**Developing a Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning**

Prepared by Northwestern University Center for Talent Development

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# The Need for a Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning

Students have varied learning and developmental needs, which may extend beyond grade-level standards and content, require different forms of intervention to support achievement and growth, and change over time. A continuum of services allows educators and administrators to provide optimally matched services and learning environments to meet those varied needs from early childhood through high school. Using a continuum of services also aligns with DESE’s educational vision and strategic objective for supporting development of the whole student, which focuses on “creating affirming environments where students have a sense of belonging, engage in deeper learning, and are held to high expectations with targeted support” (DESE, 2023, p. 5).

# Talent Development Framework and Centering Equity

## The Talent Development Framework

Talent development refers to the deliberate cultivation of knowledge and capabilities in specific domains and a framework for designing educational programs and services that address academics, psychosocial skills, and social-emotional needs. It is grounded in the idea that talent development occurs over time and that student needs, growth trajectories, and domains of ability vary, necessitating a range of rigorous enrichment and accelerated learning and support services. This range of services must be articulated—systematically and continuously—to help as many students as possible reach their full potential.

Talent development demands that we place emphasis on providing rich learning opportunities for all students, not just students who come to school already demonstrating advanced abilities or who have had greater access to formal learning opportunities. The grade-level classroom must be a place where the strengths and interests of each child can be recognized and nurtured, providing opportunities for enrichment and exploration.

Talent development strategies emphasize, at early grades, helping students discover their interests and strengths; at later grades, it emphasizes providing access to increasingly complex and authentic learning experiences in areas of strength as skills in talent areas grow. Talent development strategies in early grades emphasize opportunities for exploration and challenging novel experiences that are “low stakes” to encourage positive risk-taking and enhance motivation.

In middle and upper grades, talent development strategies increasingly focus on helping students achieve at high levels by introducing advanced content and actively cultivating psychosocial skills, executive functioning skills, and social-emotional learning. At this stage, talent development programming helps students form affinity groups and networks beyond the school that will provide support, challenge, and mentorship as students’ abilities become more advanced and specialized. These skills, taught in the context of providing challenging content, help students recognize opportunities, develop agency in pursuing opportunities, and develop self-regulation skills necessary for long-term achievement and success.

## How The Talent Development Framework Centers Equity

Ability is malleable and its expression is both developmental and impacted by opportunity. Inequity is well documented in public schools and there are significant and persistent opportunity and excellence gaps connected to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, and disability. However, when talent development is the goal of services, the focus is on providing the most rigorous curriculum possible for all students and targeted services for students who are demonstrating readiness for, or show the potential for, advanced learning as compared to other students who share similar learning opportunities and background characteristics.

Equity is a commitment to every student receiving a challenging and enriching education matched to their needs and the acknowledgement that there are students in need of advanced learning services in every school and from every demographic group. Equity in a talent development framework begins with all students receiving challenging, grade appropriate core instruction, which the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Blueprint for Massachusetts describes as “high quality, universally designed academic, behavioral, and social emotional curriculum and instruction that integrates culturally sustaining pedagogy and is linguistically responsive.” (p. 7), and which the DESE vision describes as “learning through curriculum and instruction that aligns with Massachusetts curriculum frameworks at or above their grade level, connects to their identities, and utilizes evidence-based practices” (p. 5).

With a strong core curriculum in place, a talent development-based continuum of advanced academic services allows educators to respond to individual students’ needs for more intensive services using a tiered system akin to the MTSS. As it is noted in the Blueprint for Massachusetts, “All students, regardless of disability, English language proficiency status, income, race, or academic performance can receive tier 1, 2, and 3 services.” (p. 7). It is important to use multiple pathways for identification of needs and to account for differences in opportunity to learn by providing supplemental enrichment and targeted instruction.

There are several emerging best practices for identifying the advanced learning needs of students from marginalized communities and closing opportunity and excellence gaps (Plucker et al., 2017; Gentry et al., 2019):

* Providing enrichment opportunities for all students (e.g., critical and creative thinking, interest-based subject explorations),
* Frontloaded interventions that offer interest-based extended learning within domains (e.g., supplemental programming after school, on weekends, or over the summer; early exposure to advanced content and foundational learning and executive functioning skills) typically without selection criteria based on prior achievement or measures of ability,
* Universal screening for talent and advanced learning needs,
* Use of local norms (rather than national norms) in assessment-based approaches,
* Recognition of learners who are twice exceptional (students who demonstrate advanced learning ability and who also have one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria) and collaborative interventions and supports to allow advanced twice exceptional students to participate successfully in advanced learning opportunities,
* Curriculum compacting, academic acceleration, and flexible grouping to provide optimal academic challenge and encourage development of psychosocial skills and
* Cooperative services (e.g., special education, EL services, and advanced learning specialists) and professional learning to support enrichment and acceleration.

## Dimensions of Equity

Curriculum and instruction are two critical dimensions of equity, but they are not the only ones required for a comprehensive, effective continuum of advanced learning services. The other dimensions include equity of access across schools, equity in representation of leadership, equity of access within schools, and equity of inclusive settings.

### Equity of Access Across Schools

To have their advanced learning needs met, students must be in schools that identify and respond to those needs. Currently, more than one-third of children across the US are in schools that do not identify advanced learning needs nor provide services in response to those needs (Gentry et al., 2019). Districts must ensure that students from all neighborhoods and communities served have equal access to services that reveal their potential, promote high achievement, and develop their talents fully. This means assuring that all schools provide high quality curriculum and instruction and advanced learning services tailored to its student community. Equity of access requires trained staff and careful attention to the sequence of services available in all buildings from elementary school through high school and how resources—staff, funding, materials—are allocated.

### Equity in Representation of Leadership

Districts must ensure that diverse voices and stakeholder groups contribute to decision making and are in leadership roles. Representation assures that the interests and priorities of students, staff, families, and community are addressed and that skills, capacities, and strengths are leveraged to meet the needs of all students. In the long term, talent development services support equity in representation in leadership roles by ensuring that students in every school have a path to advanced education and myriad career opportunities that can provide social mobility and prepare them for leadership roles/positions with influence and decision-making authority.

### Equity of Access Within Schools

This dimension of equity requires that districts take steps to ensure that students participating in advanced learning opportunities are reflective of the overall student population. Inequity is well documented in advanced learning services as persistent opportunity and excellence gaps connected to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, and disability (Worrell & Dixson, 2022).

### Equity of Inclusive Service Settings

The dimension of inclusive service settings requires districts to implement culturally responsive instructional practices to nurture, support, and retain learners of diverse backgrounds in advanced programming.

# Alignment of the Continuum of Services to State and District Priorities

## Alignment with Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

As described in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Multi-Tiered System of Support Blueprint, MTSS is “a framework designed to meet the needs of all students by ensuring that schools optimize data-driven decision making, progress monitoring, and evidence-based supports and strategies with increasing intensity to sustain student growth. MTSS is not just about tiered interventions, but rather how all the systems in a school or district fit together to ensure a high-quality education for all students.” (p. 2) It guides the development and implementation of a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based practices designed to meet students’ needs. It is supported by universal design for learning, centers equitable access, and integrates social emotional and behavioral components. MTSS supports are generally conceptualized as tiers of intervention, which increase in intensity from Tier 1 to Tier 3. The tiers represent the level of support a student may need for growth.

Since the MTSS framework is built on the concept of multiple levels of instructional and behavioral supports to meet varied learning needs, it can be adapted and extended to include a continuum of services that address advanced learning and development. The MTSS framework allows educators and administrators to promote high expectations for all students in a holistic way and assures that practices, policies, programs, and professional development are aligned at the school and district level (Heacox & Cash, 2020).

All students benefit from advanced learning services being connected to MTSS because it can provide:

* “Early recognition of potential or talents;
* Universal guidance and protocol for delivering high-quality learning, social and emotional supports, and behavioral interventions;
* Provisions for tiered supports or scaffolds to higher levels of learning;
* Dynamic ongoing assessments that inform instruction and curriculum implementation; and
* Collaborative planning with educators and families/caregivers to meet the needs of individual children” (Heacox & Cash, 2020, p. 44).

