Watauga County Schools
Local Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) Plan
Effective 2019-2022

Approved by local Board of Education on: 10-JUN-19
LEA Superintendent’s Name: Scott Elliott
LEA AIG Contact Name: Ike Smith
Submitted to NC Department of Public Instruction on: 09-JUL-19

Watauga County Schools has developed this local AIG plan based on the NC AIG Program Standards (adopted by SBE, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018). These Standards serve as a statewide framework and guide LEAs to develop, coordinate and implement thoughtful and comprehensive AIG programs.

The NC AIG Program Standards encompass six principle standards with accompanying practices. These standards articulate the expectations for quality, comprehensive, and effective local AIG programs and relate to the categories related to NC’s AIG legislation, Article 9B (N. C. G. S. 115C-150.5). These best practices help to clarify the standard, describe what an LEA should have in place, and guide LEAs to improve their programs.

As LEAs continue to transform their AIG Programs and align to the AIG Program Standards, LEAs participated in a self-assessment process of their local AIG program, which involved multiple stakeholders. The data gathered during this process guided LEAs in their development of this local AIG plan for 2019-2022. This local AIG plan has been approved by the LEA’s board of Education and sent to NC DPI for comment.

For 2019-2022, Watauga County Schools local AIG plan is as follows:

Watauga County Schools Vision for local AIG program:
WCS AIG PROGRAM VISION

The WCS AIG Program will advocate for, support, and challenge all gifted students to maximize their potential.

WCS AIG PROGRAM MISSION

Through collaboration with the whole school community, the WCS AIG Program will provide rigorous, relevant, engaging, equitable practices designed to meet the varying academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of our gifted students. Gifted services in WCS will cultivate students' skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and leadership, empowering them for future citizenship, leadership, and lifelong learning.

Sources of funding for local AIG program (as of 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Funding</th>
<th>Local Funding</th>
<th>Grant Funding</th>
<th>Other Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$184000.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$192000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

- **Standard 1: Student Identification** ................................................................. 3
- **Standard 2: Comprehensive Programming within a Total School Community** ......................................................... 16
- **Standard 3: Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction** ...................................................................................... 31
- **Standard 4: Personnel and Professional Development** ...................................................................................... 39
- **Standard 5: Partnerships** ............................................................................................................................ 47
- **Standard 6: Program Accountability** ........................................................................................................... 52
Standard 1: Student Identification

The LEA’s student identification procedures for AIG are clear, equitable, and comprehensive and lead towards appropriate educational services.

Practice A
Develops screening and referral processes that lead to AIG identification at all grade levels.

District Response:
The screening and referral processes of the Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program are rooted in reliably and equitably identifying gifted students. (See Standard 1, Practice C for more detailed information on how WCS ensures equity in its AIG Program.) To this end, the program relies on the research-based best practices of universal screening and multiple indicators of giftedness. Regardless of socioeconomic status, cultural or ethnic background, physical or linguistic ability, or other demographic factors, all WCS students are included in the AIG search.

In grades K-2, students are typically not formally identified as gifted out of considerations for young students’ rapidly changing academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development. However, the talent development process in these grades (described in detail in Standard 2, Practice A and Standard 3, Practice G) provides AIG Specialists a regular opportunity to directly interact with all K-2 students and their teachers in order to observe potential gifted characteristics. Through this process, AIG Specialists may use student work samples, student academic interest, teacher and/or principal recommendations, and formal observation scales completed by the classroom teacher or AIG Specialist to indicate a need for referral.

In the fall semester of grade 3, all students take an aptitude assessment. (As of the 2019-2020 school year, the aptitude test used by the WCS AIG Program is the the Cognitive Abilities Test, also known as the CogAT.) Parents may opt out of this process if desired. Research consistently supports this universal screening practice as a key means of reducing bias and ensuring equity in gifted identification (Card & Giuliano, 2016, p. 13683). AIG Specialists review these assessment results to determine which students should be referred to Excel Teams for review; any student scoring a 90th percentile or greater on a standardized aptitude assessment composite or subscore will be referred to the school Excel Team, and AIG Specialists may also refer students who score below the 90th percentile if other data may indicate giftedness or a need for additional assessment.

In grades 4 through 8, historical data serves as a source of screening information for all students. WCS AIG Specialists continue to monitor student data and regularly conduct searches for potential AIG students; as part of this search, AIG Specialists can request additional testing (e.g. CogAT readministration, individual psychologist-administered assessments, etc). Data that could generate an Excel Team referral may include (but is not limited to):
- Aptitude assessment scores (e.g. from the CogAT, or, when appropriate, scores from alternative assessments such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children [WISC]);
- Course grades;
- Scores on end-of-grade assessments;
- Other formative and benchmark/interim assessment data;
- Observations from teachers, support staff, and/or other WCS professionals as documented using
the Gifted Behavior Scale.

Classroom teachers and school principals at all grades may also refer students for Excel Team review by completing the Gifted Behavior Scale. Prior to accepting these referrals, each school's AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the AIG Director, administrator tasked with gifted education, and/or School Counselors) will conduct a beginning-of-year AIG awareness training that addresses the following topics:
- The definition of giftedness;
- Characteristics and needs of gifted students;
- The service delivery plan for meeting the needs of gifted students;
- Best Search Practices (see Appendix A);
- AIG screening, referral, and identification procedures.

Parents/guardians who feel their child may be gifted should discuss the nomination process with the student's classroom teacher(s) and their school's AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, their student’s School Counselor).

