

Gifted Education Benchmarking Study: Flossmoor School District 161

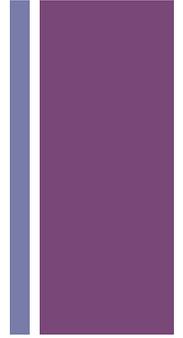
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Center for Talent Development

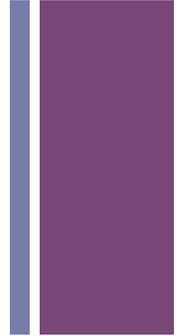
Northwestern University

+ Purpose



- Formative assessment process designed to:
 - Determine current range of needs among high ability students
 - Identify current strengths and gaps in programming for high ability students
 - Identify stakeholder goals and priorities for high ability students
 - Identify areas of consensus for potential improvements
 - Develop recommendations for action

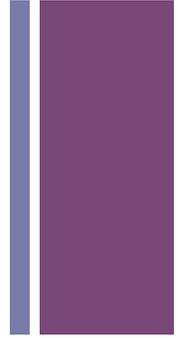
+ Evaluation Methods



- Mixed methods design based on National Association for Gifted Children Program Standards:
 - Above-grade-level assessment of student achievement
 - Surveys of parents of academically advanced students
 - Survey of district educators

- Focus groups interviews:
 - Students
 - Parents of academically talented students
 - Teachers

+ Results Preview

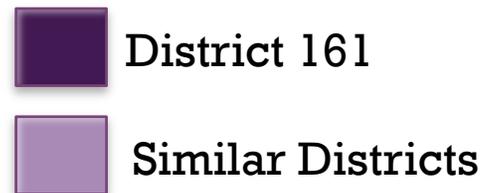
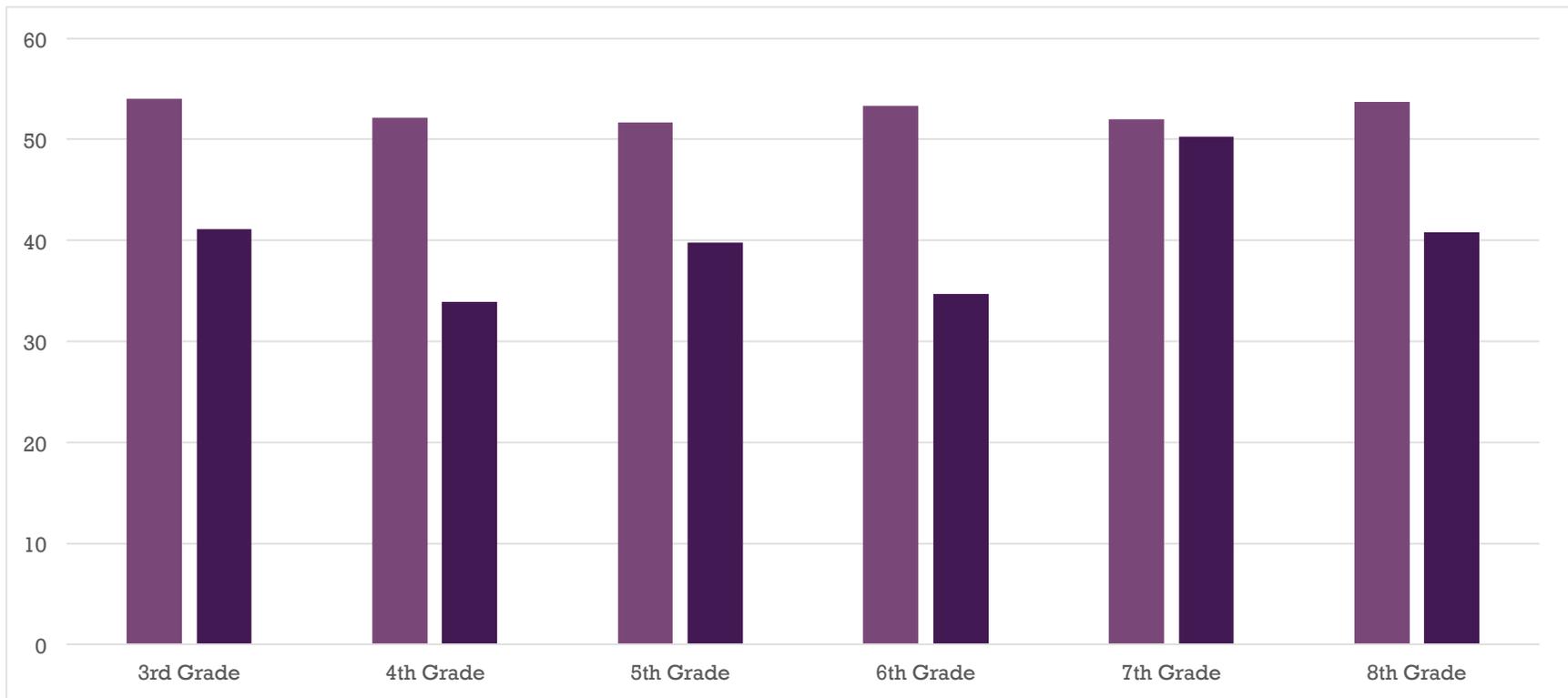
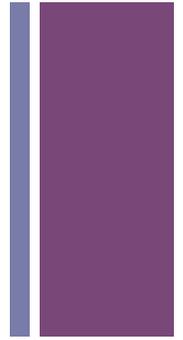