This document outlines how MTSS can be adapted and extended to advanced learning and provides a roadmap for educators and administrators to develop students’ talents fully.

## Alignment with the Deeper Learning Framework

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to assuring that all students achieve at their highest potential. With Deeper Learning, students engage in authentic, rigorous work that builds their knowledge and skills that can be applied to the real world, supporting talent development across the lifespan. Talent development strategies, emerging from, but applicable beyond the field of gifted education, emphasize, at early grades, helping students discover their interests and strengths and providing access to increasingly complex and authentic learning experiences as skills in talent areas grow. As students reach middle and high school, talent development focused teaching strategies help students form networks in and beyond the school that will provide support, challenge, and mentorship as students’ abilities become more advanced and specialized.

For any student to learn and grow, they need rigorous and authentic tasks within subject areas that both nurture their potential and challenge them at their readiness level. A continuum of services for advanced learning aligns with Deeper Learning’s mission and focus on professional development, curriculum, instruction, and assessment helping to “reshape the traditional classroom experience so that all students can exercise and deepen their unique talents, skills, and ways of thinking” (Deeper Learning, 2022).

## Alignment with the Acceleration Roadmap

The Acceleration Roadmap is grounded in the idea that all students can access grade-level appropriate work with supports and that grade-appropriate work is critical to their academic development. However, there are many students who enter the classroom already achieving at grade-level or beyond (Peters et al, 2017) and are ready for above-grade-level work. For these students’ growth, a different approach to accelerated learning is required. Acceleration in the context of advanced learning, and as defined in the field of talent development, is providing students access to advanced content at an age or grade that is earlier than typical. Acceleration may also involve quickening the pace of instruction, matching a student’s ability to learn the content.

The Continuum of Services for Advanced Learners can be aligned to the three priorities in DESE’s Acceleration Roadmap, with some adjustments to the approach used:

* + - 1. Rather than attaining grade level mastery as the learning goal make sure students are working in their zone of proximal development, which for many students may require access to above-grade-level curriculum.
      2. Provide access to enrichment and accelerative opportunities for students in their strength areas even if they are not yet achieving at grade level in other subjects.
      3. Some students ready for advanced or beyond-grade-level learning will also require targeted scaffolds that make the curriculum accessible. Integrate advanced learning services into system-wide priorities and leverage community resources to assure that each child has the proper advanced learning supports, particularly students who also receive special education services, English language services, or other services.

Though there are these points of differentiation, it is possible and advantageous to identify connections between the Continuum of Service for Advanced Learners and the Acceleration Roadmap priorities. The language and core theme of each priority remains the same, but the way the priority is applied reflects needs specific to advanced learning.

# The Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning Tiered System of Interventions

The Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning is a system of providing instruction to students using a talent development framework and in response to students’ learning needs. The Continuum of Services intensifies instruction and supports provided as students’ needs increase (academic, behavioral, social emotional). Movement across levels may change over time and is supported by data from assessments, progress monitoring, and how a student responds to services. Like with the MTSS model as applied to special education, students are not labeled by an intervention tier (e.g., a “tier 3 student”). They simply receive tier 1, 2, or 3 services and support. The level of service required may vary by content area (e.g., math versus science).

The Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning builds upon a baseline that all students have access to high-quality, culturally responsive, and evidence-based curriculum. Massachusetts has completed extensive work to provide guidance for districts to select the high-quality instructional materials that best meet their needs. This includes the [CUrriculum RAtings by TEachers (CURATE)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html) process and the [IMplement MA guide](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/instruction/implement-ma-process/story.html). The CURATE reports include an evaluation of the strengths of the curricular materials to provide supports for students working below and above grade level. The IMplement MA guide provides detailed steps district teams can take to select the best curricular materials for their students.

## Tier 1: Universal, Opportunities for All Students

Services that include all students (Tier 1) take place in the general education program guided by the classroom teacher. Teachers use [high-quality, culturally responsive, and evidence-based curriculum](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/), instruction, and assessments to meet students' needs and cultivate strengths and interests. Teachers make use of pre-assessment and enrichment activities, flexible grouping strategies, and differentiated instruction to increase depth and complexity of content and also to extend and enrich the core curriculum based on student needs and interests.

Tier 1 Interventions (See the Evidence-Based Services section for details.)

* Academic
  + Flexible Grouping
  + Differentiated Instruction (Content, Process)
  + Schoolwide Enrichment (Type 1 Activities)
  + Curriculum Compacting
  + Total School Cluster Grouping
* Psychosocial and Social-Emotional
  + Metacognitive Strategies Instruction
  + Counseling Services
  + Self-Regulation Strategies
  + Independent Learning

## Tier 2: Targeted Supports

More intensive services for smaller groups of students (Tier 2) consist of interventions beyond that which can be regularly provided only in the grade-level, general education classroom by the classroom teacher. Services typically include curriculum replacement supported through strategic grouping, co-teaching, self-contained programming, or subject acceleration. A curriculum specialist or coach may provide direct interventions or support the classroom teacher to supplement instruction through push in or pull-out services aligned to the core curriculum. Students may move to a different classroom for instruction or take a replacement class utilizing technology or other instructional tools.

Tier 2 Interventions

* Academic
  + Subject Acceleration
  + Schoolwide Enrichment (Type 2 Activities)
  + Independent Study
  + Collaborative Teaching (Push In or Pull Out)
  + Mentorships/Internships
  + Subject Acceleration
  + AP or access to advanced classes, including online options where there is not a local critical mass of students in need of advanced instruction in a given area.
  + College Credit
* Psychosocial and Social-Emotional
  + Transition to Acceleration Support
  + Twice-exceptional support services (special education services)
  + Limited-term English language support services
  + Counseling Services

## Tier 3: Intensive Services, Provided to Individuals

The most intensive level of services (Tier 3) is designed to meet the needs of individual students, or a small group of students, that go well beyond core grade level instruction. Students in need of these services have demonstrated unusually rapid development or significant above-grade-level achievement or have learning needs requiring special accommodations or supports to participate successfully in advanced learning opportunities due to a disability, social-emotional or behavioral needs, or language learning. Services at this level may include whole grade acceleration, dual enrollment, or other accelerative approaches and are done following established criteria and procedures to assure the best instructional match, or push-in or pull-out services to provide accommodations and supports to advanced learners with complex needs. These interventions typically require a differentiated education plan for the student to determine the best placement in the current year and to guide future academic plans and support services as the student matriculates through grade levels.

Tier 3: Interventions

* Academic
  + Whole Grade Acceleration
  + Multiple Grade Acceleration
  + College Credit
  + Early Graduation
  + Mentorships/Internships
  + Guided Independent Study
  + Targeted supports for students with disabilities, English learners, and complex needs in advanced learning settings
* Psychosocial and Social-Emotional
  + Individualized or small group counseling
  + Support during transitions to accelerated learning settings
  + Twice-exceptional support services
  + Limited-term English language support services

# Planning a Continuum of Services

## Identification of Needs, Goals, and Capacity

Strategic approaches to developing a high impact local continuum of services for talent development begin with an assessment of local needs, goals, community values, and district capacity. This process includes exploring data to understand the students’ current learning needs and engaging with stakeholders to identify shared district and community goals, values, and student interests.

For classroom-based differentiation and individual student planning (Tier 1 services), classroom teachers and/or teacher teams make decisions and determine interventions based on the needs and profiles of their specific students. Teachers make use of standardized and/or classroom assessments, grades, and observations in the classroom.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 services are determined by an advanced academics team which typically consists of a school administrator, a student services staff member (e.g., an advanced academics specialist), and the classroom teacher. Data is gathered, including assessment data, classroom observations, grades, and family input. Students may be administered additional assessments to provide insight about cognitive ability and above-grade-level readiness levels.