**Practice B**
Establishes a process and criteria for AIG student identification at all grade levels that provides multiple opportunities to reveal a student's aptitude, achievement, or potential to achieve. The criteria may include both qualitative and quantitative data in order to develop a comprehensive learner profile.

**District Response:**
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program strives for comprehensive, holistic evaluation of student referrals for gifted identification. The reliable collection of multiple indicators of giftedness and their careful, consistent consideration by Excel Teams is essential to equitably identifying gifted students.

As student referrals are submitted throughout the school year, the school's AIG Specialist coordinates the collection of any additional data necessary for informed evaluation, documents this data using the Multiple Indicators of Giftedness form, and brings referrals to the school Excel Team. Excel Team membership is as follows:
- K-8 schools have standing Excel Teams made up of, at minimum, the principal (or her/his designee) and classroom teachers representing the school's grade spans (e.g. K-2, 3-5, 6-8) and/or subject areas.
- Watauga High School (WHS) and the Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) currently convene ad hoc Excel Teams as needed to evaluate referrals or previously-identified student transfers. These teams consist of the principal (or her/his designee, e.g. the assistant principal tasked with gifted education) and subject-area classroom teacher representatives.

As its members deem necessary, Excel Teams may also include in their meetings other appropriate personnel. This may include professionals such as the nominating teacher, School Counselor, School Psychologist, and/or School Social Worker. These persons may serve in an ad hoc capacity or become standing Excel Team members. Additionally, the AIG Director can serve on request as an ad hoc Excel Team member and may elect to observe and provide feedback on any Excel Team
Under the AIG Specialist's leadership, Excel Teams examine qualitative and quantitative student data to determine whether students should be identified and served. The possible gifted identifications and criteria for each are outlined in the following sections and are also contained in Appendix A, Identification Flowchart and Criteria.

ACADEMICALLY GIFTED IN MATH (AM), READING (AR), OR BOTH SUBJECT AREAS (AG)

Students in grades 3-12 may be identified as Academically Gifted in Math, Reading, or both based on compelling evidence in these subject areas as demonstrated through a combination of the following criteria:
- 90th percentile or greater quantitative (for AM), verbal (for AR), or both (for AG) aptitude assessment score (or, depending on how scores are reported for the assessment used, a corresponding index or subscore composite accurately depicting aptitude in Math or Reading);
- 93rd percentile or greater rank on the relevant subject-area North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) or End-of-Course (EOC) tests or PreACT/ACT subtests (excluding the PreACT/ACT composite);
- Course grades in the relevant subject area of 90% or greater;
- Score of at least 130 on the Gifted Behavior Scale.

INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED (IG)

By contrast with academically gifted designations, intellectual giftedness is not contingent on performance in a specific subject. The WCS AIG Program defines intellectual giftedness as exceptional aptitude in the absence of compelling achievement in a specific academic subject area. These students exhibit a disparity between their significant potential to achieve and actual achievement. As a result, services for these students should focus not only on engaging their aptitude through rigorous pursuit of personal interests, but also meeting whatever social, emotional, or other needs cause this disparity so they can perform academically at a level consistent with their aptitude.

To be identified as IG, student data must meet all of the following criteria:
- 98th percentile or greater quantitative, verbal, nonverbal, and/or composite score (or, depending on how scores are reported for the assessment used, a corresponding index or subscore composite) on both group and individual aptitude assessments (e.g. both the CogAT and the WISC);
- Average or below-average subject-area achievement as shown by course grades and EOG/EOC or PreACT/ACT scores;
- Score of at least 130 on the Gifted Behavior Scale.

ACADEMICALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED (AI)

This designation refers to highly gifted students who show exceptional elements of both academic and intellectual giftedness as demonstrated through a combination of the following criteria. Depending on the available data, students may be identified and served as AI in Math, Reading, or both subject areas.
- 98th percentile or greater quantitative, verbal, nonverbal, and/or composite individual aptitude assessment scores (or, depending on how scores are reported for the assessment used, a corresponding index or subscore composite);
- 98th percentile or greater rank on the relevant subject-area North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) or
End-of-Course (EOC) tests or PreACT/ACT subtests (excluding the PreACT/ACT composite);
- Course grades in the relevant subject area of 93% or greater;
- Score of at least 145 on the Gifted Behavior Scale.

In grades K-2, students are typically not formally identified as gifted out of considerations for young students’ rapidly changing academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development. However, students in this grade span may be formally identified as Academically andIntellectually Gifted (AI) when a combination of the criteria below indicate a compelling need for advanced differentiation. These criteria are based on those for AI identification in grades 3 and above but differ slightly due to the data sources available in these grades.
- 98th percentile or greater quantitative, verbal, nonverbal, and/or composite individual aptitude assessment scores (or, depending on how scores are reported for the assessment used, a corresponding index or subscore composite);
- Score at least three years above grade level expectations on a standardized individual achievement test in all areas for grade acceleration, or two years above grade level in the subject to be accelerated;
- K-2 Gifted Behavior Scale scores of 200 or greater from the classroom teacher and AIG Specialist;
- AIG Specialist, classroom teacher, and principal recommendations documenting anecdotal evidence of social-emotional and academic levels as well as exceptional student interest;
- Portfolio of work samples demonstrating exceptional, consistent ability to work with course content beyond factual recall (e.g. to creatively synthesize knowledge from disparate sources, to independently apply learned content in new contexts).

