



**Program for  
Academically  
Highly Capable Students**  
*(includes Explorer Program)*

Walla Walla Public Schools  
364 South Park Street, Walla Walla, WA 99362



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## OVERVIEW

The Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program offers highly capable students an opportunity to study academic topics, complex ideas, and problems. Highly capable students are those who perform or show potential for performing at significantly advanced academic levels when compared with others of their age, experiences or environments. Highly Capable students comprise approximately three percent of our district population, K-12

The goal of the Highly Capable Program is to offer students challenging and academically rigorous educational opportunities, while developing their abilities to think creatively and to reason effectively. Those scholastic experiences will provide students with the tools and background they need to become responsible for their own learning.

In their December 2010 Report to the Washington State Legislature, the Highly Capable Program Technical Work Group was charged with establishing recommendations on what constitutes a basic education for highly capable students and establishing related standards, guidelines, and definitions. Effective September 1, 2011, the Washington legislature found that, “for highly capable students, access to accelerated learning and enhanced instruction is access to basic education.” (Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.185.020)

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has been at the forefront of developing national standards for highly capable education. NAGC noted that while gifted students do have an extraordinary level of potential and ability, their aptitude for learning can easily go to waste if it is not fostered properly. The facts clearly show that gifted students need teachers who will challenge them. A 1991 study found between 18 and 25 percent of gifted and talented students drop out of school. Gifted drop-outs were generally from lower socio-economic status families and had little or no access to extracurricular activities, hobbies, or technology.

As used in this document, the term highly capable student shall mean “a student who has been assessed to have superior intellectual ability as demonstrated by one or more of the multiple criteria in the WAC.” (Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-170-040)

“Highly capable students are students who perform or show potential for performing at significantly advanced academic levels when compared with others of their age, experiences, or environments. Outstanding abilities are seen within students’ general intellectual aptitudes, specific academic abilities and/or creative productivities within a specific domain.” (WAC 392-170-035)

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

Providing students with an accelerated program to meet specific needs in select academic subject areas is the primary goal of the Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program. Additionally, the program provides students with unique opportunities to develop individual talents and to strengthen skills. Emphasis is on building a positive self-concept, relationships with others, and strategies to develop critical thinking skills which enable students to become independent, self-directed learners.

Goals are focused in three specific areas:

1. To develop a realistic concept of self and work cooperatively with peers and adults.
2. To develop critical thinking skills using knowledge, comprehension, synthesis, application, analysis, and evaluation in order to solve problems.
3. To create original projects to reflect critical thinking skills as supplemental learning to the regular classroom curriculum.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Students identified for the Highly Capable Program will:

- Generate new ideas of familiar concepts and situations by showing increased fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.
- Develop critical thinking skills in order to solve problems logically.
- Develop research skills and use information gathered to implement individual and group research projects.
- Demonstrate the ability to use creative problem solving strategies.
- Recognize how change in and around their world affects their relationships.
- Show continual growth through improvement in state/district test scores.
- Acquire competence commensurate with ability in both written and oral communication.

## **DEFINITION OF A HIGHLY CAPABLE STUDENT**

Highly capable children and youth perform at or show the potential for performing at a significantly advanced level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who generally possess these learning characteristics:

- (1) Capacity to learn with unusual depth of understanding, to retain what has been learned, and to transfer learning to new situations;
- (2) Capacity and willingness to deal with increasing levels of abstraction and complexity earlier than their chronological peers;
- (3) Ability to make unusual connections among ideas and concepts;
- (4) Ability to learn very quickly in their area(s) of intellectual strength;
- (5) Capacity for intense concentration and/or focus.

## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHLY CAPABLE STUDENTS

### General Intellectual Ability

- Comprehends abstract ideas and concepts
- Considers concepts and situations in which he/she has no personal experience
- Makes quick and valid generalizations and uses them in new situations
- Demonstrates skills in reasoning and evaluating situations
- Sees cause and effect
- Chooses and enjoys challenging tasks or problems
- Generates sophisticated and creative ideas and solutions
- Demonstrates great curiosity; asks how, why, and what if
- Chooses original methods and produces innovative products
- Is keenly observant

### Social/Emotional/Behavioral

- Strong sense of self
- Perfectionism that may include being critical of self and other's ideas/beliefs/opinions
- Questions authority
- Motivation for and intense focus on tasks
- Withdrawal from peers/prefers adults
- Subtle sense of humor/original jokes and puns
- Boredom with routine
- Sensitive to the needs of others
- Critical of self and others