### Assessing the Range of Learning Needs

Growth for any student depends on the student experiencing appropriate challenges and having access to curriculum and instruction that exposes them to concepts and skills beyond those they have already mastered. “Working at the edge of competence” (Neihart, n.d.) supports continuous growth, motivation for learning, and helps advanced learners develop executive functioning skills needed for success in higher education and the workplace.

Therefore, a first step of designing a strategic continuum of service is to determine the current range of readiness and learning needs among each grade band of students.

For many students, this can be largely accomplished by making thoughtful use of extant data, utilizing local norms, to produce a body of evidence about the range of learning needs among the student population. A body of evidence is critical to decision-making given the documented limitations of standardized tests, particularly for minoritized populations and for students performing at an advanced level. To address the needs of English learners, for example, a body of evidence could include non-verbal tests, tests in students’ native language, or a collection of school and/or district assessments that show above average growth or achievement either in English or their native language (DOE, 2015).

MTSS incorporates formative (e.g., observations, performance-based projects, conversations, writing samples) as well as standardized assessments in all three tiers for different purposes. Standardized achievement tests that report Rasch Interval Unit (RIT) scores and tests that provide norms by grade level can be used as one set of tools to estimate how many students in a subject are clustered near the middle of the distribution, how many students are more comparable to students one or two grade levels above them, and how many students are functioning three or more grade levels above their age peers, offering insight into the type and scope of interventions required in each tier. It is also possible to create opportunities where students can demonstrate strengths and interests while engaged in activities (i.e., enrichments).

Be aware, however, that most grade-level assessments have “ceiling effects” that limit their ability to accurately estimate learning beyond grade-level. To differentiate needs and readiness among students already operating a grade level or more ahead of their age peers it may be necessary to administer assessments “above grade-level” (Makel et al., 2016) or to select adaptive assessments that include items assessing knowledge both “at grade level” as well as enough items aligned to higher level standards to provide a valid estimate of advanced students’ current abilities and needs. There are several important questions to answer in this process, including:

* How many students in each grade are already performing 1-2 years ahead of grade-level expectations?
* How many students in each grade are already performing more than 2 years ahead of grade-level expectations?
* What is the average grade level equivalent score for each local grade level by subject? How many students in each grade and subject area are already performing 1-2 years ahead of the local mean grade level equivalent score for their current grades?
* How many students in each grade and subject area are already performing more than 2 years ahead of the local mean grade level equivalent score for their current grades?
* Looking at student growth scores over time from state and other locally administered assessments, determine the following:
  + Are students at all achievement levels (warning, needs improvement, proficient, advanced) exhibiting similar growth, or does growth appear to taper off at one or more levels beyond “proficient” (indicating that learners may not be adequately challenged and supported)?
  + Are there characteristics students exhibiting slowing rates of growth (or no growth) seem to disproportionately have in common? (For example, are previously high achieving students from one or more demographic subgroups growing significantly less than other students? If so, this may indicate a need for targeted intervention or supports above and beyond those offered to other students.)
  + Are there any subject areas where growth appears strong across the board? (This may suggest a particularly effective and equitable local approach to talent development in that subject area that may merit study and replication in other subject areas.)

### Assessing Student Interests and Stakeholder Values

Talent development benefits from connecting curriculum, instruction and supports to students’ interests, district strengths, and community values. Talent development is maximized when curriculum and instruction connect to students’ own interests and goals and when students’ efforts are supported and reinforced by peers, teachers, family members at home, and the community at large.

Therefore, assessing all students’ interests and values is useful in planning a continuum of services for advanced learning because it will help predict future choices students and families may make, anticipate what kinds of enrichment opportunities would best capitalize on students’ interests, predict where the range of learning needs is likely to grow across grade bands, and help ensure that families, district leaders, and community leaders will support the district’s efforts which is necessary to ensure that a continuum of services that provides articulated opportunities for talent development across grade bands can be developed and sustained over time.

Additionally, because motivation and family and community support contribute significantly to talent development, it is also valuable to assess students’ *interests,* community values, and family aspirations for their children. Approaches to assessing student interests range from practitioner-designed interest surveys, standardized assessments of interest, and “action research” approaches sampling non-test data.

Similarly, family and community support are invaluable to building a sustainable continuum of services for talent development supported by the school community. Surveying and interviewing families about the opportunities they would like their students to have in school, their perceptions of their students’ strengths and interests, what fields they would like their students to be able to explore, and what obstacles they perceive and encounter in helping support their students in pursuing their interests and aspirations can all be highly informative.

When soliciting family and community input, it is important to be mindful of potential barriers to participation families in the community may experience, such as inflexible work schedules, limited access to transportation, uneven access to telecommunications technologies, and home language. Equitable participation in stakeholder input is vital to process validity, as uneven ability of stakeholders to respond to requests for input often leads to some perspectives being underweighted (or unrepresented altogether) in the data to be used to inform decision-making. Therefore, providing multiple opportunities to provide input through multiple means will help ensure school leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of community perspectives.

Assessing student interests and stakeholder values can be accomplished using a variety of methods, including:

* Reviewing extant data related to areas where students and families can already make choices. Consider examining:
  + What extracurricular activities and in-school clubs attract the most students?
  + What elective course topics have attracted strong enrollments over a sustained period?
  + Are there high interest topics reflected in the subjects of books and media students check out of the school library/media center?
  + Are there types of school events and activities that are particularly well attended by the community? (e.g., Musical performances? Plays? Math or science competitions? Particular athletic events?)
* Surveying stakeholders
  + Structured stakeholder surveys can be an effective and low-cost way to capture feedback from large numbers of stakeholders.
  + When surveying stakeholders, be mindful of equity to ensure that the data picture painted by survey results truly reflects the whole district and is not skewed by disproportionately high or low participation by any one stakeholder group. Depending on district demographics, this may require:
    - Translating surveys into languages other than English, particularly for any surveys targeting families.
    - Distributing alternative forms of the survey to stakeholders known to have limited access to technology when online surveys are used. (One efficient strategy may be offering a survey online for a period of time and include some basic demographic items to allow stakeholders to indicate race/ethnicity and free or reduced lunch eligibility status and then to send paper-based surveys home to families that are members of subgroups that are underrepresented among online survey responses.)
    - Asking staff or community leaders who have status with subgroups that tend to respond to surveys at lower rates than the district as a whole to use their platforms to promote survey participation.
    - It is recommended that stakeholder surveys informing developing a continuum of services for talent development touch on the following topics:
      * What talent areas do families want to see more school-based opportunities to cultivate?
      * What areas do families see as their children’s areas of relative strength?
      * What areas do families see students showing interest in outside of school?
      * Are there talent areas families want support to help develop at home?
      * In what, if any, subjects do families hear children regularly complaining of boredom or lack of challenge?
      * What talents do families perceive the school currently developing effectively? What talents do families perceive the school currently developing ineffectively?
      * To what extent do families perceive the school as valuing the talents of students from all cultural and economic backgrounds?
      * To what extent do families perceive the school as setting high expectations for growth for all students? (And are there any groups families perceive as the school holding lower expectations?)
      * To what extent do families feel supported in making educational choices for their children?
      * To what extent do families of students with disabilities, students who are English learners, and students in low-income households perceive existing services and supports for students from these groups as supportive of optimal growth vs. reflective of an exclusively remediation-oriented “deficit lens”?
      * To what extent are families aware of any currently available services or supports for advanced learning and talent development?
        + Among families who are aware of such services and supports, to what extent do they perceive these services and supports as effective? As equitable? As being transparent about their purpose, placement process, and outcomes?

### Considering District Capacity

A third consideration in developing an effective and sustainable continuum of services is district capacity. Providing effective, *high-quality* services that support growth and engagement depends on a variety of factors, including the following.