To complement these criteria, Excel Teams may be informed by other qualitative data, including observations, recommendations, and/or work samples indicating high student interest, motivation, and ability to work with course content beyond factual recall (e.g. to creatively synthesize knowledge from disparate sources, to independently apply learned content in new contexts).

In reviewing any student's data, Excel Teams follow the research-based best practice of using multiple indicators of giftedness (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, p. 235-246). At no point will Excel Teams use a single data point in and of itself as a reason to exclude a student from gifted identification.

Following careful deliberation, the Excel Team may choose one of the following three routes regarding a student’s nomination:
1. Continue regular education services because available data does not indicate a need for differentiation beyond the regular educational program.
2. Place the student on a wait-and-watch list in order to gather additional data (e.g. teacher observations, work samples, assessment data, etc) for informed decision-making. In this case, Excel Teams should clearly articulate (a) what additional data will be gathered and by whom, and (b) on what timeline that data will be gathered and discussed.
3. Identify the student as academically and/or intellectually gifted (AM, AR, AG, IG, or AI) and determine appropriate services.

The school’s AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, a School Counselor) maintains a roster of all nominations and Excel Team decisions and also notifies parent(s)/guardian(s) of any Excel Team decision for their student(s). Documentation of parent involvement is required for placement in any AIG service delivery options. (See Standard 1, Practice F for more information on documentation.) The Excel Team will obtain parental permission if additional testing is required. Parents have the right
to appeal Excel Team decisions as outlined in Standard 6, Practice J.

Students entering WCS who have been previously identified as gifted must meet the criteria as presented in the WCS AIG Plan for formal identification. Excel Teams will reach a decision when all required documentation has been received and reviewed but no later than 45 school days from the date of transfer.

**Practice C**
Ensures AIG screening, referral, and identification procedures respond to under-represented populations of the gifted and are responsive to LEA demographics. These populations include students who are culturally/ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, highly gifted, and twice-exceptional.

**District Response:**
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program is committed to equitably screening for, referring, and identifying gifted learners from any background. All educators involved with the WCS AIG Program have a duty to understand WCS demographics and respond to them by applying research-based best practices for ensuring equity.

Understanding district-wide demographics is necessary to examine equitable practices in the WCS AIG Program. This data from the three academic years between 2016 and 2019 is described in the following section and also tabulated in Appendix B. Data from April of each academic year is used since all AIG programs in North Carolina submit an official headcount of gifted students to the NC Department of Public Instruction annually on April 30. District-wide demographics refer to students in grades 3-12 since these are the grades in which students are identified as gifted (except for rare cases in grades K-2).

As of April 2017, WCS had 3,354 students enrolled in grades 3-12. Demographics of this group were as follows:

**Gender**
- 49.4% female
- 50.6% male

**Race / Ethnicity**
- 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1.6% Asian
- 1.1% Black or African American
- 8.2% Hispanic
- 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 2.8% two or more ethnicities
- 86.0% White

**Subgroups**
- 35.6% were economically disadvantaged (i.e. eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch)
- 2.7% received English Learner services
- 25.5% received Exceptional Children’s services
- 19.6% were identified as gifted

By comparison, the demographics of the of the 656 students identified gifted as of April 30, 2017 were as follows:

Gender
- 52.9% female
- 47.1% male

Race / ethnicity
- 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 2.1% Asian
- 0.5% Black or African American
- 2.9% Hispanic
- 0.0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 3.4% two or more ethnicities
- 91.0% White

Subgroups
- 0.0% also received English Learner services
- 4.9% also received Exceptional Children’s services

As of April 2018, WCS had 3,456 students enrolled in grades 3-12. Demographics of this group were as follows:

Gender
- 49.6% female
- 50.4% male

Race / ethnicity
- 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1.5% Asian
- 1.2% Black or African American
- 8.6% Hispanic
- 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
- 2.8% two or more ethnicities
- 85.5% White

Subgroups
- 33.0% were economically disadvantaged
- 3.0% received English Learner services
- 25.7% received Exceptional Children’s services
- 19.8% were identified as gifted

By comparison, the demographics of the of the 683 students identified gifted as of April 30, 2018 were as follows:
Gender
- 54.5% female
- 45.5% male

Race / ethnicity
- 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1.9% Asian
- 0.3% Black or African American
- 3.1% Hispanic
- 0.0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
- 3.1% two or more ethnicities
- 91.5% White

Subgroups
- 0.1% also received English Learner services
- 2.3% also received Exceptional Children's services

As of April 2019, WCS had 3,529 students enrolled in grades 3-12. Demographics of this group were as follows:

Gender
- 49.9% female
- 50.1% male

Race / ethnicity
- 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1.5% Asian
- 1.3% Black or African American
- 8.9% Hispanic
- 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
- 2.9% two or more ethnicities
- 85.0% White

Subgroups
- 32.9% were economically disadvantaged
- 2.9% received English Learner services
- 18.0% received Exceptional Children's services
- 20.0% were identified as gifted

By comparison, the demographics of the of the 707 students identified gifted as of April 30, 2019 were as follows:

Gender
- 54.5% female
- 45.5% male

Race / ethnicity
- 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1.7% Asian
- 0.3% Black or African American
- 3.1% Hispanic
- 0.0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
- 3.1% two or more ethnicities
- 91.7% White

Subgroups
- 2.1% also received Exceptional Children's services
- 0.0% also received English Learner services

While this data shows a generally stable makeup both of the overall WCS student population and its gifted students, proportional comparison between district-wide and AIG Program demographics reveals the following problematic areas:

- Overrepresentation of white students. White students continue to be overrepresented in the gifted population at a growing rate, exceeding the total percentage of white WCS students in grades 3-12 by 5.0% in April 2017, 6.0% in April 2018, and 6.6% in April 2019. The presence of this overrepresentation in a racial majority is concerning, made more so in light of its steady upward trend since 2017.

