents
- Review of student achievement data
- Final document preparation

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Survey data were tabulated for each stakeholder group. In addition, results were analyzed for differences across and between groups (e.g. neighborhood ALPHA parents and Aboite Self-Contained ALPHA parents, Parents and Faculty, Faculty and Students, etc.). Narrative
comments from the interviews and surveys were analyzed for themes according to best practices in coding and analyzing qualitative data.2

*It is important to note that the evaluators have extensive experience in conducting high ability program evaluations in districts of varying performance and size including districts larger than Southwest Allen and higher performing. In no other evaluation conducted by this team have so many comments been submitted in the surveys from all stakeholder groups. The number and length of individual comments from the beginning to the end of the surveys (collectively nearly 300 single-spaced pages) reflect the strong opinions held regarding the high ability program by stakeholder groups. While there are always outlier comments, this report includes only representative comments that reflect themes of opinions shared. As is recommended practice when conducting qualitative research, direct quotations are included so as to honor the participants’ voices and provide validity for the researchers’ interpretations. Sample survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to survey data, information on teacher background preparation and professional development was reviewed (Form in Appendix C). Classroom instruction was analyzed with elements found in the classroom observation tool, Assessing Classroom Differentiation designed for use in classrooms with high ability students (Appendix D). Lesson plans and other program materials and policies were analyzed according to guidelines proposed by the National Association for Gifted Children’s Standards and its Networks. An informative summary of the accepted components of gifted education can be found in Appendix E. Student achievement and other test data were analyzed. The Indiana Department of Education High Ability Data Card was also reviewed (Appendix F). Results from all data sources were used to triangulate findings from each of the overarching evaluation components.

Background Information about Southwest Allen County Schools

- Total enrollment: 7,190 in 2016-17
- Number of teachers: 478
- Number of teachers licensed in high ability education: 15 (professional development survey recorded 12 currently)
- 81% White, 5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 5% African American; 4% Multiracial
- 14% on Free or Reduced Meals

This information was obtained from the Indiana Department of Education website, the IDOE High Ability Data Card, and the district.

### Table 1: Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity and of any race</th>
<th>American Indian or Native Hawaiian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability Population</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey to constituent groups

### Table 2: Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboite ALPHA Parents</td>
<td>61 7th</td>
<td>Aboite ALPHA 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood ALPHA Parents</td>
<td>92 8th</td>
<td>Neighborhood ALPHA 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Elem Parents</td>
<td>153 All Middle</td>
<td>All Elem 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Parents</td>
<td>119 9th</td>
<td>Middle School 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Parents</td>
<td>136 10th</td>
<td>High School 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11th 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12th 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All High School 272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Parents</td>
<td>408 All Students</td>
<td>All Faculty 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all groups</td>
<td>1208</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Southwest Allen County School’s programming for high ability learners has strengths that merit noting, and these strengths are articulated in detail throughout the report. They include offering a continuum of services for high ability learners in recognition that high ability learners differ both in the degree and area of advancement, and, therefore, need differentiated services in order to meet their learning needs effectively. Stakeholders valued the fact that the teachers in the self-contained magnet were licensed in gifted education or were working toward licensure. Stakeholders expressed appreciation for the opportunity for high ability students to be grouped together for instruction, as they believe this has fostered students’ social development. The district has also put considerable time and effort into providing training for teachers on how to
differentiate skills to provided targeted instruction on standards acquisition. This differentiation allows for high ability students to accelerate their skill development. Finally, stakeholders were also appreciative of the array of course offerings and extracurricular experiences at the secondary level. Collectively, these reasons contributed to a satisfaction rate of 64% for parents and 61% for students when stakeholders were asked how satisfied they were with the opportunities offered for high ability learners in the district.

Stakeholders did express concern regarding some programming areas, and these concerns were validated when triangulated with other data sources analyzed. Specifically, while programming was found to be strong in attention to standards acquisition and acceleration, it was not as strong in attention to other core elements of gifted education including the development of conceptual understanding, problem solving, higher level thinking skills, and specific attention to social and emotional needs of high ability students. In each area of the report, suggestions are offered to improve that dimension of high ability programming. These suggestions will need to be considered with regard to other district goals and initiatives to determine the feasibility of implementation. A strong commitment to program development by the district, coupled with the support from the community, will allow the district to move forward in implementing changes to address these additional elements of gifted education. Strengthening these areas will ensure high ability learners are actualizing their potential and are well prepared for their future educational and career goals.
Program Area: Program Design

The evaluation of the area of Program Design included an examination for the following components:

- The existence and functionality of a Broad Based Planning Committee that includes representatives from all stakeholder groups
- A written definition, mission statement, and goals and objectives for programming for high ability students
- A continuum of services offered to meet the needs of all identified high ability students

Data Sources

- Verification of the presence of a Broad Based Planning Committee
- Review of program documents
- Review of service options
- Interview and survey data

Findings

**Existence and functionality of a Broad Based Planning Committee with representation from all stakeholder groups.**

Indiana Code requires that districts establish a “broad based planning committee that meets periodically to review the local education authority's plan for high ability students. The committee must have representatives from diverse groups representing the school and community” (IC 20-36-2). The Indiana High Ability Coordinator's Handbook recommends that the stakeholder groups include educators, parents, students, community members, and any other interested stakeholders.

In SACS, the ALPHA Parent Group Advisory Board currently serves as the Broad Based Planning Committee. The district high ability coordinator serves as an ex officio member of the committee. Minutes of the meetings are kept by the ALPHA parent group president instead of the district. The coordinator noted, “at times and as relevant, there have been open APG meetings, small group discussions and focus groups that have included the various stakeholder groups required.”

Since the BBPC is required, and the meetings should include representatives from all stakeholder groups, SACS should consider developing a BBPC committee that is independent of the ALPHA Parent Group. Members of the APG should be invited to serve on the BBPC, but the BBPC should also include a teacher representative from each building,
one or more administrators, and one or more high ability high school students as well as any additional committee members. As this is a district committee, the district should determine the agenda for the meetings and keep the minutes of the meeting on file.

**Program Documents: Mission statement, goals, and objectives**

While the district has Board-approved mission, vision, and belief statements as well as documented goals and outcomes, no specific mission or vision statement was found for the high ability program. The website includes only a description of the services provided and states that the program “is designed to meet the educational needs of high ability students through instruction of appropriate pacing and complexity, developing creative and critical thinking, and encouraging the utilization of research skills.” Additionally, no specific high ability program goals or objectives were found.

**Indiana Requirements for High Ability Services**

In 2007, Public Law 84 took effect stating that schools must identify students with high ability K-12 at least in the domains of general intellectual and specific academic ability and provide them with appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction in the core content areas. (Schools may identify and serve additional domains of high ability.) The specific citation is IC 20-36-2-2 Schools high ability programs. Some additional requirements and clarifications referenced here are found in Rule 511 IAC 6-9. There are other sections of Code that impact high ability, e.g. Advanced Placement, School Improvement Plans, reporting requirements, etc.

Southwest Allen County Schools has demonstrated a commitment to high ability programming with their longstanding magnet program at the elementary level. Two years ago, SACS began to offer a second tier of services for advanced learners with the introduction of the Neighborhood ALPHA Program. While the magnet program is designed to meet the needs of students who meet the criteria for the designation of High Ability: General Intellectual and need appropriate differentiation for high ability students in all content areas, the neighborhood program is designed to meet the needs of students who are identified as High Ability in one area only (Math or Language Arts) or whose scores demonstrate that their needs can be addressed with modifications to the differentiation options within the neighborhood schools. The addition of the neighborhood program was added in recognition that not all advanced learners are alike, and therefore a continuum of services is needed to adequately address their differing learning profiles and needs. While Indiana has a requirement to serve high ability learners, the degree to which and how these students are served is local decision; it speaks well of the SACS’s commitment to high ability learners that it is offering more than one service option at the elementary level.
At the middle school, accelerated math classes are offered, and honors courses are available in the other subject areas. Finally, at the high school, a host of advanced offerings include honors classes, Advanced Placement classes, dual credit offerings, and Project Lead the Way courses.

Perceptions of Service Options

Survey and interview data suggest that stakeholders have mixed opinions and/or a lack of awareness regarding the services offered for high ability students and what they entail. For example, a third of the participants responding to the survey whose children qualified for the magnet program chose not to accept this placement (n = 27). An analysis of their reasons for not electing this service option fell into three groups. A small group of respondents elected not to send their students because they wanted to keep siblings together, and not all siblings qualified for the program. Others held the philosophical belief in the value of a neighborhood school and a heterogeneous group of students. This belief was reflected in comments such as, “I like Haverhill’s positive atmosphere and having my daughter around kids of all different abilities and talents,” “I like the family feel of Lafayette as well as trust the staff,” and “We felt the overall education provided as well as the atmosphere at Covington was a better option for our child than what would be provided at Aboite.”

Finally, a third category of responses indicated that parents elected not to send their children to Aboite due to negative perceptions of the program. Representative comments are below:

I didn’t feel it would be a good fit for my child. I haven’t heard very good reviews about the program at Aboite.

There is a very negative reputation of the school now, which is why I believe [fewer] kids are choosing the self-contained option.

With regard to the neighborhood program, some parents felt that this service was able to meet the needs of their children. This opinion is reflected in comments such as “We love that it’s located within [neighborhood school] and led by the same teacher as all the other kids. We love that every teacher, thus far, has tailored their teaching to engage our son and keep him challenged.” and “At the present time our son is being challenged and is having fun at his school.”

Fewer than half of the parents responding to the survey (45%), however, felt satisfied with the neighborhood program. While many acknowledged the differentiated instruction in
math and/or language arts, they indicated that was not enough to constitute a program for high ability. For example, comments included:

We again have not been informed of what additional things the school is doing for our child that would be different than a normal child that is not high abilities. It’s a bit frustrating. It was not covered clearly at all at conferences. We were just told he would be in a higher Math group.

I do not believe the neighborhood school program is effective. Last year, my child was pulled out for a high ability reading group, in which he read books at his level with other students. That, in my opinion, is no different than what should be happening in the classroom on a day-to-day basis for all students.

Parents in the neighborhood program also felt frustrated in the lack of communication regarding how learning is further differentiated for their high ability students in the neighborhood program:

There is little to no communication to the teachers, and little to no communication to the parents regarding the neighborhood program. We didn't even know our daughter was given any different instruction last year until the end of the year, and don't know if there is any different instruction going on this year. Any time we asked about the program, we were directed to talk to the principal, as they were not equipped to answer anything.

Additionally, parent comments indicate that those who were familiar with the ALPHA program at Aboite did not think that the neighborhood program was comparable in what it offered high ability students:

Another of my children was identified as neighborhood ALPHA for language arts in 5th grade, and that child definitely was challenged. the level of challenge for students depends *completely* on the teacher and how much effort that teacher wants to put forth/how much support that teacher has to provide challenging and appropriate materials/if that teacher has any time to prepare extra, challenging lessons.

My two older children attended Aboite for self-contained Alpha and the neighborhood high ability program is not nearly as challenging, instructional, organized, structured, and enriching.

Finally, in addition to parents, members of the neighborhood ALPHA faculty also expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of the neighborhood ALPHA program with comments
such as “I have trouble finding strengths with our current program as a teacher” and “I am unsure of what the high ability program at my school offers apart from guided instruction to meet their needs.” Perhaps due to the lack of complete understanding of what constitutes programming for high ability at the neighborhood level, teachers and parents indicated that programming is “hit or miss” depending on the teacher. As one teacher commented, “Southwest Allen has no specific curriculum other than the Standards for these subjects. The result of this is that students in different classrooms at the same level throughout the district receive widely varying instruction.”

Having a wide range of abilities in the classroom also presents a challenge for teachers to adequately address the needs of their neighborhood ALPHA students. Consequently, survey responses indicate that 54% of neighborhood parents and 38% of the neighborhood faculty said their high ability children were being challenged only sometimes, rarely, or not at all in language arts, and 47% of the neighborhood parents and 30% of the neighborhood faculty said their high ability children were being challenged only sometimes, rarely, or not at all in mathematics. One teacher noted:

As teachers, we do our best to always challenge our students - no matter their level. However, this means working late hours, giving up time on our weekends, and coming to school after our children are in bed. I am sure this is easier to do at the middle and high school levels. However, at the elementary level the range of learners, per class, is huge. Also, having 28 students makes individualizing even harder. With textbooks going away we are often left to create the curriculum on our own, however the planning time is not provided.

Parents also indicated frustration that their identified high ability students in the neighborhood program had less instructional time with the teacher. For example, for guided reading, the highest reading groups meet with the teacher only three times a week whereas the other reading levels meet with the teacher either four or five times a week. For math, the parents were concerned high ability students were spending too much time waiting for others to catch up, spending their time with computers and not enough time with the teacher. As one parent commented, “The current system of teaching Math in small groups allows for my child to spend too much time on the computer, and not enough time mastering the standard he is working on. I also have not seen evidence that there is an emphasis on problem-solving in Math.” Another parent elaborated, “When challenging a high ability student, it needs to be taught by someone and not a computer. A computer can supplement but they need someone to confirm that they are doing the right things and they still need to be taught their grade level standards.” As a result of the heterogeneous grouping, some parents feel their children are not able to maximize their potential. One representative comment from a parent highlights this worry: “I believe my child is
somewhat handcuffed. . . I think he could move up quicker if given the time and opportunity, but since the others are not ready it is holding him back.”

It is important to note that the neighborhood program is only in its second year of implementation. As such, it is understandable that not all of the elements of programming for high ability have been put into place. However, unless the structure is modified to allow for more time to implement the additional elements of gifted education, it is not likely teachers will be able to do so effectively.

Perceptions of Service Options at the Middle School

For the 2016-2017 school year, SACS provided a change in the services offered for identified high ability students at the middle school level. For the first time, identified ALPHA students were placed in honors classes with other non-identified, but high achieving students who would have previously been enrolled in a separate honors section of the same course. Combining ALPHA and honors students into the same class provides advantages in terms of scheduling as well as providing students with more opportunities to interact with different students throughout the day. It also, however, increases the range of ability and achievement within the class which may present challenges to teachers to maintain an appropriate level of rigor and incorporate the type of instruction to challenge all students. Not surprisingly, stakeholders have had mixed reactions to these changes. Some parents, teachers, and students have expressed positive comments regarding the change as indicated here:

I am thrilled that there is no longer a separation between ALPHA and honors students. (Middle School Parent)

The blending of the honors and ALPHA program at the middle school level has made for a more pleasant classroom experience. (Middle School Teacher)

I am glad that it has been opened up to other students than just self-contained because I do think there are students who could be successful in those classes but were not identified through CogAT. It was too restrictive. (Middle School Teacher)

Some stakeholders, however, expressed negative responses to the changes as they feel that the combination of students has decreased the rigor in the courses. Representative comments include:

There is a definite difference between students who come to middle school from the Aboite program and those who have waited to enter high ability classes until arriving at middle
school. Students from the Aboite program are more creative thinkers, and they are more prepared for the challenges of the middle school high ability classes. (Middle School Teacher)

Again, I am not convinced that opening the gifted program to other students has been the best plan for kids. Perhaps it will be in time, but right now I do not see the benefit. (Middle School Teacher)

This year I feel like with self-contained and honors students all mixed together, the high ability students aren't getting the challenge they once had. There seems to be more repetition in the classroom (Parent)

After ALPHA and Honors were mixed, these classes became more boring. I am so used to being in a class where kids are engaged and want to learn more, but with this new mix, I feel like the students in my classes are relatively smart, but also don't care half as much as ALPHA students. I am not saying ALPHA kids are smarter, I am saying that they care enough to want to do their best on a group project. (Student)

Since the change in programming at the middle school level to combine the Honors and ALPHA sections into one section is new this year, no data is yet available to determine its impact on the achievement of students.

Perceptions of Service Options at the High School

Stakeholders are pleased with the service options available at the high school including honors classes, Advanced Placement, Project Lead the Way, and dual credit offerings. [11 Honors, 17 Advanced Placement, 2 Project Lead the Way, and 35 dual credit courses] While participants shared opinions on some changes they would like to see within those offerings, those comments are included within the curriculum and instruction portion of the report.

Suggestions for Consideration

The district may wish to consider the following suggestions in order to address challenges and concerns related to the design of its high ability program.

- Establish a districtwide Broad Based Planning Committee that includes representatives from each building, an administrator, parents, students, and other community stakeholders who are interested in high ability services. The BBPC should be charged with accomplishing the following tasks:
  - Developing a mission statement specifically for the high ability program. While this mission should align with the district mission, it should extend the
district mission by specifically stating the district’s recognition that high ability students are found in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, that these learners have unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs; and that these learners require differentiated curriculum and instruction in order to maximize their development.

- Establishing High Ability program goals and measurable objectives for each of the required program areas: Identification, Curriculum and Instruction, Affective Needs, Professional Development, and Program Effectiveness. The goals will frame the future direction for the program, and the objectives will allow the district to measure the progress toward meeting the goals.

The establishment of a district BBPC and the development of a specific mission for the high ability program and measurable goals and objectives will communicate to the stakeholders the district understanding of the unique needs of high ability and its dedication to improving services for these students.

- Clearly define and communicate the types of services available to meet the needs of high ability students including the rationale for the self-contained program and the differences between what the self-contained program and the neighborhood program offer.
  - Develop and post written curriculum plans for both the self-contained and neighborhood programs that illustrate how these curricula go beyond the standards and are differentiated specifically to meet the needs of high ability learners.
  - Showcase student projects and work that demonstrate the elements of high ability education including an emphasis on conceptual understanding, higher level thinking, and problem solving. This showcase could be in the form of an open house that is open to the community.
  - Hold informational meetings regarding the services for high ability students with program teachers and administrators present to answer questions.
- Consider ways to remove obstacles to parents selecting the self-contained high ability program for their children who qualify.
  - If possible, allow for siblings who do not qualify for the self-contained program to be placed in the general education program at Aboite to keep families together.
  - Address the negative perception of the self-contained program.
    - Demonstrate district and building administrative support for high ability programming that goes beyond standards based instruction.
- Implement changes suggested in the Curriculum and Instruction section of this report to enhance the quality of the self-contained program.
- Support teachers in seeking out professional development opportunities specific to high ability learners. Share with parents what teachers are learning and how they are implementing it within their high ability classrooms.
- Consider changing the name of the program to one that does not carry a connotation of superiority such as Extended Learning Program. This may assuage perceptions of elitism.

A clearer understanding of these programs, and the type of learners they are designed to serve will help parents make better-informed choices of the appropriate services for their children.

- For the neighborhood high ability program, consider changing the structure of the program to allow for more instructional time to be spent on the elements of gifted education (e.g. enrichment, higher level thinking skills, problem-solving). This alternate structure could be in the form of a pullout. Another suggestion could be to utilize between class grouping and/or cluster grouping of high ability students. For example, the identified high ability math and the identified high ability language arts students could all be clustered into the same classroom with a teacher trained in high ability education. The rest of the class would be made up of non-identified students. If all sections at the grade level could be scheduled to have math and language arts instruction at the same time, teachers could do between-class ability grouping across sections. The high ability students would remain with the one high ability cluster teacher, and other high achieving students could join the classroom for instruction as well. For example, consider the following example of how this recommendation might work in practice: Assume there are four sections of 3rd grade. If 4 students were identified as high ability in language arts only, and 5 identified as high ability in math only, these 9 students would be placed in the same homeroom with a teacher trained in high ability education. The remaining students in the homeroom would be heterogeneous in terms of ability. Students in the other sections would also be heterogeneously grouped. At the time of math instruction, all students in the grade would be divided according to their instructional levels and would change classrooms to be with the teacher assigned to their instructional level for math. The identified high ability math students would stay in the cluster classroom with the teacher trained to work with high ability students. The next level of advanced math students would also join this classroom. Note: The identified high ability language arts only students would not necessarily stay in the
cluster classroom for math instruction unless they were in the next level of advanced math students. The same process would be repeated for language arts instruction with the identified high ability language arts students staying in the cluster classroom and being joined by the next level of academically advanced language arts students. The remaining students would be divided and placed with a specific teacher for their instructional level in language arts.