**Instructional expertise.** Most teachers and school leaders understand intuitively that each student is unique and recognize the potential benefits of effectively differentiating curriculum and instruction. But teachers often struggle to differentiate in practice for a variety of reasons including lack of deep knowledge of curriculum beyond their grade level, lack of classroom management strategies needed to facilitate different students doing different things at the same time in the same space, or limited ability to use assessment to guide appropriate modification of assignments.

Particularly at the secondary level, there may also be students who are so advanced in certain areas that their knowledge of certain topics exceeds their teachers’ knowledge in that area, making it difficult for teachers to support such students’ continued development. Additionally, some educators receive training in the needs and learning characteristics of advanced students in their pre-service training, but many do not or receive only a cursory overview but no opportunities for applied reflective practice. Where expertise to recognize and support advanced learners through highly differentiated instruction is abundant, it may be possible to quickly offer a wide array of services with relatively minimal support from specialists. In schools where capacity to differentiate beyond grade level is more inconsistent from teacher to teacher, greater use of clustering strategies and more frequent use of academic acceleration may be needed initially to ensure equitable access to appropriate instruction.

**District size and structure.** While large and small schools both have advantages and disadvantages for talent development, being cognizant of scale is also important to developing a sustainable continuum of services. Schools with very large school populations may be able to provide a wide array of courses and experiences catering to many niches of students that are not practical in small or rural schools that may only have a few dozen students and only one or two classes per grade-level. A large school may favor offering a variety of specialized courses targeting students with similar interest and learner profiles whereas a smaller school may need to make more intensive efforts at differentiating without use of grouping strategies, more frequent use of academic acceleration, and services and opportunities provided online or regionally in collaboration with neighboring schools to create the scale needed to provide services economically. On the other hand, smaller districts may find it much more practical to use subject acceleration to provide access to appropriate curriculum and instruction for advanced elementary school students by placing students in middle school courses, or to support advanced middle school students by facilitating participation in courses in their areas of strength at the high school compared to a large urban district with many grade-level centers where accessing higher level courses may require transportation or virtual learning solutions.

**Physical infrastructure.** Developing talent to high levels in certain fields (particularly in STEM and the performing arts) may require specialized lab equipment, technology, or facilities. Considering current facilities against the strengths and aspirations of students may lead to some districts partnering with higher education institutions, other K-12 schools, or community partners to provide access to equipment and facilities that would be unaffordable to a single local school. The number and size of classrooms may also constrain a school’s ability to provide all the options it may wish to. Considering the facilities that are needed to support growth for today’s students and anticipating the needs of those students in the future as talent development opportunities improve in early grades is important to factor into long-term facilities and capital planning.

**Community Resources.** Not all learning can or should happen in a traditional classroom. Community resources can afford access to facilities, equipment, and expertise beyond those found at school. And, all students can benefit from opportunities to observe authentic workspaces, connect with mentors and peers beyond the classroom who share their interests, connect with resources to extend learning outside of school. Students from marginalized communities especially benefit from formal efforts to observe and experience higher learning environments and explore the cultures of workplaces and professional domains, as they are less likely to have been provided access to these talent development catalysts. “Asset mapping” by surveying local and regional higher education institutions, arts organizations, workforce development organizations, museums, major employers, and nonprofit entities on their interest in and capacity to support partnerships, internships, mentorships, and service-learning opportunities can be a useful step in determining what resources might be available outside the school that can be creatively leveraged.

**Support Systems for Twice Exceptional Learners.** Many students who have advanced learning needs also have disabilities (twice exceptional). Students with specific learning disabilities, physical limitations, visual or auditory needs, behavioral disabilities, and students with autism can also have high cognitive ability, be exceptionally creative, or have advanced knowledge in one or more subject areas. The structure of local services and supports for addressing these disabilities may impact the structure of services and supports for advanced learning and talent development. Some districts have historically interpreted the principle of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) focusing on “access to the general curriculum” as meaning their obligation to students with disabilities is to provide access to grade-level curriculum only, so focus services for students with disabilities in a handful of general education classrooms supported by intervention specialists but do not provide accommodations and supports in advanced classes or specialized opportunities for advanced learners in a topic area. However, the U.S. Department of Education has issued clarifying guidance that services and supports for students with disabilities must be provided in any accelerated or advanced class available in the district for which the student is otherwise eligible (2007). So, reviewing local data on students with disabilities, their strengths, and their needs for accommodations and supports in instructional settings that also provide appropriate challenge and opportunity to develop their talents is also worthwhile in considering possible permutations of a local continuum of services. Similarly, students who are English learners may also have advanced learning needs in one or more areas and, like students who are native English-speakers, need opportunities to discover their interests, academic strengths, and talents. Therefore, similarly reviewing data on students classified as English Learners and the current structure of support for English Learners in the district are important, particularly in districts with significant numbers of students identified as English Learners.