## HIGH ACHIEVER vs. A GIFTED LEARNER

<p><b>A High Achiever...</b>            Knows the answers            Is interested            Is attentive            Has good ideas            Works hard            Commits time and effort to learning            Answers questions            Absorbs information            Copies and responds accurately            Is a top student            Needs 6 to 8 repetitions for mastery            Understands ideas            Grasps meaning            Completes assignments            Is a technician            Is a good memorizer            Is receptive            Listens with interest            Prefers sequential presentation of information            Is pleased with his or her own learning</p>	<p><b>A Gifted Learner...</b>            Asks the questions            Is highly curious            Is intellectually engaged            Has original ideas            Performs with ease            May need less time to excel            Responds with detail and unique perspectives            Manipulates information            Creates new and original products            Is beyond his or her age peers            Needs 1 or 2 repetitions for mastery            Constructs abstractions            Draws inferences            Initiates projects            Is an innovator            Is insightful; makes connections with ease            Is intense            Shows strong feelings, opinions, perspectives            Thrives on complexity            Is highly self-critical</p>
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Based on a concept from "The Gifted and Talented Child" by Janice Szabos, Maryland Council for Gifted and Talented, Inc. as reprinted in Heacox, D. (2002), p. 136.

## MYTHS/FACTS ABOUT GIFTED STUDENTS AND GIFTED EDUCATION

Myths	Facts
Gifted education and the “gifted” label are “elitist” because schools with gifted programs offer “special” treatment for smart kids that already have it all.	<b>Gifted education is, in fact, about meeting the academic and affective needs of students whose abilities and knowledge exceed what is being taught in the regular classroom.</b>
Gifted kids have “pushy” parents.	<b>In fact, parents of gifted children are often less inclined to make an issue of their children for fear of drawing attention and harming their child’s school experience. Often, parents of gifted children may be reliving their own negative experience in school and simply want their child to be intellectually challenged each day in school.</b>
Gifted kids tend to be physically weak and unhealthy.	<b>Gifted children actually tend to be stronger, have fewer illnesses, and many are outstanding athletes.</b>
Gifted kids are emotionally unstable and social misfits.	<b>The opposite is generally true. Many children fail to be identified by teachers because their outward behavior seems so normal. They are often very outgoing and can be outstanding leaders.</b>
Gifted kids are enthusiastic about school and academic work.	<b>Gifted children will, in fact, opt for alternative ways to demonstrate their intellectual and creativity, if not encouraged to do so in a school environment. Gifted students will often choose the easiest path to an “A” since the “A” comes so easily to them.</b>
Gifted kids are smart enough to learn by themselves.	<b>Gifted children require the same professional educational and emotional support as other children, but support must be appropriate to their needs.</b>
Gifted kids are usually from upper/middle class professional families.	<b>Gifted children are found in all socioeconomic groups in proportionate numbers.</b>
Gifted kids with the same level of intelligence have the same abilities and interests.	<b>Gifted children, like all children, are unique individuals and differ in their abilities, talents, and personalities.</b>
All children are gifted.	<b>All individuals are unique with their own relative strengths and weaknesses, but gifted refers to extraordinary, exceptional, beyond-the-norm abilities and talents; they are different than other children of the same age and grade level.</b>

## PROGRAMMING DESCRIPTIONS

The Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program focuses on two domains: 1) general intellectual growth and exploration and 2) specific academic content areas. The specific academic areas focus on Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies. Students in the Highly Capable Program are offered the following services:

- Students in kindergarten through second grade, identified as Highly Capable, are served through the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. The elementary principal or designee will work with classroom teachers to provide appropriate accelerated/enhanced learning opportunities. K-2 classroom/program options could include, but not be limited to: alternative activities, enrichment activities, flexible group learning, independent projects, advanced lessons, online or supplemental instruction. The model for K-2 includes cluster and flexible grouping within the classroom or grade level.
- For grades three through five, the Highly Capable (Explorer) Program consists of a pull-out program focused on Science and Mathematics. The pull-out program allows students to be grouped homogeneously by with other students identified for the program and to participate in enriched academic experiences at a rigorous pace.
- The middle school Highly Capable (Explorer) Program focuses on the subject areas of English, Language Arts and Social Studies. This middle school program is incorporated into the school day through separate self-contained Explorer Program classrooms. Students are involved in inquiry-based lessons, group problem-solving settings, independent investigations, and group discussions. Middle school Explorer students have an opportunity to take different levels of mathematics classes, based on their ability and test scores. This same opportunity is extended to all students in grades six through eight at both middle schools.
- Students previously identified as Highly Capable and transitioning to ninth grade will meet with high school counselors (or principal's designee) for the purpose of course selection and access to advanced instruction. Teachers of high school Highly Capable students will know who has been identified and will be provided with professional development and/or instructional suggestions through the high school RtI team. Services for high school students can include, but are not limited to, honors or Advanced Placement classes, Running Start, independent study or online classes.
- Previously identified transfer students, with proof of program acceptance, will be scheduled according to their educational needs in the academic focus areas of Mathematics, Science, Language Arts and Social Studies. New students lacking transcripts or proof of program acceptance will be given STAR Reading and Math placement tests to help determine appropriate placement and/or the need for further testing.

