

Internal Audit Report

Division of Curriculum and Instruction – Academic Services

Advanced Academics: Gifted and Talented Program Eligibility Audit

November 2023



Baltimore County Public Schools
Office of Internal Audit

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Advanced Academics: Gifted and Talented Program Eligibility Audit

Background

The Office of Advanced Academics (OAA), under the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, establishes procedures for identifying the ongoing instructional needs of advanced learners and implementing advanced academics programs and services in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). The OAA supports schools to identify advanced and high potential learners and provide the students with gifted and talented (GT) programs and services.

A universal screening process is used to identify elementary students for acceptance into the GT program. Additionally, students may be accepted into the program through a referral process in place at each BCPS secondary school.

Objective

The audit objective was to determine if students identified as receiving GT services have documentation to support eligibility. Additionally, we determined if the screening processes to determine GT eligibility were applied consistently and equitably.

Results in Brief

The results of Internal Audit's review disclosed no reportable issues with GT program eligibility. However, the population we tested was limited.

Limitation

Internal Audit could not identify the entire population of secondary students who were referred into the GT program during the 2022-2023 school year to test for compliance with the established referral process. There is no requirement for secondary schools to retain GT referral information once a placement decision has been made. However, an email survey determined that 20 of the 33 responding schools did retain this information. We tested compliance with the referral process for a sample of students from schools with available information.

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BACKGROUND

Organizational Status & Purpose

The OAA, under the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, identifies advanced and high potential learners and provides the students with GT programs and services. GT instruction consists of programs and services designed to extend, enrich, and/or accelerate the standard school program. There were 31,879 BCPS students identified as GT as of September 5, 2023.

Gifted and Talented Identification

A GT student is an elementary or secondary student who is identified as having outstanding talent and performing, or showing the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels, exhibiting high performance capability, or excelling in specific academic fields.

Universal screening is a process in which every student is reviewed to determine the most appropriate learning experiences needed for continued growth and challenge. BCPS conducts universal screening in Grades 3 and 5. In Grade 3, universal screening determines whether a student is identified for placement in Advanced 4 Mathematics and/or GT English Language Arts (ELA). In Grade 5, the universal screening process determines if GT course(s) are recommended for students as they enter middle school.

At the middle and high school level, referrals for students to participate in GT courses may be made by a teacher, parent/guardian, administrator, counselor, or student. The Review and Referral Team at the middle or high school will then collect data and decide which class or classes best meet the needs of the student.

Regulations

The applicable regulations for GT programs and services are:

- The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.07
- Board policy and Superintendent's rule 6401
- Standard operating procedures for universal screening, acceleration, and appeals.

Superintendent's Rule 6401 defines the responsibility for establishing procedures for identifying the ongoing instructional needs of advanced learners and provides guidance for student identification and the referral responsibilities. The rule also identifies the responsibilities of schools and the OAA.

LIMITATION

Internal Audit could not identify the entire population of students who were referred into the GT program during the 2022-2023 school to test for compliance with the established referral process. The OAA does not track students who are referred into the GT program. All GT referrals are managed at the secondary school level.

Although schools are required to collect data and make decisions for all students who are referred for GT instruction, there is no requirement for schools to retain GT referral information once a placement decision has been made. We surveyed the secondary schools and determined that 20 of the 33 responding schools retained GT information even though it is not required. We tested compliance with the referral process for a sample of students from secondary schools with available information.

COMMENDATIONS

Communication	<p>The Coordinator for the OAA was prompt in his responses to our requests and provided detailed explanations when follow-up was requested.</p> <p>GT program information is available on the OAA website with links to related content.</p>
Written Processes	<p>The OAA's written processes for student identification and appeals complied with COMAR's requirements and Superintendent's rule 6401.</p>
Students Identified as GT	<p>At least 10% of BCPS students were identified as GT in grades 4-12 as of September 5, 2023. This is in compliance with COMAR.</p>
GT Determinations Support	<p>For the students reviewed, GT determinations for students identified through universal screening and through the referral process were supported with appropriate evidence.</p>
GT Instruction – Universal Screening	<p>Students identified as GT through the universal screening process were receiving GT instruction at their schools.</p>
Referral Process	<p>Schools are aware of the OAA's procedures for the GT referral process. Internal Audit conducted a survey to determine the GT referral process used at secondary schools. Each of the 33 secondary schools that responded provided appropriate examples of the criteria used to determine GT eligibility including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Student's academic performance and grades○ Assessment scores○ Teacher recommendations○ Parent recommendation○ Student interest

Annual Report The OAA’s annual report to the Board of Education complies with Board policy.

Appeals Appeals were processed in compliance with Superintendent Rule 6401.

RESULTS

There were no reportable issues noted. For the students reviewed, Internal Audit determined that students identified as receiving GT services had documentation to support eligibility. Additionally, the screening processes to determine GT eligibility was applied consistently and equitably.

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Objective The audit objective was to determine if students identified as receiving GT services have documentation to support eligibility. Additionally, we determined if the screening processes to determine GT eligibility was applied consistently and equitably.

Scope The audit period was the 2022-2023 school year.

Methodology To achieve the audit objectives, we performed the following:

- Discussed GT eligibility processes with the OAA Coordinator and staff to ensure an understanding of student GT eligibility.
- Reviewed applicable law, Board policies, Superintendent’s Rules, and standard operating procedures.
- Evaluated risks and controls over the GT eligibility process.
- Reviewed the OAA’s website to ensure that that information about GT instruction was available for schools and families and that related links were current and active.
- Compared written processes for student identification and appeals for compliance with COMAR.
- Reviewed Focus to determine if the required percentage of students identified as receiving GT services was in compliance with COMAR.
- Conducted a survey of secondary schools related to the GT referral process.
- Randomly and haphazardly selected samples of GT students and:

- Verified that students identified as GT through the universal screening process were receiving GT instruction.
 - Determined if the GT determinations were supported with appropriate evidence.
- Reviewed appeals for GT placements who were denied to ensure that:
 - The OAA Coordinator reviewed student data and prepared a written analysis for the Executive Director.
 - The Executive Director's written decision to the family was documented.
- Reviewed the OAA's annual report to the Board of Education for compliance with Board policy.