- Part I: Summary of Assessment Data
- Part II: Summary of Survey, Interview, and Document Review Data

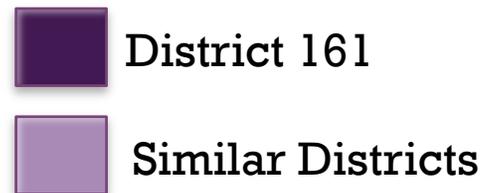
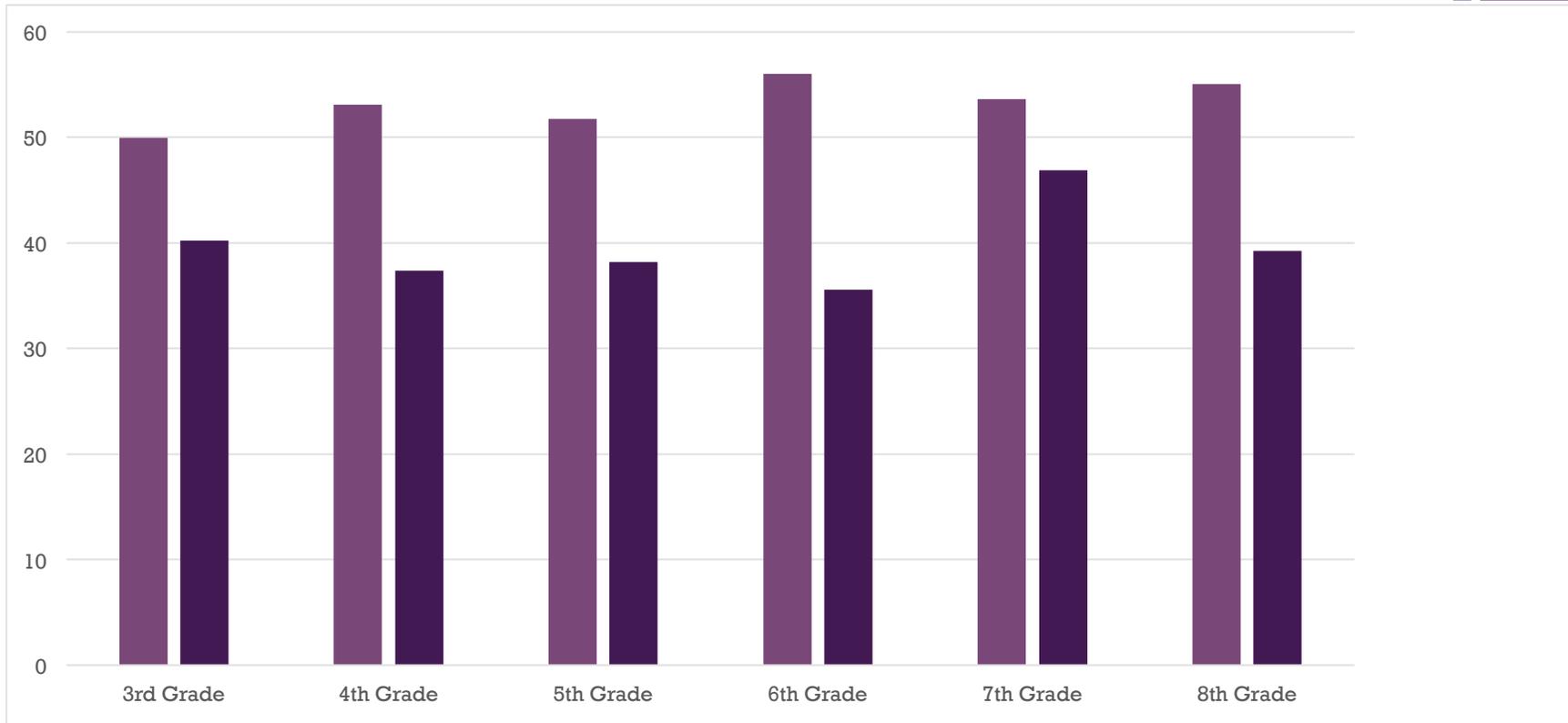
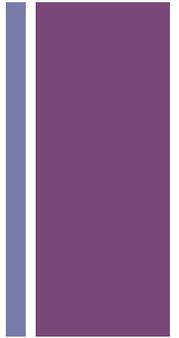
+ Part I: Assessment Data Background

