Middle School
Gifted Program

Updates and Possibilities

Dr. Casey McNeely
Director of Academic Support & Gifted
What is Gifted Education in Georgia

According to GA State Board Policy,

Curriculum for gifted students should focus on using differentiated instruction in one or more of the following content areas: mathematics, science, English/language arts, social studies, world languages, fine arts, and career, technical and agricultural education.

In Bulloch County, our middle schools provide this differentiated instruction primarily through a separate curriculum within the QUEST classroom.

Values that have been brought forth for Gifted Education:

- **Academically challenging environments** for all learners, including our gifted learners.
- Activities for gifted students that promote *creativity, critical thinking, research, and extensions* beyond the regular curriculum.
- Learning environments that give gifted students an *opportunity to collaborate* with other gifted students.
- **Additional honors class options** beyond those currently offered that maintain high curriculum standards and employ strategies specifically designed for gifted learners.
- **Smaller class sizes** in advanced content classes.
- **Gifted endorsed teachers** teaching gifted students.
- **Consistency of gifted services** provided across the district.
State Approved Delivery Models for C

- Resource Class
- Advanced Content
- Advanced Content: Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in Diploma Program
- Cluster Grouping
- Collaborative Teaching
- Internship/Mentorship
- Approved Innovative Models
Delivery Models Currently Utilized in BU:

- Resource Class (QUEST)
- Advanced Content
- Advanced Content: Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in Diploma Program
- Cluster Grouping
- Collaborative Teaching
- Internship/Mentorship
- Approved Innovative Models
Why re-evaluate middle school gifted?

- To ensure that our values about learning for all students are being met, including our current gifted learners.
- Parents have concerns for the relevance of the current curriculum and model.
- Current model limits other connection options for students.
- Data indicates room for improvement in the % of gifted students performing at the proficient or distinguished level on GMAS.
- Research suggests that there are additional effective models for teaching middle school gifted students.
- Our current middle school gifted program does not align with the majority of middle schools gifted programs in Georgia.
The following data shows the percentage of each model claimed by Georgia schools based on FTE for FY18 (Bulloch County designated in red):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Served via Each Model in the State of Georgia (K-12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Content (including AP and IB)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship/Mentorship</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative Model</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential Concerns

Potential Concern: We want to eliminate services for gifted students.

Clarification: We want to evaluate the most effective gifted models. We are not eliminating gifted services, but finding the optimal model to meet our students’ needs.

Potential Concern: A final decision has been made for gifted for next year.

Clarification: This work is still in process. We are collecting input from stakeholders.

- Principals
- Current QUEST teachers
- Current middle school gifted parents
- Academic Support department
Current Model vs. New Possibilities
Current Middle School Models

Bulloch County Middle Schools currently utilize the resource, advanced content, and cluster models for gifted services.

- **Resource**: QUEST class offered during a connections period
  - 6th grade Environmental Biology focus, 7th grade US Government focus, 8th grade Economics, History, & Physical Science focus
- **Advanced Content**: We currently offer honors math and ELA courses in grades 6-8 and high school credit to 8th grade students in Coordinate Algebra and Physical Science.
- **Cluster**: When a gifted endorsed teacher is teaching a non-honors class with a small group of gifted students in the class, gifted students are grouped together to provide gifted services through small group differentiation.
Advantages of Current Models

- Gifted students are provided with a time to collaborate with other gifted students on study projects within the QUEST curriculum.
- Gifted students are given the opportunity to participate in study trips, providing enrichment beyond the classroom to places like the Barrier Islands, Washington, D.C., and New York City.
- Gifted students are exposed to content and concepts such as the Stock Market and US Government that are not necessarily found in the regular education standards for middle school.
- QUEST provides an opportunity to utilize creative thinking, critical thinking, and research skills that may not be fully utilized in other classes.
- Parent perceptions indicate that the resource class best meets their child’s gifted needs.
Concerns for Current Models

- Principals’ concerns that we are not providing enough rigor within the current model to grow our gifted learners academically.
- Parent perceptions that the current model is not meeting the needs of their children due to the QUEST class lacking purpose in assignments and consistency in grading.
- Students continue to request withdrawals from the QUEST class because of lack of interest or desire to take other connections classes.
- Parent perceptions that current advanced content classes are not rigorous enough for gifted students.
- Ongoing parent and community concerns about the exclusive nature of the QUEST program. 
One New Possibility

A Middle School Honors Program built upon our district work with proficiency scales utilizing the advanced content model for gifted services.

- Honors classes offered in all four content areas (math, science, social studies, and ELA)
- Students would take at least two advanced content classes each year based on ability and interest.
- To maintain eligibility for the honors class and gifted program, students would need to perform at a proficiency scale level 4 on 80% of the priority standards identified for each honors course.
Proficiency Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Scale Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Level 4 describes the expectations and types of activities that show mastery beyond the grade level standard. At this level, students are required to transfer learning to more complex content and thinking, including deeper conceptual understanding and applications that go beyond what is explicitly taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Level 3 describes what students must know or demonstrate to show mastery of the grade level standard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Proficiency Scale Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard: Students explain how water shapes landforms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Exceeds Standard</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transfer of learning to more complex content and thinking (not new content), including deeper conceptual understanding and applications that go beyond what is explicitly taught in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Predict how the processes of erosion and deposition can affect humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design a solution to a human problem related to erosion or deposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 At Standard</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The standard or learning target—content, details, vocabulary, concepts, procedures, processes, and skills (simple and complex)—explicitly taught in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explain how water shapes landforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how a landform is created by water erosion (for example, a canyon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how a landform is created by deposition (for example, a delta)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Above and beyond grade level standards
- Encourages creativity, critical thinking, research, in-depth study, etc.
- Ensures rigorous coursework
Benefits of the Honors Program (Advanced Content Model)