In this way, the range of abilities within each of the math and language arts classes would be narrowed so that all students would benefit. For the high ability cluster class, this would allow the identified high ability students to receive more direct instructional time with a teacher than they are currently receiving. Not only would this address the current parent concern that high ability students are not receiving as much direct instructional time, but it would also allow teachers to offer more than just standards-based guided reading and math groups to their identified students. The restricted range of abilities, coupled with the ability to cover content at a faster pace, will free time for instructional activities that include more elements of gifted education such as real-world problem solving applications, enrichment and independent study projects, and activities to promote critical thinking, creative thinking, and conceptual understanding. While the neighborhood ALPHA option has been in place only two years, a change in the structure as suggested and the addition of instructional activities that incorporate gifted education models and strategies would allow the neighborhood schools to provide more targeted programming for identified high ability students. A pull-out opportunity for hands-on investigations or interdisciplinary projects would strengthen engagement for these students as well. Written documentation of these instructional activities will provide parents an understanding of what constitutes the neighborhood program beyond just differentiated reading and math groups. Without some change, the perceptions of parents are unlikely to change.

- Consider monitoring the effects of combining the Honors and ALPHA classes at the middle school level.
  - Collect and analyze longitudinal achievement data on the growth of both groups of students
  - Encourage teachers to share their perceptions of the combined classes and offer supports for assisting them in meeting the needs of this wider range of learners.
Program Area: Identification

The program area of Identification was reviewed for consistency with Indiana requirements and adherence to best practices in gifted education. Specifically, the review considered to what extent:

- The identification plan is available for public inspection.
- Selected instruments are valid and reliable for the construct and program purpose.
- Multiple pathways are in place for identifying students.
- Students are being identified in the areas specified in the Indiana Code including Math, Language Arts, and General Intellectual (qualifying in both areas).
- The selection process neither over nor under-identifies students for advanced curriculum and instruction.

Data Sources

- District program documents and website relating to the identification process
- Instruments used in the identification process

Findings

Identification Plan available for public inspection

SACS should be commended in their transparency regarding the identification process used for the self-contained and neighborhood ALPHA programs. The process is summarized on the district’s website, and it is included in a Powerpoint presentation that is posted on the website as well.

Selected instruments are valid and reliable for the construct and program purpose

With regard to instruments used in the identification of high ability students, the state recommends norm-referenced measures of both potential (otherwise referred to as ability or aptitude) and achievement designed to predict or demonstrate academic achievement in the core content areas of math and language arts. The state also recommends that districts consider additional, descriptive information for those students whose scores on either the norm-referenced measure of achievement or ability fall just below the district’s guideline for inclusion. A review of the instruments used in SACS’ identification process indicates that the district is using both valid and reliable measures of potential (Cognitive Abilities Test) and achievement (NWEA). The district also considers qualitative data from the Kingore Observation Inventory or the Scales for Identifying Gifted Students for students whose scores fall just below their guideline for inclusion.
Students are being identified in the areas specified in the Indiana Code including Math, Language Arts, and General Intellectual (qualifying in both areas)

Indiana Code requires that high ability students be identified and provided services in general intellectual and specific academic areas. SACS is in compliance with the code at all levels, K-12.

Multiple pathways are in place for identifying students rather than multiple hurdles for excluding students during the identification process, and the selection process neither over nor under-identifies students for advanced curriculum and instruction

While Indiana allows school districts flexibility in the instruments used and the process followed in the identification process, the state does specify some parameters within which the districts should operate. For example, the Indiana Code defines a high ability student as one who “performs at or shows the potential to perform at an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment.” This definition means multiple pathways should be available to qualify for high ability programming; if students scored high enough on either a norm-referenced measure of ability or a norm-referenced measure of achievement, they should be identified. Moreover, Indiana’s guidance on identification also recommends the use of qualitative data (descriptive data) to supplement test data in the identification process. For example, for students whose test scores on the identification measures miss the district’s guideline for a cutoff yet fall within the standard error of measure of the cutoff, additional data in the form of qualitative indicators are recommended for consideration to determine the best placement for the child.

According to the district documents on identification, SACS begins the identification process in kindergarten. For the elementary and middle level, CogAT and NWEA, and qualitative data are used in the identification process. To determine placement in the self-contained program for 1st and 2nd grade, any kindergarten student scoring at the 96th percentile or higher on the achievement measure (NWEA) is invited to take the Cognitive Abilities Test. Any student from that group who subsequently earns a score of a “Global 9,” a district term to describe the composite of the Verbal, Nonverbal, and Quantitative Batteries at the 9th stanine, qualifies for the ALPHA self-contained program. Those scoring at 96th percentile on any of the NWEA subtests are identified as high ability in that subject (math or language arts) and served in the neighborhood program. To find additional students who may need high ability services, all second grade students take the CogAT. While the district documents are not clear, from the spreadsheet of data, it appears that any student with a composite stanine of 9 on the CogAT qualifies for the self-contained ALPHA program regardless of their corresponding NWEA scores. Additional qualitative
data in the form of teacher rating scales may be collected for those whose composite falls at the 8th stanine to determine placement in the self-contained program. For the neighborhood program, those with NWEA scores at the 96th percentile are identified in the respective subject area. This identification is reviewed annually depending on the subsequent NWEA scores. Finally, those with a composite score on the CogAT at the 8th stanine, or those with individual verbal, quantitative or non-verbal subtest scores at the 9th stanine are also identified and served in the neighborhood program. Identification decisions are determined by building level identification teams.

Southwest Allen should be commended for using valid and reliable measures and a multifaceted identification plan. The district should also be commended for its understanding that the identification process should be repeated at select grade levels in order to determine if additional students are in need of high ability services. Certain facets of the current selection process, however, may inadvertently be contributing to the misidentification of some students and should therefore be reconsidered. For example, the Indiana definition of a high ability student says that students should be identified either “who perform at or show the potential to perform at an outstanding level of accomplishment . . .” However, SACS’ current process for kindergarten precludes any student from being identified based on their potential for outstanding performance (as measured by the CogAT) because they are not permitted to take the CogAT unless they already have documented outstanding performance (as measured by NWEA). This process results in the under-identification of high ability students, particularly for those students with limited opportunities for formal learning experiences prior to kindergarten. On the survey, teachers commented about the lower percentage of students identified at the primary level and wondered if this was due to the process. For example, one teacher said, “I feel like some students that are high ability are not identified in the primary grades. There tends to be a surge in numbers at 3rd grade. The numbers in 1 and 2 have been going down. This could be legitimate that fewer students are high ability, or we might be missing them in the identification process.” and another teacher stated, “It seems many times we have kindergarteners and first graders that are not identified right away due to many factors. Then we have a huge influx in 2nd and 3rd grade. Many people wonder how/why they aren’t being identified earlier.”

While it is true that ability is more difficult to measure in young children, the CogAT 7 was specifically designed with the purpose of identification of gifted students, and therefore attention was given to reducing the amount of error in the testing for scores at the extreme
ends³. Additionally, any student scoring at the 9th stanine on the CogAT is demonstrating outstanding reasoning capability compared to age level peers and should be given the opportunity for high ability services to maximize that capability. However, as cognitive development and its assessment may be variable at the primary level, continued high ability identification and placement should be reconsidered based on subsequent testing and performance in high ability services.

Another aspect of the current identification procedure that may need to be reconsidered is the use of the composite score on the CogAT to determine placement in services. The Indiana mandate requires services in core content areas, specifically math and language arts. Districts may serve in additional domains beyond these areas, but they are required to serve core content areas. Of the three reasoning abilities measured on the CogAT, Quantitative and Verbal reasoning are the two greatest predictors of academic success⁴ and correspond directly with Indiana’s mandate to serve in math and language arts, respectively. While the nonverbal reasoning battery alone is not predictive, when combined with the quantitative battery, it does add to the prediction of who will be successful in mathematics, and therefore this partial composite is also recommended for consideration in the identification process. The overall CogAT composite score is comprised equally of verbal, quantitative, and non-verbal subtests. As such, some students who are “Global 9s” may have a weakness in one of the three reasoning abilities that will be masked in the composite because of an extreme score (or scores) on the other two areas. A student may therefore be falsely identified as “High Ability: General Intellectual” when she or he really only needs services in one area. A review of the CogAT scores and high ability identification designations for Southwest Allen’s third and fourth grade students indicates that the use of the composite score to determine high ability designation has resulted in this problem for some students. A few examples are included below to highlight the problem. In each case, the child’s high ability designation is General Intellectual, yet not all their CogAT Verbal, Quantitative, and Nonverbal scores nor all of their NWEA scores were in a qualifying range. More examples can be found when considering the students who were identified as General Intellectual with a “Global 8.”

³ For a review of the reliability and validity studies of the CogAT, please see the CogAT Form 7 Research and Development Guide
### Table 3: Student Identification Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>CogAT Verbal Percentile</th>
<th>CogAT Quantitative Percentile</th>
<th>CogAT Nonverbal Percentile</th>
<th>CogAT Composite “Global 9”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Faculty Perceptions of Effectiveness of Identification Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboite ALPHA Faculty</th>
<th>Neighborhood Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Effective</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers of both the ALPHA self-contained and neighborhood programs were asked their perceptions of the effectiveness of the identification process. The use of the composite score may serve to explain some teachers’ perceptions that the wrong students are identified for the ALPHA program. For example, one teacher commented that “At the beginning of the year I am handed a list of students who were identified "high ability" on the COGAT because they scored in the 8th stanine or above...In the end, I teach them at their guided reading level (which may or may not be above grade level). In Math, they may or may not need above grade level instruction based upon their NWEA score. Which leads me to wonder if they are really "high ability" and why we are placing that label on the child” and another teacher said, “There are students receiving services due to testing scores, but their classroom performance does not support the need for additional challenge or extension.”

Additionally, teachers in the neighborhood ALPHA program also expressed discontent with the identification process and the fact that student’s designation changes every year depending on one test administration of NWEA. For example, a teacher commented, “NWEA as an identifier: how is that effectively used, as it depends on the testing session... Some quarters/years the student is identified as HA, but then later they are no longer considered HA because of a slightly lower score on the next testing session. I would think parents might have an issue with that.” and another stated, “Receiving a "one time high score" isn’t always valid and pushing those students into a program based on that fact alone is a disservice to the student at times as they can struggle greatly in the wrong environment.”
Southwest Allen provides an excellent opportunity for high achieving students to accelerate their math curriculum. Qualified students are permitted to take algebra as early as sixth grade. Placement for algebra is determined by a combination of NWEA scores, ISTEP+ scores, and grades. Interview and survey data indicated that some parents, teachers, and students had concerns about the validity of the early algebra placement process. When asked on the survey, 12% of middle school parent respondents indicated that they wished they would have made a different placement decision for middle school math. Ten percent of the middle school kids surveyed (n=42) and 16% of the high school students surveyed (n = 43) said they retook an advanced math class because they were not satisfied with their performance the first time through. Two student comments are representative of this problem: “I have no idea how it was decided for me to be in advanced math. I have never thrived in these classes and have gotten "B"s nearly every semester. Whatever system is in place for selecting these students needs to be reviewed,” and “I was in the ALPHA program, but math was always a struggle for me. I was put into 7th grade math in 6th grade and ended up having to take 7th grade math again in 7th grade. Even though ALPHA has an advanced curriculum that I appreciated, it failed to notice that students may not be ALPHA-level in all subjects. To this day, I hate math because teachers never taught the foundation I needed to understand it or breezed through that section thinking that we all understood it already.”

On the other hand, 24% of middle students and 33% of high school students surveyed reported that they wished they had taken algebra a year earlier because their math sequence had not been challenging enough. A student comment that is representative of this experience: “My Honors math class is very easy, and I don’t feel I am challenged enough I would like to go up to Algebra next semester or go high enough to where it is challenging. I get bored with my math class because I already know how to do it and feel no challenge.”

High School Identification

The district documents on identification indicate that at the high school level identification is determined through performance based assessments, PSAT scores, and qualitative data. The selection procedure for how these measures were used was not included. For placement into advanced courses, however, stakeholders at this level were less concerned about the identification process than at the earlier grades. For example, teachers shared comments such as “My AP class is open to any student regardless of high ability identification. I have many different levels and if the students are willing to work, everyone will learn.” and “As a matter of fact, the meaning of ‘ability’ as it pertains to student performance even changes over the years. As students get older, factors such as intrinsic motivation, curiosity, discipline, and critical thinking become more defining characteristics than simple ‘ability.’”
**Suggestions for Consideration**

To address the concerns with the current identification procedures articulated above, the district may want to consider the following suggestions:

- Establish a district level identification team. Identification should take place at the district, not building level, to ensure that the same selection procedure is consistently followed across buildings. The district level identification team should be comprised of the high ability coordinator and a representative from each building level who is trained in high ability identification.

- Provide all kindergarten students with the opportunity to be identified through their reasoning potential regardless of their achievement level on NWEA. This practice is in compliance with the mandate stating that K-12, a high ability student can be identified based on their outstanding performance or their potential for outstanding performance.
  - To increase the validity of the CogAT scores for kindergarteners, the district may work with the Indiana representative for Riverside Publishing who will provide advice on recommended timing in the academic year for testing, practice materials, number of students to be tested in one sitting, and other factors to promote validity for online testing of primary students.

- Reconsider the selection processes for the high ability services, so they reflect both best practices in gifted education as well as the Indiana mandate for high ability identification.
  - For ALPHA self-contained program: Since this program is designed to serve those students with the greatest academic potential in all core content areas, students should have a qualifying score on the CogAT at the 9th stanine (Age Percentile) on the Verbal Battery and a qualifying score at the 9th stanine (Age Percentile) on either of the Quantitative Battery or the Quantitative/Nonverbal Partial Composite. These students shall be identified as High Ability: General Intellectual. For students whose scores fall just below this guideline but within the standard error of qualifying, additional information may be considered to determine appropriate placement.
    - Since the pace of instruction and curriculum of the ALPHA self-contained program is accelerated, in addition to the qualifying CogAT scores, students should also have a minimum of 8th stanine NWEA scores to participate.
    - Testing for the ALPHA program should take place in the spring of kindergarten and again in the spring of 2nd grade in recognition that cognitive development is variable at the primary level.
• Placement decisions should be re-evaluated for all students for whom additional data and performance in the program suggest the placement may not be appropriate for meeting the needs of the student. If a student was not performing well, an exit procedure that includes conferencing with parents, the implementation of interventions, and a review of subsequent performance could be put into place.

For the neighborhood program: Students may be selected for identification through the multiple pathways listed below. If a student qualified in both Math and Language Arts, that student should be labeled High Ability: General Intellectual.

For High Ability Identification in Math:
• Through Performance: Outstanding score(s) (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of math achievement (NWEA)
• Through Potential: An outstanding score (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of quantitative reasoning or a composite measure of quantitative/nonverbal reasoning (CogAT)
• Through Additional Data: When a child’s score on either the norm-referenced measure of achievement or reasoning falls just below the cutoff, additional data in the form of teacher rating scales or classroom work samples will be reviewed to determine appropriate placement.

For High Ability Identification in Language Arts:
• Through Performance: Outstanding score(s) (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of reading and language achievement
• Through Potential: An outstanding score (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of verbal reasoning
• Through Additional Data: When a child’s score on either the norm-referenced measure of achievement or reasoning falls just below the cutoff, additional data in the form of teacher rating scales or classroom work samples will be reviewed to determine appropriate placement.

In responses to the concern that neighborhood identification changes yearly based on one NWEA score, the district may wish to consider trend data on NWEA for identification instead. For example, students may be identified for high ability services the following year based on Fall and Spring NWEA scores that were both at 9th stanine. As long as the student continued to perform well in high ability services, the high ability designation could be kept on the student test number. Consistent with the self-contained program, if a student was not performing well in high ability services, an exit procedure that includes
conferencing with parents, the implementation of interventions, and a review of subsequent performance could be put into place.

- Reconsider the selection procedure for determining which students are ready for algebra in 6th or 7th grade. Better selection procedures will help ensure that students have the strong mathematical foundation necessary for future success in advanced math classes as well as the self-confidence in their ability to be successful in these courses.
  - Analyze district data for those who were successful and those who were not successful with their early placement to determine if a pattern exists that may help determine different qualifications.
  - Consider using an established measure such as the Iowa Algebra Prognosis test or the Orleans Hanna Algebra Prognosis test to facilitate math course placement.

- Clearly delineate a selection procedure for high ability designation at the high school level. While such designation is not as important for determining course placement, it is important for documenting the program effectiveness for high ability students. For example, the district may wish to disaggregate the data on Advanced Placement exams for high ability compared with non-identified students as an indicator of program effectiveness at the high school level. Accurate identification is necessary for this data to be used.
  - The PSAT was recently re-normed on a nationally representative sample and therefore can serve as an appropriate identifier of ability at the sophomore level. The same criteria of 96th percentile or higher on either the verbal or the quantitative subtests could be applied to the selection procedures. PSAT results for the current 11th grade students and the new results for the current 10th grade students should be reviewed to be certain students are appropriately tagged on the Student Test Number and to provide appropriate guidance for those scoring very well and not previously identified.
Program Area: Curriculum and Instruction

The evaluation of the program area of Curriculum and Instruction included an examination for the existence of the following components:

- A written, vertically and horizontally-aligned Curriculum and Instruction Plan specifically and appropriately differentiated for high ability students and developed at the district level
- Observation of students participating in instruction that includes elements of gifted education and at a pace commensurate with the learning characteristics of high ability students
- Stakeholder perceptions of the existence of elements of gifted education: advanced content, appropriate challenge, engaging learning experiences, development of critical and creative thinking, constructivist learning, development of communication and collaboration skills, and the development of the skills of an independent learner

Data Sources

To assist in the review of curriculum and instruction for high ability learners, the district provided or described, or the reviewers accessed online, the following items:

- An article entitled “What is Differentiation?” written by Dr. Simmers regarding how the differentiated instruction approach embraced by the district can include the differentiation needed for high ability learners. Instructional strategies for identified students mentioned in the article include the self-contained program for students in grades 1-5, differentiation within the classroom, leveled reading groups, flexible grouping, cluster grouping, guided math, additional enrichment opportunities and projects, curriculum compacting, independent learning, student-driven inquiry, honors classes, Advanced Placement courses and dual credit courses.
- The HOW (Hall of Wisdom) link on the district’s website with links and resources related to curriculum and instruction. English resources included links to brief outlines of content to be covered in Honors English 9 and Honors English 10. Other resources were not specific to high ability students.
- A designated Curriculum Coordinator and a Vertical Articulation Team (VAT) to assist with the process of curriculum and assessment alignment through course descriptions. Teachers, department chairs, and team leaders are members of the VAT teams.
- Homestead High School Course Descriptions including policies on weighted grades, Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, dual credit, Project Lead the Way, and honors
courses. With some exceptions, students may self-select into above grade options but are encouraged to follow teacher recommendations. Students must meet specific criteria for Grades 9 and 10 Honors English. Specific mention of high ability was not found.