- Underrepresentation of Hispanic students. By contrast with white students, Hispanic students are historically underrepresented in the WCS gifted population, falling behind the total percentage of Hispanic WCS students in grades 3-12 by 5.3% in April 2017, 5.5% in April 2018, and 5.8% in 2019. Hispanic representation rates have a net increase of 0.2% from April 2017 to April 2019 while white representation rates have a net increase of 0.6% in the same period, suggesting a slowly widening identification gap between these two groups.

- Underrepresentation of English Learners. In the past three sets of AIG Spring headcount data, only April 2018 showed English Learners also identified as gifted. On this headcount, only 0.1% of WCS gifted students were also English Learners.

- Overrepresentation of females. Female gifted learners outpaced females in the WCS 3-12 population as a whole by 3.5% in April 2017, 4.9% in April 2018, and 4.6% in April 2019.

- Representation of economically disadvantaged students. It is unknown at this time how many identified AIG students are also considered economically disadvantaged. The need to maintain confidentiality of applications for free and reduced-price lunch presents difficulty in making this analysis, since personnel outside the School Nutrition department are prohibited from knowing which students have made these applications; however, as of the writing of this AIG Plan, the AIG Director is actively seeking ways to obtain this information while maintaining student confidentiality.

Taken together, this data suggests the need to critically examine equitable screening, referral, and identification practices as they pertain to Hispanic, English Learner, and male students. (Further demographic analysis to examine intersectionalities of these groups will also be necessary.) There are, however, some practices already in place to help address issues of equity.

A fundamental strategy for ensuring equity in the WCS AIG Program is universal screening for gifted potential. Research consistently supports universal screening as a reliable practice for equitable identification (Card & Giuliano, 2016, p. 13683). While universal screening cannot on its own solve issues of equity in gifted education, it is a consistently effective practice that is relatively easy to implement. As described in Standard 1, Practice A, all WCS third graders take an aptitude assessment as part of the AIG screening process, ensuring AIG Specialists have access to and
examine this data for every third grade student. The WCS AIG Program is committed to the continued use of universal screening and will investigate opportunities to expand this practice.

AIG Specialists collaborate with School Psychologists and/or other specialists to use and interpret alternative assessments appropriate to a given student's demographics, which Excel Teams can request in order to gain potentially more accurate and informative student data. Nonverbal assessments, for example, remove barriers for students not yet proficient in speaking English, thus more accurately representing their ability. Additionally, the WCS AIG Program provides assessment administration directions in a student's native language whenever possible.

While the majority of our AIG students are referred and identified at the beginning of each school year, AIG Specialists work throughout the year to monitor students in underrepresented populations who show potential for giftedness and regularly seek teacher referrals within these specific groups. This rolling referral process, which happens at least at the end of the second and third nine-week periods, minimizes the possibility of overlooking gifted students by providing underrepresented populations additional time they may need to adjust and display characteristics of giftedness.

In considering referrals, Excel Teams pay particular attention to demographic factors such as (but not limited to) socioeconomic status, cultural or ethnic background, and physical or linguistic ability. As described in Standard 1, Practice A, the AIG Specialist will also invite support personnel (e.g. Exceptional Children's or English Learner teachers, School Counselors, School Social Workers, etc) to serve on the Excel Team as needed. These professionals help promote equity by providing additional insights into students' potential to achieve, assisting in interpreting student data, and advocating for referral and identification of historically underrepresented students.

In order to ensure equitable screening, referral, and identification in high poverty schools, AIG Specialists will provide broader talent development services in settings where both of the following conditions are met:
- Less than 10% of the school's enrollment is identified as gifted, and
- 50% or more of the school population qualifies to receive free and reduced lunch.

In these schools, students who are not formally identified as gifted but nevertheless consistently outperform their peers may, when recommended by the school Excel Team, be offered talent development differentiation and enrichment opportunities with the AIG Specialist.

AIG Specialists also give particular attention to students identified for both gifted and Exceptional Children's services. These twice-exceptional students, along with those identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AI, also known as highly gifted), may require more intense differentiated services (see Standard 2, Practice A; Standard 3, Practice B; and Appendix C, Array of Services), which may warrant documentation on an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP). AIG Specialists will meet periodically with their schools' Exceptional Children's teachers to ensure twice-exceptional students receive appropriate modifications and services.

The AIG Director, through participation in district teams such as the Curriculum and Instruction Team and District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team, collaborates regularly with colleagues whose roles are relevant to seeking equity, such as the Director of Exceptional Children's Programs and the coordinator for English Learner (EL) teachers. This collaboration promotes assessing progress toward equity in AIG services through regular analysis of demographic and performance
Similarly, the AIG Director also advocates for equity in gifted education through serving on the WCS Equity Team led by the Director of Student Services. This group engages a variety of stakeholders, including WCS classroom teachers, support staff, and community members, in broad examination of equity throughout WCS and the creation of specific recommendations for action.

**Practice D**

Implements screening, referral, and identification processes consistently within the LEA.

**District Response:**

Procedures for student screening, referral, and identification are detailed in the Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Plan, which is approved by the Watauga County Board of Education. The WCS AIG Plan is the source of unifying guidance in gifted education for all Watauga County schools, and its consistent implementation is assured through the regular collaboration of the AIG Director, AIG Specialists, and, in grades 9-12, School Counselors and the Watauga High School (WHS) / Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) administrator tasked with gifted education.

