

# Frequently Asked Questions

Parent Part D of the  
Competencies  
Collaboration

*SEVA Council of Gifted Administrators*

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# **Frequently Asked Questions**

# We are moving into Virginia. How will my child's previous identification as a gifted student be handled?

- Each school division in Virginia establishes procedures for the identification of gifted students and for the delivery of services to those students consistent with the *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students*. In order to have your child assessed, you will need to complete a referral. It would be helpful if the information from the previous school was provided with the referral. Your child's strengths and abilities may be assessed by an identification committee, according to the division's approved procedures. For further information, contact your child's principal, teacher, or guidance counselor.



# Why are identification procedures and services different from division to division?

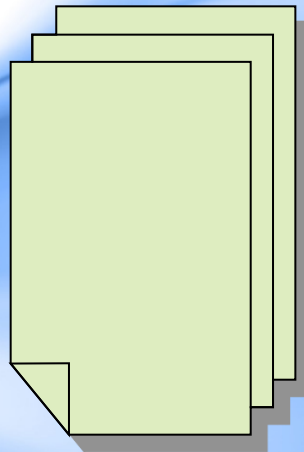
- Virginia law allows school division to establish gifted education policies and procedures according to the needs and interests of the local division. Divisions may choose to provide either General Intellectual Aptitude or Specific Academic Aptitude programs. While these areas of giftedness are both academic, they serve different kinds of learners.

# What is the Interstate Compact?

- A military compact law pertaining to identified gifted students was passed on July 1, 2009. In Article V, section B, it states:
- *“The receiving state school shall initially honor placement of the student in educational programs based on current educational assessments conducted at the school in the sending state or participation/placement in like programs in the sending state. Such programs include, but are not limited to, (i) gifted and talented programs and (ii) English as a second language (ESL) programs. This does not preclude the school in the receiving state from performing subsequent evaluations to ensure appropriate placement of the student.”*
- If the receiving school division has a gifted program that is **equivalent** to the gifted program in which a military student was previously placed, then that student should be placed in the program while further evaluation is completed.

# Why don't gifted students have IEPs and other safeguards similar to special education students?

- Federal law establishes policies and procedures for special education, but gifted education policies and procedures are established by state law.



# What is the difference between screening and referral?

- Screening is the annual process of reviewing existing, generally available, or specifically designated data for all students to determine whether students should be referred for identification for gifted services.
- Referral is a direct procedure that enters a student into a school division's identification process. Referral of a student requires the school division to administer all assessments and reach an eligibility decision as specified in the division's approved local plan for the education of the gifted. Referrals may be offered by parents, teachers, community members, administrators, peers, or the student him or herself.



# What do I do if I disagree with the decision of the identification committee?

- Parents and school personnel may appeal the decision of the committee by following the procedure established by the division. In Hampton, the first step is to call the gifted education director at 727-2160.

# Who can appeal an identification or placement decision?

- An appeal may be made by parents or guardians, and school personnel, including guidance counselors, teachers, and principals.

# What is a cut-off score? How are cut-off scores determined?

- Eligibility decisions must be based on multiple criteria which may include scores on valid and reliable tests or assessments. Tests and other measures are ranked or scored according to the procedures established by the division and approved in the local plan. No single criterion shall be used in determining students who qualify for, or are denied access to, programs for the gifted. Hampton looks at points on a matrix, not cut-off scores.

# What is the difference between an ability test and an achievement test?

- Ability tests measure a student's critical thinking, abstract reasoning, and problem solving skills.
- Achievement tests measure academic skills and progress in specific areas such as reading and math.
- Hampton uses ability test scores, not achievement test scores, as part of the gifted eligibility criteria.



# How can my child study for the gifted tests?

- Read, think, and read some more! Ask thoughtful questions, and participate in thoughtful discussions.
- Because these are ability tests, and not achievement tests, there really is no benefit in trying to study for them. We are looking for thinking skills, the ability to use visual information to see patterns, and the ability to understand and solve problems. These are not skills that can be learned in a short study session, but rather skills that have been developed over years. If your child is truly gifted, we will be able to see evidence of that.

# How are gifted programs funded? How may those funds be spent?

- The Commonwealth of Virginia provides each locality with an apportioned share of funds to support local program services, based on that locality's total student enrollment.
- State funds administered by the Department of Education and local matching funds may be used to support only those activities identified in the school division's approved local plan for the education of the gifted.

How much additional money does my division receive for programs for the gifted?  
What is a “local match”?



- The money is apportioned according to guidelines in the *Standards of Quality*, and must be matched with a prescribed amount of local funds.
- School divisions are required to match state funds with local funds based on the composite index (ability to pay) formula.

# What is a local advisory committee?

- Each school board may appoint members to a local advisory committee. This committee is composed of parents, school personnel, and other community members. The purpose of this committee is to advise the school board and the division superintendent of the educational needs of all gifted students in the division, and to review the implementation of the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted.
- Meetings of the advisory committees are open to the public. Meeting dates and times are posted on the gifted website.



# What is “appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction”?

- “Appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction” means curriculum and instruction adapted or modified to accommodate the accelerated learning aptitudes of identified students in their areas of strength. Such curriculum and instructional strategies provide accelerated and enrichment opportunities that recognize gifted students’ needs for
  - Advanced content and pacing of instruction;
  - Original research or production;
  - Problem finding and solving;
  - Higher level thinking that leads to the generation of products; and
  - A focus on issues, themes, and ideas within and across areas of study. Such curriculum and instruction are offered continuously and sequentially to support the achievement of student outcomes, and provide support necessary for these students to work at increasing levels of complexity that differ significantly from those of their age-level peers.

# How are teachers selected for work with gifted students?

- Localities develop specific procedures to select administrative and teaching staff to deliver services to gifted students. Teacher selection may be based on a demonstrated ability to create and carry out flexible, differentiated, and enriched curricular experiences which are suited to the gifted students' needs, or other criteria established by the school division.

# What training is required for teachers?

- The *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* require that school divisions provide professional development based on the teacher competencies outlined in 8VAC20-542-310 related to gifted education. Each school division specifies the required annual training expected of personnel. This training or professional development should include, but not be limited to, classes offered by the division, courses at a local university or college, conference attendance, and options tailored to meet the needs of the specific educator or group of educators. Teachers of the gifted may also choose to complete the coursework to obtain an add-on endorsement in gifted education.
- In Hampton, all full time teachers of the gifted are required to have a gifted endorsement, or to obtain that endorsement within two years of hire.



# What courses do I have to take to get a gifted endorsement on my license?

- The Commonwealth of Virginia provides an add-on endorsement in gifted education for teachers and administrators. Twelve hours of graduate level coursework in gifted education are required, as well as a practicum. The four required courses may include:
  - *Characteristics of Gifted Students*
  - *Social/Emotional Needs of Gifted Students*
  - *Curriculum Development for Gifted Students*
  - *Strategies/Differentiated Instruction for Gifted Learners*
  - *Assessment and Measurement for Gifted Students*
  - *Underserved Populations of Gifted Learners*



# How are high school students provided with differentiated instruction?

- The delivery of services for high students, as specified in the school division's local plan, may include options such as:
  - Differentiation in the regular classroom
  - Honors or advanced level courses, such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, that are differentiated for gifted learners
  - Seminars and special workshops
  - Mentorships
  - Independent study
  - Counseling sessions
  - Access to secondary level specialized programs (Academic-Year Governor's Schools)
  - Access to dual-enrolled classes with colleges and universities

# How are students selected for participation in Governor's Schools?

- Academic Year Governor's School
  - These are established as "joint schools" by Virginia school law. As such, they are typically managed by a regional governing board of representatives from the school boards of each participating division. The regional governing board is charged with developing policies for the school including the school's admissions process. While these processes differ from school to school, all applicants are assessed using multiple criteria by trained evaluators who have experience in gifted education and the focus area of the specific Academic-Year Governor's School.
  - The Governor's School for Science and Technology makes the acceptance decisions for that program. Applications are submitted online.

# Summer *Residential* Governor's School

- Any Virginia gifted tenth or eleventh-grade student may apply. Applications are made available in October and sent to high school guidance departments of public and private schools, as well as each division's gifted education coordinator. Each division has a specific number of nominations it may send to the VDOE. Nominations may be made by teachers, counselors, peers, or the students themselves. A school or division selection committee chooses the nominees from each school or division and forwards them to a state committee. Consideration is given to students' academic records, test scores, extra-curricular activities, honors, awards, creativity, original essays, and teacher recommendations. Students applying for the Visual and Performing Arts program participate in an adjudication where they audition or present portfolios for review before a pair of professionals in the specific arts field. Due to the limited number of slots available, not all students nominated by their schools can be accepted for participation.



# Summer *Residential* Governor's School

Programs are available in:

- Visual and Performing Arts
- Humanities
- Math, Science and Technology
- Agriculture (think cutting edge genetics, not cows and plows!)
- Mentorships in Medicine and Health Sciences
- Mentorships in Engineering
- Mentorships in Marine Science at VIMS

Information and applications are posted at:

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/  
governors\\_school\\_programs/summer\\_residential/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/governors_school_programs/summer_residential/index.shtml)

Foreign Language summer academies are also available.



# Summer *Regional* Governor's School

- Gifted students may apply for the regional summer school in their area. The Summer Regional Governor's School director and the local planning committee with representatives from the participating school division at each regional site establish nomination and selection procedures.
- Hampton students do not have access to any Summer Regional Governor's Schools at this time.

# **Reminders to Teachers and Parents**

# Confidentiality

- Gifted identification and placement records must be secure.
- Gifted students' confidentiality must be protected.
- Written parental consent must be secured to disclose information except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure.
- Gifted records must be accurate.

# Teachers Should Not Say...

- “Your child is gifted.” “Your child should be in the gifted program.”
- “I cannot meet the needs of your child because he/she is so far ahead.”
- “Your child is bored in my class, so he/she should be tested for the gifted program.”
- “If you want your child to be challenged in the classroom, you should refer them for the gifted program.”
- “Your child gets all A’s, so he/she should be in the gifted program.”
- “You should consider the gifted program for your child because it is safe and he/she won’t be picked on or bullied there.”

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to differentiate instruction meet the academic needs of **all** the students in his/her class. It is the responsibility of the gifted identification/placement committee to make gifted eligibility decisions.



# Teachers Should Not Say...

- “All of my students are gifted.”
- “Your child missed the eligibility cutoff by two points. You should appeal the decision.”
- “Other children in my class are just as smart as this identified child so I think the identification process is unfair/inaccurate/wrong.”
- “Your child was not identified as gifted, but I think she is, so you should keep asking for additional tests.”

The gifted identification/eligibility committee carefully looks at multiple criteria to make the best decisions possible for each student. The criteria used are listed in the local plan, and are approved by the superintendent and school board. Both objective and subjective criteria are used.

# Teachers Should Not Say...

- “You cannot go to the gifted resource class because you have not finished your class/home work.”
- “John Doe was misbehaving, so he cannot go to the gifted resource class.”
- “We are working on SOLs, and that is more important than the resource class.”
- “This child does not belong in gifted classes because he/she gets poor grades in his/her regular classes.”
- “This child is identified as gifted, but she does not do her work, so I don’t think she really is gifted.”

Gifted services are mandated by the state for identified students. A teacher cannot keep a student out of mandated services without parent permission.

# **Regulations Governing Gifted Services**

# Virginia Code and Regulations

- The Virginia Administrative Code, 8VAC20-40-10 through 8VAC20-40-70 requires all local school divisions in the Commonwealth to have gifted education programs that provide services to students from kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- The Virginia Board of Education adopted the latest *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* on May 27, 2010.



# Funding for Gifted Services

- The Commonwealth of VA provides funds to each locality based on total student enrollment.
- “Funds designated by the Virginia General Assembly for the education of gifted students shall be used by school divisions in accordance with the provisions of the Appropriation Act.”
- The local division funding appropriation can be found at the VDOE Web site as part of the direct aid payments to school divisions.
- [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/school\\_finance/budget/calc\\_tools/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/school_finance/budget/calc_tools/index.shtml)

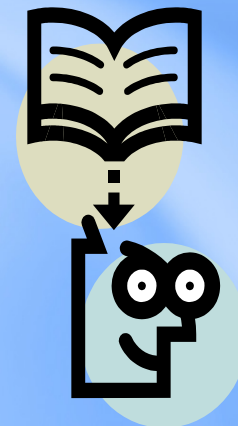
# Virginia Standards of Quality (SOQ)

- The SOQ state that each local school board shall employ with state and local gifted funds a minimum number of licensed, full-time equivalent instructional personnel for each 1,000 students in average daily membership as set forth in the appropriation act.
- The SOQ require each local school board to provide a program of high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators to assist teachers and principals in acquiring the skills needed to work with gifted students.
- §22.1-253.13:5.E

# Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted

- “Each school board shall submit a comprehensive plan for the education of gifted students to the Department of Education (DOE) for technical review on a schedule determined by the Department. Each school board shall approve a comprehensive plan for the education of gifted students that includes the components identified in these regulations.”

- 8VAC20-40-60A



# Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted

- The plan is a public document and must address all aspects of services for gifted students including
  - A statement of philosophy
  - The areas of giftedness served
  - An operational definition of giftedness in the division and its identification procedures
  - Program services
  - Professional development
  - Curriculum development
  - Equitable representation of students, and
  - Parent and community involvement



# Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted

- The *Regulations* serve as the starting point for local plan development.
- The plan must provide specific explanations of the school division's implementation of the *Regulations*.
- It must be accessible through the division's web site with printed copies also available to citizens who do not have online access.
- 8VAC20-40-60A
- Hampton's Local Plan for 2012-2016 is available on the gifted web site.

# References

- Virginia Department of Education. *Understanding the Virginia Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students*. October 2010.
- Virginia Department of Education. *Frequently Asked Questions About Gifted Education*.
- VDOE. *Roles and Responsibilities of Local Gifted Education Advisory Committees*. Oct. 2010.
- VDOE. *Local School Boards: Roles and Responsibilities in Gifted Programs*. Oct. 2010.
- Grillo, Ruth. *Please Do Not Say... Handout*. Hampton City Public Schools.