- The 2015 Mission Statement for District (this is not specific to high ability, but education in general)
- Sample student assessments
  - Sample math standards tracking documentation form
  - Theme reading contract
  - Algebraic Expressions Math Contract
  - Algebra Standards Assessment
  - Standards-Based Progress Report
- A link to ELA Standards for Grades 1-5 “Unpacked” into discrete skills (Indiana Academic Standards - not specific to high ability)
- A document of ALPHA Standards
  - ELA for grade 1, 2, and 3 (utilizes many of the Indiana Academic Standards for one grade level above placement)
  - Targeted Fountas and Pinnell Reading level targets for elementary ALPHA students
  - Math for grades 1 – 4 (utilizes many of the Indiana Academic Standards for one grade level above placement)
- Reviewer Observations of Instruction with Lesson Plan Review (18 videos with lesson plans):
  - 1st grade neighborhood school classroom teacher with identified students in math
  - 1st grade Aboite ALPHA classroom teacher with identified students in math
  - 2nd grade neighborhood classroom teacher with identified students in guided reading
  - 3rd grade neighborhood classroom teacher with identified students in math
  - 4th grade neighborhood classroom teacher with identified students in guided reading
  - 5th grade neighborhood classroom teacher with identified students in guided reading
  - 5th grade neighborhood classroom teacher with identified students in math
  - 5th grade Aboite ALPHA classroom teacher in language arts
  - 6th grade algebra for high ability students
  - 6th grade math for identified students
  - 7th grade honors language arts (both schools)
Findings

**Essential Elements for Quality Curriculum and Appropriate Instruction for High Ability Learners**

Appropriate curriculum for gifted students does not consist only of extensions of material appropriate for the typical student. Gifted students are a unique population of learners as far from the mean on ability measures as are students in special education. They also have been shown to have particular learning differences with implications for content and methods of instruction. Consequently, they need qualitatively different curriculum and instruction to maximize their potential. While a variety of curriculum models and approaches have been developed for gifted learners, commonalities can be found across these models, including the following features:5

- Content is taught through higher level, “macro” concepts that foster interdisciplinary connections.
- Content is accelerated in standards covered.
- Materials used are substantive and written at levels of complexity appropriate for students with high ability.
- Opportunities for in-depth exploration of concepts giving students opportunity to pursue individual areas of choice are included.
- Assessments call for the development of authentic products and demonstration of advanced understanding and the skills of synthesis, analysis, and evaluation.
- Curriculum is vertically articulated, documenting conceptual and skill development throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

5 See Appendix D for an article written by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson and consult any of Dr. Joyce Van Tassel-Baska’s curriculum texts, e.g. *Content-Based Curriculum for High Ability Learners, 3rd Edition* (2016), published by Prufrock Press. Both authors are recognized national experts on differentiation for gifted students.
According to experts and best practice, instruction for high ability students also needs to be different from grade level instruction in multiple ways. Both curriculum and instruction need to be based upon these students’ characteristics of learning “whole to part,” being more able to think conceptually and make connections between disciplines, preferring open discussion and less repetition or routine. The pace of instruction should be accelerated, and a significant amount of instructional time should focus on the development of critical and creative thinking, communication and collaboration skills, and problem-solving. Instruction needs to be designed to provide learning experiences that are constructivist at times allowing students to discover ideas more often than they are told ideas, concepts, and analysis. Work and experiences for students with high ability should not be just additional or sooner than occurs in the grade level standards, but should be different work than that for typical learners and focused on analysis and problem solving.

Indicators of inappropriate instruction for high ability students include:

- Asking students to complete “more of the same” type of work rather than different, more complex work.
- Asking students to spend too much time working on their own or with technology rather than with direct interaction with teachers.
- Asking students to serve as “junior teachers” for other less able peers.
- Asking students to complete “enrichment” activities that may be fun or novel but are disconnected from their core curriculum or do not result in a depth of understanding.

Review of Curriculum

Curriculum documents, lesson plans, videos of classroom instruction, and survey and interview data were reviewed to determine the extent to which Southwest Allen’s curriculum and instruction for high ability learners encompass these common elements of gifted education.

Required Written Curriculum and Instruction Plan for High Ability Students

Indiana Code requires each district to have a written plan for curriculum and instruction for students with high ability. The plan should be constructed at the district level and detail specifically how the curriculum and instruction are differentiated in breadth, depth of content, focus, instructional activities, materials used, and authentic assessments to meet

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the needs of the identified high ability students within each grade level. The plan should be based upon the Indiana Standards but differentiated from the general education curriculum according to the elements of high ability education described above. This district plan should include a Scope and Sequence or Curriculum Map to show the K-12 articulation of the curriculum for high ability students. When looking at the Plan, an interested party should see what was provided for students with high ability at each grade level and how the learning progresses in a purposeful way from K-12. Finally, according to Indiana rules, the plan should be available for public inspection.

To date, Southwest Allen does not have a written plan specific to high ability that describes how curriculum and instruction are differentiated for high ability learners, K-12.

**Attention to Vertical and Horizontal Articulation**

Curriculum and instruction for high ability students needs to be vertically articulated to ensure that skill development and conceptual understanding are scaffolded appropriately to avoid gaps or redundancy.

At the middle and high school level, district Vertical Articulation Teams for core subject areas are currently developing written course descriptions for general education and honors classes. SACS is commended for devoting the resources of time and expertise to unpack the Indiana College and Career Readiness Standards, to articulate the unpacked standards for grades 6-8 and for 8-12, to establish a sequence for learning the grade level skills, to translate the tasks into student-friendly language, and to develop common assessments. This is a challenging process for curriculum work that many districts do not do, and SACS is to be recognized for this important work.

Teachers in the self-contained ALPHA Program have begun vertical articulation work by identifying which above grade standards are included at each grade level in math and language arts. Beyond articulation related to the standards, however, additional documentation of how the qualitatively different elements of curriculum and instruction for the gifted are systematically addressed throughout the high ability program is still needed. This additional documentation should be included in the required High Ability Curriculum and Instruction Plan and made available for public inspection.

Additionally, even though some honors classes at the secondary level have already been included in the district’s articulation work, the quarterly distribution of tasks and readings will need to be evaluated as the new curriculum and assessments are piloted. While some students are very appreciative, as evidenced in student comments such as "So far, AP Literature has increased my understanding of English most, as the material, that I sometimes
do not understand at all, is broken down very well, to the point where I can do nothing but analyze the works as effectively as possible now.” Other survey responses suggest that the content and assignments in some courses are resulting in an unnecessary amount and type of work. Representative comments illustrate this concern:

I thoroughly enjoy Honors English 10, however there is simply too much material and too many books being crammed into one semester. If even one book was subtracted from the mix it would allow for us to go deeper into each book. (High School Student)

Although I like to read and enjoy partaking in classroom discussions, I do not like being forced to read two books at the same time, especially right when I start high school. This also left little time for personal, independent reading and to me, discourages students to continue reading based on personal interests. Many of the activities that we do in class classify as busy work and are not effective in helping one comprehend and really think about the meaning of a book. (High School Student)

Finally, faculty also expressed concern that the focus on alignment with general education and common experience is resulting in a loss of opportunity and understanding of how to incorporate the qualitatively different elements of gifted education necessary to challenge their most-able learners. These concerns are evidenced in the following representative comments:

There are many resources available, but the teachers need more time and help to find those resources. Teachers who are new are not going to have their "bag of tricks" established. Those who have been around for a while have more resources at their fingertips to help with challenging the high ability students. Programs like Word Within the Word need to continue. (Middle School Faculty)

Sometimes it is difficult to balance providing my high ability students with the "same experience" that we want all students to have, while also challenging and engaging them at a gifted level. (Middle School Faculty)

**Differentiation of Content**

In the absence of a written curriculum for the ALPHA classrooms, an analysis was conducted of interview comments, documents, lesson plans, observations, and videos to determine how and the extent to which content was differentiated for the students with high ability. According to communication from district personnel, some teachers are using the Indiana Department of Education High Ability Language Arts Units or parts of the units. Some Michael Clay Thompson vocabulary or grammar materials were mentioned as being
used some of the time. However, materials written specifically to include the elements of gifted education are not widely used, nor in a specific or sequenced way.

Differentiation is comprised of two elements: structure and content. The structural component centers on how students are organized to work in groups, so different groups can be working on different learning tasks at the same time. The content component of differentiation centers on what the students are working on within their small groups or within their large group instruction. From the observations of instruction, Southwest Allen teachers have an excellent command of the structural component of differentiation to target instruction to an individual student’s skill acquisition needs. They place students in guided instructional groups and use small group activities. They incorporate the use of technology so that students can practice skills independently at their level. The teachers interact with small groups on a rotating basis in order to work with a new skill or to discuss text or more difficult problems. Students know their routines and work well in groups and stay on task. These examples illustrate the effectiveness of professional leadership in establishing this model for literacy and for teachers’ competency in using the structure to support differentiated learning. In fact, the reviewers have not seen this implemented so consistently in another district.

**Appropriate level of challenge, engagement, complexity**

To help determine the extent to which content is differentiated appropriately for high ability learners, stakeholders in the high ability program were asked their perceptions of the level of challenge, engagement, and complexity in their core content classes. Results are reported by content area below.

**Language Arts:** An analysis of the survey responses indicates that while the majority of stakeholders found language arts to be challenging, parents and faculty of the neighborhood program were less likely than parents and faculty of the self-contained ALPHA program to report that the curriculum was challenging.
Neighborhood parents reported their children were receiving differentiated learning but did not feel that constituted enough challenge for them. As one parent noted, “The classroom teacher differentiates instruction with individualized spelling lists, small group instruction, and reading levels. I do not believe my child is receiving services above what is given to any other student in the class. I also do not feel the content is accelerated at a level that is appropriate for him. He is happy and likes school. However, I do not believe all of the learning is rigorous for him.”

Another difference to note is that high school parents and students found Language Arts to be more challenging than did the parents and students at the middle school level. Many students and parents at those levels perceive the Honors English/Language Arts classes to be overwhelming in terms of the amount of work, and fewer than half surveyed found their language arts courses to be engaging often or all of the time. Parents gave comments such as “I think Language Arts lacks engagement and the teacher just piles on extra homework and projects versus teaching to someone of higher ability.” Many students at the high school level offered comments clarifying that the problem is the volume of work, not the level of work. A representative comment from a high school student includes: “My honors English 10 class has presented a huge work load difference from my honors English 8 and 9th grade...”
year classes. It has been hard adjusting even though I have had no trouble in the past with my honors classes. It is the [amount] work and assignments that have been hard to keep up with-not the ideas and content of the course.”

**Math:** Stakeholders were also asked their perceptions of challenge and engagement in math. Results are reported in the graph below.

*Figure 2: Challenge in Math*

At the elementary level, an analysis of the comments regarding challenge and engagement in math largely centered on the desire for between class ability grouping for students in both elementary programs. Without such grouping, parents feel there is too much unproductive time resulting in a lack of challenge for these students. Even among the ALPHA Aboite parents, there were those who commented on the need for grouping when selecting the choice of “often” instead of “all the time.” Representative comments include:

*With math, there are a number of ALPHA classes in each grade, so why aren’t the students broken up between classes for math based on their ability. There are some units my daughter tests out of and basically she sits there and does nothing for the week. Why can’t the kids be broken up by level between the different ALPHA classes by ability for each topic. (Parent of Self-Contained ALPHA student).*
As they do assessments of the class my boys fly through those and then do nothing for long periods of time. That it is the ongoing cycle, they catch on to the new thing taught and do well, and then keep repeating and practice the same thing over and over for months while the class catches up before they can move on. They used to rotate teachers to be in appropriate groups a few years ago, I don’t know why that stopped (Parent of Neighborhood ALPHA students).

At one neighborhood school and in one grade level, teachers are using between class grouping for math. The teacher commented on how valuable this practice is to meeting the needs her identified high ability students: “For math, my grade level is allowed to switch students across all classes for our math block. This is the most effective way for us to reach our high ability learners in that they are able to learn and master skills that are above grade level. If we were not allowed to switch across the grade level, I don’t believe the high ability students would be able to have their needs met as well as they are now.”

At the middle and high school level, perceptions of challenge in math varied widely. As discussed in the section of this report on identification, this variation may be due to the fact that some students felt their early acceleration into algebra was not the appropriate fit for them, and other students were not as accelerated and in turn felt bored and under challenged.

**Science and Social Studies.** Stakeholders at each level were also asked to report their perceptions of challenge and engagement in social studies and science. Results are summarized in the graphs that follow.
At the elementary level, results for the perceptions of challenge and levels of engagement for both science and social studies were lower than they were for math and language arts at the elementary level. Based upon the comments, this difference may be rooted in less instructional time devoted to these subjects at the elementary level, where instruction is
focused more heavily on language arts and math. Parents were asked specifically about their opinion regarding the amount of time spent on science and social studies. Generally, parents thought the appropriate amount of time was spent on social studies with only 15% of the parents of self-contained ALPHA students and 33% of the parents of neighborhood ALPHA students wanting more time. However, for science 70% of the parents of self-contained ALPHA students, and 54% of the parents of neighborhood ALPHA parents wanted more instructional time. Parents provided comments to explain their rationale for more time on these subject areas. Sample comments are included below:

[Social Studies] will become increasingly important to top, intelligent citizens. I see little focus on responsibility for the world around us (Aboite ALPHA Parent).

Science needs to be a bigger part of the ALPHA program. Last year in 4th grade, the science curriculum was all on computer (Aboite ALPHA Parent).

By the 4th grade, I would have expected Social Studies and Science to be disciplines that are taught every single day. Instead, my child has a Social Studies block where they focus on that topic for a period of time, and when it is over they move on to a Science block where they focus on that topic. I believe that they are learning relevant and important things during those blocks, but I just think it is something that they need to begin focusing on year-round at this age (Neighborhood Parent).

In addition, parent comments indicate a desire for a more hands-on approach to learning these subject areas. Parent responses do indicate an appreciation for Project Lead the Way. Samples comments are included below:

Now that we have Project Lead the Way science has improved, but it surprises me how little focus Aboite puts on science. At one point, science fair was a big event and mandatory for 5th graders. After a year of no science fair at all, followed by a parent outcry, there is now an optional "choice fair." I was at a PTC mtg where the principal explained that there was no science fair because she couldn't ask the teachers to do any more work. They were all over worked. (Aboite ALPHA Parent)

4th and 5th grade social studies are well done incorporating field trips and history. There is room for improvement in project-based learning in this area. When my student was in K-3 there was more of an emphasis on projects then there appear to be now. Challenge and engagement in science was rare until the school brought in Project Lead The Way. This program seems to really engage the kids and help them focus more on STEM. There was some activity with Maker's Faire but that has seemed to die off. (Aboite ALPHA Parent)
At the middle school and high school, students generally felt positive about challenge and engagement in science and social studies; varying opinions may reflect differences in the options for courses taken, particular instructors, or interests of the students. No programmatic differences were noted at the secondary level. The student view of Challenge and Engagement in Social Studies and Science are found in Figures 6 and 7.

**Figure 5: Student View of Challenge & Engagement in Social Studies**

![Student Challenge & Engagement in Social Studies](chart)

**Figure 6: Student View of Challenge & Engagement in Science**

![Student Challenge & Engagement in Science](chart)

Sample comments from middle and high school students regarding their impressions of social studies and science are included below:
8th grade SS has been particularly challenging. [My teacher] does not use typical text books, is much more engaging in class and teaches in a way that is different and engaging, involving thinking and discussion. not just memorization of historical facts (Middle School Student)

I think the level of challenge in both of the classes is good. I love social studies because we learn in a very engaging way, and the teacher does a lot of interactive activities. In science the teacher goes too fast and we learn everything on our own. There is no one really teaching us, we kind of have to learn it ourselves. We just get a bunch of worksheets to do, and the teacher never really explains them. (Middle School Student)

AP Psychology is excellent, the course moves at a reasonable pace and covers a wide range of material. The suite of offering in the social studies department is the strongest. Both AP history courses were excellent and well-paced as well. (High School Student)

**Review of Instructional Practices**

Instruction was reviewed through observations drawn from classroom walkthroughs during site visits, lesson plans, and videos of the most advanced group or honors classrooms. Evaluators were looking for the features of appropriate instruction for high ability students described at the beginning of this section by examining the structure and level of the questioning, type of student learning activities, level of student engagement, and pace of instruction.

As far as classroom management is concerned, the analysis of all videos revealed well-behaved students and pleasant, orderly classrooms. Students knew what was expected and transitions were smooth. Students and teachers seemed relaxed and comfortable. Teaching methods varied within the sample of observed classes and included students working individually, in pairs or small groups, or in whole group activity. Use of technology varied. Students were typically on task. The teachers were kind, organized, and capable managers. They had established routines for classroom work which included opportunities for students to move around and work in a variety of ways.

In some classes working in small groups, the focus centered on the students completing the task, worksheet, etc. The teacher worked with one group while other students worked independently. The advantage of station work is the ability to work with students in small groups; the disadvantage is the lessened opportunity for discussion of the learning that hopefully took place as a result of the activity. During whole group instruction at the secondary level, frequently the teacher would ask a question, and one student would respond directly back to the teacher; this was repeated with another exchange between one student and the teacher. This is to be expected in early elementary when students are
more self-centered. While this style may appear to be a classroom discussion, in reality, it is a series of one-to-one exchanges between one teacher and an individual student. Direct instruction in teaching has its place; however, as students get older, more student-led discussion should be a goal for classes with high ability students, as this enables them to gain in-depth understanding and to learn how to present their ideas effectively. That being said, student-led discussion must be developed through careful scaffolding by the teacher so that the students learn how to ask in-depth questions, provide evidence for their answers, and treat one another respectfully. The goal is not for the teacher to direct students in how to find the answer or to complete the worksheet or to have students listen to someone’s analysis of literature or primary source documents. The goal is for the students to analyze their own methodology and to construct their own analysis of what the theme of a story is or the point the author was making. Minimal constructivist learning was observed as many teachers were intently focused on meeting their learning targets. Students and teachers are not wasting learning time, but high ability students need to learn in different ways much of the time to find school engaging.

**Higher Level Thinking: Critical and Creative Thinking and Problem Solving:** Survey responses were analyzed for differences between and among stakeholder groups in perceptions that instruction in the high ability program was facilitating the development of higher level thinking and communication skills including critical and creative thinking, writing, presentation skills, and collaboration. With the exception of the neighborhood parents and faculty, results for the stakeholder groups were combined due to the similarity in responses. Results are included for the development of critical and creative thinking below.

**Figure 7: Development of Critical & Creative Thinking**
Some stakeholder comments for the self-contained ALPHA, middle, and high school program revealed positive perceptions of the high ability program's influence on the development of critical and creative thinking. A sampling of these comments is included below:

*PLTW helps with the flexible thinking and being creative as the tasks are very open-ended. Students are presented a problem and they're given a multitude of materials to create a solution as a collaborative group. We always incorporate a real-world "project" of some type at the end of the math units that students are moving through at their own pace. In reading we often give extension pieces that provides student-choice products that are interdisciplinary as an extra "proof" of what they've learned (Teacher in self-contained ALPHA).*

*I like that the teacher asks students HOW to solve problems and looks at multiple procedures in Math class (Parent of Self-contained ALPHA program).*

*My math and science classes are the best classes in teaching me critical thinking and creativity. We do a Problem of the Day each day in math and it is a new topic each day. It teaches me how to creatively solve problems that I haven't done before (Middle School Student).*

*I love how we are tasked in science to create our own labs for certain units (Middle School Student).*

*[In my history class] we had class discussions rather than verbatim notes, and I felt as though we were being presented with a story of history, which helped me to feel engaged and to actually think about what I learned. Currently, in my AP Government with We the People, the same is true. Talking about current events and topical issues that don't have a right or wrong answer is, in my opinion, one of the best ways to develop critical thinking skills and be able to be open-minded and clear in opinions and thought processes. The class, especially in regards to the We the People program aspect, is amazing in helping me do that (High School Student).*

*In Honors and AP classes, analyzing and problem solving is used frequently. If these skills are not developed, you will have a hard time doing well and understanding the subject material better (High School Student).*

An analysis of the comments regarding critical and creative thinking, however, revealed two primary themes: Stakeholders do not think enough attention is given to cultivating these skills, and stakeholders with a more long-term perspective on the program believe that the emphasis on developing these skills has diminished over time. These themes were found across all stakeholder groups. Representative comments are grouped according to program and shared below.
**Self-contained ALPHA**

Again, we really saw a strength in these areas several years ago, but the program seems to have moved to simply teaching above grade level and trying to raise the overall test scores. It is strange because this makes no sense in light of the elimination of the math groups. Our older kids were much more challenged at the younger grades in these areas than they have been recently in fourth/fifth grade (Parent)

*Opportunity for creative thinking, versus just accelerated learning, seems to have decreased as the school as moved more toward conformity and discipline (Parent)*

**Neighborhood**

Survey responses regarding the development of critical and creative thinking for the neighborhood program were considerably lower than the scores for the other programs. Sample comments include:

*The only creative thinking she is doing is coming up with things to do to keep busy until it is time to move on to the next activity (Neighborhood ALPHA Parent).*

*Same as above- there is no differentiated learning at the home school that I’m aware of. Too many resources are over exhausted with behavioral issues and remedial learning so I think my kids aren’t getting exposed to the sort of learning that will make them critical thinkers. I find it very disappointing (Neighborhood ALPHA).*

**Middle School**

*I don’t see much evidence for a push on creative thinking. I do not blame the teachers when they are restricted by evaluations, standards, and curriculum that teaches to test. I wish our high ability kids were given more access to the arts or project-based learning. Even field trips- what an antiquated idea! Quit sticking my kids in front of computers. (Middle School Parent).*

*We haven’t had many opportunities to be creative this year, so far. I’m hoping this will change because I love doing creative projects with groups. (Middle School Student)*

**High School**

*We do more busy work than creative thinking work, especially in English class. Instead of having good, strong, classroom discussions, we have busy work such as portions of our Reading Notebooks and small assignments where all we do is highlight and insert a few comments on a word document (High School Student).*
I would like to see more of a stress on creativity in mathematics. Being someone who studies math on my own time, I like to think that math is more of an open world than education would like to imply. I once read where a famous mathematician said that doing math in school is like doing a lot of dribbling drills in soccer but never actually playing the game. I tend to agree with that... My classes have taught me the foundations of mathematics, but never taught me how to explore the vast expanse of numbers and dimensions that it opens up, and they have never taught me how it fills the world around me. I believe that stressing that would stop so many people from the mentality of "I hate math." (High School Student)

Over the past few years the teachers have put more emphases on standardization and less on creative and abstract thinking; mainly to satisfy the state standards. These kids need the opportunity to express their ideas through open discussion (High School Parent).

