

Discovery Charter School High Ability Program Plan

Indiana Department of Education Definition of a High Ability Student

“High Ability Student’ means a student who performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests.” [IC 20-36-1-3]

Identification of Students for High Ability Services at Discovery Charter School

Following the guidelines of the Indiana Department of Education, students are identified for high ability services using a “multifaceted assessment”, including potential-based and performance-based evaluations, plus other qualitative measures as indicated.

The assessments used at Discovery Charter School are:

Norm-referenced aptitude measure: CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test)

Norm-referenced achievement measure: Renaissance Star Assessments in Early Literacy (Kindergarten) or in Reading and Math (Grades 1-8)

Qualitative Indicators: Teacher Observations; Student Portfolio (when indicated)

Annual Screening for High Ability Students – K, 2nd, 5th

Each year in the spring all students in Kindergarten, 2nd Grade, and 5th Grade will be screened for high ability potential and considered for high ability services in the following school year. All students in those grades will be given the CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) or the CogAT Screener (a shortened version) in January/February. In addition, national percentile ranks will be obtained for all Spring Renaissance Star scores in Early Literacy (K) or Math and Reading. All students who perform at or above the 96th percentile nationally on either the CogAT Verbal or Quantitative/Nonverbal composite, all students who perform at or above the 96th percentile nationally on either of the Renaissance Star achievement tests, all students who are currently identified for high ability services, and all students who have been nominated by a parent, guardian or teacher for high ability consideration are considered to constitute the screening pool of students for that grade level.

The High Ability Identification Committee then requests a teacher observation for each student in the grade level screening pool. In addition, they may request student work samples (portfolio), or other information about a student’s potential or performance. At this point the committee will decide whether to calculate local norms, if indicated. The committee makes the final identification decisions based on the preponderance of evidence – achievement testing, aptitude testing, and qualitative indicators - for each student.

Because the state requires that schools identify and serve high ability students as early as their Kindergarten year, a number of Kindergarten students begin services with the High Ability Teacher ahead of the spring identification process outlined above. Identification of these Kindergarten students typically occurs in the winter following CogAT testing, and relies more heavily on teacher recommendations, supplemented by winter Renaissance Star results.

Annual review of High Ability students - Grades 1, 3, 4, 6, 7

The High Ability Identification Committee also reviews identified students in grades 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 at the end of each school year. In addition, a student not in the screening year grades may be nominated for consideration by a teacher, parent, or guardian (see below). The student screening pool in these grade levels includes all currently identified students and all students nominated by a teacher, parent, or guardian. Spring Renaissance Star achievement scores are reviewed, and the HA Identification Committee may decide to administer CogAT testing to a particular student or grade level, and/or to request teacher observations. There are times when it is determined that a student no longer fits the profile for high ability identification at their grade level, and they will not be identified for the following year.

Nominating a Student for High Ability

A teacher, parent, or guardian may nominate a student to be considered for high ability identification. There are two times a year when such nominations are invited:

1. Fall Nomination Window: Students New to Discovery

A nomination window is opened in the fall for teachers and parents or guardians to nominate students new to Discovery. Those students will be given the CogAT if there are no such scores in their files, and their Fall Renaissance Star scores will be evaluated, along with teacher observations, by the High Ability Identification Committee. The party who nominates the student will be advised of the committee's decision.

2. Spring Nomination Window

For students NOT in a screening year (students currently in 1st, 3rd, 4th 6th, and 7th grades): The spring nomination window provides an opportunity for teachers and parents or guardians to nominate a student who is not in a screening year to be considered for high ability identification. Their Spring Renaissance Star scores will be examined, and additional data (CogAT scores, teacher observations, or other information about student performance) may be collected as determined by the HA Identification Committee. Nominated students will be reviewed along with those in their grade level who are currently identified and receiving services. From this screening pool, the HA Identification Committee will identify students for high ability services for the following school year.

For students in a screening year (K, 2nd, and 5th): Nomination by a teacher, parent, or guardian is not necessary for these students to receive CogAT testing and to be considered for the screening pool for their grade level. Each year, all students in these grade levels are screened. If a teacher, parent, or guardian feels they have information that will contribute to the evaluation of the student, they are invited to submit a nomination regardless of whether the student is in a screening year or not.

High Ability Selection

After all assessments have been administered the High Ability Identification Committee will meet to consider the preponderance of evidence for each child with regard to his or her eligibility for high ability services at Discovery. In general, students who score in the 96th percentile or higher on the CogAT and Renaissance Star achievement test, based on national norms, will qualify for high ability services. There may be some cases in which the Discovery population does not reflect the national population, and the High Ability Identification Committee will elect to calculate the local norms for that testing group. In that case, a student may fall in the 96th percentile based on national norms, but may not fall in the 96th percentile based on local norms. It is important to understand that the focus of identifying high ability students is to identify those who are performing at or who demonstrate the potential to perform at an outstanding level above their peers.

Student aptitude and achievement are considered in two academic domains: Math and English/Language Arts. A student may be identified in one domain or the other, or both, and services will be provided accordingly.