- 205 District 161 high ability students participated in Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS).
- NUMATS uses “above-grade-level” assessment to remove ceiling effects of grade level assessments. This approach allows differences between high ability students to be observed, and reveals areas of relative strength within individual high ability students.
- Students in grades 3-5 took the ACT Explore test. Explore is aligned with ACT benchmarks in Reading, Mathematics, and Science. Explore is typically administered to students in grade 8 for high school course placement.
- Students in grades 6-8 took the ACT test, typically used to assess college readiness among students in grades 11-12.
- A virtual comparison district was constructed of 7096 other recent NUMATS students attending schools in the Midwest in the same quartiles as District 161 for average household income and percentage of households below the poverty line.
- **The overall pool of NUMATS students is comprised of students identified as gifted by their local schools and/or scoring above the 90th percentile on a grade level achievement test.**

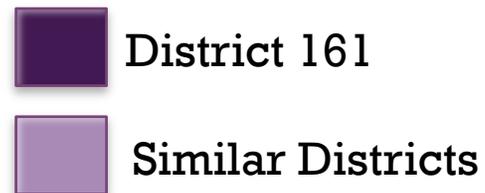
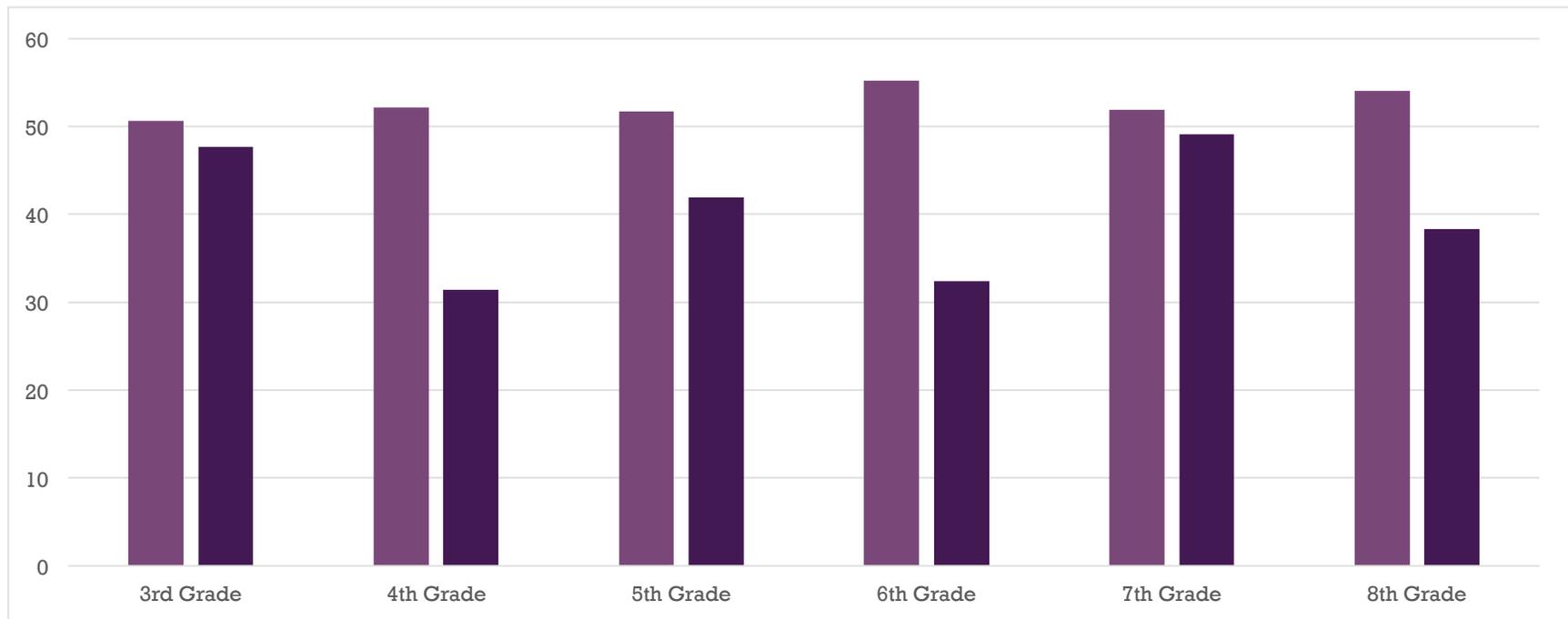
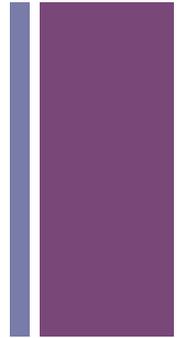
+ Reading: District 161 vs. Comparison