Too often there is only one "right" answer. We value objectives and assessment over true learning. My "achievers" are trained to perform--to the point that they are afraid to fail because they will get a bad grade. Learning needs to be removed from assessment. They are not the same thing. I wish my kids could freely create, think, even fail, on the path to greater discovery without being assessed by a sometimes subjective standard (High School Parent).

Hoop jumping decreases creativity and critical thinking. Collaboration increases creativity and critical thinking. In many classrooms you would see very little to no collaboration and a lot of direct instruction and hoop jumping (High School Faculty).

**Collaboration Skills:** Stakeholders were also asked their perceptions about the extent to which they had the opportunity for collaborative work in the high ability program. When reviewing the survey data, the Aboite Alpha, Middle School, and High School Parents and Faculty all had similar patterns to their responses, as can be seen in the following table:

**Table 4: Effectiveness of Developing Collaboration Skills – Part A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents Aboite ALPHA</th>
<th>Faculty Aboite ALPHA</th>
<th>Parents Middle School</th>
<th>Faculty Middle School</th>
<th>Parents High School</th>
<th>Faculty High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not or Slightly Effective</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Effective</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very or Extremely Effective</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This differed from the pattern for the Neighborhood and Student Respondents evident in the table below.
Table 5: Effectiveness of Developing Collaboration Skills – Part B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents Neighborhood</th>
<th>Faculty Neighborhood</th>
<th>Students Middle School</th>
<th>Students High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not or Slightly Effective</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Effective</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very or Extremely Effective</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the comments indicates that when students are given the opportunity for collaborative work, stakeholders are appreciative as evidenced by these comments from a high school parent and a high school student.

_I have been very impressed with the collaborative skills my daughter has developed through her courses both at Woodside and at Homestead High School. A.P. Literature has been the best course when it comes to helping my daughter learn how to participate actively and meaningfully in class discussions._ (Parent of a High School Student)

_My ability to talk to others and work with others has improved exponentially in the last 2 years because of Socratic seminars._ (High School Student)

Some stakeholders indicated that students needed more experience as well as more direction in how to collaborate effectively with their peers. Representative comments include:

_I think that because of the unique social needs of a high-ability learner, collaborative skills can be a challenge. I don't think we spend enough time on helping these kids get along with their peers, accept and embrace each other's differences, and teach them how to be good team members. Many of these kids need extra social assistance and do not get it._ (Parent of Self-Contained ALPHA student)

_I think we should be taught how to work better in groups. That is something that a lot of us struggle in, and it would really be helpful._ (Middle School Student)

_Often students in advanced courses are told that the environment they learn in is more competitive and thus their education should be individualized and that students need to have an emphasis on learning skills specifically to gain a competitive "edge" later in life. However, because of this, we often lack opportunity to develop group work and collaboration—a skill just as important as independent learning._ (High School Student)
**Communication Skills: Writing and Presenting:** Some stakeholders were positive about the development of communication and writing skills within the high ability program. The following represent the positive comments for skills development in these areas:

*I have had the chance to communicate with others and make a good amount of presentations this year in my honors classes, and I think I am improving at it in some way every time* (Middle School Student).

*I have had plenty of experiences with presenting work and projects, working with others, and improving my writing skills in almost all of my classes. Besides math class, I have presented many things in each grade year. All of my language arts classes helped me improve my writing.* (High School Student).

As with the comments on critical and creative thinking, however, many parents and students felt that attention to these skills was limited, particularly writing and presenting at the middle and high school level. Those two areas were among the lowest rated of all survey items for students. Comments also reflected the perception that attention to these skills has diminished over the last few years. Sample comments separated by program area are included below:

**Self-Contained ALPHA:**

*Very little focus on presentations. This is a disappointment and the focus seems to have declined significantly in the last three years. When our older kids originally joined the program, there was a very strong presentation component (they got up and gave presentations, even small ones, multiple times a week). This seems to have been eliminated from the curriculum* (Parent of a Self-contained ALPHA).

*There were more individual projects a couple of years ago at the same grade level. My older child had completed more presentations and developed more skills in that area* (Parent of Self-contained ALPHA).

**Neighborhood Program**

*Because my child is in the community program, my child never gets opportunities like this. There is just too much of a range of abilities in a regular classroom to service these children and address these areas without pulling them out weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.*

*I am not aware of any of those things happening at [our school] for my 2nd grade daughters. It’s very upsetting to know that if they were at a different school they might be having these types of experiences.*
Middle School

“The program has decreased requirements for student presentations so she has had less practice with this. Group work challenges her though I am not always sure if they are given good strategies for working with each other (Middle School Parent).

Self-directed learning, presentations, writing and collaboration do not exist in these classes. The students are little robots that have to sit in class and endure the exact same approach every day in class. The administration is content to keep graduating the same little cookie-cutter students with limited problem-solving skills. They receive no real-world knowledge, skills or experiences (Middle School Parent)

High School Program

Regarding writing, I asked my student if he/she felt comfortable writing a research paper. He/she responded that he/she felt they had never really been taught to write one. Again, I ask where do they learn grammar, proper formatting of research papers, and writing in general? (Parent)

If there is an opportunity to give presentations or participate in group work, it is often for short and irrelevant opportunities--as if to check off a box on a standard rather than to actually gain value from it. Writing in particular is hard for teachers to help students with, unless we are able to effectively practice and face exposure to different types of writing (High School Student).

I struggle with writing and wish I had more in class opportunities to get better at it. We write a lot of essays, but whenever I get a bad grade I never receive an explanation as to why I deserved a bad grade. (High School Student)

Hands-On Learning and Investigating Topics of Personal Interest: The inclusion of opportunities to investigate topics of personal interest and to figure things out for oneself with hands-on learning experiences are an integral part of gifted education. Survey items were constructed that asked the stakeholders about whether there were opportunities to do such research and solve authentic problems. The pattern emerged in the data of the neighborhood experience that was similar to patterns reported for other elements of gifted education; there is the perception of fewer opportunities for personal interest research and hands-on projects for neighborhood students than for those in the ALPHA Program at Aboite. These were the two lowest rated items for middle and high school students. Findings for the students are reported in the figures included.
Many comments were shared related to these desirable types of learning. The question seemed to elicit a longing from all groups for more time for this type of experience as well as lamenting the pressure and confines of the nature of education today. Representative comments from the middle and high school level include:

_The most incredible hands-on investigation that I ever was involved in was in Honors Science 7, when we took pond water from the Environmental Center and openly searched and discovered microorganisms using a microscope. It was open-ended, there were infinite..._
questions, and it only caused more eye-opening existential questions, all of which appeals greatly to an accelerated student. Sometimes the best hands-on investigations have no requirements and just allow us to be independent and figure things out ourselves. (High School Student)

Because these courses are also often geared toward preparing students for taking a test or assessment that measures the amount of skill and knowledge gained from a class rather than understanding and applying the concepts to real-world situations, it is often harder to make room for these activities (High School Student)

Most projects are not based on personal interest and are very straightforward, to the point where they are nearly fill-in-the-blank. (Middle School Student)

I would really like to do more research on ways to help the environment from pollution and limit the amount of emissions, but we already ended that unit in science and when we were in that unit of ecological impact we didn’t do much research or any projects on it which I would have really liked to do. (Middle School Student)

Preparing students for a content based standardized test controls many of the activities that are completed. Additionally, being able to give students these types of projects requires time out of class (you cannot expect them to complete these projects independently at home) which is not available with the district curriculum map. (High School Faculty)

The years that I did [academic project competition], the kids were so excited about learning. They were solving real-world issues, and they advanced all the way to the state level. They were totally into it from beginning to end. It became their project, and it truly meant something to them because they felt that they could be heard. (Middle School Faculty)

This is a fantastic way of encouraging self-driven educational opportunities, but often lacks in meeting specific standards with a particular set of targeted, in-depth levels of knowledge. . . Additionally; objective common assessments that provide data are difficult to administer or include when given after a project-based unit. They don’t often fit nicely into the formative cycle when there is a balance between freedom of personal interest/projects and data collection. (Middle School Faculty)

**Instructional Time**

In considering the review of curriculum and instruction for high ability students at the elementary level, it is important to remember that Southwest Allen has not used the same service model or curriculum for all students identified as high ability in grade levels 1-5, so the proportion of students who have been identified as high ability in classrooms varies
from no students to all students (The self-contained program at Aboite). The neighborhood schools are providing instruction to a broad range of student abilities and achievement levels in every classroom. In the neighborhood schools, with some exceptions, teachers differentiate by reading level and math levels in guided reading and guided math groups within that classroom. In the ALPHA Program at Aboite, teachers have mapped the Indiana Academic Standards to include some that are above grade level, and all students in the class have above average reading targets. By the nature of the current placement structure, teachers in the ALPHA program at Aboite are much better able to provide more time for targeted instruction to high ability students than teachers in the neighborhood schools. Teachers at the neighborhood schools have a broad range of learner skill levels in their classrooms and have to adhere strictly to a schedule to meet daily with multiple groups. Typically, teachers meet with three differentiated instructional groups each day; they meet with their lowest instructional group five times per week, two mid-level groups four times per week each, and their top reading group three times per week. Because of the range of needs among the students for whom they are responsible, neighborhood ALPHA program teachers do not have much time to differentiate the language arts content in additional ways that are appropriate for high ability learners. The guided reading and math structure is thorough and targeted but leaves little time to work outside that framework in a classroom with such diverse learning needs. The teachers shared their frustration with the current structure of heterogeneously grouped, large classes for the limits it puts on time available to meet their high ability students' needs:

“As teachers we are very overwhelmed and in a huge time crunch day in and day out. In my third grade class, we have leveled word study groups, guided reading groups, and math groups. Our day is jam packed trying to get all of these lessons planned and implemented for all 27 students in our classroom.”

“The middle and high schools are able to more closely meet the needs of these students, since the students are grouped by academic skill rather than having the wide range of skill levels found in a typical elementary classroom.”

In the self-contained ALPHA program, the teachers also see the value in attending to the development of each individual child’s skills, and they incorporate above grade standards with their narrower range of student abilities. However, some feel they are being encouraged to focus narrowly on the more prescriptive approach used throughout the district making them less able to include enrichment and other gifted education elements that are not strictly standards focused. For example, one self-contained ALPHA teacher explained, “There are times when ALPHA has to conform to gen ed norms that may or may
not be the best for gifted students. It seems much of the enrichment aspect of ALPHA is gone and does not fit into the current model.” Another teacher echoed this concern by saying, “Sometimes students need different instruction and it doesn't always fit with Balanced Literacy expectations or math center expectations.” Finally, another teacher shared, “It would be wonderful if ALPHA teachers could actually use what they learned in their high ability college classes and apply it in the classroom. We are told to do and comply with everything gen ed is doing even when our kids may need something different. Many people also feel that some teachers are taking technology integration a bit far. Technology is great and absolutely needed for the future, but there is also something to be said for tried and true collaboration, creativity, and communication.”

Some ALPHA parents have expressed concern for this loss of the elements of high ability education in favor of more time spent on individualized, standards-based learning with a focus on using technology for instruction. As one parent said, “In math, our child that is particularly strong typically "tests" out of units and spends time on activities that are supposed to be enrichment, but are really just computer time.” Other parents lamented the loss of thematic units and culminating projects that were once the hallmark of the ALPHA program. From interview and survey comments, it appears that such units were discontinued as they were not connected to standards. As noted at the beginning of this section, enrichment activities, no matter how appealing, that do not result in deeper learning or skill development are not recommended; however, when the standards can be taught through conceptually based units and activities, the learning experience can be more engaging and result in deeper understanding for the students.

**Suggestions for Consideration**

Overall, the analysis of data pertaining to curriculum suggests that high ability students are given opportunities to work on above grade level standards in math and language arts, specifically. Additionally, differentiation of reading materials and language and math skills allows for targeted, individualized skill instruction in these areas. Attention to the other facets of gifted education curriculum, including a focus on macro concepts and deeper complexity within the content, however, is sporadic, with minimal opportunity for this content in the neighborhood program, in particular. Likewise, instructional activities to promote critical and creative thinking, communication and writing skills, and collaboration and problem solving also vary widely across programs, courses, and individual teachers. Again, students in the neighborhood program, in particular, do not have as many opportunities to develop these skills. In response to these findings, the suggestions below are suggestions for program improvement. Attention to these suggestions would renew parental confidence in the quality of the high ability programs.
• Consider the suggestion stated in the Program Design section of this report to change the structure of the neighborhood program to allow for more instructional time. This structural change may include cluster grouping and/or between class grouping for language arts and math, or it may include a pull-out option. This will provide the additional instructional time necessary to incorporate more of the elements of gifted education that are currently lacking. Standards can be met with the high ability students outside of the structured routine of the guided reading and math format.

• Consider systematic use of curriculum materials developed specifically for gifted students that include more complexity and greater development of conceptual understanding and critical and creative thinking. Students in the high ability program at all levels can have a qualitatively different experience that is based upon Indiana Academic Standards yet includes the approaches and elements of gifted education.

  o Consider use of the IDOE High Ability Language arts materials in grades 1-10 (grades 9 and 10 to be released in the summer of 2017). These units are aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards. Some of the teachers of the self-contained ALPHA program are using some of these units, but full implementation throughout each grade level would provide vertical articulation of conceptual understanding as well as skill development of communication, critical and creative thinking, writing, and problem solving.

  o While teaching vocabulary and grammar through authentic writing is also encouraged, survey results indicate that specific instruction in these areas is also warranted. Consider how the Michael Clay Thompson vocabulary and grammar materials can be more effectively implemented within language arts classes. Note: Regardless of the materials selected, because the self-contained ALPHA and neighborhood students merge into the same honors classes at middle school, their preparation with grammar and vocabulary needs to be consistent between the self-contained ALPHA and the neighborhood programs.

  o Consider the IDOE recommended resources for math enrichment and problem solving appropriate for high ability learners posted in the IDOE Moodle.

  o Incorporate more opportunities for hands-on science and social studies at the elementary level to provide a better foundation for these subject areas.
Attention to the development of higher level thinking and problem solving can also be incorporated into these areas.

- Develop units of study built around macro concepts that are applicable across discipline and time periods (for example, concepts such as patterns, systems, power, and change). For maximum effectiveness, these units should incorporate interdisciplinary elements. When topics of study all center around the same macro concepts, students are able to tie their learning together and construct a more complex understanding. Note: Units built around macro concepts should still align to the standards. Enrichment learning activities should not be included just because they are fun for the students; they can be engaging and result in deeper understanding or skill development.

- Consider a greater focus on instructional activities that promote higher level thinking skills, problem solving, and the development of communication and collaboration skills.

  - Provide more scaffolding for students in the development of strong collaboration skills; students need step by step guidance in developing these skills in order for group work to be an effective instructional strategy.
  - Provide more opportunities for students to develop writing skills at the middle and high school level. Attention needs to be given to providing constructive feedback so writing can improve.
  - Incorporate more authentic problem solving opportunities to promote critical and creative thinking.

- When applicable, incorporate articulation for the elements of gifted education and instruction within the district VAT team process. Honors course descriptions could be written to include specifics of how the course addresses the elements of gifted education. After building the framework for the curriculum, the next task will be to complete this written articulation for curriculum, instruction, and assessment for high ability learners. This will then demonstrate the differentiation of what students are learning and how they are demonstrating their exceptional reasoning abilities and their outstanding achievement levels. As noted at the beginning of this section for high ability students, this refers to including learning activities that develop conceptual understanding, build critical and creative thinking, offer a more in-depth study of a topic, incorporate more complex content, and use all learning to solve interdisciplinary problems. Some of the honors classes will likely need to
adjust some of what has been constructed already in order to include these elements of gifted education. This change may result in reading fewer selections but focusing more on higher-order thinking skills with those readings. Those courses that are still involved in the articulation work can include these elements as the work is completed.

• The high ability curriculum and instruction will benefit from encouraging and eventually requiring G/T licensure for all teachers who are assigned to teach students with high ability in core content areas. The in-depth understanding of how curriculum and instruction are different for these learners is not something that can be gained in a short time. Completing a license in Gifted and Talented Education will enable teachers to find and create curricular materials that will provide their high ability students with the appropriate level of depth, conceptual focus, and emphasis on higher level thinking skills.

• Once teachers have received training in curriculum and instruction for high ability students, the district may wish to convene a team of teachers to construct a common curriculum for students receiving high ability services, K-12 across the district. While this should include mastery of grade level Indiana Academic Standards, it will need to go beyond grade level curriculum and standards and include a more flexible instructional approach in order to meet the needs of high ability learners.
Program Area: Affective Needs and Self-Regulatory Skills

The evaluation of the program area regarding affective needs and self-regulatory skills included an examination for the following components:

- A specific written Guidance and Counseling Plan that includes an affective curriculum to address social and emotional needs of gifted students and college and career guidance services specifically designed for high ability students
- A high ability program that intentionally fosters positive social and emotional development
- A program that intentionally fosters the development of self-regulatory skills including organization, time management, self-discipline, and motivation

Data Sources

- Written documentation of appropriate guidance and counseling services reviewed for evidence of differentiation for high ability students.
- Program faculty, student, and parent survey and interview questions relating to social and emotional needs and self-regulatory skills
- Classroom and building observations

Findings

Classroom observations and walkthroughs were completed at three elementary schools, both middle schools, and the high school. At each building, observations showed students respectfully interacting with one another. The teachers observed appeared to enjoy a friendly rapport with the students, and the school environments seemed to provide a psychologically safe and pleasant atmosphere for learning.

Differentiated Guidance and Counseling Plan (Affective Curriculum and Career and College Guidance)

A written guidance and counseling plan, differentiated for high ability learners, is required in Indiana Administrative Code. On the district’s Powerpoint presentation explaining the high ability program, it states that the elementary services include a guidance and counseling plan that was framed around the IDOE recommendations for guiding students with high ability specific to social and emotional considerations. While the IDOE guidance language was found, the district plan for implementing those recommendations was not found in the documents submitted by the district to review. Additionally, high ability is not referenced on any of the elementary school counselors’ websites. As such, verification and
review of the plan could not be completed. Teachers in the self-contained ALPHA program, however, expressed the need for targeted guidance lessons as reflected in this comment from one teacher who said, “Our gifted students would tremendously benefit from targeted guidance lessons. Many have intensities that are hard for them to handle and deal with on their own.”

**Understanding Characteristics and Dissemination of Information:** Stakeholders were asked their impressions regarding faculty awareness of the characteristics of high ability students. Results are summarized in the graph below.

*Figure 10: Faculty Understanding of Characteristics of High Ability Students*

Overall, parents of students in the self-contained ALPHA felt that the faculty has substantial understanding of the characteristics and social and emotional needs of high ability students. Parents of students in the neighborhood, middle, and high school programs largely felt that teachers held some understanding of the characteristics and needs. The faculty results paralleled those of the parents with the majority of faculty of the self-contained ALPHA feeling that they had substantial understanding of characteristics (75%), and the majority of faculty in the neighborhood and middle (57% and 63%, respectively) feeling that they had at least some understanding. Half of the high school faculty reported some understanding of the characteristics, and half reported substantial understanding.
Comments from parents and students reflect the differences in perceptions of understanding of characteristics. Many parents attribute these differences to the variation in training that teachers have received as illustrated in the following comment, “We have had both extremes. Teachers with training and experience who fully understood the kids and their classrooms were amazing. And, we have had the negative impact of untrained and inexperienced teachers with no idea how to teach the kids. It is a shame because the experienced, trained teachers are amazing and once you have had a child in a classroom with a teacher that "gets" these kids and then you have an inexperienced teacher another year, you truly understand the value to the kids of the training.”

Parents of high ability students were asked to share the extent to which they receive guidance regarding the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Results are summarized in the graph below.

Figure 11: Parent Perception of Assistance in Understanding Needs

Parents expressed appreciation for the information shared at the Alpha Parent group meetings regarding the social and emotional needs of their high ability students. Collectively, parent responses reflected a desire for more information not only about social and emotional characteristics but also about extracurricular or summer programs in the community. In summary, one parent commented, “I would like to see more information on social and emotional needs of gifted students. My student’s 1st grade teacher recommended a book, which was very helpful, and the Alpha PTC had a guest speaker talk about the topic at one meeting. I think helping understand and learning how to best live with the quirks and
In addition, parents of high school high ability students were asked if their students received targeted college guidance including information on scholarships, Honors College offerings at universities, or summer programs for gifted students. Of the respondents, 61% said their students received no targeted college guidance, and 32% said they received some guidance. More targeted guidance on college and career preparation would be appreciated by the families.

Finally, faculty members in the neighborhood and middle school programs expressed a desire for more information and training regarding the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Their comments indicate they have received little or no training in understanding the social and emotional needs of high ability students as reflected in the sample comments below:

*My understanding of the characteristics of high ability learners comes primarily from being the parent of two of them. The school system has provided little or no support in this area (Neighborhood Faculty).*

*Other than NWEA data and working with kids to know what they know and what they need to know, I don’t know much more about high ability kids (Neighborhood Faculty)*

“I have had no official profession development nor was it ever required. I have asked for guidance for years for myself and my students” (Middle School Faculty).

**Social Development, Attitudes Toward Learning, and Stress:** Stakeholders were given the opportunity to answer survey questions related to attention given to addressing the affective needs of high ability students including their social development, friendships, satisfaction with extracurricular activities, attitudes toward learning, and stress. Survey results and themes of narrative comments for each area are summarized below.

*Social Development and Friendships*

Parents were asked how participation in the program influenced their children’s social development, and students were asked how participation in the program influenced their friendships. Results are summarized in the graph below.
With the exception of the parents of students in the neighborhood program, parents and students were generally positive about the influence of the program on students' social development and friendships. A high school student’s comment summarizes the general level of appreciation for the friendships in the high ability program: “Connecting with other similar students is the gem of the advanced programming at Homestead. Peers and friends will often provide just as much challenge and development as the course itself.” Parents positive perceptions of the program’s influence on social development is summarized in comments such as, “I think my student has benefited from relationships and friendships with other like-minded kids. It is very affirming to know people with similar interests and intensities” and “Our gifted learners and high ability students not only want to be with similar learners but they need to be with them, at least at the elementary level and middle school level. It is truly invaluable to socialize and learn and collaborate with other students that love to learn and can learn quickly so that they may continue to dive deeper into a subject.”

While the neighborhood parents did not think the program had a negative influence on their children’s social development; the majority of respondents (65%) indicated that the program had no influence at all. This finding suggests that the neighborhood program is not as salient to families as the other service options. As one parent indicated, “[My child] does not even know he is in a High Ability program, nor does he receive special instruction or services. I cannot answer this question.”
Satisfaction with Extracurricular Activities

Parents and students were also asked to report on their level of satisfaction with the extracurricular activities offered. Both stakeholder groups reported high levels of satisfaction with these offerings; this was the most highly rated area of the survey for students. Results are summarized in the graph below.

Figure 13: Extracurricular Activities

Participants were particularly effusive about certain extracurricular activities including marching band, the student news, We the People, Future Citizen, and Rube Goldberg. Their comments about why they perceived these programs to be of value reflect the core elements of gifted education including real world application, problem solving, and the development of creative thinking. They also allowed students to develop skills of collaboration and time management. Representative comments regarding the value of these extracurricular activities are included below:

Spartana has probably been the most significant factor in my daughter’s social development, from the standpoint of high school classes and activities. It has put her in situations to interview many people, from students she might otherwise not have approached to adults with various positions of authority. It has exposed her to the many clubs, arts and athletic groups at the school. It has helped her to develop various kinds of leadership as well as collaboration.

The Rube Goldberg club is an example of what should be happening in class. The students are presented with a task and must work within parameters to accomplish it. They work as a collaborative group to solve the problems they encounter. The teacher is there to guide and offer assistance. While this could not happen all the time in every class, this method of instruction is severely underutilized in many higher level classes. The marching band is an
example of teachers taking an active part in character development, as well as covering the curriculum.

Band is [my child’s] absolute favorite part of high school. The band directors are phenomenal and are very invested in those students. This class and the band program have definitely helped my student’s social development, more so than any other class or teacher. My student is considering a career in the music field. I cannot say enough wonderful things about Homestead’s band!!!!!!

Attitude Toward Learning and Stress

Stakeholders were also asked how they perceived the high ability program as influencing their attitude toward learning. Results for the parents of the self-contained ALPHA and neighborhood program are summarized below.

Figure 14: The Effect of the Elementary High Ability Program on Attitude Toward Learning

As the results indicate, parents of students in the ALPHA self-contained program overall felt that the program has positively influenced their students’ attitude toward learning. Comments reflecting this positive influence include:

“My son has a more positive attitude about school since joining the self-contained program. His social development has also been influenced positively by being in the self-contained program because he is around kids who think like he does and who come up with "weird" ideas like he does. He feels like he belongs.” (ALPHA self-contained program parent)

“Being enrolled in the ALPHA program in first grade renewed their enjoyment in school and the increased challenge and opportunity to be around more like-minded peers was most welcome. We are so grateful for the self-contained program for our children's educational and social development” (ALPHA self-contained program parent).
A difference of note: 42% of the parents in the neighborhood program felt that the program had no influence on their children's attitude toward learning.

“They are labeled high ability but are not in any way doing anything different so it has had no impact on them.” (Neighborhood Program Parent)

“I don’t believe the neighborhood high ability program is positively influencing my child’s social and psychological development the way that the self-contained Alpha program positively influenced my two older children. My older children in self-contained Alpha thrived in an intellectually stimulating environment with other gifted children where it was "cool" to be smart and there were positive peer influences from other gifted children who would challenge each other. The neighborhood high ability program does not even compare, which is a big disappointment.” (Neighborhood Program Parent)

Middle and high school parents and students were also asked to report on the effect the high ability program has had on their attitude toward learning. Results are included in the figure below.

**Figure 15: The Effect of the Secondary High Ability Program on Attitude Toward Learning**

As the results of the graph indicate, parents at both levels were overall positive about the influence of the high ability program on their children’s learning. As one middle school parent commented, “One of the best things about the high ability program is that my children have been with academically like minded students. They seem to raise each other to a higher
level. They are competitive and really seem to be engaged by the students around them” (Middle School Program Parent).

The students at both levels, however, were not as positive regarding the influence of the program on their attitudes toward learning. An analysis of the survey responses indicated that the primary reason is the stress students feel. The figure below shows the percentage of time the students feel stressed.

**Figure 16: Prevalence of Student Stress**

As the graph indicates, 42% of middle school students and 74% of high school students reported feeling stressed most or all of the time. The stress appears not to be the result of too much challenge in the courses but simply too much homework to manage. Because of the sheer volume of comments submitted by students regarding their stress level, we have included more sample comments than we have for other questions:
I think sometimes teachers are just giving students unnecessary work that isn’t even that challenging, it just causes us to be stressed about all of the work that we have. I think teachers should give less homework but maybe make it a little more challenging (Middle School Student)

Often more rigorous classes are simply named that way for an increased work load. I have thoroughly discussed with others who are in the same boat, and all agree that with an increased emphasis on "completing assignments simply to get a good grade and go to a good college so you can get a good job and slowly become miserable" definitely adds extra pressure and stress (High School Student).

I love to learn, but as soon as I walk into Homestead the enchantment of knowledge fades away. I’m always stressed (High School Student)

Advanced classes give me a lot of stress because of how much extra, unnecessary work they give us. It seems like they worry more about due dates rather than if we understand the material. When teachers focus more on busy work than real-world applications to the topics, I lose interest in learning (High School Student)

Parents, too, submitted a substantial number of comments regarding the volume of homework and expressed the desire for teachers to understand that gifted education does not translate to just more work. Comments summarizing the parents’ frustration with the work include:

“My student is extremely stressed due to excessive amounts of homework/busy work and inadequate amount of time to get it all completed. Homework often is mundane, too repetitive and does not take students to deeper level of understanding” (High School Parent)

“I can’t stress enough the negative effect of too much work instead of quality of work” (High School Parent)

Finally, teachers also agreed that some of their colleagues had difficulty understanding more work was not necessary, as noted in this representative comment from a middle school faculty member: “Kids at the ALPHA / Honors level should be prepared for more rigorous workloads and expectations that meet a greater depth of knowledge than regular classes. This is often confused at the Middle school level; teachers sometimes mistake “higher frequency of assignments” for fewer, more challenging assignments which leads to stressed out students who are left with just “more things to do.” ALPHA / Honors should not just be “more things to do.” High school teachers also commented on how the demanding
workload has led to increased stress levels among students as reflected in the one teacher’s comment:

“The stress level is terrible! Students are taking seven classes, sometimes without a study hall. They are involved in multiple clubs, activities, sports, etc. The school day can last (with homework included) for some students a full 15 hours or more, making any down time impossible. Simply consider the schedule of a band student and the number of AP/honors courses a student might be carrying. More than ever, I have seen anxiety at an all-time high along with tears and apathy from our highest performers. That does not make me feel good. And yet....I have a curriculum that must be met and "rigor" (not well understood by most) hanging over my head.”

Development of Self-Regulatory Skills

Survey and interview questions were asked to determine the extent to which stakeholders perceived the high ability program as facilitating the development of self-regulatory skills including organization and attaining independence in doings one’s work. Results of the survey questions for these skills are summarized in the following figures.

Figure 17: Influence of Elementary Program on Self Regulation

As the results indicate, parents of students in the self-contained ALPHA program perceived their students had ample opportunity to develop self-regulatory skills. One parent commented, “In 4th and 5th grade there is strong emphasis on self-directed learning, and it is appropriate and well-done.”

The parents of students in the Neighborhood program also felt their students had some opportunities to develop self-regulatory skills, but not as many opportunities. Their comments reflected that parents in the neighborhood program are
not as aware of what is happening for their students in the program and therefore felt they could not accurately answer the question. Example comments, “Since I really do not know what is being done differently or even DONE in the class, I feel my answers are not too valid. Do not know is my answer,” and “I am not aware that my child is in a program. His instruction looks no different than any of his peers, aside from the normal differentiation that occurs in the classroom.”

Figure 18: Influence of Secondary Program on Self Regulation

At the secondary level, results indicate that parents, faculty, and students overall felt that participation in the high ability program provided opportunities to develop self-regulation skills. At the middle school level, however, an analysis of the parent comments indicated a theme wherein parents felt that the development of self-directed skills needed more scaffolding in order to be successful. For example, one parent commented:

I think there is too much emphasis on independence without direction. I want my child to be very independent, but this year has been a struggle for him, as there in my opinion is an expectation to be completely independent without direction. I think we still at this age need to occasionally remind kids of homework projects up coming tests etc. versus never mentioning them in class and expecting the kids to look up everything in Canvas on their own.

Another parent echoed this concern with the comment, “My child does not have good organizational skills, which has negatively impacted his ability to do well in his Honors
classes. Unfortunately, his teachers have not been helpful in this area, as the students in Honors classes are simply expected to have exceptional organizational and time management skills.”

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Provide teachers of high ability students the opportunity to attend professional development targeted to understanding common social and emotional issues facing gifted students. Share with parents that teachers have attended these trainings, so they are aware the district is supporting training in this area.

• Develop a differentiated affective curriculum that systematically addresses common social and emotional concerns of gifted individuals. A team of teachers and guidance counselors could outline topics and places within the curriculum (social studies and language arts, in particular) where such topics could naturally, but specifically, be addressed. The plan should also include attention to differentiated college guidance for high ability high school students. This district plan should be disseminated across all buildings and posted, so parents can see how these issues are being addressed at each level.

• Convene a taskforce at the middle and high school level that includes representatives from all stakeholder groups (administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students) to determine 1) how to alleviate some of the stress and anxiety students are experiencing and 2) how to de-emphasize the performance goals and instead rekindle students' natural interest in learning. A plan to accomplish these goals may include immediate the implementation of suggestions such as establishing district wide no-homework nights each quarter to longer term suggestions such as implementing interdisciplinary capstone courses for seniors, (weighted the same as AP courses) that culminate in independent study projects that allow students to explore their interests more in depth.

• Provide parent education in the form of information nights or shared resources on social and emotional topics such as perfectionism, stress, anxiety, and achievement motivation. Post any handouts or information on these topics on the district high ability webpage.
Program Area: Professional Development

The evaluation of the program area of Professional Development included an examination for the following components:

• A written district High Ability Professional Development Plan
• Faculty with direct responsibility for high ability students licensed in gifted education
• Faculty participation in ongoing professional development in high ability education

Data Sources:

• Documentation of faculty licensure in gifted education7.
• Faculty Professional Development Documentation Form: Southwest Allen teachers of high ability students were provided with a form to document years of teaching experience, professional development in content, gifted education, or other matters relating to meeting needs of students with high ability. Of 135 teachers sent the form, 95 teachers (41%) completed and submitted the form. This was from 54/149 elementary teachers and 41/84 secondary teachers. As shared by the High Ability Coordinator, some teachers questioned the intent of the form or the need to provide the information while others expressed confusion by the use of the terms gifted and/or high ability. This form can be viewed in Appendix C.
• Interview and survey responses

7 The Gifted and Talented License is earned by teachers in Indiana by completing courses at a university with a graduate program in gifted education that meets the NAGC/CEC Standards. This is a license that is attached to a regular teaching license; it is not a stand-alone license. The course titles and requirements vary among the universities; however, most include characteristics and identification of gifted learners; appropriate curriculum and instruction for gifted learners; and a demonstration of the ability to teach these students. Electives or other content within the licensure requirements vary but can include social and emotional needs, creativity, and program evaluation. It is a four course sequence or 12 semester hours of coursework. Courses and the entire licensure series are available online through at least two universities in the state. Following the completion of coursework, the candidate must take and pass a standardized state test over High Ability content for Indiana. The license is then available through the Indiana Department of Education.
**Findings:**

*Documentation of a District High Ability Professional Development Plan*

The district does not currently have a written district professional development plan specific to high ability education.

*Documentation of Faculty Licensure in Gifted Education*

Of the 95 teachers who submitted a response to the professional development form, 12 indicated that they have earned a license in gifted education. Eight of these teachers are at the elementary level, three at the middle level, and one at the high school level.

*Professional Development Not Specific to High Ability Education*

Faculty were asked, “What other (outside or within the district) professional development events have you attended during the past two years that have contributed to your professional effectiveness in meeting the needs of high ability students?” Of those completing the form, 48 said they had had none, and another 8 did not respond with an answer to the question. Of the 39 teachers replying with particular professional development, the types of relevant professional development they cited included:

- 12 cited building-level or other within-district professional development
- 7 cited technology related PD they had attended
- 7 cited outside literacy training they had received
- 5 had attended AP workshops
- 8 others had attended other events for math, Orton-Gillingham training, NWEA, Indiana Standards, etc.

*Professional Development Specific to High Ability Education*

Teachers were also asked if they had attended any professional development outside of the district specific to high ability students. Only 7 teachers indicated that they had attended specific professional development. Of these seven, 4 attended Advanced Placement workshops, 2 attended the IDOE training on the High Ability Units, and one participated in a Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) web offering (the teacher paid for this out of pocket). Interview and survey comments indicated there had been some opportunities for the self-contained ALPHA program teachers to share information with the neighborhood teachers; however, these were reportedly poorly attended, perhaps due to the timing.

Results are summarized by program level.
In addition to the Professional Development Documentation Form, the faculty version of the survey asked about the availability of professional development opportunities specific to high ability. As the survey results indicate, a significant number of neighborhood ALPHA and middle school faculty members in particular (80% and 68%, respectively) indicated they rarely or never have an opportunity to attend professional development specific to high ability education. The desire for this training was commented on frequently throughout the entire survey by both parents and faculty, and it was repeatedly mentioned as one of the suggestions to improve programming. Sample comments reflecting the desire for more training include:

*The current process of giving new teachers three years to get certified, with no documented curriculum in place, is putting the kids that go through those first years with a teacher at a real disadvantage* (Self-contained ALPHA parent).

*The district provides training to small groups of teachers instead of to the whole group. It is very frustrating that there is such a difference in professional development across buildings and district. Training that is provided to everyone would be great* (Neighborhood Faculty)

*An area of improvement for the high ability program would be that the district could provide the high ability teachers with some professional development opportunities specifically related to gifted and high ability. (Middle School Teacher)*

*I will repeat my previous comment that I would like all the teachers of honors classes in middle schools to receive training about the social/emotional needs of high ability learners and *how* those learners are different. This training would make life easier for the students and teachers!* (Middle School Parent).
I think many of the teachers in the program need more training on how to deal with varied learning styles. I hesitate to put more of a burden on Indiana teachers already highly overstressed, but I think they do not understand how a one-size-fits-all "gifted program" does not take into account different styles of learning and communication. (High School Parent)

Summary

Teachers in the self-contained ALPHA program are required to earn a license in gifted education within three years of teaching in the program. Teachers of high ability students in other programs (neighborhood ALPHA, middle, and high school) are not required to earn a license in gifted education. Additionally, while the district has provided professional development in district-wide initiatives, minimal attention has been given to providing professional development opportunities specific to high ability education for program teachers. Without a broad base of faculty who have been trained in gifted education, some of the recommendations of this report will be difficult to implement. Southwest Allen is a strong district but to truly attend to the qualitatively different elements of programming for high ability students, teachers will need coursework and professional development specific to this population. Once again, it is a credit to Southwest Allen to seek this evaluation to find ways to improve its program.

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Support licensure coursework for all high ability program teachers with district high ability grant funds or other district funds for professional development. Investigate the current availability from the Indiana Department of Education of funds for a one-time stipend to teachers upon completing the license.
• Develop a High Ability Professional Development Plan.
• Allow faculty members to attend targeted professional development opportunities specific to high ability education that are led by experts in the field.
• Allow faculty members opportunities to attend professional conferences specific to high ability education.
Program Area: Program Effectiveness

The evaluation of Program Effectiveness included an examination for the following components:

- Program effectiveness as evidenced by standardized test scores
- Stakeholders’ perceptions of effectiveness and satisfaction

Data Sources

- Standardized test data: ISTEP+, NWEA, and Advanced Placement
- Data on Academic Honors Diploma
- Perceptions of stakeholders obtained through interviews
- Survey data from program students, faculty, and parents

Findings

Standardized Test Data

ISTEP+

One indicator of program effectiveness is the performance of high ability students on standardized measures of academic skills and achievement. One measure to consider is the state assessment (ISTEP+) to determine mastery of academic content. This test was included for analysis since it is based on the Indiana Academic Standards. Since ISTEP+ covers grade level content only, the expectation would be for all, or nearly all of the high ability identified students to earn the distinction of pass plus. For the years 2015 and 2016, the percent of high ability students earning a pass plus in math and language arts for Grades 3-8 is summarized in the figure that follows.
As the graph indicates, the district’s identified high ability students performed better in every grade in both years in math than in language arts on the measure of grade level standards of pass plus on ISTEP+. The percentage of identified high ability students earning the distinction of pass plus is also lower than expected for both math and language arts (with the exception of 7th grade 2015 math).

