



FAQ High Ability and Honors Programming

Which schools are clustering in 2021-22?

- For the 2021-2022 school year, Allisonville 3rd and 4th grade classes, as well as Crooked Creek 3rd grade classes will be implementing the clustering model.

How long would the high ability services last?

- All students in grades 3 – 5 who qualify are eligible to participate.

How many high ability students are in the classrooms at schools where they're grouped along with conventional classroom students?

- Enrollment fluctuates in high ability like it fluctuates throughout the entire District on a yearly basis. It is far more common for students attending schools who do not host Compass to stay in their home schools compared to students qualifying in those schools who do host Compass.

Is the curriculum/pace any different than the concentrated high ability classrooms at the dedicated schools?

- The curriculum in both the self-contained model and our clustering model follow the state standards. Pacing may look different between the two but that doesn't mean one program covers more or less curriculum than the other. The self-contained program has traditionally been able to offer more collaborative, project-based learning opportunities.

Any other differences between the two options?

- Traditionally there has been more emphasis on independent learning expectations during and outside the school day in our self-contained model.

In general, what differentiates the High Ability program from the normal student experience?

1. The building where the student is assigned for high ability services can provide more specific details about the instructional day (which could vary from classroom to building). In general, all the classrooms should meet the following objectives:
 - a. *Infuse rigor, differentiation and enrichment into all classrooms to meet the needs of all students; and*
 - b. *Nurture talents and deliver meaningful enrichment opportunities; and*
 - c. *Develop critical thinking skills; and*
 - d. *Develop the academic abilities of students so that they will be able to master new and difficult curriculum challenges.*

Language arts between the traditional model and high ability self-contained rooms are very similar as schools use workshop methodology where each student works on specific skills at their level. Math in self-contained programming has been structured to expose students to content that is a grade level above their placement. However, we are working to change that standard since research conveys that students need more depth and foundational skills as building blocks. In general, high ability students should have opportunities for enrichment or inquiry-based learning whether in a self-contained classroom or a cluster model (if you chose to stay at your homeschool and have the teacher differentiate instruction).

**How is the program this year different from the Compass program of the past?
I believe this program is new for this year, correct?**

- The self-contained model is still in existence. We are piloting a researched based model of clustering specific grades and schools. Families impacted by this change have already been notified.

Can you give a bit of background on why it was changed and how this program has evolved from past iterations?

- We began an audit of our high ability services K-12 across the district in 2019-2020 to examine inequities in services, supports, and differences in achievement for our student subgroups. The audit revealed underrepresentation in assessment, qualification, and acceptance into our high ability programming. We began identifying and providing research-based recommendations for addressing some of these barriers.

Is the township investigating technology to aid clustering? I am aware of systems like teachtoone math, that can aid in continually assessing and adjusting learning paths to meet each learner where they are.

- Educators have access to many technology apps and devices to supplement learning experiences. Although technology may be useful during times of independent learning, direct instruction generates effective outcomes for students.

Will this clustering be done earlier than 3rd grade? IDOE is requiring CogAT at K level moving forward. Will our district be using that to cluster at that age as well? Will you also screen next year's first grade class?

- The Indiana Department of Education is requiring that Kdg, 2nd, and 5th grade students receive a high ability screener. This information could be useful to cluster incoming first grade students, however, they would not be screened again until second grade. Historically, students who identify as high ability have been clustered to have their needs met. This practice is not new, yet we are taking an intentional approach to educate families.

Have the teachers been selected and will they complete their training prior to implementing in the school?

- Teachers are receiving an ample amount of training this year with the assistance of gifted education experts. During the High Ability Information Night, Dr. Brulles showed families a menu of scheduled training sessions for teachers. This model requires educators who have experience with high ability students and professionals who are strong at differentiating instruction. Principals were requested to think about that criteria prior to assigning roles. Anyone who is working toward a high ability endorsement is also qualified. Additionally, the Indiana Department of Education has training for high ability instructors, including bootcamps in the fall for all Indiana teachers.

Is Washington Township still going to use the title "Compass" for HA self contained classrooms? Will there ever be a time in the near future where we stop self contained and go the clustering model? Is the plan to move all classes to clustered after this year?

- We are still utilizing COMPASS, however, as a district we are questioning the meaning of the term in relation to high ability. Many people equate COMPASS to a self-contained service model which leaves out varied forms of services that are researched-based to support high ability learners. When referencing high ability, we need to reflect more on high ability services and align to language of the state so families can understand the services that are offered to high ability students. There are several researched based models and the evolution of the term COMPASS, limits the scope of research accessible to high ability needs.

What about children who have moved to the COMPASS program and are not at their homeschool currently? Will they continue at the COMPASS school for the 21/22 school year or will they go back to their homeschool?

- If students have been identified and are enrolled in a self-contained classroom, their placement will remain the same.

How do you ensure higher ability kids aren't being held back in a class when the teachers are having to teach a classroom that is more inclusive to different types of learners?

- Per research, if identified students are in a clustering classroom with an educator who effectively differentiates and the composition of the class is devised to narrow the ability ranges to meet diverse needs, students do not show signs of regression. Dr. Dina Brulles, the author of *The Clustering Handbook* mentioned that the model is ineffective if the range of ability is too wide for differentiated instruction.

Does this (clustering) only apply to elementary school students or is it expanding through high school as well?

- This only applies to elementary settings. Middle school students transition to Honor courses which have an application process, while high school students self-select courses.

If your child would typically have joined the Compass classroom at Crooked Creek or Allisonville, will they remain at their home school in a cluster room?

- If your student is currently assigned to a self-contained model, then they are not impacted by the clustering structure (only 3 grade levels are impacted between two buildings- AV and CC).

If your child is going into 3rd grade next year, and is considering moving to the COMPASS classroom at Fox Hill, will the self-contained compass model continue through 5th grade? Or, will this be a year-by-year decision?

- Once identified and accepted into high ability programming, a student will receive services (whether clustered or in a self-contained classroom) through 5th grade. Middle School honors will require an application process that will also review high ability testing (the high ability screener, CogAT is required in 5th grade).

Does this mean that parents will no longer "opt in" for GT classes, but students will automatically be placed in the clustered classrooms if their testing shows they are gifted or talented?

- High ability services will always be a choice for families to make. Some sites will cluster students based on data and number of identified students, while others will maintain a self contained model. The structure of high ability will be continuously evaluated based on data, research, and the collective work of the Broad-Based Planning Committee.

Are there success indicators that the District is looking to over time, for instance, more minority students graduating with honors diplomas?

- MSDWT would expect to see the factors identified in the 19-20 audit improve under high ability services. This would include, but is not limited to increased achievement (i.e. honors diplomas, etc.) and racially diverse candidates, accessible information with clear procedures, multiple data measures to identify high ability students, and culturally responsive identification processes.

Is there a book that you can recommend about how we, as parents, can best support our high ability child(ren)?

- The National Association of Gifted Children has excellent resources to support families. Additionally, MSDWT will be offering parental workshops this year to help support families with high ability students.

Can you speak to clustering that has happened in the past? As a parent of a high-ability student who stayed in a "cluster" at a non-COMPASS school, it wasn't sufficient. There were behavior issues, and more focus on the average student. Can you provide an example of tiered curriculum?

- Historically, clustering has been offered in the past, however, we will have an intentional focus on the instructional practices and composition of classrooms for effective differentiation.