## **IDENTIFICATION PROCESS (WAC 392-120-045)**

This process is available K-12, modified as necessary for the various grade band programs, as described on the previous page. The referral and identification process conducted in Walla Walla School District consists of four steps:

1. **Nomination/Referral**
2. **Assessment/Testing**
3. **Committee Review/Identification**
4. **Selection**

### **1. Nomination/Referral**

The annual selection process for in-district students takes place in the spring. The deadline for varies slightly from year to year, but usually is during March. All referred students will be pre-screened at their school using norm-referenced standardized test results and those who qualify for further testing will participate in cognitive abilities testing. In all cases, parents will be notified of the results of the process, and a child not selected one year may be referred again in subsequent years. New kindergarten students will be evaluated in the fall and parents will be notified of the results.

Students may be referred by parents, teachers, counselors, learning specialists or other school personnel. They may also self-refer. Referral forms must be completed by the individual who refers the student; however, parents must give consent that the student be tested and evaluated. Referral forms, available in the front office of each school, are completed by parents, teachers and others, and then are submitted to the appropriate school personnel (elementary Learning Specialist, middle school or high school Counselor).

Referrals and testing will be completed according to the Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program assessment and identification schedule. (For current year deadlines, please call 526-6735 or look under the Highly Capable/Explorer Program link on our website: [www.wwps.org](http://www.wwps.org)).

Written parental permission is required before non-universal screening/testing begins. No student may be denied access to Highly Capable programs on the basis of race, creed, or handicapping conditions.

Following nominations/referrals, screening procedures are designed to facilitate viable nominations.

### **2. Assessment/Testing**

Assessments, using nationally normed tests, can occur at home schools and/or the district office. Testing may take place during school hours and/or after-school.

New Kindergarten Students participate in a universal screening process within the first six weeks of the school year. Assessment results are shared with parents during late fall parent/teacher goal setting conferences. Students exhibiting Highly Capable characteristics and/or achievement scores across multiple measures may be nominated for Highly Capable services. The school team, including the parent, will determine if further testing is required. This may include, but not be limited to, Renaissance STAR Reading and Math, Pre-LAS English/Spanish, AIMSWeb math assessments, oral language screeners, DIBELS and IDEL. If Highly Capable Services are determined by these assessments, the Learning Specialist at each site will help teachers develop appropriate individual programming.

Current Kindergarten through Second Grade Students will be identified using a variety of norm-referenced standardized test results which may include, but not be limited to, Renaissance STAR Reading and Math, Pre-LAS English/Spanish, AIMSweb math assessments, oral language screeners, DIBELS and IDEL. Assessment results are shared with parents. Students exhibiting Highly Capable characteristics and/or achievement scores across multiple measures may be nominated for Highly Capable services. The school team, including the parent, will determine if further testing (such as the CogAT) is required. If Highly Capable Services are determined by these assessments, the Learning Specialist at each site will help teachers develop appropriate individual programming.

Third through Twelfth Grade Students seeking Highly Capable services in the Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program are assessed as described below:

**Achievement Tests** are used to determine a student's performance level in the academic core areas of English/Language Arts and Math. This testing process is used as a screener to begin the referral process for the Explorer Program. Examples of achievement tests include, but are not limited to the AIMSweb, DIBELS or IDEL, Renaissance STAR Assessments (Reading and Math), Terra Nova, CTBS, and the Supera (for ELL students).

#### **Cognitive Ability Tests**

The cognitive abilities test used by The Walla Walla School District is the Riverside Publishing Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). It consists of two parts.