**NWEA**

While the percentage of high ability students earning a pass plus distinction on ISTEP+ is lower than expected, an analysis of NWEA data illustrates a more positive picture of high ability students’ growth in achievement. According to NWEA research scientist, Nate Jensen, growth projection represents the best estimate of the average or typical performance for students in the same grade, in the same subject, with the same starting RIT score. It is important to note that because these projections are based on estimates of

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8 Website explaining growth projections: https://www.nwea.org/blog/2013/interpreting-percentage-students-meeting-exceeding-growth-projections/
average performance, it is not expected that every student will meet or exceed his or her growth projection; in fact, NWEA reported that nationwide, approximately 50-60% of students meet or exceed their growth projections. With consideration of this information, the percentage of high ability students meeting or exceeding their growth targets is provided in the graphs below.

Figure 21: Percentage of District High Ability Students Meeting NWEA Growth Targets
As the graphs indicate, the high ability students are meeting their growth targets at a rate that, at minimum, is similar to the national rates, and in many cases, far exceeds the national rate of 50-60%. These high percentages of high students meeting their growth targets are reflective of the amount of time and energy SACS has put into training teachers to provide targeted, individualized instruction to students. The district should be commended for their work in this area and the performance of their high ability students on this indicator of achievement.

**Advanced Placement Participation Rate and Scores**

As further evidence of program effectiveness, the participation rate and scores for high ability students on Advanced Placement exams were analyzed. As Advanced Placement is broader than high ability, it is reasonable to expect the majority if not all identified students would participate and earn at least one score of a 3, 4, or 5 sometime during high school. Results for Southwest Allen’s 2015 high ability student participation and pass rates were found on the districts IDOE High Ability Data Card and are included below. In addition, Homestead High School had 82% of its identified high ability students earn a 3, 4, or 5 on at least one AP exam in 2015, the most recent year for which cohort data is available. Homestead also had 38% of all of its graduates passing an AP exam. This is to be
commend. Homestead offers a strong array of AP courses and encourages students to take those courses by adding weight to those grades, thus giving “extra credit” to those students for taking the most rigorous class selections.

An additional comment about AP is needed. While high ability students do not need to take a full load of AP courses, it is important for them to take the courses offered in the subject areas they plan to pursue in college. Taking AP math and science courses are especially important for preparation for students planning to pursue any medical or STEM-related field. Not only will the rigorous preparation be helpful, but the vast majority of students pursuing those majors from other high schools and other states will have had those courses and done well on the corresponding AP exams. Because dual credit courses do not have a summative, standardized exam, and because those courses vary in the rigor of the institution and the instruction, they are not reliably comparable to AP. However, dual credit courses can be taken by high ability students to balance out their work load or in areas that are outside of their major interest. In reviewing the AP data, it was noted that several students take 4 and 5 AP courses in the same year. While an exceptional student may be able to handle this work load, this review also noted an unhealthy amount of stress being reported by high school students. Consider careful guidance on the number and concentration of AP courses in one year taken by individual students.

Table 7: High Ability Students and Participation in Advanced Placement

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*As reported in DOE AD files
** From AP files

Academic Honors Diploma

The other data available from the state relates to attainment of the Academic Honors Diploma for students identified as high ability. In 2015, SACS had approximately 257
identified students in grade 12 and 210 (82%) of them received Academic Honors Diplomas.\(^9\)

**Survey Responses Regarding Program Effectiveness: Satisfaction, Strengths, and Areas for Improvement.**

In addition to reviewing performance on standardized test measures, perceptions from stakeholders regarding program effectiveness were also analyzed. Parents and students were asked how satisfied they were with the high ability program services, what they felt the strengths of the program were, and the results are disaggregated by program area and included in the graph below.

*Figure 23: Satisfaction with High Ability Programming*

![Satisfaction with High Ability Program](chart)

While noting the general satisfaction of the majority of parents, the comparative lack of satisfaction of neighborhood parents regarding the high ability program for their children should also be noted. This issue was discussed in the Program Design section of this report to support suggestions for modifying this service option. When asked about the strengths of the program, parents of students in the self-contained ALPHA program commented on the opportunity for their children to work with licensed teachers, as one parent said, "I

\(^9\) The information for that report was collected at different times during the school year, so the number of high ability graduates may not fully align with the number of identified students in grade 12.
appreciate that the teachers have a gifted endorsement on their teaching licenses.” They also emphasized the value of grouping like-minded students together for the pace of instruction as well as to meet social needs. One parent noted, “I believe ALPHA allows reduced repetition which gives time to learn more depth than a typical classroom. Also, for my oldest son he gained more confidence and self acceptance being with others who understood/accepted his social awkwardness. He now interacts with more confidence with others and accepts/recognizes rejection and moves forward. I know that he would not be the confident person he is without having a safe environment to learn without/with minimal criticism from peers. The home school school experience from a social aspect was very difficult prior to acceptance into ALPHA.” Finally, the comment from a third parent summarizes the comments from many: “When the right teachers are in place, the stand alone program is amazing. I cannot say enough positive things about some of our classroom experiences and the social benefits the program has provided. Again, the common theme has seemed to be the experience level and training of the teacher.”

Comments regarding the strengths of the high ability program from middle school and high school parents and students focused on the variety of advanced courses offered, the strong teachers, and the opportunity to work with others of similar ability. One middle school parent noted, “There are some wonderful teachers in the high ability program. They are definitely a big reason for its success!” and one high school parent said, “I like the way that the high-ability program has formed my daughter’s expectations - about her abilities, her learning style and her future. Homestead HS offers such an abundance of advanced courses that she, honestly, could not take all the classes that interested her! “

Above all, parents are grateful for the opportunities the high ability program has afforded their children, as is evident in one middle school parent’s comment, “Despite the challenges I have listed previously, we are grateful for the opportunity to participate in this program and believe it is better than anything else offered in the area.” The value of the program was echoed by many parents: “These high ability kids get to interact in an environment where they are not belittled for extra effort. They get a chance to develop strong friendships and move at a pace and level of difficulty that pays off for them in high school and college. That is what I am seeing with my older son that is a college freshman. Continuing this program is a must for the district. It is a strong part of the reason I have not moved from the area and taken another job.”

Suggestions for Program Improvement

As with other questions on the survey, parent comments indicated a strong belief that the quality of the self-contained program as it pertains to meeting the unique cognitive and social and emotional needs of gifted students has diminished over time. Exacerbating this
belief is the perception that the administration does not support high ability learners or communicate openly about why program changes have been implemented. Teachers also expressed the need for more communication across the neighborhood and self-contained ALPHA programs in order to strengthen the program. Comments regarding the importance of communication and the need to build a positive culture surrounding the program were abundant; representative comments by program are included below:

**Self-contained ALPHA**

*It seems over the past couple of years, we are getting less out of the Alpha program. These questions were difficult to answer because I know less now about what my 5th grader is doing than when my previous child that is two years older went through the program. I feel that my older child (who is 2 grades older), dove deeper into subjects and learned more (Parent of Self-contained ALPHA)*

*. . . Moving from first through fifth grade, it does appear there has been a culture shift. There appears to be greater emphasis on policy and procedure which can diminish opportunity for creativity and critical thinking. It may be a product of standards, of being over-scheduled and under-funded, but there is something tangible that the parents feel is different in parent and teacher relations. With the split high ability/general ed building there will always be some tension in the school community. Which is why it is even more critical that the district defines what high ability looks like at each level, encourages and provides opportunity for differentiated and deeper learning, and learns to communicate (Parent of Self-Contained ALPHA).*

*More communication between buildings about what they are doing with high ability curriculum, working together to best meet the needs of students across the district. A committee made up of high ability self contained teachers and Gen Ed teachers to meet and discuss curriculum and identifying students for each program (Teacher of Self-contained ALPHA program).*

*I feel that it would benefit all for there to be a high ability committee to discuss high ability across the district, there is very little of this, and I don’t feel connected to what others are doing at other schools than my own. It would be helpful to get together and discuss what is going on at each school on a regular basis; a high ability committee per school (Self-contained ALPHA teacher).*

**Neighborhood**

*There is virtually no communication between school and home regarding Alpha (Neighborhood Parent)*
There is little to no communication to the teachers, and little to no communication to the parents regarding the neighborhood program. We didn't even know our daughter was given any different instruction last year until the end of the year, and don't know if there is any different instruction going on this year. Any time we asked about the program, we were directed to talk to the principal, as they were not equipped to answer anything (Neighborhood Parent).

**Middle School**

Focus on going more in depth on topics and more critical thinking skills (how would you solve this, etc.). NOT more to do. NOT assume the child has already "picked up" the info (grammar and spelling patterns for ex) and skip ahead. (Middle School Parent)

Any ways to put less emphasis on grades and more more emphasis on the joy of learning would be appreciated. These high ability kids seem extremely competitive and only focused on getting all A's. I would like to see some ways to help them gain perspective about what is important. (Middle School Parent)

An area of improvement for the high ability program would be that the district could provide the high ability teachers with some professional development opportunities specifically related to gifted and high ability. (Middle School Faculty)

**High School**

Challenge them, go deeper into materials, allow time for critical thinking, discussion and reflection. And make sure teachers teach- not just offer up the internet for kids to figure things out on their own.” (High School Parent)

Some areas that could be improved include making classes which are encouraged to "challenge" students, not by focusing on challenging them with the amount of work they can complete on time within a week, but rather an increased challenge on developing critical and creative thought processes and pushing the learning beyond any expected parameters (after all, a high ability program should not have a limit on it's ability to create a higher level of education). (High School Student)

Whenever I learn something just because it's going to be on the test I will remember it for the test but once the test is over I don't remember it at all, whereas having projects lets me learn things that I can remember forever because I was engaged in the project and was interested in how I was learning. (High School Student)
Administration has been told over and over about the concerns about the program...they are absolutely deaf to parental input. It almost seems like they are trying to dissolve the program. (High School Parent)

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Consider keeping a spreadsheet of all data for high ability students from the time they are identified until they graduate from the district. Sample information kept in the spreadsheet could include their scores on identification measures, ISTEP+, NWEA, PSAT, and Advanced Placement. The district can analyze the database to determine the long-term effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction on the achievement of academically advanced students.

• The district will want to investigate what the course taking patterns are for the identified students not receiving the Honors Diploma.

• Present information on program performance of high ability students to the Broad Based Planning Committee. This could be accomplished by sharing the Data Card from the IDOE.

• Consider a data sharing information night for the community, highlighting how the district looks at data to make programming decisions. High Ability could be a small breakout report within that presentation. This would allow the community to see the reasons behind particular changes and whether or not changes were effective.
Summary

Southwest Allen County Schools has supported high ability students and programming for decades. The value of the program by community members is evidenced in the sheer number of comments provided throughout the survey conducted for this evaluation. Data from multiple sources indicate that current programming for high ability students is successful in providing differentiated instruction in reading, language, and math skill development. The program also offers students access to advanced curriculum beyond grade level standards. Additionally, Homestead High School offers opportunities for advanced coursework and a myriad of extracurricular activities that are appealing to students with high ability.

Generally, parent stakeholders are satisfied with the program, and two thirds of high school students feel prepared for success at their next level. Many stakeholders, however, feel that the quality of programming for high ability students has diminished over time. This perception may be the result of the shift in programming at Aboite and the middle school to conform to a more skill-based series of activities, controlled by a district curriculum calendar and rubrics that are standards based. It is essential for all students, including high ability students, to have a strong command of the standards, and teachers have learned procedures to target their instruction very intentionally and specifically to assist students in mastering the skills of reading and math. At the secondary level, the district is unpacking standards into discrete skills and knowledge, making use of vertical articulation teams to be certain that all students have parallel experiences, all of which are to prepare them for success at high school and beyond. High ability programming, however, will need to include this attention to standards and skill development as well as include the elements of gifted education described throughout this report. Different instructional approaches will be needed for the more constructivist, problem-solving, open-ended, interdisciplinary approach of gifted education. By incorporating both individualized instruction for skill development and attention to the other elements of gifted education, the neighborhood ALPHA program could be more effective as a high ability service option than it is currently.

The middle school program for high ability students has expanded to include students that have not been previously exposed to gifted education. The blending of students with differing experiences and a broader range of learning needs has fostered a concern that the middle school program is moving to the more structured curriculum in order to be certain all students have mastered all of the required standards, at the expense of a curriculum that is standards aligned, but that includes the elements of gifted education. High ability
learners also need to demonstrate the content and skills required to move forward with success; but they do not need to demonstrate them in the same way or attend to them as explicitly. Both approaches can co-exist in SACS; high ability students should demonstrate mastery of standards, but they should be able to do so in ways that also allow for inclusion of the core elements of gifted education.

Communication, professional development, trust, and collaboration will help Southwest Allen meet the needs of this group of learners and raise achievement levels of these students as well.

**Summary Suggestions for Southwest Allen High Ability Program, K-12**

The strengths and challenges for SACS’s high ability program have been carefully articulated throughout this evaluation. Southwest Allen County Schools has a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on its strengths and move the program forward in a positive direction. The suggestions offered for program improvement should be considered in light of other district initiatives and goals to determine feasibility of implementation. A word of caution is also in order. It is unwise to try to implement too many of these suggestions at one time as change takes time in order to be effective. However, while many of the recommendations will require planning and long-term implementation, others are “Quick Wins” that the district could consider implementing with minimal time or budget implications. These “Quick Wins” will also communicate to the community the dedication the district has to improving its program and services for high ability learner. A summary list of Quick Wins is provided below.

**Quick Wins**

- Convene the Broad Based Planning Committee to accomplish the following tasks:
  - Revising the district’s definition and mission statement so that they both align with the state definition of high ability and reflect the specific mission of Southwest Allen’s high ability program.
  - Establishing High Ability Program Goals and measurable objectives for each of the required program areas: Identification, Curriculum and Instruction, Affective Needs, Professional Development, and Program Effectiveness. The goals will frame the future direction for the program, and the objectives will allow the district to measure the progress toward meeting the goals.

- For identification, discontinue the use of a composite score for General Intellectual. Use the sub score for Verbal Reasoning to identify those students qualifying for services in Language Arts. Use the score for Quantitative Reasoning, or the Quantitative Non Verbal Partial Composite (CogAT) to identify students as
qualifying for services in Math. If a student qualifies in both subjects independently, they are considered as General Intellectual.

• For the 2017-18 school year, consider cluster grouping into a single classroom at each grade level for identified students at the neighborhood elementary schools. Also, establish the practice of between-class leveled instructional grouping so that each teacher has a narrowed instructional range for the guided reading and math group approach that is currently the routine. The students with high ability will not experience the same approach, but will be able to have a qualitatively different type of experience for language arts during that time; their curriculum will still be based upon the Indiana Academic Standards.

• Consider some no-homework nights at the high school in consultation with a task force of students and faculty.

• Explore funding options for more teachers to seek Gifted and Talented licensure.

• Send teachers of high ability students to outside gifted conferences and/or professional development provided by experts in the field.

• Consider some type of spring "showcase" of student-developed learning projects or demonstrations that incoming or interested students and parents could attend.

• Produce a quarterly newsletter for high ability parents that could highlight student learning activities, include articles on the social and emotional needs of gifted children, and information about outside opportunities or resources.

Complete List of Suggestions by Program Area

Program Area: Program Design

Suggestions for Consideration

The district may wish to consider the following suggestions in order to address challenges and concerns related to the design of its high ability program.

• Establish a districtwide Broad Based Planning Committee that includes representatives from each building, an administrator, parents, students, and other community stakeholders who are interested in high ability services. The BBPC should be charged with accomplishing the following tasks:
  o Developing a mission statement specifically for the high ability program. While this mission should align with the district mission, it should extend the district mission by specifically stating the district’s recognition that high ability students are found in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, that
these learners have unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs; and that these learners require differentiated curriculum and instruction in order to maximize their development.

- Establishing High Ability program goals and measurable objectives for each of the required program areas: Identification, Curriculum and Instruction, Affective Needs, Professional Development, and Program Effectiveness. The goals will frame the future direction for the program, and the objectives will allow the district to measure the progress toward meeting the goals.

The establishment of a district BBPC and the development of a specific mission for the high ability program and measurable goals and objectives will communicate to the stakeholders the district understanding of the unique needs of high ability and its dedication to improving services for these students.

- Clearly define and communicate the types of services available to meet the needs of high ability students including the rationale for the self-contained program and the differences between what the self-contained program and the neighborhood program offer.
  - Develop and post written curriculum plans for both the self-contained and neighborhood programs that illustrate how these curricula go beyond the standards and are differentiated specifically to meet the needs of high ability learners.
  - Showcase student projects and work that demonstrate the elements of high ability education including an emphasis on conceptual understanding, higher level thinking, and problem solving. This showcase could be in the form of an open house that is open to the community.
  - Hold informational meetings regarding the services for high ability students with program teachers and administrators present to answer questions.

- Consider ways to remove obstacles to parents selecting the self-contained high ability program for their children who qualify.
  - If possible, allow for siblings who do not qualify for the self-contained program to be placed in the general education program at Aboite to keep families together.
  - Address the negative perception of the self-contained program.
    - Demonstrate district and building administrative support for high ability programming that goes beyond standards based instruction.
    - Implement changes suggested in the Curriculum and Instruction section of this report to enhance the quality of the self-contained program.
- Support teachers in seeking out professional development opportunities specific to high ability learners. Share with parents what teachers are learning and how they are implementing it within their high ability classrooms.

- Consider changing the name of the program to one that does not carry a connotation of superiority such as Extended Learning Program. This may assuage perceptions of elitism.

A clearer understanding of these programs, and the type of learners they are designed to serve will help parents make better-informed choices of the appropriate services for their children.

- For the neighborhood high ability program, consider changing the structure of the program to allow for more instructional time to be spent on the elements of gifted education (e.g. enrichment, higher level thinking skills, problem-solving). This alternate structure could be in the form of a pullout. Another suggestion could be to utilize between class grouping and/or cluster grouping of high ability students. For example, the identified high ability math and the identified high ability language arts students could all be clustered into the same classroom with a teacher trained in high ability education. The rest of the class would be made up of non-identified students. If all sections at the grade level could be scheduled to have math and language arts instruction at the same time, teachers could do between-class ability grouping across sections. The high ability students would remain with the one high ability cluster teacher, and other high achieving students could join the classroom for instruction as well. For example, consider the following example of how this recommendation might work in practice: Assume there are four sections of 3rd grade. If 4 students were identified as high ability in language arts only, and 5 identified as high ability in math only, these 9 students would be placed in the same homeroom with a teacher trained in high ability education. The remaining students in the homeroom would be heterogeneous in terms of ability. Students in the other sections would also be heterogeneously grouped. At the time of math instruction, all students in the grade would be divided according to their instructional levels and would change classrooms to be with the teacher assigned to their instructional level for math. The identified high ability math students would stay in the cluster classroom with the teacher trained to work with high ability students. The next level of advanced math students would also join this classroom. Note: The identified high ability language arts only students would not necessarily stay in the cluster classroom for math instruction unless they were in the next level of advanced math students. The same process would be repeated for language arts instruction with the identified high ability language arts students staying in the
cluster classroom and being joined by the next level of academically advanced language arts students. The remaining students would be divided and placed with a specific teacher for their instructional level in language arts.