- Extended learning opportunities beyond the grade level standards
- Extended to high achieving regular education students that have shown high academic performance
- Honors course offerings would be expanded to **science and social studies** in all grades, 6th - 8th
- Students placed into courses based upon ability and preference
- Proficiency scales **define clear honors course expectations** for students, teachers, and parents and **differentiation for gifted learners** is built into Level 4 activities
- Studying core content subjects at a deeper level will provide **higher order thinking and processing skills for all students**. Examples: analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking
- Gifted students will have more opportunities to learn core content with like-minded, similar ability peers than currently available
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

● Would students be able to continue learning the QUEST material that stakeholders value?
  ○ Yes. There are opportunities to incorporate some of the current QUEST material into the core content classes
    ■ 6th grade Earth Science could be extended to include further study of the Barrier Islands
    ■ 7th grade Social Studies could be extended to include an in-depth comparison of the government and economics of other countries to US government and economics
    ■ 8th grade Georgia Studies could extend the economics standards to include the Stock Market game and Physical Science can provide extended study of the physics of bridge designs
  ○ These opportunities would be available to more students through the advanced content model.
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

● Would students still be able to participate in the traditional middle school QUEST study trips?
  ○ Yes. We could offer these trips to not only gifted students, but to any student in the specified grade level that would like to participate in the field trip experience
  ○ We could continue the same trips that have been taken in the past or explore new options
    ■ 6th Grade: Barrier Islands
    ■ 7th Grade: Washington, D.C.
    ■ 8th Grade: New York, N.Y.
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

- Would core content teachers be trained to teach gifted learners?
  - Yes. Many of our core content teachers have completed or will have completed their gifted endorsement by the end of this school year.
    - Core Content Regular Education Teachers with Gifted Endorsement
      - LCMS: 8 of 24 teachers
      - PMHS: 5 of 9 teachers
      - SEBMS: 6 of 31 teachers
      - WJMS: 8 of 24 teachers
  - Currently, our plan is to ensure that all honors course teachers are gifted endorsed within the next two years.
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

● Would core content teachers be trained to teach gifted learners?
  ○ We will provide training for all honors course teachers on best practices in teaching gifted learners and provide opportunities to collaboratively plan with gifted endorsed teachers.

  ■ Professional Development Plan if Honors Program is Implemented
    ● May 29th - Full Day training on using proficiency scales in the classroom and specifically for use in honors classes.
    ● July (Pre-planning) - Full Day training for teaching gifted students in academic content classes using proficiency scales.
    ● October (PD half-day/subs needed) - Collaborative planning by content area/grade level
    ● January (PD day) - Collaborative planning day
    ● March (PD half-day/subs needed) - Collaborative planning by content area/grade level
  ○ Training provided to honors course teachers has the ability to positively impact all students.
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

- Would the honors program courses look different?
  - In many cases, yes. The proficiency scales would be used to ensure that quality extension opportunities, such as those currently provided in QUEST, are offered in all four content areas throughout each course.
  - Teacher training would provide honors course teachers with strategies that ensure all honors students are challenged to extend their thinking and reasoning abilities in a variety of ways.
Honors Program Concerns & Considerations

- How would this affect connections classes?
  - Gifted students would be able to experience more connections courses if they are not required to take the QUEST resource class during one of their connections classes.
  - Schools could potentially restructure their staff in order to offer an additional connections option for all students.
  - Offering a new connections class may reduce the number of students in each connections class.
Before Moving Forward with the Middle School Honors Program

- We need to ensure that
  - proficiency scales are in place and ready for use for all middle school core content courses
  - the Professional Development Plan for teachers is realistic and achievable
  - a class size limit is established for honors courses

- We need to determine
  - the entrance criteria for enrollment in an honors course.
  - the continuation criteria for remaining in the honors program.

- We need to establish a monitoring process to ensure a rigorous GVC is implemented for honors courses across the district.
One Additional Challenge

If the Honors Program is implemented, schools will no longer have a dedicated teacher to complete gifted paperwork, record keeping, testing and identification of future gifted students required by the SBOE.

While this will free up capacity of teacher resources within the schools, we will still need to fulfill these requirements. Therefore, we would need to consider creating a middle/high school lead gifted teacher position that would perform these tasks for all middle and high schools in the district. In addition to these tasks, this person would also assist in planning for honors courses as an added measure to ensure gifted students needs are met through the honors program.
Next Steps

- Building upon this information session, each middle school will host a parent information session to discuss the options for the gifted program, address parent concerns, and obtain feedback from parents.
- Principals and district staff will meet to discuss the feedback from stakeholders, evaluate the pros and cons of each option, decide if changes are in the best interest of their students, and if so, create a plan for implementing changes within their schools.
Thank You!

Questions/Feedback?