

HIGH ABILITY LEARNER

SERVICE PLAN

Arlington Public Schools

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Arlington Public School District

The mission of Arlington Public Schools is to empower all students to develop skills for life-long learning and responsible decision making in order to contribute to a global society.

Section 1: Introduction

High Ability Learner services in the Arlington Public School District are designed to help academically gifted students achieve their highest potential throughout their school career. Currently services begin at the K-6 level with the identification of HAL characteristics and the differentiation of curriculum. The following plan describes criteria for eligibility and components of instruction for High Ability Learners for grades K-12. This service plan is meant as a general resource for parents and educators. It was established to outline K-12 alignment and improve continuity, to ensure compatible goals across grade levels, to provide consistent access to educational opportunities across the district, and to enhance communication and collaboration.

Who are High Ability Learners?

High Ability Learners (HALs) are intellectually gifted students who may need differentiated instruction to meet their educational needs. HAL services are intended to supplement instruction provided by the general curriculum and to ensure opportunities for each person to maximize individual potential. Educational planning is individualized for each identified HAL student based on his/her strengths and needs.

Why do HALs need Differentiated Learning?

Most HALs demonstrate positive and negative (or neutral) behaviors associated with their rapid learning and their advanced understanding. The positive behaviors can easily be stifled in a standard classroom environment, and the negative behaviors can be magnified-these two forces working together can be very disruptive toward the student's own learning, the resources of the classroom teacher, and the student's classmates. Differentiated learning strategies attempt to encourage positive behaviors and minimize the negative behaviors allowing the HAL student to maximize his/her potential. In this context, learning includes academic subjects but also includes the child's intellectual, psychological, and social growth.

Section 2: Process to Determine HAL Needs

How is a HAL identified?

Identification of HAL students in the Arlington Public School District begins with either a referral or results from standardized testing.

Once a student has been referred, additional data is collected and a decision is made by the HAL Identification Committee regarding placement. A variety of quantitative and qualitative measures are used for this evaluation.

What is a DLP?

Each HAL student has a unique set of strengths and needs. The individual DLP attempts to deal with both and is tailored to each child's specific profile. Effective strategies used in the classroom may include (but are not limited to) some of the following examples.

Modify the daily structure

- independent or small group work (math, language arts, research)
- use of technology

Compact the curriculum

- learning contracts
- pre-testing

Provide extensions to create a more individualized learning environment

- Continental Math League
- WordMasters
- Stock Market Game
- WebQuests
- Puzzles, brain teasers
- Destination Imagination
- MathCounts
- Future Cities
- Middle School Learning Lab
- Academic Decathlon

HAL students need opportunities to complete tasks that are both more demanding and that require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of instructional concepts. These may be tasks that are offered to the entire class but with the opportunity for the HAL to explore content more deeply (for example, for a classroom project on electricity, a HAL might be encouraged to learn about the structure of an atom), branch out (for a classroom project on butterflies the HAL might learn about common characteristics of insects), or do something creative (make a model, or write or perform a skit related to the topic).

This list of strategies and activities is meant as a very broad outline of the kinds of things that might be implemented as part of a DLP. No HAL is likely to participate in all activities listed. DLPs are tailored to the individual student's needs and interests. Like the individual learning plans for other special needs students, the best strategies for HAL's will benefit the other students in the classroom as well. This is especially true for other high performing students (who do not meet the HAL criteria), but the benefits can in many circumstances, extend to a broader range of students.

Section 3: Academic and Support Services

What services are available for HAL students to receive?

Services for HAL students vary throughout the K-12 continuum. Students are served within the classroom, through pull-out instruction with peers, and are invited to attend many opportunities outside the regular school day.

Elementary School

HALs are identified using previously described criteria and the teachers, parents, and students are notified during September. Teachers differentiate learning in their own classrooms for HALs. The elementary HAL facilitator meets with individual teachers or grade level partners regularly throughout the school year to exchange ideas and information about strategies to meet the needs of HALs.

The elementary HAL facilitator and the classroom teachers develop DLP's for HALs in the various subject areas of need. Parents may be consulted in this process, and would be included if requested by parents. The program will be cross-curricular and thematic in nature and will be developed according to individual needs of qualifying students each year. DLP strategies and other enrichment opportunities will be implemented no later than the first week of October, and will continue until at least the 3rd week of April each year.

Off campus opportunities will be investigated and passed on to students and parents. The HAL facilitator will arrange for HALs to attend various critical thinking workshops available through the Educational Service Unit. Students and parents will receive information regarding additional challenges they may participate in through the APS website and other opportunities available for them to challenge themselves at home or other facilities.

Competition opportunities will include Math Counts, Destination Imagination, etc. dependent on interest and number of qualified students each year. These programs will be offered before or after school and will consist of critical thinking and problem solving activities throughout the year to prepare for competitions with other area students.

Middle School

HAL students at the middle school level have various opportunities to be served, both within and outside the regular classroom setting. Teachers of all students have been instructed in differentiation and will include that teaching strategy whenever possible. Students that score high on an Algebra readiness test at the end of 6th or 7th grade will be accelerated into Algebra in 7th or 8th grade, respectively.

Identified HAL middle school students also have the opportunity to take an elective in 8th grade. Topics that are addressed include, but are not limited to, reading, research, and debate. Similarly, there is a class for 7th grade students in lieu of the general Reading course. All standards are met through this course, but at a more challenging level.

For the HAL student, Learning Lab is a one half hour daily time period that is designated for extension activities related to Reading, Writing, Math and Science. Some HAL students will be involved each subject, while others may be placed in selected classes, per their individual needs as indicated on their DLP.

There are several extra-curricular clubs that HAL and other motivated students may get involved in. MathCounts, a national organization that promotes higher math skills through competition meets weekly before school between roughly September through February.

Students can also work before school with Future Cities. This is an engineering competition that includes working with computer models, writing aspects and a physical scale model. Work begins in September and runs through January/February.

Selected students also may take advantage of off-campus workshops, Quiz Bowl and additional math competitions.

High School

High school students that have been identified as High Ability Learners typically take honors courses. Many students also take advantage of college courses, either taken through dual credit enrollment, or through an online format.

Extra-curricular opportunities are varied and are not limited to HAL students. They include, but are not limited to, Quiz Bowl, Speech, Academic Decathlon, and the AMC Math contest.

What is the HAL Advisory Committee?

The HAL Advisory Committee is in the planning stages at this point. In the future, a group of HAL instructors, teachers, parents and students will be formed to gather information and provide input for the purpose of improving gifted services.

What resources are available to teachers?

Teachers have been trained in differentiation for all students, including those with high ability. Other teacher resources are available through the HAL page on the Arlington school website. HAL instructors are also available for consultation on an as needed basis.