

Merrillville Community School Corporation

High Ability Program Handbook



Mission Statement

Merrillville Community School Corporation

- Creates quality learning experiences by setting standards that engage students to reach their highest potential;
- Provides learning environments that are enhanced through meaningful relationships that give students a global perspective;
- Empowers students to believe they can be successful.

Program Design

Definition of High Ability

The Indiana Code defines a student with high abilities as one 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).

Objective

It is the objective of the Merrillville Community School Corporation to meet every student where they are and to help them advance as far as they can in their learning. We recognize that high ability students, found in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic populations, have unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs. As such, these learners will require differentiated curriculum and instruction in order to reach their potential.

Identification Process

The purpose of identification is to provide the appropriate academic placement or services needed for the student. Students identified as high ability in Indiana must be provided appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction. In the primary grades, some students enter school with strong school readiness having had many opportunities to learn. These students may already be reading and be comfortable in a school environment. Later, other students with high ability may catch up in their school related skills and even surpass those with an early advantage. Development plays an important role at the primary level. Motivation and hard work can also propel student achievement for those with high ability. Therefore, students must be evaluated at strategic points in their development in order to make the most appropriate academic placement decisions for those who “perform at or show the potential for performing at an outstanding level when compared with others of the same age, experience, or environment” (Indiana Department of Education, 2019).

- **Assessments**
 - ✓ **Cognitive Abilities Test (full CogAt) (Kdg. – 6th)**
 - ✓ **I-Ready (Kdg. – 6th)**
 - ✓ **ILEARN (Elementary, Intermediate & Middle School)**

Elementary: All students in grades K, 2, and 4 will be given the CogAt pre-screener. Students who score in the 90th percentile of the CogAt pre-screener will be given the full battery. The middle of the year (MOY) iReady Diagnostic Test for both math and language arts will also be utilized.

A student will qualify as high ability if they meet ONE or more of the following requirements:

- score in the 96th percentile of the iReady math diagnostic;
- score in the 96th percentile of the iReady reading diagnostic;
- score in the 96th percentile of the CogAt full battery on the Verbal subtest;
- score in the 96th percentile of the CogAt full battery on the Quantitative subtest;
- score in the 96th percentile of the CogAt full battery the Quantitative/Nonverbal Composite.

Note: Students, who score in the 94th percentile in at least two of these measures, will be considered after collecting qualitative data from the teacher. Qualitative data will be collected using the Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS). Students may qualify as high ability in language arts, math, or general intelligence. In addition, other supporting data may be considered as needed: Lexile Level, ILEARN scores, and teacher recommendation based on classroom data.

Middle School: Students, who earn an “above proficiency” on the Indiana Learning Evaluation Assessment Readiness Network (ILEARN) Math test and/or the English Language Arts test in seventh grade, will be invited to take advanced classes (Honors Integrated Math I and/or Honors English 9) in the eighth grade. This class’s membership is not limited to high ability students.

High School: Students, who score in the 96th percentile on the PSAT, will be invited to participate in honors and advanced placement. The membership of these classes are not limited to high ability students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Grades: 1st – 2nd Identified high ability students will be placed in a cluster group in the same homeroom class. The homeroom teacher will differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students in the class. The high ability cluster of students will be placed in a class that is comprised of other students in the average ability range and slightly below average ability range. The high ability cluster will not be placed in the same classroom as the *above proficiency* cluster or the *below proficiency* cluster.

Grades: 3rd – 4th If there are least fifteen students in the grade level cohort group, the identified students will be invited to attend the high ability class, which will be housed at one of the k-4 buildings. If the grade level cohort is less than fifteen students district-wide, students will be clustered in their home schools as in grades 1-2 or a multi-age high ability class may be created if feasible with regard to numbers.

Grades: 5th – 6th Identified High Ability students will be clustered together and move throughout their core classes as a cohort group.

Grades: 7th – 8th Identified High Ability students will have the opportunity to participate in honors and pre-AP classes.

Grades: 9th – 12th Identified High Ability students will have the opportunity to participate in honors, AP, and dual credit classes. They will take classes on track to earn the Academic Honors Diploma.

New Students

Students who move into the district between testing periods, will be placed in the high ability program if the family is able to produce the student's previous test scores, and they would qualify under the MCSC criteria. Participation in a different school district's high ability program does NOT necessarily guarantee that the student will qualify in the MCSC program.

Guidance and Counseling

The Merrillville Community School Corporation acknowledges that gifted students have unique social and emotional needs, and counselors and social workers are available in each school to support these diverse needs.

Appeals Process

Parents may appeal a decision to qualify a student for high ability services by writing a letter to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction or the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction and explaining the reason for the appeal. Members of the identification team will meet to re-examine the test data, and other qualitative information to determine if the student qualifies for the program based on the qualifications stated above. The parents will be contacted with the results of the identification team's decision.

Withdrawal Process

Once a student has qualified as “high ability,” they will remain in the program unless the student begins to struggle with the placement. At that time, a meeting with the parent(s)/guardian(s), school administrator and teacher will be held, and an intervention plan will be created, implemented, and assessed. If, after five weeks, the student continues to struggle with the placement, another meeting will be held, and the student’s placement may be changed.

Professional Development

As part of the High Ability Grant, teachers who are working with high ability students will be offered professional development opportunities to continuously inform them of best practices and improve learning for high ability students.

Program Evaluation

Internal evaluation of the MCSC high ability program will occur annually. Feedback through surveys of students, teachers, and parents, will be used to determine the program strengths and needs in the following areas: student progress; program design; student needs; learning environment; program goals and curriculum; student identification; personnel qualifications; resources and effectiveness.

High Ability Resources

Indiana Department of Education

<http://www.doe.in.gov/achievement/individualized-learning/office-high-ability-education>

Indiana Department of Education Gifted Resource Guide

<http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/individualized-learning/indiana-association-giftedresource-guide.pdf>

Indiana Department of Education – Guiding Students with High Abilities: Social and Emotional Considerations <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/individualized-learning/guiding-students-high-abilities-social-and-emotional-considerations.pdf>

National Association for Gifted Children <http://nagc.org/>

College Board <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/Controller.jspf>