# Evidence-Based Services that Meet Advanced Learning Needs

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Tier 1** | | Service: Curriculum Compacting **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 12  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Curriculum compacting is a form of differentiating instruction where teachers use pre-assessments to identify students’ readiness for the content and skills to be taught and then adjust curriculum for students who have already mastered the material to be learned, replacing it with new content, alternative enrichment, or extension activities.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students whose pre-assessments or other achievement measures demonstrate mastery of individual grade level units of study but who may not be ready for full-year single-subject or whole-grade accelerated placements.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Pre-assessment of all students at the beginning of year and before each unit. * Scaffolding of instruction for students who are English learners or students with disabilities.   **Implementation Resources**   * National Association for Gifted Children [Curriculum Compacting Overview](https://nagc.org/page/curriculum-compacting) * Standards and grade-level progressions * [Curriculum Compacting](https://www.routledge.com/Curriculum-Compacting-A-Guide-to-Differentiating-Curriculum-and-Instruction/Reis-Renzulli-Burns/p/book/9781618215444) Book (Reis, Renzulli & Burns, 2016) and [Quick Reference Guide](https://www.routledge.com/Educators-Quick-Reference-Guide-to-Curriculum-Compacting/Reis-Renzulli/p/book/9781618217882) * [Curriculum Ratings by Teachers (CURATE) Resources](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html) |
| Service: Total School Cluster Grouping (TSCG) **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 8. Schools will need to have more than one classroom per grade level to implement this strategy.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Total School Cluster Grouping (TSCG) is a research-based approach to managing classroom placements that addresses equity and considers the needs and readiness of every student in the grade.  All classrooms are heterogeneous, but the range of learning needs in each classroom is lessened to support differentiated instruction. TSCG modifies the traditional cluster grouping model by looking at each students’ demonstrated learning needs when classroom placements are made, not just advanced learners.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  All students because each student's learning readiness is considered in the placement process with the aim of creating responsive learning environments.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Screen all students annually or even more frequently to respond to changes in learning needs. * Use multiple measures (grades, test data, classroom performance) and involve classroom teachers in the decisions-making process. * Provide training to teachers and administrators on TSCG implementation.   **Implementation Resources**  [Total School Cluster Grouping](http://www.geri.education.purdue.edu/tscg/Overview.html) guide and research from Purdue University |
| Service: Schoolwide Enrichment Model - Type I **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 8. Schools will need to provide dedicated time for enrichment activities for all students. Educators trained to implement enrichment and identify advanced learning potential.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Type I enrichment activities are designed to expose students to a wide variety of topics and disciplines outside of the regular curriculum. Activities encourage discovery and are designed to stimulate new interests that lead to further exploration and talent development. Type I enrichments help students demonstrate their potential and introduce them to new areas of study.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  All students, as Type I enrichment provides an opportunity for them to demonstrate potential for advanced learning. Students who have expressed an interest in exploring a subject area may also be provided with Type I enrichment activities to provide enrichment and extension.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Involve all students to provide access to enrichment and the chance to demonstrate their abilities. * Provide students choice of enrichment topics and products.   **Implementation Resources**  [Schoolwide Enrichment Model Overview](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/whatisem/) and Implementing the [Schoolwide Enrichment Model resources](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/semart/) from University of Connecticut |
| **Tier I** | **Tier II** | Service: Advanced Placement® (AP) Courses **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  Grades 9-12. According to the College Board, any student who has reached grade 9 and meets course prerequisites may take an AP course.   * High schools may offer AP courses after completing a [College Board Audit](https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/launch-grow-ap-program/launch/how-your-school-can-offer-ap). * Students may access AP courses online through organizations that have been authorized by the College Board to offer AP. * AP courses are a Tier 1 service for students for whom the AP course is next in their grade level course sequence (e.g., students in grade 11 or 12). A student in AP may still require compacting, enrichment or extensions, or further differentiation. * AP courses are a Tier 2 service for students who are subject area or grade accelerated, accessing the course earlier than is typical or taking it in a compacted format.   **Brief Definition and Benefits**  AP courses from the College Board provide college-level work to high school students. Students who take and score high enough on AP exams can earn college credit and placement at many colleges and universities.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Motivated students who have completed the requisite introductory level courses and for whom an AP course is the next level course in the content area.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Remove grade-level restrictions and minimize prerequisites for enrollment in AP courses. The College Board only requires that students be in grade 9. * Frontloading important executive functioning and study skills for students who may have had less exposure to advanced courses (tutoring, prep sessions, orientations) * If AP courses cannot be offered locally, accept credits for College Board approved AP courses taken online or through organizations other than the school. * Subsidies for AP Exam fees (coordinated with DESE) * Ongoing communication with students and families about the program and the process for enrollment   **Implementation Resources**  [College Board guidance](https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/launch-grow-ap-program) for launching an AP program  [Learning in the Fast Lane](https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691178721/learning-in-the-fast-lane) by Chester Finn & Andrew Scanlan. History and applications of AP |
| Service: Earned Honors Option **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  Grades 6-12. Educators trained to implement differentiated projects and assessments.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Students can opt to pursue an “earned honors” report card designation in designated courses through completion of more advanced alternative assignments and a student-selected project unit. Talent development specialists and the curriculum director support teachers in developing the alternative assignments and project options available to students and supporting differentiated learning and assessment in their classrooms. Allows for heterogeneously grouped classes while giving students the opportunity to "opt in" to a more rigorous, differentiated set of assignments.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Any student may choose to pursue the earned honors option in one or more courses. The program gives all students the opportunity to engage in advanced learning activities based on their readiness and interests.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Students aren't divided into "Honors" and "Regular" course sections. * All students provided the choice to participate. * Students from racial and economic subgroups traditionally underrepresented in advanced courses with B or higher grades and/or test scores in the top two quintiles on a related assessment should be explicitly encouraged to pursue earned honors.   **Implementation Resources**  [Case Study](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0031721716681775) and Related Research |
| **Tier II** | | Service: Schoolwide Enrichment Model - Type II **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 8. Schools will need to provide dedicated time for enrichment activities. Educators trained to implement enrichment and identify advanced learning potential.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Type II enrichment promotes the development of advanced thinking in domains of interest and talent, building on Type I enrichments. Some Type II activities are general, focusing on creative thinking and problem solving, critical thinking, and affective processes; how to use advanced-level reference materials; and improving communication skills. Other Type II enrichment is specific and involves advanced instruction in an interest area selected by the student.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students who have expressed an interest in exploring a specific subject area in greater depth than is possible in the regular grade level classroom. Students who have demonstrated an interest in or need for advanced problem-solving and critical or creative thinking.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Involve any student who expresses an interest and the willingness to engage in activities. * Provide students choice of enrichment topics and products.   **Implementation Resources**  [Schoolwide Enrichment Model Overview](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/whatisem/) and Implementing the [Schoolwide Enrichment Model resources](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/semart/) from University of Connecticut |
| Service: Push-In Collaborative Teaching **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 8. Trained advanced academic specialists (training in enrichment and acceleration strategies, adapting curriculum, and collaborating with classroom teachers)  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  A general education teacher and a specialist trained in instructional strategies for advanced learning collaborate to provide differentiated instruction within the general classroom. The specialist works with a group of students who need advanced instruction on a unit of study, following a pre-assessment and/or based on students’ need for scaffolding (e.g., English language support). Provides opportunity for the general education teacher to observe and engage in the advanced instruction as it takes place.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students the classroom teacher identifies through pre-assessment who have mastered the content of a unit and who need replacement content beyond what the classroom teacher is able to provide.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Regular pre-assessment of all students. * Scaffolding of instruction for English learners or students with disabilities   **Implementation Resources**  [Collaboration and Co-Teaching in Gifted Education](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED608029)  [Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and Coaching Text (Routledge)](https://www.routledge.com/Collaboration-Coteaching-and-Coaching-in-Gifted-Education-Sharing-Strategies/Mofield-Phelps/p/book/9781618219756) |
| Service: Short-Term Pull-Out Collaborative Teaching **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 8. Trained advanced academic specialists (training in enrichment and acceleration strategies, adapting curriculum, and collaborating with classroom teachers)  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  A small group of students who need access to specialized resources (e.g., frontloading of advanced content with language support or special education service) or who need replacement curriculum for a unit of study work with a specialist outside of the general classroom. The general classroom teacher and specialist collaborate to assure standards alignment and learning outcomes for the instruction. Pull-out in this context is to meet a specific, short-term learning need.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students identified through pre-assessment who have mastered the content of a unit or students who need access to advanced content and require language support or other specialized service not available in the classroom.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Regular pre-assessment of all students. * Scaffolding of instruction for English learners or students with disabilities   **Implementation Resources**  [Collaboration and Co-Teaching in Gifted Education](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED608029)  [Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and Coaching Text (Routledge)](https://www.routledge.com/Collaboration-Coteaching-and-Coaching-in-Gifted-Education-Sharing-Strategies/Mofield-Phelps/p/book/9781618219756) |
| **Tier II** | **Tier III** | Service: Schoolwide Enrichment Model - Type III **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  Elementary through Grade 12. Educators or mentors need to be trained to implement enrichment and identify advanced learning potential.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Type III enrichments allow students to pursue a self-selected and designed project in an area of strength and interest at an advanced level with a mentor or expert.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students must be self-directed and willing to commit the time required for advanced learning in the area of study.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Educators and specialists should regularly review student work and invite students engaged in Type I and II activities to consider a Type III activity. * Because SEM projects are student interest and motivation driven, test score cutoffs or predetermined levels of achievement should not be required for participation.   **Implementation Resources**  [Schoolwide Enrichment Model Overview](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/whatisem/) and Implementing the [Schoolwide Enrichment Model resources](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/semart/) from University of Connecticut |
| Service: Single Subject Above-Level Academic Acceleration **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 12. Acceleration Policy.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Single subject acceleration is the practice of assigning a student to specific content at a higher instructional level than is typical given the student’s grade for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities in one or more subject areas. Provides instruction in subject areas of strength commensurate with students’ abilities and readiness to learn. Is a cost-effective option that is supported by research. Examples:   * A third-grade student goes to a fourth-grade classroom for English/language arts class * An eighth-grade student takes a high school geometry course online   **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students who demonstrate advanced academic achievement (grades, assessments, other performance measures) in a particular subject area and have the motivation and psychosocial skills necessary for success (persistence, self-regulation, teachability).  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Universal screening of students for consideration. All student populations served. The evaluation process is fair and objective.   + Uses multiple, valid, and reliable instruments to assess cognitive, social-emotional, and developmental domains.   + When English learners are evaluated, appropriate instruments should include those in the student’s primary language. * Includes a family report and teacher observations of the students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities. * Procedures in place and resources available to facilitate placements in different school buildings or in online courses outside of the district. * Support for the transition from the receiving teacher. * Communication and collaboration with families/caregivers and students in an accessible format.   **Implementation Resources**  National Association for Gifted Children’s Guide to [[[*Developing Academic Acceleration Policies*](https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy_Guidelines/Developing-Academic-Acceleration-Policies.pdf)](https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy_Guidelines/Developing-Academic-Acceleration-Policies.pdf)](https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy_Guidelines/Developing-Academic-Acceleration-Policies.pdf) |
| Service: Whole Grade Above-Level Academic Acceleration (grade skipping) **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  K through Grade 12. Acceleration Policy.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  Whole grade acceleration is the practice of placing a student, full time, in a higher grade level than is typical given the student's age. Acceleration provides instruction commensurate with students’ abilities and readiness to learn. It is a cost-effective option that is supported by research. Examples:   * A student who finishes grade three is placed in a fifth-grade classroom on a full-time basis at the beginning of the next school year. * A student completes the fall semester in grade six and is placed in grade eight at the start of the second semester.   **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students who are demonstrating advanced academic ability and achievement in multiple subject areas (using indicators such as grades; aptitude, ability, or achievement assessments; or other performance measures) who express interest in acceleration and have the psychosocial skills necessary for success (persistence, self-regulation, teachability).  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Universal screening of students for consideration. * All student populations served. * The evaluation process is fair and objective.   + Uses multiple, valid, and reliable instruments to assess cognitive, social-emotional, and developmental domains.   + When English learners are evaluated, appropriate instruments should include those in the student’s primary language. * Includes a family report and teacher observations of the students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities. * Support for the transition from the receiving teacher. * Communication and collaboration with families/caregivers and students in an accessible format.   **Implementation Resources**  National Association for Gifted Children’s Guide to [*Developing Academic Acceleration Policies*](https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy_Guidelines/Developing-Academic-Acceleration-Policies.pdf)  Sample [Acceleration Review Process](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy_Guidelines/Appendix_E_Wendy_Behrens.pdf) |
|  |  | Service: College Credit Courses (Dual Enrollment and Early College programs) **Applicable Grade Levels and Requirements for Implementation**  Grades 9-12. Policy on College Credit Courses.  **Brief Definition and Benefits**  A college credit program allows high school students to take college-level courses for high school or college credit.  **Students Likely to Benefit (relevant learning needs addressed)**  Students who have been accelerated and who complete the course sequence the school system provides in a particular subject or subjects.  **Equity and Access Considerations**   * Minimize the grade or age restrictions for accessing courses. * No requirement that students be identified for advanced learning services to be eligible. * Scaffolding of instruction for English learners or students with disabilities. * Ongoing communication with students and families about the program and the process for enrollment.   **Implementation Resources**  [College Credit Information](https://www.mass.edu/strategic/cdep.asp) from the Department of Higher Education |