In this way, the range of abilities within each of the math and language arts classes would be narrowed so that all students would benefit. For the high ability cluster class, this would allow the identified high ability students to receive more direct instructional time with a teacher than they are currently receiving. Not only would this address the current parent concern that high ability students are not receiving as much direct instructional time, but it would also allow teachers to offer more than just standards-based guided reading and math groups to their identified students. The restricted range of abilities, coupled with the ability to cover content at a faster pace, will free time for instructional activities that include more elements of gifted education such as real-world problem solving applications, enrichment and independent study projects, and activities to promote critical thinking, creative thinking, and conceptual understanding. While the neighborhood ALPHA option has been in place only two years, a change in the structure as suggested and the addition of instructional activities that incorporate gifted education models and strategies would allow the neighborhood schools to provide more targeted programming for identified high ability students. A pull-out opportunity for hands-on investigations or interdisciplinary projects would strengthen engagement for these students as well. Written documentation of these instructional activities will provide parents an understanding of what constitutes the neighborhood program beyond just differentiated reading and math groups. Without some change, the perceptions of parents are unlikely to change.

- Consider monitoring the effects of combining the Honors and ALPHA classes at the middle school level.
  - Collect and analyze longitudinal achievement data on the growth of both groups of students
  - Encourage teachers to share their perceptions of the combined classes and offer supports for assisting them in meeting the needs of this wider range of learners.
**Program Area: Identification**

**Suggestions for Consideration**

To address the concerns with the current identification procedures articulated above, the district may want to consider the following suggestions:

- Establish a district level identification team. Identification should take place at the district, not building level, to ensure that the same selection procedure is consistently followed across buildings. The district level identification team should be comprised of the high ability coordinator and a representative from each building level who is trained in high ability identification.

- Provide all kindergarten students with the opportunity to be identified through their reasoning potential regardless of their achievement level on NWEA. This practice is in compliance with the mandate stating that K-12, a high ability student can be identified based on their outstanding performance or their potential for outstanding performance.
  - To increase the validity of the CogAT scores for kindergarteners, the district may work with the Indiana representative for Riverside Publishing who will provide advice on recommended timing in the academic year for testing, practice materials, number of students to be tested in one sitting, and other factors to promote validity for online testing of primary students.

- Reconsider the selection processes for the high ability services, so they reflect both best practices in gifted education as well as the Indiana mandate for high ability identification.
  - For ALPHA self-contained program: Since this program is designed to serve those students with the greatest academic potential in all core content areas, students should have a qualifying score on the CogAT at the 9th stanine (Age Percentile) on the Verbal Battery and a qualifying score at the 9th stanine (Age Percentile) on either of the Quantitative Battery or the Quantitative/Nonverbal Partial Composite. These students shall be identified as High Ability: General Intellectual. For students whose scores fall just below this guideline but within the standard error of qualifying, additional information may be considered to determine appropriate placement.
  - Since the pace of instruction and curriculum of the ALPHA self-contained program is accelerated, in addition to the qualifying CogAT scores, students should also have a minimum of 8th stanine NWEA scores to participate.
• Testing for the ALPHA program should take place in the spring of kindergarten and again in the spring of 2nd grade in recognition that cognitive development is variable at the primary level.
• Placement decisions should be re-evaluated for all students for whom additional data and performance in the program suggest the placement may not be appropriate for meeting the needs of the student. If a student was not performing well, an exit procedure that includes conferencing with parents, the implementation of interventions, and a review of subsequent performance could be put into place.
  o For the neighborhood program: Students may be selected for identification through the multiple pathways listed below. If a student qualified in both Math and Language Arts, that student should be labeled High Ability: General Intellectual.

For High Ability Identification in Math:
• Through Performance: Outstanding score(s) (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of math achievement (NWEA)
• Through Potential: An outstanding score (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of quantitative reasoning or a composite measure of quantitative/nonverbal reasoning (CogAT)
• Through Additional Data: When a child’s score on either the norm-referenced measure of achievement or reasoning falls just below the cutoff, additional data in the form of teacher rating scales or classroom work samples will be reviewed to determine appropriate placement.

For High Ability Identification in Language Arts:
• Through Performance: Outstanding score(s) (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of reading and language achievement
• Through Potential: An outstanding score (96th percentile or higher) on a norm-referenced measure of verbal reasoning
• Through Additional Data: When a child’s score on either the norm-referenced measure of achievement or reasoning falls just below the cutoff, additional data in the form of teacher rating scales or classroom work samples will be reviewed to determine appropriate placement.

In responses to the concern that neighborhood identification changes yearly based on one NWEA score, the district may wish to consider trend data on NWEA for identification instead. For example, students may be identified for high ability services the following year based on Fall and Spring NWEA scores that were both at 9th stanine. As long as the student continued to perform well in high ability services, the high ability designation could be kept on the student
test number. Consistent with the self-contained program, if a student was not performing well in high ability services, an exit procedure that includes conferencing with parents, the implementation of interventions, and a review of subsequent performance could be put into place.

- Reconsider the selection procedure for determining which students are ready for algebra in 6th or 7th grade. Better selection procedures will help ensure that students have the strong mathematical foundation necessary for future success in advanced math classes as well as the self-confidence in their ability to be successful in these courses.
  - Analyze district data for those who were successful and those who were not successful with their early placement to determine if a pattern exists that may help determine different qualifications.
  - Consider using an established measure such as the Iowa Algebra Prognosis test or the Orleans Hanna Algebra Prognosis test to facilitate math course placement.

- Clearly delineate a selection procedure for high ability designation at the high school level. While such designation is not as important for determining course placement, it is important for documenting the program effectiveness for high ability students. For example, the district may wish to disaggregate the data on Advanced Placement exams for high ability compared with non-identified students as an indicator of program effectiveness at the high school level. Accurate identification is necessary for this data to be used.
  - The PSAT was recently re-normed on a nationally representative sample and therefore can serve as an appropriate identifier of ability at the sophomore level. The same criteria of 96th percentile or higher on either the verbal or the quantitative subtests could be applied to the selection procedures. PSAT results for the current 11th grade students and the new results for the current 10th grade students should be reviewed to be certain students are appropriately tagged on the Student Test Number and to provide appropriate guidance for those scoring very well and not previously identified.
Program Area: Curriculum and Instruction

Suggestions for Consideration

Overall, the analysis of data pertaining to curriculum suggests that high ability students are given opportunities to work on above grade level standards in math and language arts, specifically. Additionally, differentiation of reading materials and language and math skills allows for targeted, individualized skill instruction in these areas. Attention to the other facets of gifted education curriculum, including a focus on macro concepts and deeper complexity within the content, however, is sporadic, with minimal opportunity for this content in the neighborhood program, in particular. Likewise, instructional activities to promote critical and creative thinking, communication and writing skills, and collaboration and problem solving also vary widely across programs, courses, and individual teachers. Again, students in the neighborhood program, in particular, do not have as many opportunities to develop these skills. In response to these findings, the suggestions below are suggestions for program improvement. Attention to these suggestions would renew parental confidence in the quality of the high ability programs.

• Consider the suggestion stated in the Program Design section of this report to change the structure of the neighborhood program to allow for more instructional time. This structural change may include cluster grouping and/or between class grouping for language arts and math, or it may include a pull-out option. This will provide the additional instructional time necessary to incorporate more of the elements of gifted education that are currently lacking. Standards can be met with the high ability students outside of the structured routine of the guided reading and math format.

• Consider systematic use of curriculum materials developed specifically for gifted students that include more complexity and greater development of conceptual understanding and critical and creative thinking. Students in the high ability program at all levels can have a qualitatively different experience that is based upon Indiana Academic Standards yet includes the approaches and elements of gifted education.

  o Consider use of the IDOE High Ability Language arts materials in grades 1-10 (grades 9 and 10 to be released in the summer of 2017). These units are aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards. Some of the teachers of the self-contained ALPHA program are using some of these units, but full implementation throughout each grade level would provide vertical
articulation of conceptual understanding as well as skill development of communication, critical and creative thinking, writing, and problem solving.

- While teaching vocabulary and grammar through authentic writing is also encouraged, survey results indicate that specific instruction in these areas is also warranted. Consider how the Michael Clay Thompson vocabulary and grammar materials can be more effectively implemented within language arts classes. Note: Regardless of the materials selected, because the self-contained ALPHA and neighborhood students merge into the same honors classes at middle school, their preparation with grammar and vocabulary needs to be consistent between the self-contained ALPHA and the neighborhood programs.

- Consider the IDOE recommended resources for math enrichment and problem solving appropriate for high ability learners posted in the IDOE Moodle.

- Incorporate more opportunities for hands-on science and social studies at the elementary level to provide a better foundation for these subject areas. Attention to the development of higher level thinking and problem solving can also be incorporated into these areas.

- Develop units of study built around macro concepts that are applicable across discipline and time periods (for example, concepts such as patterns, systems, power, and change). For maximum effectiveness, these units should incorporate interdisciplinary elements. When topics of study all center around the same macro concepts, students are able to tie their learning together and construct a more complex understanding. Note: Units built around macro concepts should still align to the standards. Enrichment learning activities should not be included just because they are fun for the students; they can be engaging and result in deeper understanding or skill development.

- Consider a greater focus on instructional activities that promote higher level thinking skills, problem solving, and the development of communication and collaboration skills.

- Provide more scaffolding for students in the development of strong collaboration skills; students need step by step guidance in developing these skills in order for group work to be an effective instructional strategy.
- Provide more opportunities for students to develop writing skills at the middle and high school level. Attention needs to be given to providing constructive feedback so writing can improve.

- Incorporate more authentic problem solving opportunities to promote critical and creative thinking.

- When applicable, incorporate articulation for the elements of gifted education and instruction within the district VAT team process. Honors course descriptions could be written to include specifics of how the course addresses the elements of gifted education. After building the framework for the curriculum, the next task will be to complete this written articulation for curriculum, instruction, and assessment for high ability learners. This will then demonstrate the differentiation of what students are learning and how they are demonstrating their exceptional reasoning abilities and their outstanding achievement levels. As noted at the beginning of this section for high ability students, this refers to including learning activities that develop conceptual understanding, build critical and creative thinking, offer a more in-depth study of a topic, incorporate more complex content, and use all learning to solve interdisciplinary problems. Some of the honors classes will likely need to adjust some of what has been constructed already in order to include these elements of gifted education. This change may result in reading fewer selections but focusing more on higher-order thinking skills with those readings. Those courses that are still involved in the articulation work can include these elements as the work is completed.

- The high ability curriculum and instruction will benefit from encouraging and eventually requiring G/T licensure for all teachers who are assigned to teach students with high ability in core content areas. The in-depth understanding of how curriculum and instruction are different for these learners is not something that can be gained in a short time. Completing a license in Gifted and Talented Education will enable teachers to find and create curricular materials that will provide their high ability students with the appropriate level of depth, conceptual focus, and emphasis on higher level thinking skills.

- Once teachers have received training in curriculum and instruction for high ability students, the district may wish to convene a team of teachers to construct a common curriculum for students receiving high ability services, K-12 across the district. While this should include mastery of grade level Indiana Academic Standards, it will need to go beyond grade level curriculum and standards and include a more flexible instructional approach in order to meet the needs of high ability learners.
Program Area: Affective Needs and Self-Regulatory Skills

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Provide teachers of high ability students the opportunity to attend professional development targeted to understanding common social and emotional issues facing gifted students. Share with parents that teachers have attended these trainings, so they are aware the district is supporting training in this area.

• Develop a differentiated affective curriculum that systematically addresses common social and emotional concerns of gifted individuals. A team of teachers and guidance counselors could outline topics and places within the curriculum (social studies and language arts, in particular) where such topics could naturally, but specifically, be addressed. The plan should also include attention to differentiated college guidance for high ability high school students. This district plan should be disseminated across all buildings and posted, so parents can see how these issues are being addressed at each level.

• Convene a taskforce at the middle and high school level that includes representatives from all stakeholder groups (administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students) to determine 1) how to alleviate some of the stress and anxiety students are experiencing and 2) how to de-emphasize the performance goals and instead rekindle students’ natural interest in learning. A plan to accomplish these goals may include immediate the implementation of suggestions such as establishing district wide no-homework nights each quarter to longer term suggestions such as implementing interdisciplinary capstone courses for seniors, (weighted the same as AP courses) that culminate in independent study projects that allow students to explore their interests more in depth.

• Provide parent education in the form of information nights or shared resources on social and emotional topics such as perfectionism, stress, anxiety, and achievement motivation. Post any handouts or information on these topics on the district high ability webpage.
Program Area: Professional Development

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Support licensure coursework for all high ability program teachers with district high ability grant funds or other district funds for professional development. Investigate the current availability from the Indiana Department of Education of funds for a one-time stipend to teachers upon completing the license.
• Develop a High Ability Professional Development Plan.
• Allow faculty members to attend targeted professional development opportunities specific to high ability education that are led by experts in the field.
• Allow faculty members opportunities to attend professional conferences specific to high ability education.

Program Area: Program Effectiveness

Suggestions for Consideration:

• Consider keeping a spreadsheet of all data for high ability students from the time they are identified until they graduate from the district. Sample information kept in the spreadsheet could include their scores on identification measures, ISTEP+, NWEA, PSAT, and Advanced Placement. The district can analyze the database to determine the long-term effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction on the achievement of academically advanced students.
• The district will want to investigate what the course taking patterns are for the identified students not receiving the Honors Diploma.
• Present information on program performance of high ability students to the Broad Based Planning Committee. This could be accomplished by sharing the Data Card from the IDOE.
• Consider a data sharing information night for the community, highlighting how the district looks at data to make programming decisions. High Ability could be a small breakout report within that presentation. This would allow the community to see the reasons behind particular changes and whether or not changes were effective.
## HIGH ABILITY PROGRAM EVALUATION

**October 12-13, 2016**

Dr. Ginny Burney and Dr. Kristie Speirs Neumeister

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>8:00-8:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Lori Paul</td>
<td>Fifth Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Lafayette Meadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>8:25-8:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Matt Loshe</td>
<td>Third Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Lafayette Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>8:50-9:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Erin McKever</td>
<td>Art Teacher</td>
<td>Lafayette Meadows</td>
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<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>9:15-9:35 a.m.</td>
<td>Joan Williams</td>
<td>Literacy Specialist</td>
<td>Lafayette Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>9:40-10:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Jenny Fedele</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>*Building Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>10:15-10:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Lynn Simmers</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent/High Ability Coordinator</td>
<td>Lafayette Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>8:00-8:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Betsy Brooks</td>
<td>First Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Covington Elementary</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>8:25-8:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Shaina Schoof</td>
<td>Third Grade Teacher</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>8:50-9:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Sarina Schroeder</td>
<td>Literacy Specialist</td>
<td>Covington Elementary</td>
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<td>Sarah Spittler</td>
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<td>Fred Graf</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>10:15-11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Dianne Moake</td>
<td>Director of Data, Assessment &amp; Accountability</td>
<td>Covington Elementary</td>
</tr>
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<td>* Travel Time/Lunch</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>11:50-12:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Lauren Hoghe</td>
<td>ALPHA Teacher - Grade 4</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>12:15-12:35 p.m.</td>
<td>Jenn Donahue</td>
<td>ALPHA Teacher - Grade 2</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>12:40-1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Sarah Schenkel</td>
<td>Second Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>1:05-1:25 p.m.</td>
<td>Jessica Nix</td>
<td>APG President/Parent</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>1:30-1:50 p.m.</td>
<td>Jennifer Court</td>
<td>Literacy Specialist</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>1:55-2:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Erin Beck</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Aboite Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13/16</td>
<td>2:20-2:50 p.m.</td>
<td>Richelle Miller</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>*Building Tour</td>
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### HIGH ABILITY PROGRAM EVALUATION

**October 19-20, 2016**

**Dr. Ginny Burney and Dr. Kristie Speirs Neumeister**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>8:00-8:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Melissa Renfrow</td>
<td>Honors English/Language Arts</td>
<td>Woodside Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>8:25-8:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Ginny Ryan</td>
<td>Honors Reading &amp; Science</td>
<td>Woodside Middle School</td>
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<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>8:50-9:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Muana Rupley</td>
<td>Honors Math</td>
<td>Woodside Middle School</td>
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<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>9:15-9:35 a.m.</td>
<td>Celeste Bradford</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Woodside Middle School</td>
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<td>Jerry Schillinger</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>*Building Tour</td>
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<td>10/19/16</td>
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<td>Lynn Simmers</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>Woodside Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>10:15-11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Phil Downs</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
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<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>10:15-11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Dr. Kelly Hutner</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Summit Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
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<td>Paul Kennel</td>
<td>Honors Social Studies</td>
<td>Summit Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
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<td>Julie Niman</td>
<td>Honors English/Language Arts</td>
<td>Summit Middle School</td>
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<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>9:15-9:35 a.m.</td>
<td>Meagan Milne</td>
<td>Board President/Parent</td>
<td>Summit Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/19/16</td>
<td>9:40-10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Samantha McGlennen</td>
<td>Honors Geometry/Dept. Chair</td>
<td>Summit Middle School</td>
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<td>Josh St. John</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>*Building Tour</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>11:35-11:55 a.m.</td>
<td>Jim Schmidt</td>
<td>A.P. U.S. History</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>12:00-12:20 p.m.</td>
<td>Dave Panning</td>
<td>Honors Algebra II</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>12:25-12:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Holly Wenning</td>
<td>E/LA Curriculum Coordinator</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
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<td>Park Ginder</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>*Building Tour</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>1:25-1:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Ellis Yoder</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>1:50-2:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Diana Cronk</td>
<td>Honors Biology</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
<td>2:15-2:35 p.m.</td>
<td>Nicole Vickrey</td>
<td>Honors English 9</td>
<td>Homestead High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Representative Survey (Student Version)

Q1 What is your grade?
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade

Q2 Which middle school do you attend now or did you attend?
- Summit Middle School
- Woodside Middle School
- I did not attend middle school in this district

Q3A Do you now or did you participate in the past in the high ability program in middle school in Southwest Allen?
- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Q3B In elementary school did you participate in the ALPHA Program at Aboite Elementary?
- Yes
- No

Q4A Does your advanced or honors language arts/English class have enough challenge for you?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time
- I am not taking an advanced or honors Language Arts/ English class

Q4B Do you find your advanced or honors language arts/ English class engaging (interesting)?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the time
- I am not taking an advanced or honors language arts/ English class
Q5A Does your advanced or honors math class have enough challenge for you?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time
- I am not taking an advanced or honors math class

Q5B Do you find your advanced or honors math class engaging (interesting)?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the time
- I am not taking and advanced or honors math class.

Q5C In what grade level did you take Algebra?
- Sixth
- Seventh
- Eighth

Q5D Did you decide to retake any accelerated math (for example, if you took algebra in 6th grade, did you retake it in the 7th grade?)
- Yes
- No

Q5E In looking back, do you wish you had been in a different level of math beginning in the 6th grade?
- Yes, I wish I had taken algebra one year earlier than I did.
- Yes, I wish I had taken algebra one year later than I did.
- No, I took the right level of math for me in the 6th grade.

Q6 Please share any comments regarding the level of challenge or engagement in advanced or honors language arts or math. Please indicate if particular grade levels or courses stand out either in a good or bad way.

Q7A Are you taking an advanced or honors social studies class?
- Yes
- No
Q7B Does your social studies class provide enough challenge for you?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q7C Do you find your social studies class engaging (interesting)?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q8A Are you taking an advanced or honors science class?
- Yes
- No

Q8B Does your science class provide enough challenge for you?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q8C Do you find your science class engaging (interesting)?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the time

Q9 Please share any comments you may have about the level of challenge or engagement in your social studies or science classes. Please indicate if particular grade levels or courses stand out either in a good or bad way.
Q10 Do your honors or advanced classes teach you how to become independent with your school work? (for example, developing time management and organization skills)
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All the time

Q11A Within your honors or advanced courses are you given opportunities to give presentations (for example, oral presentations, poster presentations, etc.)?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q11B Are your honors or advanced classes effective in teaching you how to write better?
- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q12 Are your honors or advanced classes effective in helping you learn how to work with other students?
- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q13 Please share any comments you have on opportunities to develop independence in school work, make presentations, learn to write, or work with others. Please note any particular grade levels or courses stand out in in a good or bad way.
Q14 Are your honors or advanced classes effective in helping you develop critical thinking (for example, analyzing, making inferences, or assessing relevance)?
- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q15 Are your honors or advanced classes effective in helping you develop creative thinking (for example, generating possibilities, being a flexible thinker, or elaborating on ideas)?
- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q16 Please share any comments you have on opportunities to develop critical thinking and creative thinking skills. Please specifically note if any particular grade levels or courses stand out (good or bad) in opportunities to develop the skills.