In WCS, Excel Teams are responsible for gifted identifications. At the K-8 schools, these teams are standing committees led by the AIG Specialists; at WHS and WIA, they are formed as needed and led by the administrator responsible for gifted education and/or the WCS AIG Director. To promote consistency, the AIG Director trains Excel Team members annually (or, in the case of WHS/WIA Excel Teams, upon convening) on the following topics:

- the intent of the AIG Plan;
- the purpose of the Excel Team;
- identification procedures (as detailed in Standard 1, Practice A) and the AIG Identification Flowchart (see Appendix A);
- the Array of Services (see Standard 2, Practice A; Standard 3, Practice B; and Appendix C);
- confidentiality of student information; and
- advocacy for students and the AIG Program.

To promote consistent practices within each school from year to year, each AIG Specialist (or, at WHS/WIA, the AIG Director, administrator tasked with gifted education, and/or the School Counselors) provides their school’s staff with an annual awareness session that includes:

- the legal mandate for and definition of giftedness (i.e. Article 9B);
- an overview of the WCS AIG Plan;
- the characteristics and needs of gifted students (see Appendix A), including those from traditionally underrepresented populations (see Standard 1, Practice C);
- a review of Best Search Practices (see Appendix A); and
- a review of the gifted screening, referral, and identification processes (see Standard 1, Practices A and B).

The AIG Director takes an active role with Excel Teams throughout the year to ensure consistent identification practices. The AIG Director will assist any AIG Specialist new to WCS in preparing for the first Excel Team meeting by helping collect student information, co-planning the agenda, attending the meeting itself, modeling correct student identification procedures, and helping complete
any follow-up paperwork. The AIG Director may also be invited to any Excel Team meeting and may randomly attend Excel Team meetings to monitor consistency of practices. The AIG Specialist Team also periodically conducts collaborative case studies of individual student files to ensure consistent identification practices across schools, and the AIG Director annually conducts random audits of student files to ensure consistent identification practices.

Practice E
Disseminates information regarding the screening, referral, and identification processes to school personnel, parents/families, students, and the community-at-large.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program provides stakeholders with information on its processes and services through multiple means.

As referenced in Standard 4, Practice B, AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, the AIG Director, administrator tasked with gifted education, and/or School Counselors) provide faculties with annual orientation on the WCS AIG Program, including an overview of screening, referral, and identification practices. The AIG Director and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with support roles such as School Counselors or School Psychologists, may also provide professional learning throughout the school year on various aspects of the WCS AIG Program. The AIG Specialists and high school personnel supporting gifted education may also share information through participation in grade-level or subject-area professional learning community (PLC) meetings. The AIG Director provides school personnel with information about the gifted program through participation in district-level meetings, including those of the Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team.

AIG Specialists and School Counselors play a crucial role in communicating about the WCS AIG Program with families and students. These personnel maintain websites and/or newsletters and participate in school orientations and open houses. In addition to these messaging methods, these professionals are the personal face of the WCS AIG Program. Classroom teachers, school principals, or other personnel direct interested students and families to AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, School Counselors) who can have informed conversations about the program's processes and opportunities.

The WCS AIG website, which houses the WCS AIG Plan, its ancillary documents, and other relevant gifted education information, is a primary means of communication with the general public. The AIG Director also shares information with families and community members through the meetings of the AIG Advisory Council and public presentations to the Watauga County Board of Education.

Practice F
Documents a student's AIG identification process and evidence which leads to an identification decision. This documentation is reviewed with parents/families and maintained in student records.

District Response:
The AIG Specialist, in collaboration with classroom teachers, support staff, and other Watauga County Schools professionals, creates a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or an Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) for each AIG-identified student. This plan is based on student need and the array of services available. The AIG Specialist meets with the parent(s) or guardian(s) for an initial placement conference to review and sign the student's DEP/IDEP; subsequently, the AIG Specialist conferences annually with the parent(s) or guardian(s) to review, revise, and/or rewrite the student's current DEP/IDEP. The AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) is responsible for maintaining and securing all student records and updating them as needed.

At the end of each school year, each AIG Specialist conducts the Yearly Performance Review for all AIG-identified students with a DEP/IDEP. Review evidence may include (but is not limited to):
- Teacher and support staff feedback;
- Progress reports and/or report cards;
- Parent conferences;
- Summative assessment data (e.g. EOGs, EOCs, NCFEs, other end-of-year data, etc.);
- Student work samples.

If the student is progressing satisfactorily in his/her service option(s), the parents will be notified via the Yearly Performance Review form.

The entire educational experience for all students, including gifted learners, exists within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.) This system allows all educators to consider available resources, examine available data, and proactively plan academic, attendance, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for students in need of intervention and enrichment. Like any student, gifted learners may show varying strengths and needs due to varying factors at varying points in their educational careers, and a high-functioning MTSS helps all educators work together to support AIG students in both their successes and struggles. The organization this framework provides can be useful in situations when gifted students' service delivery plans need adjustment.

For students currently on a DEP who are not progressing satisfactorily in their service option(s):
- The AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) writes an IDEP with input from all stakeholders (e.g. principal, classroom teacher(s), School Counselor, etc);
- The AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) conferences with parent(s) or guardian(s) for input on and approval of the IDEP.

