Expectations for and Characteristics of Honors-designated Courses

Everett Public Schools honors level courses are the program option for highly capable students in middle school and are one of the options for high school students (Policy 2215), along with AP and other courses. In accord with this, our honors courses should address/meet the policy expectations for instructional programs that meet the needs of highly capable students:

Highly Capable Programs (2215)
In accordance with the philosophy to develop the special abilities of each student, the district shall offer appropriate instructional programs to meet the needs of highly capable students of school age.
The framework for such programs shall encompass, but not be limited to, the following objectives:
A. Expansion of academic attainments and **intellectual skills**;
B. Stimulation of **intellectual curiosity, independence and responsibility**;
C. **Acceleration** of specific content to meet student learning needs;
D. Development of a **positive attitude** toward self and others; and
E. Development of **originality and creativity**

Research about best practices for gifted children suggests these important considerations for honors courses/highly capable programming:

National Association for Gifted Children
http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/timely-topics/common-core-state-standards-national-science-o

What is the Research Support for Differentiating the Common Core State Standards for Gifted Learners?
Evidence-based practices that inform the teacher preparation and programming standards in gifted education relate to assessment, curriculum, instruction, and grouping issues, all of which are embedded within the CCSS. The most salient examples of these practices are:

- Pre-assessment and ongoing assessment can help educators adjust instruction for a positive educational experience since **the pace of instructional delivery should be consistent with the individual student's progress**.
- Assessments should be used to document academic growth and may **include performance, products, and other tasks that are authentic to the domain**.
- In the classroom, curricular modifications for gifted students include **acceleration, enrichment, grouping, cluster grouping, problem-based learning, curriculum compacting, tiered lessons, independent study, and the use of specific curriculum models**.
- By engaging gifted individuals from diverse backgrounds in challenging curricula, educators are more likely to recognize their abilities and potential, understand differing points of view and cultures, and reduce underachievement. **Working in groups** with other gifted students can yield academic benefits as well as enhance self-confidence and communication skills.

What are the Approaches to Use in Differentiating the English Language Arts Standards?
Guided by assessment data, the ELA standards suggest that teachers are responsible for tailoring learning experiences for gifted students to foster the continued development of advanced skills, knowledge, and conceptual understanding.

- Instructional approaches in reading, for example, could include matching gifted readers with **texts that are commensurate or slightly above their documented reading level**.
- Gifted and high-potential readers may also benefit from other instructional approaches recognized as beneficial for advanced readers, such as **Socratic Seminars and literature circles**.

- In line with the ELA standards' recommendations, to promote students' continued development of research skills, teachers of the gifted may also infuse opportunities for **research in students' areas of interests** as well as creative production.
- Teachers of gifted writers may encourage the development of advanced writing skills through writing competitions, production in public venues, or staging of a student's original writing through drama, poetry readings, mentorships with local writers or other writing experts, or in-class response groups comprised of classmates with similar advanced writing abilities.
- Teachers of gifted and high-potential students also should be mindful of the importance of providing conceptual units of study that foster **interdisciplinary thinking, examination of complex issues, problem finding, and problem solving** to stimulate discussion, debate, reasoning, and related skills of persuasion, which are progressively targeted as learners move from K-6 through secondary education.
- **Instructional pace** is also a critical consideration in the education of gifted students. As noted in the Common Core State Standards materials, advanced learners may demonstrate rapid or early mastery of the standards. Depending on an individual student's rate of learning, which might differ depending on the ELA areas in which a student excels, curriculum should be made more advanced and challenging in that area.

What are the Approaches to Use in Differentiating the Mathematics Standards?

When considering the implications of the CCSS for the development of mathematical talent, it is important to take into account the eight Standards for Mathematical Practice that educators should seek to develop in their students as well as the individual Mathematics content standards.

- For example, the **Standards for Practice** expect proficient students to reason abstractly and quantitatively, persevere in solving difficult problems, and construct and critique viable arguments to support their reasoning.
- Students need a chance to experience the joy of **investigating rich concepts** in depth and applying **innovative mathematical reasoning and justification** to a variety of scientific, engineering, and other problems.
- The instructional pace is also a critical consideration in the education of gifted students in mathematics. Advanced learners may demonstrate rapid or early mastery of some of the mathematics standards, especially those involving skill at computation and mastery of algorithms, requiring accelerative opportunities at key stages of development. Appropriate pacing for these students, including in accelerated courses, means that students have the time and opportunity to delve deeply and creatively into **topics, projects, and problems of interest**.
- Teachers of the gifted also should be mindful of the importance of providing **problem finding and problem-solving skills and strategies to stimulate mathematical reasoning, spatial reasoning, and work with number theory**.
- As applied skills to **conducting meaningful research**, early exposure of gifted learners of probability, statistics, and logic are viable approaches to be used.