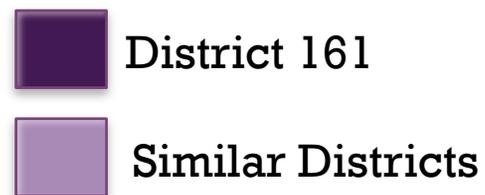
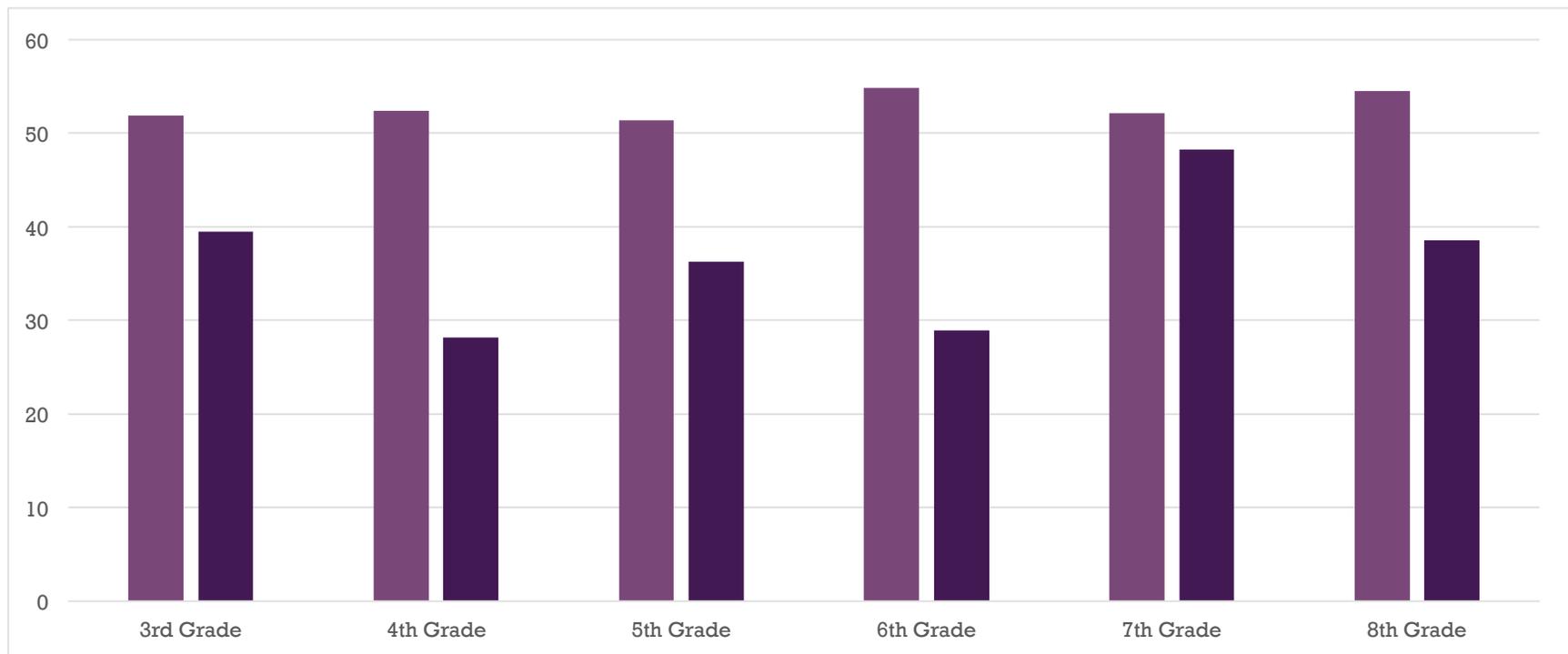
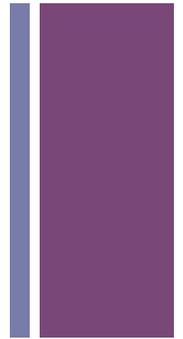
+ Math: District 161 vs. Comparison



+ Science: District 161 vs. Comparison

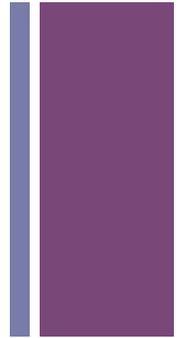


+ Composite: District 161 vs. Comparison



+ Assessment Data Summary

- Overall, average scores of District 161 students were lower than students from other economically similar districts across subject areas
 - Comparison district students may have had a slight advantage through access to test orientation and practice items
- The gap between District 161 and comparison district students narrowed somewhat at upper grades
- However, the District 161 included extremely high scoring students:
 - Three students in grades 7 and 8 earned composite ACT scores at or above average for the current freshman class at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

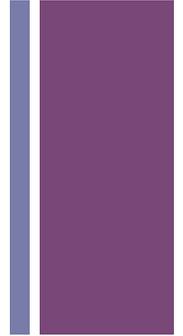




Part II

Summary of Qualitative Data

+ Survey Data

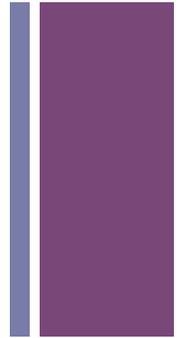


- 96 parents participated in the online survey
- 66 educators participated in an online survey with parallel items to the parent survey
- Focus group interviews were conducted with parents, staff, and students around the district to probe initial survey findings

+ Qualitative Findings

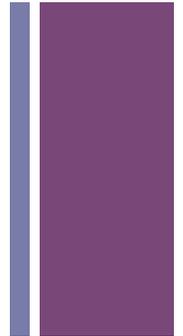
■ Strengths:

- Overall, all three groups perceived the school climate as:
 - Valuing high academic achievement
 - Valuing gifted students and their abilities
 - Recognizing that gifted/high ability students come from all cultural and economic backgrounds and that students may be “twice exceptional” (gifted students with disabilities)
- Curriculum differentiation for students with different levels of ability and readiness is occurring in the district (although not consistently)
- All groups reported their schools made some use of flexible grouping arrangements to support differentiation and provide opportunities for gifted and advanced students to collaborate and enjoy peer support
- Students reported that the ACE program gives them greater opportunities to explore their interests and be challenged. Students also reported warm relationships with ACE teachers.
- Some educators reported having collaborative relationships with gifted education specialists, and had received useful resources and instructional modeling through “push-in” services

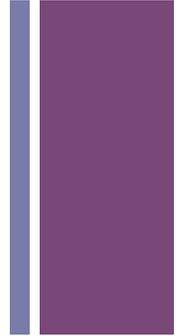


+ Qualitative Findings

- Areas for possible improvement: Identification
 - Many parents and some teachers indicated that procedures and criteria for identifying gifted students were not clear.
 - Relative underrepresentation of minority students in gifted services was a concern
 - Mixed feelings about the use of subjective judgment in the identification process were expressed:
 - Some parents perceived possible favoritism
 - Some teachers felt tension between maintaining positive relationships with parents and giving objective input on identification process
 - However, some teachers also wanted teacher judgment to have more weight in the process
 - Some educators questioned the appropriateness of some assessments used in the process. Some questioned the validity of the NWEA MAP test for identifying gifted students. Some questioned using a test of general cognitive ability in identifying students in the humanities.

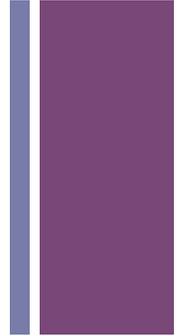


+ Qualitative Findings



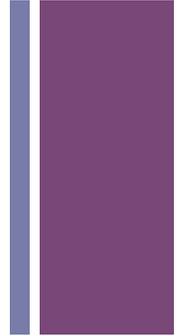
- **Areas for Possible Improvement: Curriculum and Instruction**
 - While perceptions of ACE were generally positive, students and some parents felt that increasing the level of challenge within the program would be appropriate. Students also wanted to spend more time in ACE or ACE-like learning settings.
 - While the percentage of teachers reporting using differentiation strategies on a regular basis was very high, students and parents wished for more opportunities for increased challenge, faster pacing, and more project-based learning.
 - Teachers also identified opportunities to receive professional development (particularly through opportunities for observation, peer coaching, and collaborative curriculum development) in this area as a high priority for future improvement.

+ Qualitative Findings



- **Areas for Possible Improvement: Curriculum and Instruction**
 - There was general consensus that curriculum modifications for gifted students should prioritize opportunities for students to move on when learning objectives are mastered vs. exploring grade level content in depth. Yet, few participants were aware of opportunities for formal acceleration.
 - Mixed perceptions about learning in math were reported. Focus group students reported this subject area as the most consistently challenging. Yet, many parents expressed concerns about the clarity and value of some homework in math. Some parents and students also felt that sometimes personal learning paths defined for students needed modification to meet students at a specific target level and provide appropriate pacing.

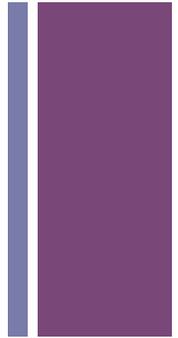
+ Other Notable Findings



- Visual arts programs were often mentioned as strength of the district. However, some parents and teachers noted a gap in arts opportunities in grades 7-8
- Students and parents both reported very high levels of interest in participating in STEM-related enrichment opportunities, clubs, and competitions
- Parents and educators agreed that their schools should focus on further differentiating core curriculum.
 - Many teachers noted recent improvements in math curriculum for more advanced students, but parents perceptions were less positive
 - Parents and teachers agreed that English Language Arts curriculum should be improved