For students currently on an IDEP who are not progressing satisfactorily in their service option(s), the AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) will revise the IDEP in collaboration with individual specialists (e.g. School Counselors, School Psychologists, School Social Workers) and/or school-wide assistance/intervention teams.

School-wide assistance/intervention teams may, through their data analysis structures and processes, independently identify gifted students in need of academic, attendance, behavior, and/or social-emotional supports. In such cases, these teams will communicate with the AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) to develop intervention plans, which may be reflected in DEP/IDEP documentation.

At no point will any gifted student's lack of satisfactory academic progress or need for intervention be
used as grounds for eliminating gifted services. Giftedness is part of a student's identity that cannot be taken away, and gifted services are a key component of their educational experience necessary to ensure continued success and growth, not a privilege to be earned or revoked. Once students are identified as gifted, their services can and should be modified to ensure appropriate match to their shifting strengths and needs, but these services will not be terminated.

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will develop targeted plans for enhancing equitable screening, referral, and identification practices among Hispanic and English Learner students.
2. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will participate in professional learning on giftedness in historically underrepresented populations and develop plans to train faculties on this topic.
3. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will develop a process for including demographic audits as a component of all Excel Team meetings.
4. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will investigate the use of additional data collection sources for screening, referral, and identification, including standardized achievement assessments and an updated gifted rating scale.
5. By June 2020, the AIG Director, WHS/WIA administrator tasked with AIG, and the WHS/WIA Student Services Department will develop a specific plan for gifted screening, referral, and identification in grades 9-12.
6. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will develop a rigorous, well-defined, research-based process for using student work portfolios in gifted referral and identification.
7. By June 2020, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will investigate alternatives to the current process for AIG-identified transfer students.
8. By June 2021, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the AIG Advisory Council, will develop an AIG Handbook and/or Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for families.
9. By June 2021, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will develop an AIG Communication Plan document including regular open interest meetings, meetings with culturally/ethnically diverse community groups, a quarterly WCS AIG Newsletter, and participation in transitional orientations (e.g. Kindergarten, 9th Grade).

**Sources of Evidence:**
1. Clear, detailed plan for equitable screening, referral, and identification practices responsive to Hispanic and English Learner students
2. Giftedness in historically underrepresented populations professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
3. Clear procedure and documentation for Excel Team demographic audits
4. Documentation of meetings discussing additional data collection sources or, if possible, the additional sources themselves
5. Clear, detailed documentation of screening, referral, and identification process in grades 9-12
6. Clear, detailed documentation of a research-based process for assembling and evaluating student work portfolios
7. Documentation of meetings discussing the WCS AIG Program transfer procedure
8. Completed AIG Handbook or FAQ document for families
9. Clear, detailed WCS AIG Program Communication Plan
Standard 2: Comprehensive Programming within a Total School Community

The LEA provides an array of K-12 programs and services by the total school community to meet the diverse academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

Practice A
Delivers an AIG program with comprehensive services that address the needs of gifted learners across all grade levels and learning environments. These services are aligned to a student's AIG identification.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program designs effective gifted education experiences through an intentional combination of services and settings varying in kind, degree, and duration to meet each student's unique academic, intellectual, and social-emotional strengths and needs. WCS also recognizes the role of gifted education within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) and uses this framework to inform the services gifted students receive and the settings in which those services are provided. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.) The array of services described in this section (and summarized in Appendix C) ranges from developing gifted potential (described in detail in Standard 3, Practice G) to addressing the needs of students who demonstrate advanced skills and abilities.

Once the Excel Team identifies a nominated student, the AIG Specialist consults with the student, parents, classroom teacher(s), and any other relevant stakeholders (e.g. educational support specialists such as Exceptional Children's or English Learner teachers, School Counselors, School Social Workers, etc) to develop a service delivery plan matched to the student's identification area (academically gifted in Math, Reading, or both subjects; intellectually gifted; or academically and intellectually gifted; see Standard 1, Practice B for more information on these identification areas).

Service delivery plans are developed based on available data, the identification criteria (see Standard 1, Practice B, also summarized in Appendix A), and the array of services (described in this section and summarized in Appendix C). All differentiated services are documented in a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or, if appropriate, an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP). To ensure identified AIG students are matched to appropriate services, AIG Specialists annually review DEPs and IDEPs. (See Standard 3, Practice I for more information about documentation and review of student services.)

Service delivery settings can vary depending on student needs, human capacity, scheduling considerations, and other factors; options may include delivery within the general education classroom (also known as "push in" services), within an AIG Specialist's classroom (also known as "pull out" services), during scheduled periods designated specifically for intervention and/or enrichment as part of an MTSS (e.g. "I/E Time," "FLEX Time," etc) or in a variety of other settings as described below.

Specific services and settings available at each grade span may include the following options...
described below.

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 2

Out of considerations for young students' academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development, it is the general practice of the WCS AIG Program not to identify students as gifted prior to third grade. Instead, all students in grades K-2 receive talent development services from an AIG Specialist through their general education classroom. These services foster the development of gifted characteristics and allow AIG Specialists an early opportunity to observe potentially gifted students; however, working with the AIG Specialist in grades K-2 does not in and of itself constitute gifted identification. (See Standard 3, Practice G for more information on talent development in grades K-2.) In rare cases of compelling evidence, students may be formally identified prior to third grade; see Standard 1, Practice B for more information on identification practices.

Identified students in grades K-2 may be served in settings including (but not limited to)
- Flexible groups;
- Heterogeneous groups;
- Accelerated subject or grade.

Services for identified students in grades K-2 may include (but are not limited to)
- Classroom interest centers;
- Community resource programs;
- Cultural arts presentations and programs;
- Guest speakers;
- Interest-based clubs, contests, and/or competitions (e.g. art and writing contests, Math/Science fairs, Odyssey of the Mind, etc. -- see Standard 2, Practice I and Standard 3, Practice D for more information on these types of opportunities);
- Summer programs and/or camps (e.g. through WCS, universities, community organizations, etc).

GRADES 3-5

In addition to service delivery settings used in grades K-2, students in grades 3-5 may also be served in settings including (but not limited to)
- Online coursework (e.g. through the North Carolina Virtual Public School).

In addition to service delivery options used in grades K-2, services for students in grades 3-5 may include (but are not limited to)
- Academic clubs and competitions (e.g. Elementary Battle of the Books, Duke TIP, Elevating Mathematics, Geography Bee, Junior Beta Club, Math/Science Fairs, Robotics, Stock Market Game, Student Council, etc.);
- Mentoring.

GRADES 6-8

Students may be served in settings including (but not limited to) those used in grades K-5.

In addition to K-5 service delivery options, services for students in grades 6-8 may include (but are not limited to)
- Academic clubs and competitions (e.g. Future City, MathCounts, Middle School Battle of the Books, Mock Trial, Model UN);
- Advanced courses (e.g. Pre-Math I, Math I, etc);
- Exploratory courses (e.g. School Newspaper, School Yearbook).

GRADES 9-12

In addition to service delivery settings used in grades K-8, students may also be served in settings including (but not limited to)
- Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), dual-enrollment, and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) courses;
- Early graduation and/or admission to college;
- Governor's School;
- Residential schools (e.g. NC School of the Arts, NC School of Science and Math; these options are offered outside of WCS at the family's expense).

In addition to K-8 service delivery options, services for students in grades 9-12 may include (but are not limited to)
- Academic clubs and competitions (e.g. Beta Club, Career/Technical Education competitions, High School Battle of the Books);
- Apprenticeships, internships, and/or job shadowing;
- Community service projects;
- Elective courses;
- Independent studies;
- Mentorships.

These service delivery options are also supported by interest-based activities as described in Standard 2, Practice I; AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, School Counselors) collaborate with the range of educators in their schools to recognize students' interests and connect them to these opportunities. In addition to these service delivery settings and options, Standard 3, Practice B describes the variety of differentiation strategies used for all identified gifted students.

**Practice B**
Integrates and connects AIG services with the total instructional program and resources of the LEA in policy and practice.

**District Response:**
Watauga County Schools (WCS) is committed to providing an array of services designed to meet the unique and varying needs of gifted students while educating these students, like all students in WCS, for productive citizenship and lifelong learning. The WCS AIG Program is not an isolated initiative within the school system; rather, various frameworks and collaborative structures at all levels allow gifted education to be integrated with and connected to the total instructional program in WCS.

At the district level, the AIG Director serves on several teams central to instructional and strategic planning for the district:
- Central Services Team, comprised of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief
Academic Officer, and all director-level positions in the WCS central office;
- District Leadership Team, comprised of all Central Services Team members plus all school principals;
- District Media and Technology Advisory Committee (in the capacity as Director of Instructional Support Services), comprised of teacher, parent, administrator, School Library Media Coordinator, and Digital Learning Coach representatives from each school, as well as the Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Middle Grades Education, and Board of Education representative;
- District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team, comprised of the Chief Academic Officer, Curriculum Specialist, Director of Accountability and School Improvement, Director of Exceptional Children's Programs, Director of Middle Grades Education, Director of Student Services, and Exceptional Children's Program Specialist;
- District Curriculum and Instruction Team, comprised of the District MTSS Team members plus the Director of Technology;
- Strategic Planning Steering Committee (in the capacity as Director of Instructional Support Services), comprised of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Accountability and School Improvement, and Director of Public Information and Community Relations.

The AIG Director also regularly attends Board of Education meetings and is actively involved in policy revision. The Director of Accountability and School Improvement, in the role of liaison with the North Carolina School Boards Association, manages the overall policy revision process and notifies all central office directors when policies under their purview are up for review. When policy revisions arise that impact the AIG Program specifically or curriculum and instruction more broadly, the AIG Director has an active role in providing input on and rewriting these policies.

At the school level, AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, School Counselors) also serve on various teams integral to the instructional program, including (but not limited to):
- Compassionate Schools implementation teams;
- Grade-level, subject area, or other professional learning communities (PLCs);
- School Improvement Teams (SITs);
- School MTSS Teams.

For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.

Through membership on these teams, the AIG Director, Specialists, and High School Counselors are empowered to continually share information about and advocate for the WCS AIG Program with other stakeholders, who in turn provide context for and input on AIG programming through their perspectives and work. These reciprocal conversations and resulting plans drive the allocation of available resources and the practical implementation of the WCS AIG Plan and WCS Board of Education policies pertaining to gifted students.

**Practice C**
Develops procedures for intentional, flexible grouping practices to facilitate the achievement and growth of AIG and other students with advanced learning needs.
District Response:
Watauga County Schools recognizes the importance of flexible grouping as a best practice not only for AIG students but all learners (as discussed by Robinson, Shore, and Enersen, 2007, p. 123-127). AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers to employ a variety of research-based grouping methods both within AIG services and in general classrooms.

