

March 26, 2021

Dear MISD K-5 Families,

Last night at the School Board meeting, our department shared some changes our District is implementing beginning this spring - specifically the ways in which we provide services to students. In alignment with our District values and our commitment to equity and inclusion, we are shifting away from "programs" and moving towards "services." This includes our current "Highly Capable Program," "Compass Program," "Personalized Learning Program," and "Resource Program." We are moving to provide services to students who qualify through the least restrictive environment - general education classrooms.

We realize that these significant changes are welcome and overdue by some and frustrating and disappointing by others - change is never easy. We believe we have incredible educators with a wealth of knowledge and experiences that when shared with colleagues will improve the learning opportunities for ALL students. This includes staff who are experts in social-emotional learning, adaptive learning, academic supports, gifted/highly capable learning, curriculum and assessment, and content and pedagogy. We want to facilitate and support the professional learning of all staff to provide the most inclusive opportunities for our students.

Information about the changes will be shared as details are solidified. The Special Services Team will be providing additional information about the shifts in special education services, but we want to take this opportunity to outline the changes and details we have thus far for highly capable services.

Please note that the testing process and service delivery model for our Primary Enrichment Services is not changing, nor is the service delivery model for current students identified for highly capable services in grades 3-11. The testing and identification process has changed for all students in grades 2-11 and the service delivery model will begin a rolling shift with students entering grade 3 in the 2021-2022 school year.

IDENTIFICATION PROCESS:

The Highly Capable Advisory Committee revised the identification process for students who will receive services and these changes go into effect with the spring testing administration. We added an element of assessing students' creative thinking by using the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) and we added the science portion of the Iowa Assessment. Testing will now occur in two phases:

Phase 1: TTCT & CogAT test administration

Then a robust Multidisciplinary Committee (MDC) will review the results in addition to other data points such as special services, home language, aimsweb+ data, etc., and make recommendations for students who should move to the second phase of assessment.

Phase 2: Iowa Assessments in math, reading, and science test administration

The MDC will then review all of the data again and make determinations about if/which highly capable services are appropriate for each student.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Originally, our intention was to convene the Highly Capable Advisory following the assessments and identification process to determine how to best provide the identified services; however, an opportunity arose as a result of a confluence of different factors including staffing, our focus and work on equity and inclusion, the shifts occurring in Special Services, and the shift in the identification process for highly capable services. As a leadership team (inclusive of District and building leaders), we determined the time was right to make a shift, and based on the timing of upcoming assessments and meetings, we needed to roll out communication about the change as soon as possible. Thus, elementary principals shared with staff on Thursday morning, we shared with the Board Thursday evening, and all elementary families are receiving this message today. Additionally, we will post updates to the District website and Highly Capable webpage as they are available. If you want to know where to find the most up-to-date information, please visit the [HiCap webpage](#) as it will be updated as additional information and decisions are made.

In short, the changes to the service delivery model are highlighted below:

- Students in grade 3 will remain at their neighborhood schools to receive HiCap services beginning in the 2021-2022 school year.
- Students in grades 4 & 5 next year will continue with their current service delivery model and each year we will roll up one grade.
- Julie Newcomer will become the Inclusion and Integration Coach and her time will be devoted to providing professional learning, calibration, and support for the 3rd-grade team next year.
- We created a [7:40 minute video](#) that explains the changes both to the identification process and to the service delivery model.

As you can imagine, there are many moving pieces at this time and we don't yet have all the answers. Now is the time to hear some of the amazing ideas that our staff have about how we can meet this exciting challenge! The Highly Capable Advisory Committee will begin collaborating to identify the needs and ways in which services can be delivered within the general education classrooms and we hope to learn from the incredible expertise of our current HiCap teachers as they partner with our Inclusion and Integration Coach, other instructional coaches, grade-level staff, special services staff, and building and District leaders to help identify and design curriculum, instructional strategies, and supports that serve students with highly capable needs within heterogeneous classes.

As a district, our values include:

- Supporting the whole child
- Creating inclusive and equitable learning settings
- Ensuring our school communities are safe and supportive
- Providing rigorous and challenging learning for all students

Additionally, we are committed to seeking inclusion and equity for all students. Thus, we cannot pick and choose which services we apply our values and actions to; we must universally apply them in order to serve all students.

We are excited for us to align our values and actions and we realize we will face challenges along the way. We truly believe that through collaboration, professional learning, and a commitment to serving all students we will create opportunities to provide every student with the services and supports they need and deserve.

Sincerely,
The MISD Learning Services Team