

KENTUCKY EDGUIDES | VARIED NEEDS 3.3

Students Ready for Added Challenge

All students benefit from engaging in work that gives them achievable challenges to meet and opportunities to stretch and grow. Some students are ready for bigger or deeper challenges than others, and Kentucky schools have a number of ways to serve those students.

HOW CAN CHALLENGE BE ADDED IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM (KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 3)?

The *continuous progress* feature of the primary program means that all children should receive support to move steadily forward, including opportunities to do deeper or faster work in primary subjects if they show that they are ready.

School districts provide a *Primary Talent Pool* for students who are informally selected as having characteristics and behaviors of a high potential learner and further diagnosed using a series of informal and formal measures. Those students may receive differentiated service delivery needs during their stay in the primary program. For example, some may receive accelerated instruction in one or more subjects in their regular classroom or work with students in a different grade on their subjects of distinctive strength. Others may participate in a specialized program for music, art, leadership or another specific area in which they have been identified as having distinctive needs. Each school is expected to have multiple service options to respond to the varied talents their students bring to school.

Response to Intervention or "RTI" is a statewide initiative in the primary years. Response to intervention calls for schools to organize instruction by setting up tiers of response that start with a core program that will be effective for most students and then add supplemental support and then intensive intervention when evidence shows which students need different or additional support. For example, a student who is easily mastering the core program (tier 1) may receive some added opportunities (tier 2) and then if that support is not enough, move to more intensive support (tier 3). In parent-teacher discussions, it may help to ask what "tier" of services a child is receiving and then for details about how that tier works. It may also be helpful to ask what kinds of evidence the school is using for RTI decisions. ("Kentucky System of Intervention" and "KSI" are related terms, describing an approach to RTI implementation shared by the Kentucky Department of Education.)

Individual student needs should also be considered in deciding when students *start school*: parents may petition to allow a younger child to start school if an evaluation determines the child's school readiness.

HOW CAN CHALLENGE BE ADDED IN GRADES 4-12?

Most schools have a policy commitment to helping all students achieve their potential, especially if parents or teachers point out that a particular student is quickly finishing work or showing signs of boredom with current assignments. While continuous progress and RTI are not required across the state after the end of primary, many schools and districts choose to continue using those terms and approaches in serving students.

In grades 3 through 8, parents receive individualized reports on their children's reading and mathematics skills. If those reports identify student strengths, the school's staff is to develop an *accelerated learning plan* for that student.

SEEING RESULTS

Statewide, the current school report cards do not report results separately for students who receive gifted & talented services or accelerated learning supports. At the local level, you may want to ask teachers and administrators what evidence they are gathering and what trends they see in your local schools for these student groups.

LEARNING MORE

The Kentucky Association for Gifted Education offers helpful resources at kagegifted.org

Learn more about the Kentucky System of Interventions by visiting education.ky.gov and searching for "KSI"

Added information on how Kentucky schools serve students can be found in other Kentucky EdGuides offered at www.prichardcommittee.org, including those on:

- Early Childhood and Preschool
- Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, and High Schools
- Students Who Need Added Support
- Students With Disabilities
- Barriers to Learning

Similarly, for high school students, if the Explore, Plan, ACT or WorkKeys readiness tests show that a student is ready for advanced work, intervention strategies for accelerated learning are to be incorporated into those students' individual learning plans. (Note: Explore and Plan will not be given after 2014-15, but Kentucky expects to adopt new readiness tests for grades 8 and 10 and use those results for future accelerated learning decisions.)

Challenge can be added in multiple ways, including:

- Planning more demanding readings, problems, or topics for appropriate assignments
- Regrouping a student to do some work in a different class that is closer to a student's skill level in a particular subject
- Using digital learning options that can add challenges as soon as a student is ready
- Taking some high school courses in middle school, especially algebra and geometry
- Taking some college level courses in high school, either as Advanced Placement classes or through dual enrollment or dual credit arrangements with a college or university
- Applying to the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky, which offers a residential program where students spend their junior and senior years at Western Kentucky University taking college classes in math, science, and other subjects (wku.edu/academy/) or to the Craft Academy for Excellence in Science and Mathematics at Morehead State University (www.moreheadstate.edu/craft-academy)
- Early graduation (discussed in more detail in the EdGuide on High Schools)
- Other systematic options to ensure that the student is moving steadily forward

HOW CAN A STUDENT BE IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED AND TALENTED?

Kentucky's definition of exceptional children includes gifted and talented students, defined as those who possess demonstrated or potential ability to perform at exceptionally high levels in one or more of the following categories: general intellectual aptitude, specific academic aptitude, creative or divergent thinking, psychosocial or leadership skills, and/or visual or performing arts.

Until grade 4, students are eligible for inclusion in the talent pool, but not for formal gifted and talented identification. Beginning in grade 4, each district has a system for diagnostic screening that can identify students at any time. Parents may also petition to have their children screened. To learn more, ask your school or district for information on the local policies.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A STUDENT IS IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED AND TALENTED?

Each gifted student has an individual education plan, often called a Gifted Student Services Plan or GSSP. That plan is developed using information about the student, including information from parents and guardians about students' individual interests, needs and abilities. Because each GSSP is differentiated and customized for that student, the included services will vary from child to child. During regular school hours, the service may include studying some subjects at a higher grade level, taking Advanced Placement and honors courses, specialized counseling, differentiated study experiences for individuals and cluster groups in the regular classroom, independent study, mentorships, resource services delivered in a pullout classroom or other appropriate instructional setting, and a variety of other possibilities. Academic competitions and optional extracurricular options may also be included, and those can occur outside the regular school day. Parents receive reports about what is included in a child's GSSP at least once a year and reports on the child's progress under the plan at least once a semester. In providing gifted and talented services, each school is expected to have multiple service options to respond to the varied talents their students bring to school.

HOW ARE GIFTED AND TALENTED SERVICES FUNDED?

Kentucky provides a limited amount of funding specifically for serving gifted and talented students. The other costs of meeting student needs, including those of gifted and talented students and others who are ready for accelerated learning, are covered with SEEK state and local dollars.