+ Recommendations

- Increase communication related to identification, opportunities, and specialized services for parents and regular classroom teachers. Possible opportunities include updating and expanding gifted education information on the district website, hosting parent seminars in conjunction with STEM enrichment opportunities for students, and providing more extensive documentation and interpretive resources related to assessment.
- Create interest-based opportunities for talent development in technology-related areas within the school day and as extracurricular offerings
- Ensure there are opportunities for artistically and creatively gifted students to develop their talent continuously across grade levels
- Provide opportunities for role-specific professional development:
 - All educators:
 - Professional development on strategies for differentiating and compacting curriculum for advanced students utilizing concrete tools and examples and opportunities for observation, collaboration, and coaching with specialists
 - ACE team and school leadership:
 - Professional development on latest research-based practices in identifying giftedness and exceptional potential in diverse populations
 - Professional development on grouping strategies that enhance curriculum differentiation (particularly for math instruction and for reading instruction in the early grades)
 - Professional development on coaching and collaboration models to further enhance impact of “push-in” opportunities and resource sharing valued by regular classroom teachers

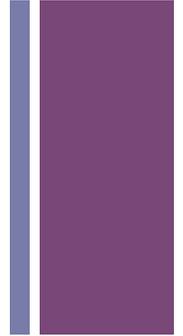


+ Recommendations

■ Identification

- Ensure identification processes begin consistently no later than grade 2 to limit the impact of “achievement gaps” that widen each year students are in school to provide best opportunity to identify gifted students from lower income backgrounds
- Expand opportunities for students to participate in formal assessment due to high variability of MAP scores at the high end of the score range. CTD recommends offering opportunity for full assessment to students who score above the 80th percentile on MAP or who score at the “Exceeds” level on one or more areas of PARCC at parent or student request or by teacher referral
 - CTD does not recommend using MAP as an achievement measure for identifying students for programs when very high score criteria, as MAP reliability above the 90th percentile is low.
- CTD has concerns about possible culturally loaded items in the Renzulli and Hartman behavioral checklists. Given the diversity of the district’s population, we recommend replacing these with the GATES-2 if a behavioral checklist is desired. This tool was recently revised to better ensure items function similarly for students from diverse backgrounds.
- CTD questions the validity of using a non-verbal test for identifying gifted students in the humanities. Therefore, we recommend removing the NNAT from criteria for identifying students in this area.

+ Recommendations

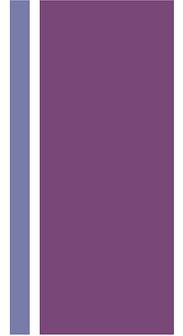


■ Acceleration

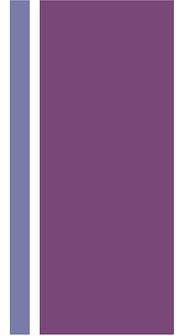
- CTD recommends continuing using a “levels of service” philosophy to guide future program development. This should be enhanced by providing formalized opportunities for subject and grade acceleration for especially advanced students for whom even well-differentiated grade level curriculum is not appropriate.
- CTD recommends developing and widely disseminating policies and procedures for acceleration based on NAGC’s Guidelines for Developing and Acceleration Policy or Ohio’s Model Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners.
- CTD recommends using the Iowa Acceleration Scale in the process for evaluating candidates for potential grade acceleration.

+ Curriculum

- Given that teachers asked for models of appropriate curriculum (and opportunities to observe it in implementation), and that enhancing ELA and math curriculum ranked as a top priority for parents and teachers, CTD recommends curriculum studies of model curricula :
 - College of William & Mary units in English Language Arts
 - Project M2 and M3 Mathematics units from Kendall Hunt Publishing
 - Boston Museum of Science curriculum units



+ Commendations



- CTD commends the district for undertaking a critical review of opportunities for gifted and advanced students
- CTD appreciates the openness and transparency demonstrated by all stakeholder groups throughout the process
- CTD was impressed by the professionalism of district teachers and leaders throughout the evaluation process and by the thoughtfulness and articulateness of students participating in focus groups