# Continuum of Services Case Studies

## Case Study One: Large School District

Central City is a large metropolitan school district serving a culturally and economically diverse community. Central City is home to many families who speak languages other than English. As a destination for both new immigrants and young professionals as well as families experiencing housing insecurity, Central City schools tend to experience higher than typical turnover in enrollment from term to term. While all Central City families look to their schools to provide a high-quality education, many families also make use of after school care, health care, or other services provided by the district in collaboration with a variety of partner organizations. Due to its large size, comprehensive high schools in Central City can offer a variety of Advanced Placement courses and district secondary schools offer a mix of extracurricular activities with opportunities in athletics, the arts, and academic areas. Student achievement varies significantly across schools in Central City with mean scores in some schools significantly surpassing state averages while mean scores in other schools are below state averages. In schools with relatively low mean scores there are students who are performing above grade level ready for more advanced opportunities and in need of academic challenge. To assure all students in the district are challenged and have the opportunity to maximize their potential, all schools offer a variety of advanced academic services that focus on talent development.

### Services for Primary Grades (K-2)

**School-Wide Strengths-Based Enrichment Units**. Students are grouped based on relative strength and indicated interest in enrichment clusters quarterly focusing on science, language arts, mathematics, and the arts. In schools with a linguistically diverse population, some enrichment cluster offerings are taught using languages other than English. First and second grade teachers coordinate schedules to allow for cross-grade grouping for enrichment clusters and to increase the number of options available to ensure all students have access to enrichment in their area of strength and high interest. Enrichment clusters are taught by regular education teachers who receive professional development and planning support from a talent development specialist. The district makes use of Title II funds which are available to support the professional development for advanced learning interventions for Title eligible schools.

*Students Served*: All students in their area(s) of relative strength and high interest with a goal of cultivating academic self-concept, affinity for learning, and talent discovery.

**Subject Acceleration**. Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for the subject area and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Whole Grade Acceleration**. Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also pro-actively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for both math and reading and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Summer Talent Development Camp**. Cognizant of the fact that academic opportunity gaps between students from low-income households and students from non-low-income households tend to stabilize or shrink while students are in school but grow during the summer, Central City uses a portion of its title funding to offer non-remedial summer programs. Students take half-day courses focused on topics that extend the traditional curriculum and take “deep dives” into a variety of high interest topics from which families are encouraged to choose based on the child’s strengths and interests.

*Students Served*: Summer Talent Development Camp is offered free of charge to Central City families. To help provide additional revenue and to expand the variety of courses that can be offered, Central City also allows children from other districts to enroll on a paid tuition basis.

**Targeted Pull-Out Services**. Central City recognizes that students with disabilities and students who are English learners have unique potential but face additional barriers to fully developing their talents. Therefore, Central City provides a weekly pull-out service for students who they believe to be twice exceptional where the talent development specialists and an intervention specialist for students with disabilities plan high interest project-based learning experiences used as platforms for teaching strategies to support executive functioning skills, emotional self-regulation, and use of assistive and augmented technologies. Participating students continue to receive accommodations and supports in the regular classroom. Similarly, Central City provides a weekly pull-out service for students who are English learners who are advanced compared to other EL students in which students have opportunities for advanced learning using their home languages as well as supplementary instruction in English that capitalizes on each students’ interests to motivate engagement in reading and speech communication activities that build vocabularies in English.

*Students Served*: EL students and students with disabilities who demonstrate advanced potential in one or more subject/talent areas.

### Services for Elementary Grades (3-5)

**School-Wide Strengths-Based Enrichment Units**. Students are grouped based on relative strength and indicated interest in enrichment clusters quarterly focusing on science, language arts, mathematics, and the arts. Grades 3-5 teachers coordinate schedules to allow for cross-grade grouping for enrichment clusters and to increase the number of options available to ensure all students have access to enrichment in their area of strength and high interest. Enrichment clusters are taught by regular education teachers who receive professional development and planning support from a talent development specialist.

The schoolwide enrichment program is modified from its K-2 structure at grades 3-5 such that, in the first and second quarters, enrichment units continue to be exploratory but in the third quarter students choose one of the topics explored in the first quarters to explore further. In the fourth quarter, students may continue their study of this subject in a facilitated project-based learning experience or choose another exploratory unit.

**Students Served**: All students continue to participate in strength-based enrichment units. However, in the second half of the year, students have opportunities to move on to “Type II” and “Type III” enrichment experiences that allow them to explore emerging interests at greater depth and more advanced levels.

**Total School Cluster Grouping.** Central City schools with especially large ranges in achievement use the Total School Cluster Grouping model in grades 3-5 to reduce the extreme range in learning needs within each classroom. Using this model allows Central City to support teachers in differentiating instruction more effectively without affecting the racial and economic diversity within classrooms, which is a top concern for this proudly diverse metropolis eager to meet the needs of all learners and create strong learning communities.

*Students Served*: All students enrolled in traditional elementary schools.

**Subject acceleration**. Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale or comparable score on the Apprenda or Logramos achievement assessments administered in Spanish.

**Whole Grade Acceleration**. Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale.

### Services for Middle School (6-8)

**Subject Acceleration**. Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs. Some students needing high school level instruction access high school level courses via distance learning to overcome transportation logistical challenges.

*Students Served*. Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale.

**Whole Grade Acceleration**. Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

*Students Served*: Schools qualifying as “whole school” Title I schools use local norms for aptitude and achievement assessments when using the Iowa Acceleration Scale to evaluate students for possible whole grade accelerated placements. Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Central City also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale.