- **Part I** measures cognitive abilities through verbal and quantitative skills. Cognitive ability shall be defined as the complete range of intellectual functions referred to as intellect, intelligence, or mental abilities and includes such psychological concepts as thinking, abstract reasoning, problem solving, verbal comprehension, and numerical facility.
- **Part II** measures non-verbal abilities in reasoning and problem solving using spatial symbols. This is a more hands on approach to evaluate a students' ability in using their environment to manipulate and solve problems.

#### **Evidence of Exceptional Creativity**

Evidence in this area is submitted through the parent and teacher nomination forms. Exceptional creativity must align with the academic focus of the Explorer Program.

### **3. Committee Review/Identification**

The Selection Committee meets in the spring to consider referred students for selection to the Highly Capable Program. The committee consists of at least five representatives which should be selected from the following groups, as per WAC 392-170-0770:

- Highly Capable program teachers
- Elementary or secondary teachers
- Learning Specialist or Middle School Counselor
- Elementary Administrator
- District Administrator
- District Psychologist

Spring selection responsibilities include paid time for reading student files which are blinded so student information is anonymous to the committee members. Committee members then convene as a group to rate each blinded file. Committee members who feel they know the identities of students should use their judgment as to whether to participate in the discussion of those students.

#### **4. Selection**

Qualification for Highly Capable services is based on the following, in accordance with WAC 392-170-055:

- The student's achievement test score, top 5 percent (95th percentile)
- The student's cognitive ability test score, top 5 percent (95th percentile)
- The student's evidence of exceptional creativity in regard to the academic focus of the program
- Parent referral form information
- Teacher referral form information
- Previous Highly Capable program enrollment

At this time, all students who qualify for Highly Capable Program services are accepted, with parental permission. No student number limits are in place at any school within Walla Walla School District.

#### **NOTIFICATION**

Depending on the grade level of the student, parents are notified in writing through the Office of Curriculum and Instruction or building principal's office as to whether their student qualifies for services. Students not accepted during one year may be referred again in subsequent years. Teachers and staff are notified following parental notification. Parents are welcome to contact the Office of Curriculum and Instruction or meet with the building principal (grades K-2) to review their student's test scores.

#### **APPEALS**

Parents/legal guardians have the right to appeal the multi-disciplinary selection committee's decision. Individuals appealing the selection committee's decision must submit a completed appeal form requesting review of selection/placement decision. Grounds for appeal include, but are not limited to, errors in scoring, testing bias against students who are members of a protected class, and special circumstances including unique, untestable characteristics evident in student performance. The written appeal request must include reasons for the appeal and any supporting documentation.

The appeal request and supporting evidence must be submitted to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment within ten school days of receiving the committee's decision. The multi-disciplinary selection committee will review the student's file, assessment data, and additional evidence provided in the request for appeal, and then make a recommendation to the Assistant Superintendent.

A decision will be made by the Assistant Superintendent within ten school days after receiving the multi-disciplinary team's review recommendation. The parent/legal guardian will be notified of the decision in writing. The decision of the Assistant Superintendent is final.

## **EXITING THE PROGRAM**

The exit process from the program involves the teacher, student, parents, school principal and/or administrator with responsibility for the supervision of the District's Highly Capable program.

Parents may remove their students from the program by contacting their student's teacher, school principal and/or administrator with responsibility for the supervision of the District's Highly Capable program.

All placements in the program may undergo periodic review including assessment data, standardized test scores, etc. to ensure that each student is demonstrating consistent academic progress. Should the determination be made that a student is not demonstrating adequate academic progress, a conference to discuss alternatives will be scheduled with parents, teacher, school principal and/or administrator with responsibility for the supervision of the District's highly capable program. This may result in a change of placement.

## **HIGHLY CAPABLE PARENT ORGANIZATION (EPO)**

The Explorer Parent Organization (EPO) has been an integral part of the Highly Capable Program since its inception in 1977. Its mission is to support open lines of communication among administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students involved in the Explorer Program; to advocate for highly capable students and academically challenging/enriching programs; and to provide financial support where possible. EPO leadership has an active voice in the decisions that are made in Walla Walla School District about curriculum and programming offered to highly capable students. As a group, these parents work in and out of the classrooms; serve as a support network for parents of children in the program; and raise money through donations and fundraising. The financial support is used to:

- Give discretionary funds to the Explorer teachers to enhance their classroom programs (books, supplies, technology)
- Complement the district's financial support for field trips and competitions
- Provide full and partial scholarships for Explorer Program families for whom the student portion of field trip and competition fees can be a hardship

EPO is affiliated with the Northwest Gifted Child Association (NWGCA), which has worked since 1963 to gain increased financial and philosophical support at the state level for gifted education through legislative lobbying.