How Do We Differentiate Assessments Based on the Common Core State Assessments?

Though end-of-grade performance expectations are identified in the CCSS, teachers must also consider how differentiation of classroom assessments can be tailored to support the ongoing development of each student's literacy and numeracy), in order to meet gifted students' unique academic and social-emotional needs.

- For example, in ELA, curriculum may be modified with more advanced content (**more difficult material, greater depth of exploration**), **more challenging readings** (increased in alignment with students' reading levels), and projects that challenge students to stretch beyond their current level of performance through assessments that appropriately gauge the growth of the advanced learner…Thus **product-based assessment** is a crucial approach in this process.
- Similarly, students with potential in Mathematics should experience rigorous Mathematics courses through **a carefully constructed, compacted and telescoped curriculum**. This requires the use of preassessments and ongoing assessments to ensure that the knowledge and

skills are matched to the student's current level of achievement and that above grade-level curriculum is provided for acceleration.

What are the Professional Learning Implications for Implementing the Common Core State Standards?

Professional development is essential for all educators, who ideally are engaged in learning communities to identify specific knowledge and skills needed to serve different groups of learners. As schools and school districts adopt and begin using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), all educators should be involved in ongoing learning to address the needs of gifted and high-potential students. Specifically, all educators need a repertoire of research-supported strategies to deliberately adapt and modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment within the framework of the CCSS, based on the needs of gifted and talented students as well as those with high potential.

While the CCSS provide the framework for the learning experiences for all students, gifted educators need focused training that is content-specific for differentiating the standards. To differentiate effectively for gifted and high-potential learners, all educators need to develop expertise at designing **learning experiences and assessments that are conceptually advanced, challenging, and complex**.

Professional development for implementing the CCSS for gifted and high-potential learners should focus on evidence-based differentiation practices as they relate to specific core content. The training should demonstrate **how to apply acceleration strategies, how to add depth and complexity elements, such as critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, and inquiry, and how to develop and encourage creativity, all within the CCSS**. In addition to the curriculum adaptation and modification, the professional development experiences should also demonstrate content-specific ways to design and implement **differentiated product-based assessments** as well as pre- and post-assessments appropriate for advanced students.

- See more at:
http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/timely-topics/common-core-state-standards-national-science-0#sthash.U8hZ2Et3.dpuf

Sample plans reflecting programming standards for highly capable learners as examples of identifying course characteristics/expectations in standards, materials, instructional strategies, assessments, etc.:

Curriculum Plan (North Carolina):

The honors level course represents extension, acceleration, and enrichment of the standards for the core course (grade level or specific course). Curriculum should indicate depth, complexity, rigor, accelerated pacing, and creativity beyond the standard course.

- Standards and objectives show evidence of CCSS extensions: resources, lessons, and tasks that enrich, extend, and/or accelerate student learning (curriculum compacting)
- Pacing, scope, and sequence of instructional maps exceed the expectations of a core/standard level course; curriculum compacting
- Instructional strategies include: student-led learning and research, exchange of ideas, problem-based learning, problem-solving learning, seminar style learning, use of higher level critical thinking skills and creative thinking skills, strategies that support greater depth and complexity for the advanced learner, learning contracts
- Texts show evidence of increasing complexity, including selections at the college and career readiness level and focus on synthesis of two or more texts
- Pre-assessments, formative, and summative assessments that support compacting the curriculum, are authentic, and include ongoing student self- and peer-assessment

Advanced Learning Plans (Colorado):

- Focus on student areas of strength and interests
- Parental involvement
- Compacting

- Differentiated instruction, including pace of instruction
- Enrichment/extension beyond the standard curriculum: depth, complexity, and novelty; focus on higher order thinking skills; participation in academic competitions
- Independent study during the school day, with a mentor, etc.
- Affective guidance and counseling