Q17 Within your honors or advanced courses, are you given opportunities to do research on areas of personal interest?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q18 Do your honors or advanced classes give you opportunities to work on hands-on investigations, projects, or real world problems?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the time

Q20 Please share any comments you have on opportunities to do research on areas of interest, work on hands-on investigation, projects, or real world problems. Please specifically note if any particular grade levels or courses stand out (good or bad) in opportunities for these.
Q21 How do your honors or advanced courses influence your attitude toward learning?
○ Very negatively
○ Negatively
○ No influence
○ Positively
○ Very positively

Q22 How much of the time are you stressed as a result of school work and school activities?
○ Always Stressed
○ Most of the time stressed
○ Sometimes stressed
○ Rarely stressed
○ Never stressed

Q23 Please share any comments you have on how your honors or advanced courses influence your attitude toward learning or stress. Please specifically note if any particular grade levels or courses stand out (good or bad) in influencing your attitude or stress.

Q24 How has being in the advanced classes influenced you in developing friendships?
○ Very negative influence
○ Negative influence
○ No influence
○ Positive influence
○ Very positive influence

Q25 How satisfied are you with the extracurricular opportunities offered?
○ Very Dissatisfied
○ Dissatisfied
○ Neutral
○ Satisfied
○ Very Satisfied

Q27 Overall do you feel the teachers in the high ability program or advanced courses have an understanding of students like you?
○ No understanding
○ Some understanding
○ Substantial understanding
○ I do not know
Q28 Please share any comments on the influence of advanced classes on developing friendships, satisfaction with extracurricular offerings, or understanding of the teachers. Please specifically note if any particular grade levels or courses stand out (good or bad) in these areas.

Q29A How well prepared do you feel for success at your next level of schooling (high school or college) as a result of your participation in advanced or honors classes?
- Not well prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- The program has not had any effect on my preparation for success at the next level of schooling
- Prepared
- Well prepared

Q29B Do you receive targeted guidance information on opportunities such as academic scholarships, Honors College offerings within universities, summer programs for high ability students, etc.?
- No targeted guidance at all
- Some targeted guidance
- A substantial amount of targeted guidance

Q30 How satisfied have you been with the educational opportunities the district has provided for high ability students?
- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Q31 What do you feel are the strengths of the high ability program? Please feel free to comment on any program area, K-12, and be as specific as possible.

Q32 What do you feel are areas that could be improved? Please feel free to comment on any program area, K-12, and be as specific as possible.

Q33 Please include any additional comments you would like to share about the high ability program.
Appendix C: Southwest Allen Professional Development Documentation

Professional Development Documentation Form

(completed with an electronic form)

Name______________________________

Grade level________________________

Content area(s)____________________

• How many years have you been teaching?

• How many years have you had designated responsibility for HIGH ABILITY learners?

• Do you have a Gifted & Talented (G/T) Endorsement or License?

• If yes, when did you complete this credential?

• What was included in this coursework?

• What teaching licenses, advanced degrees, or certifications do you hold?

• Have you presented, published, or received any honors for any organizations during the past two school years? If so, please list the organizations, location or publication, and titles.

• Have you attended any outside High Ability or G/T- specific professional development events during the past two school years? If so, please list the organizations, focus and the locations of the events.

• Describe any High Ability-specific district or building professional development activities you have participated in that contribute to your professional effectiveness as a teacher of high ability students.

• What other (outside or within the district) professional development events have you attended during the past two years that have contributed to your professional effectiveness in meeting the needs of high ability students?

• Did you complete any university coursework during the past two school years? If yes, what was that?

• Do you have particular plans for High Ability professional development for the current school year?
Appendix D: Elements of Gifted Education

What it Means to Teach Gifted Learners Well

By Carol Ann Tomlinson, Ed.D, The University of Virginia

Some people suggest that gifted education is just sort of “fluffy” or enriching-gravy on the potatoes, perhaps, but not anything especially substantial or critical in the way of mental fare. Others propose that all gifted education is what's good for all students. Unfortunately, those two criticisms sometimes stem from observing classrooms where gifted learners are taught inappropriately.

So what does it mean to teach a highly able student well? Of course it will vary some with the age of the child, the subject, the learning style of the student-and possibly even the child's gender or culture. Certainly appropriate instruction for such learners varies for a child who comes to school rich with experiences vs. a child who is equally able but lacks richness of experience. And it will vary with a child who has immense potential vs. a peer with somewhat less capacity. Nonetheless, there are general indicators of appropriate curriculum and instruction for highly able students (in their areas of strength)-and general indicators of inappropriate curriculum and instruction for such learners.

Good Instruction for Gifted Learners

1. Good curriculum and instruction for gifted learners begins with good curriculum and instruction. It's difficult, if not impossible, to develop the talent of a highly able student with insipid curriculum and instruction. Like all students, gifted learners need learning experiences that are rich. That is, they need learning experiences that are organized by key concepts and principles of a discipline rather than by facts. They need content that is relevant to their lives, activities that cause them to process important ideas at a high level, and products that cause them to grapple with meaningful problems and pose defensible solutions. They need classrooms that are respectful to them, provide both structure and choice, and help them achieve more than they thought they could. These are needs shared by all learners, not just those who are gifted. But good instruction for gifted learners must begin there

2. Good teaching for gifted learners is paced in response to the student's individual needs. Often, highly able students learn more quickly than others their age. As a result, they typically need a more rapid instructional pace than do many of their peers. Educators sometimes call that "acceleration," which makes the pace sound risky. For many gifted learners, however, it's the
someone with shorter legs. On the other hand, it’s often the case that advanced learners need a slower pace of instruction than many other students their age, so they can achieve a depth or breadth of understanding needed to satisfy a big appetite for knowing.

3. Good teaching for gifted learners happens at a higher "degree of difficulty" than for many students their age. In the Olympics, the most accomplished divers perform dives that have a higher "degree of difficulty" than those performed by divers whose talents are not as advanced. A greater degree of difficulty calls on more skills—more refined skills—applied at a higher plane of sophistication. A high "degree of difficulty" for gifted learners in their talent areas implies that their content, processes and products should be more complex, more abstract, more open-ended, more multifaceted than would be appropriate for many peers. They should work with fuzzier problems, will often need less teacher-imposed structure, and (in comparison to the norm) should have to make greater leaps of insight and transfer than would be appropriate for many their age. Gifted learners may also (but not always) be able to function with a greater degree of independence than their peers.

4. Good teaching for gifted learners requires an understanding of "supported risk." Highly able learners often make very good grades with relative ease for along time in school. They see themselves (and often rightly so) as expected to make "As," get right answers, and lead the way. In other words, they succeed without "normal" encounters with failure. Then, when a teacher presents a high-challenge task, the student feels threatened. Not only has he or she likely not learned to study hard, take risks and strive, but the student's image is threatened as well. A good teacher of gifted students understands that dynamic, and thus invites, cajoles and insists on risk—but in a way that supports success. When a good gymnastics coach asks a talented young gymnast to learn a risky new move, the coach ensures that the young person has the requisite skills, then practices the move in harness for a time. Then the coach "spots" for the young athlete. Effective teachers of gifted learners do likewise.

### Inappropriate Instruction for Gifted Learners

1. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when it asks them to do things they already know how to do, and then to wait for others to learn how. Many advanced learners regularly complete assignments calling on materials, ideas and skills they have already mastered. Then they wait for peers to catch up, rather than being pre-assessed and assigned more advanced materials, ideas and skills when they demonstrate competency.

2. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when it asks them to do "more of the same stuff faster." Reading more books that are too easy and doing more math problems that have ceased being a challenge are killers of motivation and interest.

3. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when it cuts them loose from peers and the teacher for long periods of time. Asking a highly able student to sit at a desk in the back of the room and move through the math book alone ignores a child's need for affiliation, and overlooks the fact that a teacher should be a crucial factor in all children's learning. It also violates the importance of meaningful peer interaction in the learning process, as well as in the process of social and emotional development.
4. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when it is structured around “filling time.” Highly able students are often asked to go write a play, complete a puzzle, or do classroom chores because they have completed required tasks that take others longer. It would be difficult to defend such practices as a high-quality use of educational time.

5. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when they spend substantial time in the role of tutor or “junior teacher.” All students need to be colleagues for one another, giving a hand or clarifying procedures when needed. That’s quite different from when advanced learners spend chunks of time on a regular basis teaching what they already know to students who are having difficulty. Some educators suggest that doesn’t harm highly able learners because their test scores remain high. That begs the question of the extended learning these students might have garnered had the same amount of time been spent in pursuit of well-planned new ideas and skills.

6. Instruction for gifted learners is inappropriate when it is rooted in novel, “enriching” or piecemeal learning experiences. If a child were a very talented pianist, we would question the quality of her music teacher if the child regularly made toy pianos, read stories about peculiar happenings in the music world, and did word-search puzzles on the names of musicians. Rather, we would expect the student to work directly with the theory and performance of music in a variety of forms and at consistently escalating levels of complexity. We would expect the young pianist to be learning how a musician thinks and works, and to be developing a clear sense of her own movement toward expert-level performance in piano. Completing word-search puzzles, building musical instruments and reading about oddities in the lives of composers may be novel, may be “enriching,”(and certainly seems lacking in coherent scope and sequence, and therefore sounds piecemeal). But those things will not foster high-level talent development in music. The same hold true for math, history, science, and so on.

It’s Actually Simple—In Theory

What it takes to teach gifted learners well is actually a little common sense. It begins with the premise that each child should come to school to stretch and grow daily. It includes the expectation that the measure of progress and growth is competition with oneself rather than competition against others. It resides in the notion that educators understand key concepts, principles and skills of subject domains, and present those in ways that cause highly able students to wonder and grasp, and extend their reach. And it envisions schooling as an escalator on which students continually progress, rather than a series of stairs, with landings on which advanced learners consistently wait.

It's not so hard to articulate. It's fiendishly difficult to achieve in schools where standardization is the norm, and where teachers are supported in being recipe followers, rather than flexible and reflective artisans. In schools where responsive instruction is a carefully supported indicator of professional growth, the capacity to extend even the most capable mind is a benchmark of success.
Appendix E: Assessing Classroom Differentiation Protocol – Revised
Preparation: Before doing the observation, the observer will contact the teacher to find a time that is convenient for the observation. The following will need to be arranged before the observation date:

- Permission to observe from teacher
- Copy of lesson plan - let the teacher know in advance what types of things to include or if there is a particular format to use
- Teacher will visually identify targeted group of students in classroom (with color-coded name tags or teacher’s chosen strategy)
- Teacher is made aware that there is a brief (5 minutes or so) pre-observation interview, and a short post-observation debriefing.
- Pre-Observation Interview - Review Lesson Plan before the interview. For the interview, use questions/record answers on the ACD Scoring Form - This is an informal interview that is merely to gain essential descriptive information in order to inform the observation.
- Classroom Observation and Scoring - Use the Instructional Activity Codes below and on the next page to assist in recording what is seen in the observation during 5 - 10 minute segments. Use the ACD Scoring Form to record the codes and assessments. There are other questions on the Scoring Form to complete during this phase as well.
- Post-Observation Debriefing - Follow directions on the ACD Scoring Form
- Reflection - Add final comments after leaving the classroom.

**Codes for Levels of Engagement, Activity, Learning Director, & Classroom Management**
These are global ratings for each 5-minute segment. Thus, each segment will have only one rating for each of these domains, the rating that is most representative of that time period for that group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>Pace of Instruction</th>
<th>Cognitive Activity</th>
<th>&quot;Learning Director&quot;</th>
<th>Classroom Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L – Low engagement = 20% or fewer of students engaged in learning</td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>Who directs the learning, or makes the decisions about the learning activities. Use this scale for making your segment ratings for the identified groups: 1 – Teacher directs all learning. 2 – Teacher directs most learning. 3 – Teacher and student share learning decisions 4 – Student directs most learning 5 – Student directs all learning</td>
<td>Students were on task and productive. Group procedures were clear, established, and understood by the students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M – Moderate engagement = 21 – 79% of students engaged in learning</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H – High engagement = 80% or more students engaged in learning</td>
<td>Apply</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ratings are made in each segment following the given scale: 1 – Not evident 2 – Evident 3 – Well-represented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five-Ten Minute Segment Scoring Codes (use ACD Scoring Form)

During the observation period, please indicate for each 5-10 minute segment which of the following instructional activities listed below were in practice. There will be at least one per segment, and each segment will likely have more than one. The segment ratings should be marked separately for the two groups of students: “Identified” and “Not identified.” In the event that there is no way to distinguish between the two groups, make whole-group ratings in the “Not Identified” group location only. If the entire class has been identified as having high ability in the general intellectual domain and/or in the particular subject being observed, record the observations in the “Identified” group location. Feel free to make a note on what the activity was.

In addition to the instructional activities, please also rate student engagement, cognitive level, “Learning Director,” and classroom management for each 5-10 minute segment.

### Instructional Activity Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Activity - How</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture /Teacher Presentation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Teacher presenting to group of students; teacher demonstrating how to execute a task (e.g., working a math problem on board, how to use lab equipment); teacher may ask some questions of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Discussion with whole class, students are primary discussants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Led Presentation, Demonstration, Drama, or Discussion</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Student(s) presenting information to the class (either planned presentation or on-demand task), demonstrating how to do a task, or leading the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Responding</td>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Student(s) answering questions posed by teacher (e.g. spelling bee, review questions, working problems at the board, choral response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Work</td>
<td>GW</td>
<td>Students working in small groups; could be discussing, working on academic assignments, or on a cooperative task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulatives or Hands-On</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student(s) working with concrete materials to illustrate abstract concepts (e.g., math blocks, science models)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Graphic Organizers or Other Visuals</td>
<td>GO</td>
<td>Student(s) using visual tools to illustrate concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Differentiated by Readiness</td>
<td>ADR</td>
<td>Student(s) working with planned activities differentiated according to level of readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Other</td>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Student(s) working with activities possibly differentiated by interest or learning style, but not necessarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat work-Individual student</td>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>Student(s) working at desk on academic materials (independently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interacting with individual student</td>
<td>TIS</td>
<td>Teacher working with/talking to/helping individual student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interacting with small group</td>
<td>TIG</td>
<td>Teacher working with/talking to/helping small group of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology use-Students</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Technology being used by students for related learning activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology use-Teacher</td>
<td>TT</td>
<td>Technology being used by the teacher for presenting instructional content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment by Teacher</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher is monitoring/ assessing student work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment activity</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Student(s) engaged in a formalized assessment activity (e.g., test; performance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>List “other” activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Instructional Activity - What

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Activity - What</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Choice</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Student(s) can select topic, resource, activity, product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Study</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Student(s) do independent investigations and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Audiences</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Student(s) present to/prepare for outside reviewers or audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Content</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Content is advanced, e.g. from supplementary materials, above grade level, from primary sources, not adopted texts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Assessing Classroom Differentiation Scoring Form - Revision for Field Study

**Teacher**__  **Date/Time**__  **Observer**__  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time segment</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pace of Instruction</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Activity</th>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Apply</th>
<th>Analyze</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Create</th>
<th>Learning Director</th>
<th>Classroom Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Not Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
<th>L M H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pace of Instruction</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
<td>S R F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Pre-Observation Interview (Attach the lesson plan to this form)

1. Were students in this class pre-assigned in accordance with their academic ability or achievement level?________
2. If students in this class have been identified as having High Ability (or G/T) or as having an Individual Education Plan for special education services, is the teacher licensed in that area? _______ If yes, which area?________
3. Are the materials to be used in this lesson for high ability students written above grade level?_______ Are any of the standards to be addressed in this lesson above grade level standards?_______
4. Who developed this lesson? __ This teacher or __ Other: ____________________ How closely will you be following the pre-designed lesson plan?
5. Are differentiation strategies being used so that different students have different levels of activities, directions, or expectations?  
   __ Yes (multiple identified students) 
   __ Yes (single identified student) 
   __ Yes (not related to identified status, but current skill level) 
   __ Yes (IEP-determined) 
   __ No (all students are completing the same activities) 

6. Has any of this lesson been compacted for any child? If so, please explain the alternate learning activities that are substituting for the lesson.

7. Were students pre-assessed for content knowledge so that some will not be participating in this content?

8. What are the goals/objectives of this lesson?

9. Anything else the teacher wants to add before the observation:

Classroom Observation - Use Form Above with Coded Segments

1. Total number of students: __________ Number from identified group: _______ 

2. List additional adults in room, including time in room, role, and number of children served:

At the conclusion of the segment ratings, complete the following items, PRIOR TO the teacher debriefing. 

3. Describe how grouping (if any) occurred in this classroom:

4. Did the teacher demonstrate high level content knowledge for the lesson topic?  __Yes ___No 

5. Were differentiated practices used in the classroom for Identified and Not-Identified students?  __ Yes ___ No 

Post-Observation Debriefing & Reflection

Debriefing with Teacher - Thank the teacher for the observation period, and use this last segment of approximately 5 minutes to clarify anything observed. Then, ask the teacher: Is there anything you wanted to add regarding the observation before I leave? (take detailed notes)

Final Reflection - After leaving the classroom, take a couple of minutes to make any other written comments that will help you remember what you saw or make the observation more contextually-based or comprehensive. Such issues may include the tone, demeanor, or attitude of the teacher and/or students.

NOTE: This is a Field Study Edition. We are interested in your feedback to make this both reflective of good practice and a useful tool for improvement of instruction. Contact us at klspeirsneum@bsu.edu
Appendix F: IDOE High Ability Data Card with 2015 Data
Demographics and High Ability for 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent for All Indiana</th>
<th>Paid</th>
<th>Free or Reduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent for District</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number High Ability</td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of High Ability</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent for All Indiana

- Paid: 52%
- Free or Reduced: 48%

Percent for District

- Paid: 85%
- Free or Reduced: 15%

Percent of High Ability

- Paid: 94%
- Free or Reduced: 6%
Evidence of Student Achievement for 2015
for M S D Southwest Allen County Schls

% High Ability Attaining Pass Plus on ISTEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the percentage of HA students in each grade that did NOT attain Pass Plus in Math or in Language Arts. If the percentage is higher than 10%, it is highlighted in yellow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>32.68</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>28.26</td>
<td>46.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>18.10</td>
<td>28.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>30.57</td>
<td>28.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>28.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>31.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Evidence of Acceleration and Achievement for MSD Southwest Allen County Schls

#### Advanced Placement Performance - Evidence of College Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of HA students taking an AP exam</th>
<th>Percent of HA students taking an AP exam</th>
<th>Number of HA with 3, 4, or 5 on AP exam</th>
<th>Pass rate for HA taking AP exams</th>
<th>Percent of all HA scoring 3, 4, or 5 on AP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As reported in DOE AO files
** From AP files

#### Overall District AP Performance

- Percentage of HA graduates with an AP of 3, 4, or 5 during high school: 82%
- Percentage of all district graduates with an AP of 3, 4, 5 during high school: 38%
- Percentage of Indiana graduates with an AP of 3, 4, 5 during high school: 19%
- Percentage of USA graduates with an AP of 3, 4, 5 during high school: 22%

#### High Ability Students Scoring at 8th and 9th Stanines on PSAT, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of HA students taking PSAT in Grade 10</th>
<th>Average Evidenced-Based Reading and Writing Score for HA 10th Grade</th>
<th>Percentage of HA at 89th Percentile for Evidenced Based Reading and Writing (590)</th>
<th>Percentage of HA at 96th Percentile for Evidenced Based Reading and Writing (640)</th>
<th>Average Math Score for HA students in Grade 10</th>
<th>Percentage of HA at 89th Percentile for Math (580)</th>
<th>Percentage of HA at 96th Percentile for Math (640)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>608.30</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### High Ability Students Receiving Academic Honors Diploma, 2015

- Total HA Enrollment Grade 12: 257
- Number of HA Grads earning an Academic Honors Diploma: 210
- Percent of HA Grads earning an Academic Honors Diploma: 82%

Note: Caution is warranted when interpreting percentages in cases where the number of identified students is small.