## **HIGHLY CAPABLE PROGRAM COMMITTEE**

The Highly Capable Program Committee consists of gifted and talented teachers and their building principals, elementary school learning specialists, middle school counselors, teacher representatives from district schools and representatives of the EPO. The district Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and a School Board member are also members of the committee.

The purpose of the Highly Capable Program Committee is to serve as a communication link among teachers, parents, administration, and students; discuss general issues, serving as an advisory and advocacy group; and generate a plan of action for decisions when needed; and build a spirit of cooperation.

## GLOSSARY

This glossary is not only helpful when considering the Walla Walla School District Highly Capable Program, but also when researching other highly capable programs for your children.

*Highly capable- “Highly capable children and youth perform or show potential to perform at remarkably high levels of accomplishment in one or more of the following areas: cognitive ability, exceptional creativity and achievement in specific academic fields.*

*Highly capable students require a higher level of rigor, depth, breadth or acceleration beyond the basic programs provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.” - Puyallup School District Definition and Vision for highly capable*

- *Rigor or Rigorous Learning- Increased depth, breadth, acceleration, and beyond grade level extensions. Rigor is intellectual engagement that requires the learners to stretch beyond their comfort zone in order to reach their zone of proximal development (the difference between what a child can do with help, and what he/she can do without help. Vygotsky, 1979). When in the zone, students will need to apply thinking skills and persistence; they will feel the challenge and will need to put forth effort to be successful.*
- *Depth- Explore topics of study in more detail. In-depth learning includes learning facts and intricacies of a subject, developing related thinking skills, and finding connections among ideas in the topic domain. In the classroom, strategies that allow students to learn in depth can improve achievement and motivation.*
- *Breadth- Connect overarching concepts, principles, and skills across disciplines, time periods, cultures, places, perspectives and/or events. As disciplines are linked, a larger context is created for students, requiring them to draw on past knowledge and experiences, and opening new areas for study. Interests broaden as a result and achievement is enhanced.*
- *Acceleration/Pace- Optimal pacing matches the rate of presentation of information to the learning rate of students. A study conducted in 1993 by Sally Reis revealed that most teachers adjust their teaching pace to the learning pace of students close to the 25th percentile. Highly capable students learn at a significantly faster rate. For them, when information is presented at a slow pace, it is like being stuck in a major traffic jam. Similar to moving to the carpool lane, student frustration decreases and motivation increases when information is presented at a faster pace.*

*AP- Advanced Placement classes are rigorous and challenging with a curriculum authorized by the College Board. Each AP teacher must ensure that their course includes or exceeds the College Board’s “Curriculum Requirements,” and “Resource Requirements.” AP classes are offered at the high school.*

*Cognitive Abilities Test- A group-administered abilities test used to assess students’ abilities in reasoning and problem solving using verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal (spatial) symbols.*

Flexible Grouping - Students are grouped and regrouped according to specific goals, activities, and individual needs. Teacher-led group may include whole-class or small group instruction and students working alone in teacher-directed activities. Student-led groups may include collaborative groups (i.e.: circle sharing), performance-based group (i.e.: group study) and student dyads or pairs.

Response to Intervention (RtI) - RtI is an education framework that involves research-based instruction and interventions, regular monitoring of student progress and the subsequent use of these data over time to make educational decisions for students.

Complexity vs. Difficulty- Complexity and difficulty describe completely different mental operations but are often used synonymously. Complexity describes the thought process that the brain uses to deal with information. Difficulty refers to the amount of effort that the learner must expend. Highly capable learners benefit most when teachers plan and facilitate activities that engage students at the upper level of Bloom's taxonomy - analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (complexity) rather than just assigning more work (difficulty).

NAGC: National Association for Gifted Children- [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

WAETAG: Washington Association of Educators of the Talented and Gifted- [www.waetag.net](http://www.waetag.net)

## **Contact Information:**

### **Elementary Schools**

Berney School	527-3060
Blue Ridge School	527-3066
Edison School	527-3072
Green Park School	527-3077
Prospect Point School	527-3088
Sharpstein School	527-3098
Sharpstein Explorer Classroom	526-1706

### **Middle Schools**

Garrison	527-3040
Pioneer	527-3050

### **High Schools**

Lincoln Alternative School	527-3083
Walla Walla High School	527-3020

### **Administration**

Dr. Linda Boggs	526-6735
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment	