Gifted Program Review Update

Presented to the School Board
July 15, 2025

Board Grounding

- Committee was brought together this spring to give feedback to administration on current gifted programming

- Tonight is an update on the committees' work and findings

- Next step is for an internal team to explore and refine gifted programming for the future

- Future updates will be provided to the board

Gifted Program Review Committee

This volunteer committee met 5 times this spring. Representatives included:

- Families of cluster and GATE students
- Teachers
- Principals
- School board members

Included Special Education, multilingual learning, and Spanish immersion

21 committee members

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public Participation Model for the Stillwater Area Public Schools

Our learning community is committed to building positive relationships, and engaging with our stakeholders is an essential part of our mission. The school board has adopted a Community Engagement Model to guide its work. While we will most often consult and involve, different decisions will fall within different areas of this spectrum. This model allows the district to clearly define community engagement for large-scale decisions.

Increasing Level of Community Impact

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Our Goal	To provide our community members with information related to our schools and our district	To gather public feedback on school and district issues	To work with our community members to ensure their concerns and desires are understood and considered	To partner with our community members in developing options and identifying preferred solutions	To place final decision-making in the hands of our community members
Our Promise	We will keep our stakeholders informed	We will listen and acknowledge our stakeholders' concerns, and consider their new ideas	We will work with stakeholders to reflect their feedback in decision-making	We will seek advice, and incorporate ideas, from our stakeholders into the decision-making process to the maximum extent possible	We will implement decisions made by our stakeholders
Our Methods (examples)	· District and school newsletters · Factsheets and brochures · Websites · Social media · Open houses	· Listening sessions · Public forums · Community leader forums · Surveys and focus groups · Public meetings	· Community Conversations · Deliberative polling · Cross-district teams	· Advisory committees	· Referendums/ elections

Based on the International Association for Public Participation's (iap2) Spectrum for Public Participation

Committee Goals & Desired Outcomes

- Explore our current service model

- Review data around gifted education and share observations

- Provide meaningful feedback to leadership around:
  - Identification process
  - Differentiation and acceleration model
  - Overall learning experiences
  - Social emotional support
  - Etc.

Goal:
Ensure our program meets the needs of all students

Superintendent Guidance

Key Questions:

- How can we improve our program to meet gifted students' academic and cognitive needs more effectively?

- As we review the current vertical plan for talent development, in what manner can we improve this?

- How can we improve our support of gifted students' social-emotional well-being?

- As you'll see, the demographic makeup of the program is not consistent with our district population. What are your thoughts and strategies to address this?

Expect More.

Review Of Programming

Current Gifted Programming

Grades 4-5

- Cluster model at each elementary

- Self-contained school-within-a-school experience at Stillwater Middle

Grades 6-8

- Students are clustered in honor classes in math or language arts or both

- Opportunities for subject-specific acceleration

Grades 9-12

- Advanced Placement

- Credit by Assessment

- Concurrent Enrollment; College in the Schools

- PSEO

Goals of Gifted Programming

To address the needs of gifted learners, committee members said effective programming should focus on:

1. **Academic & Cognitive Development:**
   - Personalized and challenging curriculum
   - Differentiation by subject area and individual ability
   - Open-ended learning opportunities encouraging discourse and engagement

2. **Social-Emotional Growth:**
   - Growth mindset development
   - Support for anxiety, self-confidence, and fear of failure
   - SEL (Social Emotional Learning) integrated into programming

3. **Long-Term Readiness & Equity:**
   - Equitable entry points and multiple access pathways
   - Sustainable and scalable programming with clear structure and resources
   - Opportunities for gifted students to interact with a broad peer group

Vision for the Future

Ideal Programming for All Students Should Include:

- Flexible, equitable differentiation

- Multiple entry points to acceleration across subjects

- Varied and accessible enrichment options

- Robust SEL embedded and personalized for GT students

Identification System Must:

- Be inclusive, multi-dimensional, and ongoing

- Balance achievement with ability, objectivity with teacher insight

- Reflect diverse strengths, not just standardized scores

Gaps & Challenges

Gaps & Challenges: Identification

DEFINITION:

Process to identify students in order to determine the best programming to support their learning.

- Unequal, late, and narrow—mostly test-based (CogAT, FastBridge), missing teacher input, SEL, and non-academic gifts (leadership, arts).

- Universal screening alone is not enough to ensure equitable access—barriers persist for students of color, multilingual learners, and low-income students.

  - Underidentification = boredom, acting out, lost potential.

  - Overidentification = stress, anxiety, mislabeling, academic mismatch.

Gaps & Challenges: Differentiation

DEFINITION:

Experiences in which the approach or method of learning is adapted to meet the individual needs of students

- Inconsistent and teacher-dependent, especially in elementary.

- GATE focuses on differentiation in math but is inconsistent in other subjects.

- Curriculum is not systematized; planning and delivery varies widely.

- Need for centralized resources, built-in curriculum, and professional development.

Gaps & Challenges: Acceleration

DEFINITION:

Progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional.

- Lacks clear, equitable identification standards and supports.

- Early/elementary acceleration is rare and needs to be more flexible and inclusive.

- Students would benefit from options to demonstrate mastery beyond tests.

Gaps & Challenges: Enrichment

DEFINITION:

Supplemental learning opportunities that go beyond the standard curriculum; allows students to develop interests and talents.

- Inconsistent access and offerings across buildings.

- Desire for interest-based, opt-in activities available during the school day.

- Equity challenges around after-school programming: Community Education vs. district offerings.

- Opportunities for parent and community involvement and volunteer coordination.

Gaps & Challenges: Social Emotional Supports

DEFINITION:

Practices, systems, and relationships that help all students develop emotional management skills, social skills and situational awareness, and academic achievement and habits.

- Inconsistent implementation district-wide—more systematic in elementary, less aligned in secondary

- GT students can struggle with perfectionism, growth mindset, peer relationships, and executive functioning

Highlights from Other Districts

Minnetonka - Site Visit
- Separate identification and programming for ability vs. achievement
- Multiple tiers of programming at the elementary level
- Seminar programming at middle school along with acceleration

South Washington County
- Moving towards a talent development framework for all students, not just gifted students
- Adaptive model of service with more on-ramps based in MTSS
- Use multiple measures for identification, portfolio assessment, parent interviews

North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale
- Moving away from Young Scholars program
- Strengthening Tier 1 instruction and providing coaching for differentiation
- Acceleration pathways with multiple on-ramps, particularly at middle school

Rosemount-Apple Valley
- Flux and transformation
- Moving toward talent development with more push-in support
- New superintendent and gifted staff

Wayzata
- Flux and transformation
- Working to address gaps in identification

Commonalities:

- Addressing gaps in identification

- Building teacher capacity to differentiate in the classroom

- Working toward a tiered approach to services (all/some/few)

Next Steps

Internal team will work to create a gifted program model that:

- Continues to work to close identified gaps

- Promotes equity and access

- Aligns with district values, goals, financial reality and operational capacity

Internal team will explore and refine program components:

- Identification process

- Social emotional support

- Consistent differentiation, acceleration, and enrichment practices

- Age-appropriate, vertically-aligned of support and programming across grade levels

- Professional learning needs

- Curriculum resources for enrichment and acceleration

- Continue to build principals' and Teaching and Learning capacity to lead this work

Questions