**Online Academy**. Central City and neighboring districts have pooled resources to offer advanced, standards aligned classes that make extensive use of curriculum compacting strategies, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning to provide alternative courses in core subjects and electives to students in their areas of strength. By pooling teachers and students from multiple districts, the consortium achieves a critical mass of students for each course thereby ensuring that, other than technology costs, these courses cost no more than “one-size-fits-all” local instruction of all students.

*Students Served*: Advanced middle school students may take classes taught by high school teachers for early high school credit. Any student who is performing above grade level in a subject area and passes an online learning skills assessment may enroll in online academy courses in their areas of strength. Students who do not initially pass the online learning skills assessment are not denied admission to online academy courses but are enrolled in a supplemental short course that provides an orientation to the online learning platforms used, targeted practice in technology skill areas identified by pre-assessment, and planning and time management strategies supportive of success in online learning.

**Earned Honors Option**. While Central City does not offer self-contained “honors” sections of middle school courses that require scores or other performance measures for entry, students in required subject courses can opt to pursue an “earned honors” report card designation through completion of more advanced alternative assignments and a student-selected project unit. Talent development specialists and the curriculum director support middle school teachers in developing the alternative assignments and project options available to students and supporting differentiated learning in their classrooms.

*Students Served*: Any student may choose to pursue the earned honors option in one or more courses. The honors designation is earned through projects, assignments, and assessments. The earned honors program gives all students the opportunity to engage in advanced learning activities based on their readiness and interests. Students from racial and economic subgroups traditionally underrepresented in advanced courses with B or higher grades and/or test scores in the top two quintiles on a related assessment will be explicitly encouraged to pursue earned honors.

**Differentiated “Home Room” Program.** Advanced learners experiencing challenges with perfectionism, negative peer pressure, or asynchronous development of intellectual and social and emotional skills may be placed with a talent development specialist as their “home room” teacher. Home room experiences in this setting may include units focused on managing academic stress, developing positive scholar identity, navigating peer relationships, and differentiated college and career exploration.

### Services for High School (9-12)

**Earned Honors Option.** While Central City does not offer self-contained “honors” sections of high school courses that require scores or other performance measures for entry, students in required subject courses can opt to pursue an “earned honors” report card designation to a more rigorous, differentiated set of assignments (usually involving PBL and/or research writing) and then students who complete this differentiated pathway within the course earn the designation and some minimum grade determined by the district. Talent development specialists and the curriculum director support teachers in developing the alternative assignments and project options available to students and supporting differentiated learning in their classrooms.

*Students Served*: Any student may choose to pursue the earned honors option in one or more courses. The honors designation is earned through projects, assignments, and assessments. The earned honors program gives all students the opportunity to engage in advanced learning activities based on their readiness and interests and prepares them for AP and other college-level courses. Students from racial and economic subgroups traditionally underrepresented in advanced courses with B or higher grades and/or test scores in the top two quintiles on a related assessment will be explicitly encouraged to pursue earned honors.

**Advanced Placement Courses.** Central City provides a variety of Advanced Placement courses available at its high schools or through approved online learning providers.

*Students Served*: Any student may choose to enroll in an Advanced Placement course. Students with lower past grades or who face barriers to success in AP courses are encouraged to join an online study group supported by the AP teacher that includes background-building resources for students who would benefit from additional scaffolding of the traditional AP curriculum.

**College Credit Courses (Dual Enrollment).** Central City provides the opportunity for students to take college-level courses for free or at a discounted price and earn credit. Students gain an early college experience with challenging academic courses.

*Students Served*: Eligibility for college credit courses is determined collaboratively between the school and the colleges and community colleges that allow enrollment of high school students. Guidance counselors proactively inform students from low-income households and students from minoritized populations with high academic potential of the academic and financial benefits of participating in college level courses in high school and encourage such students to take at least one course in grade 11 or 12.

**Extracurricular Activities.** High school educators recognize that some of the most powerful talent development opportunities for secondary school students are extracurricular programs focused on specific academic areas, the arts, and service-learning and leadership. Rather than viewing these activities as “extras,” Central City homeroom teachers and guidance counselors actively work to ensure that almost all students participate in an extracurricular activity related to a talent area, maintaining a participation database accessible to teachers and providing support to help ensure students meet attendance and academic eligibility requirements to participate.

*Students Served*: Central City offers a mix of non-selective extracurricular clubs and activities as well as a few selective/competitive options where students are selected based on auditions or try-outs. For extracurriculars that are selective, Central City offers “prep camps” to help students prepare for auditions or try-outs and especially encourages students from underrepresented subgroups to take advantage of these opportunities. Recognizing that “pay to play” requirements contribute to underrepresentation of students from low-income households in these activities, fees are waived for students who are eligible for free or reduced cost school meals, and coaches and sponsors organize carpool lists to reduce transportation-related barriers to participation.

**Differentiated Counseling Pull-Out Services.** College and career planning resources are tailored to students’ needs and experience.

*Students Served*: Students demonstrating high academic potential and who are from low-income households or who would be “first generation” college students participate in a targeted counseling and guidance programming aimed at addressing common issues facing such students including negative academic peer pressure, “undermatching” (where students may select less challenging academic options than are appropriate for their abilities), “under aspiration” (where students may not consider college and career paths that would fully develop their potential), as well as scholarship searches and financial planning support to help ensure that appropriate higher education options are seen as accessible.

**Summer Honors Institute.** An extension of the summer talent development camps offered to younger students, Summer Honors Institutes are focused summer experiences exploring an advanced topic in depth. Summer Honors Institute courses are developed collaboratively by district talent development specialists and faculty with relevant expertise recruited from regional colleges and universities. In some cases, SHI courses are hosted by colleges/universities to afford access to specialized facilities and equipment.

*Students Served*: Like the summer talent development camps for younger students, Central City students are provided the Institute for free. Students from other districts can enroll in Central City’s Summer Honors Institute on a tuition-paying basis.

**Early High School Graduation.** Because Central City allows for acceleration, AP courses, and college credit courses, some students complete their high school graduation requirements in less than four years.

*Students Served*: Students who complete all state and Central City requirements.

## Case Study Two: Small School District

Spring Valley is a school district comprising a small town and surrounding rural areas where agriculture, light manufacturing, and health care provision are the major sources of employment. Spring Valley School District serves a population that is predominately low and middle-income. Its population has stabilized through growth in its Latinx and Asian-American student subgroups after contracting in the early 2000s. Spring Valley families are eager to ensure their students have educational opportunities on par with students in larger and more affluent suburbs. A small student population and limited resources require school leaders to be planful and creative to address the needs of its increasingly diverse students. Spring Valley Elementary has two classrooms per grade level. This limits potential to use grouping strategies to focus advanced learning services and other specialized learning needs. All schools in Spring Valley now qualify as whole school Title I schools.

### *Services for Primary Grades (K-2)*

**School-Wide Strengths-Based Enrichment Units.** Students are grouped based on relative strength and indicated interest in enrichment clusters quarterly focusing on science, language arts, mathematics, and the arts. First and second grade teachers coordinate schedules to allow for cross-grade grouping for enrichment clusters and to increase the number of options available to ensure all students have access to enrichment in their area of strength and high interest. Enrichment clusters are taught by regular education teachers who receive professional development and planning support from a talent development specialist. The district uses Title I funds to support the development of Type I enrichments, which they are eligible to do as a schoolwide Title I-eligible school providing a schoolwide intervention.

*Students Served:* All students in their area(s) of relative strength and high interest with a goal of cultivating academic self-concept, affinity for learning, and talent discovery.

**Subject Acceleration.** Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs.

*Students Served:* Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Spring Valley also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for the subject area and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Whole Grade Acceleration.** Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Spring Valley also pro-actively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for both math and reading and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Summer Talent Development Camp.** Cognizant of the fact that academic opportunity gaps between students from low-income households and students from non-low income households tend to stabilize or shrink while students are in school but grow during the summer, Spring Valley uses a portion of its Title funding to offer non-remedial summer programs. Students take half-day courses focused on topics that extend the traditional curriculum and take “deep dives” into a variety of high interest topics from which families are encouraged to choose based on the child’s strengths and interests.

