



TO: Members of the Board of Education

FROM: Jennifer Cheatham, Superintendent

DATE: December 30, 2015

RE: Update on Advanced Learning

I. Background Information:

Over the last two years, the Advanced Learning (AL) department created and the Board of Education approved [board policy 3555](#), which summarizes the district’s vision of Advanced Learning. Additionally, the board approved updates to the Advanced Learning Plan on September 29, 2014. The Department of Public Instruction found MMSD to be in compliance with state statute on February 6, 2015. The final letter is attached to this [memo](#).

Based on the approval of the [Advanced Learning plan](#), schools have received support from the AL Department and building-based AL-Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) in the following areas:

- Identification
- Tiers of Support
- Family Engagement

II. Executive Summary:

Identification:

Formerly the AL department primarily focused on the identification of students rather than the development of programming to meet students’ needs. This approach lead to a system that identified students as, then, Gifted and Talented; however students did not necessarily receive programming or specific instruction to meet their needs. Based on our approved AL Plan, MMSD is now focusing on both identifying student needs and building support around those needs.

This new approach can be summarized as looking for students who have a high need or high interest in advanced academics. For example as part of this plan, we have identified students as an advanced learner when enrichment supports reveal evidence of high performance in the absence of assessment data. This shift in identifying students we believe will increase the number of traditionally underrepresented student populations not currently found in advanced learning data. Furthermore, this approach pushes the department

High Need Low Interest	High Need High Interest
Low Need Low Interest	Low Need High Interest

S. Peters, Beyond Gifted Education, 2014

and teacher teams to look at students differently - beyond test scores. For example, in addition to looking at assessment data, we look at the following indicators:

- What are the student's needs, beyond core instruction, to continue their academic growth?
- What supports, which extend beyond core instruction or accelerate, need to be provided for the student's identified needs to be met?

If these supports continually help the student's academic growth, then we have evidence that the student has appropriately been identified as an advanced learner.

While the AL-IRTs still formally identify students as advanced learners, the result of our work over the past year is that the method of identification of Advanced Learners has become more integrated with the work of MTSS and Curriculum and Instruction.

Supports:

Another important shift for our Advanced Learning Department since the approval of the AL Plan is the new cross-functional work within the Teaching and Learning Department. Currently the department has:

- Developed a professional development series on differentiation that can be used in schools and tailored for a specific student population
- Worked within Teaching and Learning to align Advanced Placement courses with the overall course alignment process as well as to potential Pathways planning at the high school level
- Participated within the High School Reform Collaborative process and Pathways development
- Provided more efficient guidance and support to schools
- Provided professional development for Student Centered Coaching for AL IRTs

Family Engagement:

In alignment with the district's vision of supporting home-school-community partnerships for student success, the AL department resurrected the Parent Advisory Council. Current demographics of the council membership are as follows:

- 30% African-American,
- 10% Hispanic,
- 10% Asian, and
- 50% White;
- with about 20% of the parents representing east side schools

This group of twenty parents has met several times and is currently engaged in co-developing a Parent's Guide to the Advanced Learning Plan. In response to parental requests for improved communication, the department continues to conduct presentation and feedback sessions at school PTA/PTO meetings, community organizations and department-scheduled meetings. We have also initiated systematic yearly communications via letter, phone and/or email to inform families of their child's plan of support to meet their advanced learning needs. Finally, the AL Department has updated the MMSD website to provide contact information and resources for parents of Advanced Learners.

2014-2015 Data:

Attached to this report is the review of the 2014-15 data from Research, Assessment and Data Use. The following data is highlighted in the data report (see Supporting Documentation):

- 19% of all K-8 students are identified within an Advanced Learning domain
- Demographically the student groups represented have incrementally increased as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ American Indian: + 2%○ Black/African-American: +1%○ Hispanic/Latino: +1%○ Multiracial: +1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pacific Islander: +10%• ELLs: +3%• Low Income students: +1%
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- AL students meet their MAP growth target at an average rate of 6% - 8% higher as compared to their peers.

The data report shows that we had an overall decrease in numbers of students identified between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. Although fewer students have been identified, more students are benefitting from the focus on strategies that support, enrich, and deepen the classroom instructional rigor for all students. Increased rigor, with support, means that all students have greater opportunity for both learning and talent development. These common enrichment experiences allow teachers and Advanced Learning Instructional Resource Teachers (AL-IRTs) opportunities to find AL students that would never be identified through testing data.

III. Implications/Next Steps:

- Developing and piloting common enrichment experiences within Math and Literacy
 - Piloting ways to reach underrepresented populations through classroom observations
 - Refine the U-STARS observational tool to be used to capture evidence of Advanced Learning needs
- Collaborating with Math and Literacy departments to align advanced learning supports with scope and sequence documents
 - Professional Development to supplement Literacy through Great Books Foundation
 - Refine supplemental Math resources such as CPM extensions, Red Bird and Ten Marks for Math both in text and online
- Developing summer professional learning for all staff (Summer 2016)
 - Differentiation
 - Supplemental resources for literacy
- Developing a Teacher's Guide to the Advanced Learning Plan
- Developing a Parent's Guide to the Advanced Learning Plan

IV. Supporting Documentation

- [Advanced Learning Report Fall 2015](#)