High Ability Identification Committee

The High Ability Identification Committee takes responsibility for making decisions about the identification of students for HA services at Discovery Charter School. It normally includes the HA Coordinator, HA teacher, a school administrator, and a teacher representative from each of the following: K-grade 1, grades 2-3, grades 4-5, and Middle School (grades 6-8).

Appeal Process

An appeal process is in place in the event the High Ability Identification Committee does not place a child in services and a teacher, parent, or guardian challenges this decision. The following steps clarify the appeal process.

1. The petitioner contacts the High Ability Coordinator who then provides an Appeal Request Form.
2. The Appeal Request Form is completed and delivered to the High Ability Coordinator.
3. The High Ability Coordinator reviews the student profile and may request:
 - a. Approved classroom work samples

- b. Alternative assessments
 - c. Other valid indicators of student's ability/potential
4. The High Ability Identification Committee convenes to consider new data. This meeting may include an interview with the student and /or petitioners.
 5. High Ability Coordinator reports results to petitioner.

Exit Procedure

If a parent or guardian believes a high ability placement for services is no longer appropriate, he or she may contact the teacher providing services or the high ability coordinator to express their concerns. A meeting will be convened to hear the concerns and decide on appropriate steps. If a determination is made that high ability identification and/or high ability services are no longer appropriate, the parent or guardian will sign permission to remove the student from identification and/or services.

If the teacher providing services believes a high ability placement for services is no longer appropriate, he or she may contact the high ability coordinator to express his or her concerns. Some examples of the reasons for questioning the appropriateness of high ability identification and/or services include:

- Younger students may not be appropriately placed simply because it is more difficult to assess their potential or their readiness.
- A student may be struggling with behavioral or other concerns that prevent him or her from benefiting from the services offered.
- A student's behavior issues may affect the ability of other students in the group to benefit from services.
- A student is not benefiting from services because others in the group are progressing at a much faster rate.

The HA coordinator and HA teacher will examine the issues of concern and discuss interventions that may be implemented, and a timeframe for their implementation. The parent or guardian of the student will be notified of the concerns and any interventions that are being implemented. At the end of the intervention timeframe, the teacher will meet with the HA Identification Committee to determine a course of action. If removal from services is deemed appropriate, the parent or guardian will be notified, and the student will be removed from identification and/or services.

Curriculum and Instruction Plan

High Ability Services at Discovery Charter School

The Indiana Administrative Code for High Ability Students recommends for high ability students “educational services differentiated in depth and breadth designed to meet the needs of one or more high ability students through activities such as compacting, acceleration, enrichment, problem solving, and creative thinking.” Schools are empowered to make local decisions about the best method(s) to deliver services to their students.

The foundation of Discovery Charter School’s high ability services is the availability of instruction by a teacher on staff with high ability licensure. The high ability teacher generally meets with identified students twice weekly in their area(s) of strength. He or she works to meet the needs of high ability students through curriculum which emphasizes greater sophistication in the material, encourages critical thinking skills, and exposes students to more advanced skills. Also encouraged are individual projects, learning centers in the classrooms with activities to promote critical thinking, and the use of technology to expose students to more advanced skills, additional sources of information, and additional ways to share their learning, and to track their progress.

Grade level cluster grouping is implemented in Grades 3, 4, and 5. Discovery has embraced cluster grouping as a model that benefits all students within a grade level by increasing teacher effectiveness, as it narrows the range of ability groups in any single classroom. High ability students benefit from being clustered together where the classroom teacher may provide materials or projects designed for their ability level.

The high ability teacher provides assistance to classroom teachers with high ability students in implementing differentiated instruction and in finding appropriate materials and projects to challenge high ability students in their classrooms.

Counseling and Guidance Plan

Classroom teachers, the high ability teacher, the student services specialist, the high ability coordinator, and school administrators are all expected to have an understanding of special social and emotional issues that may be more common among high ability students. These may include perfectionism, acting out because of boredom, difficulty relating to grade level peers, and extra sensitivity, among others.

The high ability teacher and student services specialist are expected to be aware of resources to help teachers, parents, and students understand and address issues that high ability students may be facing. These include books as well as resources from organizations such as SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted), the NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children), IAG (Indiana Association for the Gifted), and others. Discovery Charter School has a library of resources concerning the special needs of high ability students, and it is available to parents, students, and teachers.

Professional Development Plan

Discovery Charter School places a high priority on providing continuing education opportunities to teachers and staff who work with high ability students. The school's current high ability teacher has completed the coursework to attain her high ability licensure. In addition, the high ability teacher, along with the student services specialist, the high ability coordinator, and classroom teachers with high ability clusters in their classrooms have all continued to participate in conferences, workshops, and meetings designed to help school staff better provide for the needs of high ability students. In addition, school administrators encourage other teachers to participate in professional development related to high ability, with special attention to teachers new to the school.

High Ability Committee – 2021-22

Deb Weller, High Ability Coordinator

Melissa Westphal, High Ability Teacher

Pamela Moore, Principal

Alana Murray, classroom teacher, K-1

Allison DeFrain, classroom teacher, 2-3

Jennifer Tuck, classroom teacher, 4-5

Nathan Underwood, classroom teacher, middle school