*Students Served*: Summer Talent Development Camp is offered free of charge to Spring Valley families. To help provide additional revenue and to expand the variety of courses that can be offered, Spring Valley also allows children from other districts to enroll on a paid tuition basis.

**Targeted Pull-Out Services.** Spring Valley recognizes that students with disabilities and students who are English learners have unique potential but face additional barriers to fully developing their talents. Therefore, Spring Valley provides a weekly pull-out service for students who they believe to be twice exceptional where the talent development specialists and an intervention specialist for students with disabilities plan high interest project-based learning experiences used as platforms for teaching strategies to support executive functioning skills, emotional self-regulation, and use of assistive and augmented technologies. Participating students continue to receive accommodations and supports in the regular classroom. Similarly, Spring Valley provides a weekly pull-out service for students who are English learners who are advanced compared to other EL students in which students have opportunities for advanced learning using their home languages as well as supplementary instruction in English that capitalizes on each students’ interests to motivate engagement in reading and speech communication activities that build vocabularies in English.

*Students Served*: EL students and students with disabilities who demonstrate advanced potential in one or more subject/talent areas.

### *Services for Elementary Grades (3-5)*

**School-Wide Strengths-Based Enrichment Units.** Students are grouped based on relative strength and indicated interest in enrichment clusters quarterly focusing on science, language arts, mathematics, and the arts. Grades 3-5 teachers coordinate schedules to allow for cross-grade grouping for enrichment clusters and to increase the number of options available to ensure all students have access to enrichment in their area of strength and high interest. Enrichment clusters are taught by regular education teachers who receive professional development and planning support from a talent development specialist.

The schoolwide enrichment program is modified from its K-2 structure at grades 3-5 such that, in the first and second quarters, enrichment units continue to be exploratory but in the third quarter students choose one of the topics explored in the first quarters to explore further. In the fourth quarter, students may continue their study of this subject in a facilitated project-based learning experience or choose another exploratory unit.

*Students Served*: All students continue to participate in strength-based enrichment units. However, in the second half of the year, students have opportunities to move on to “Type II” and “Type III” enrichment experiences that allow them to explore emerging interests at greater depth and more advanced levels.

**Subject Acceleration.** Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Spring Valley also pro-actively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for the subject area and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Whole Grade Acceleration.** Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Spring Valley also proactively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for both math and reading and consults with special education and EL teams.

### *Services for Middle School (6-8)*

**Subject Acceleration.** Learners who have demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom for part-time instruction in subject(s) where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their readiness and learning needs. Some students needing high school level instruction access high school level courses via distance learning to overcome transportation logistical challenges.

*Students Served*: Students may be referred by educators or families for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. To avoid potential pitfalls of referral/nomination-based approaches which can contribute to underrepresentation of diverse learners in advanced learning settings, Spring Valley also pro-actively considers all students whose RIT scores on NWEA MAP assessments are at or above the 75th percentile of students in the next highest grade level using the Iowa Acceleration Scale for the subject area and consults with special education and EL teams.

**Whole Grade Acceleration.** Learners demonstrating readiness for above-grade-level content may be placed in a higher-grade classroom full-time where the curriculum from a higher grade is a better match to their learning needs.

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**Online Academy.** Spring Valley and neighboring districts have pooled resources to offer advanced, standards aligned classes that make extensive use of curriculum compacting strategies, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning to provide alternative courses in core subjects and electives to students in their areas of strength. By pooling teachers and students from multiple districts, the consortium achieves a critical mass of students for each course thereby ensuring that, other than technology costs, these courses cost no more than “one-size-fits-all” local instruction of all students. Particularly advanced middle school students may take classes taught by high school teachers for early high school credit.

*Students Served*: Any student who is performing above grade level in a subject area and passes an online learning skills assessment may enroll in online academy courses in their areas of strength. Students who do not initially pass the online learning skills assessment are not denied admission to online academy courses but are enrolled in a supplemental short course that provides an orientation to the online learning platforms used, targeted practice in technology skill areas identified by pre-assessment, and planning and time management strategies supportive of success in online learning.

**Earned Honors Option.** While Spring Valley does not offer self-contained “honors” sections of high school courses that require scores or other performance measures for entry, students in required subject courses can opt to pursue an “earned honors” report card designation to a more rigorous, differentiated set of assignments (usually involving PBL and/or research writing) and then students who complete this differentiated pathway within the course earn the designation and some minimum grade determined by the district. Talent development specialists and the curriculum director support teachers in developing the alternative assignments and project options available to students and supporting differentiated learning in their classrooms.

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**Differentiated “Home Room” Program.** Advanced learners experiencing challenges with perfectionism, negative peer pressure, or asynchronous development of intellectual and social and emotional skills may be placed with a talent development specialist as their “home room” teacher. Home room experiences in this setting may include units focused on managing academic stress, developing positive scholar identity, navigating peer relationships, and differentiated college and career exploration.

### *Services for High School (9-12)*

**Earned Honors Option.** While Spring Valley does not offer self-contained “honors” sections of high school courses that require scores or other performance measures for entry, students in required subject courses can opt to pursue an “earned honors” report card designation through completion of more advanced alternative assignments and a student-selected project unit. Talent development specialists and the curriculum director support teachers in developing the alternative assignments and project options available to students and supporting differentiated learning in their classrooms.

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*Students Served*: Students who complete all state and Spring Valley requirements.

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# Appendix B: High Quality Instruction Materials

Ensuring that all students receive appropriately challenging instruction should be built on a strong foundation of high-quality curricular materials. Curricular materials can make a real difference. Read more about the research and the case for High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM).

* [Learn more about the Department of Education’s Efforts](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/impd/default.html).
* Learn more about how Massachusetts Educators are reviewing materials. [[CUrriculum RAtings by TEachers (CURATE) Resources](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html)

Suggested Readings: Understanding the Foundation of Why Curriculum Matters

* Why Materials Matter. [https://www.edreports.org/impact/why-materials-matter](https://www.edreports.org/impact/why-materials-matter#s01). This article is an overview of the research on why Curriculum Matters.
* [Curriculum Is Misunderstood. Let’s Overcome That, in Service of Equity](https://curriculummatters.org/2019/05/28/curriculum-is-misunderstood-lets-overcome-that-in-service-of-equity/). This article explains some of the common misconceptions about using High Quality Curricular Materials.
* [Opportunity Myth](https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-opportunity-myth). This article documents that our most at risk students are often never presented with challenging grade level content, and when they are they are able to do it. Using high quality curricular materials ensures that all students are presented with challenging grade level content.

Suggested Readings: Getting Started

* [Learning Acceleration for All: Planning for the Next Three to Five Years](https://tntp.org/covid-19-school-response-toolkit/view/learning-acceleration-for-all-planning-for-the-next-three-to-five-years)
* [Equitable Math Instruction: Enacting Instruction That is Grade-Level, Engaging, Affirming, and Meaningful.](https://f.hubspotusercontent30.net/hubfs/7725331/FINAL%20-%20UnboundEd%20White%20Paper%20-%20Math%20-%208.2021.pdf?hsCtaTracking=9fc7f698-73aa-4e9d-80c9-45b60c916ff5%7C3644f25a-0a9d-4d93-a9ec-754be2c85cdc)
* [Equitable ELA Instruction: Immersing Students in Grade-Level Reading & Thinking.](https://f.hubspotusercontent30.net/hubfs/7725331/public-website/UnboundEd_ELA_Concept_Paper_Spring2020-FINAL%20(8).pdf?hsCtaTracking=8078e886-7621-4b1f-80b3-15a3838a2e64%7C6f050204-ae17-49ee-9e8d-2bd60d013dca)

Assessing Students’ Interests

[My Career and Academic Plan (MyCAP)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/mycap/) – for middle and high school students