AIG Specialists and classroom teachers at all grade levels may group gifted students in a variety of configurations, such as an individual student working with the teacher, small groups of students working cooperatively, and/or whole class activities. In keeping with best practices for differentiated instruction (as described, for example, by Tomlinson and Allen, 2000, p. 3), AIG Specialists and classroom teachers create and plan for flexible groups based on students’ readiness for new material, interests, and learning profiles, which may be comprised of data such as formative and summative assessment results, aptitude assessment results, student growth data, work samples, and teacher observations.

These flexible groupings may be homogeneous, grouping students with similar strengths or needs together, allowing teachers to specifically target these areas, or heterogeneous, with students of varied strengths and needs strategically grouped together in order to support and learn from one another as well as the teacher. These flexible grouping configurations can shift as needed throughout an instructional unit or even a single lesson, and the work of these groups is differentiated in terms of how students access content, process it together, and create products to demonstrate their understanding (Tomlinson and Allen, 2000, p. 3). (More information on differentiation practices can be found in Standard 3, Practice A.) Overall, flexible groupings are consistently and intentionally designed to maximize student engagement and growth toward instructional goals.

Flexible grouping practices are also supported school-wide by the work of professional learning communities (PLCs) within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Classroom teachers regularly meet in PLCs organized by grade level, grade span, subject area, or other like groups to discuss student data and plan accordingly for students’ strengths and needs. These conversations and planning directly inform the configurations of flexible groups within the classroom, and these groupings are further supported by time in the master school schedule specifically devoted to intervention and enrichment (AKA "I/E Time," "FLEX Time," etc). During these periods, flexible groups can meet with the AIG Specialist or other support staff to address their academic, intellectual, behavioral, and/or social-emotional strengths and needs to support achievement and growth in the general classroom. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.)

AIG Specialists (and, in grades 9-12, other educators responsible for professional learning such as School Counselors and Digital Learning Coaches) also provide professional learning and/or other assistance to their faculties on grouping practices as needed throughout the school year. Following these trainings, AIG Specialists are prepared to model, co-plan, co-teach, and otherwise coach their colleagues in the data-driven creation and implementation of flexible groups.

At the district level, the AIG Director regularly analyzes available data for AIG students, including academic achievement (e.g. as indicated on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests, ACT test results, AP exam scores, etc), academic growth (i.e. as reflected in the Education Value-Added Assessment System), and behavioral and social-emotional data (e.g. number of absences and office discipline referrals). This analysis is shared and discussed at least annually with groups such as the District
Leadership Team and Curriculum and Instruction Team to further inform course scheduling and grouping decisions.

**Practice D**
Informs all teachers, school administrators, and support staff about delivery of differentiated services and instruction for AIG students, regulations related to gifted education, and the local AIG program and plan.

**District Response:**
The Watauga County Schools AIG Program makes every effort to keep students, families, employees, and any other stakeholders informed about gifted education law and policy as well as the local AIG Plan. All stakeholders can access the approved local AIG Plan, its appendices, and contact information for the AIG Director and Specialists via the Watauga County Schools website. AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, School Counselors) communicate general, non-confidential information to families through means such as print or digital newsletters, school websites, and other electronic communication (e.g. email, professional social media accounts).

The AIG Director, AIG Specialists, and, in grades 9-12, School Counselors and administrator responsible for gifted education, collaborate to disseminate information about the AIG Program to Watauga County Schools employees in a variety of ways. These methods include (but are not limited to):
- Annual common, team-created training for teachers, school administrators, and support staff on AIG regulations and procedures (e.g. relevant state law; the use of multiple criteria to recognize AIG students; and the nomination, identification, and service delivery process);
- Annual common, team-created training from the AIG Director for Excel Teams on state AIG law and standards, the local AIG Plan, and procedures for identifying AIG students;
- Review of identification procedures by the AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the administrator responsible for gifted education and/or the AIG Director) at each Excel Team meeting;
- Updates from AIG Specialists at grade level, subject area, and/or PLC meetings;
- Regular updates from the AIG Director at meetings of the AIG Specialist Team, Central Services Team, Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team and/or District MTSS Team;
- Updates from the AIG Director at Board of Education meetings upon the Board's request.

Parents/guardians of gifted students conference annually with the AIG Specialist to review their child's Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP). The AIG Specialist also shares all DEPs/IDEPs annually with classroom teachers serving these students and discusses the details of implementing these plans. In grades 9-12, the AIG Director collaborates with the School Counselors and the Assistant Principal tasked with AIG services to ensure all classroom teachers are aware of their AIG rosters (e.g. by distributing AIG rosters at regular points throughout the school year and training teachers on how to locate AIG information in the student information system) and understand differentiation best practices for teaching AIG students (e.g. through professional learning sessions delivered by the AIG Director, School Counselors, Digital Learning Coaches, and/or other support staff).
**Practice E**
Communicates among and between teachers and schools to ensure an effective continuation of K-12 services, especially at key transition points.

**District Response:**
Open communication among all stakeholders is essential in ensuring the continuation of appropriate AIG services throughout a student's school experience. The AIG Director and Specialists facilitate ongoing communication among teachers, schools, and other stakeholders concerning delivery options as AIG students transition between grade spans and/or schools.

The AIG Specialist collaborates with classroom teachers to develop and implement Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) or Individualized Differentiated Education Plans (IDEPs) for gifted students. AIG Specialists share these plans annually and meet formally and informally with classroom teachers to discuss AIG student needs, particularly at key transition points. The elementary to middle grades transition is simplified since these grades are housed within K-8 schools, placing teachers across these grade levels in regular contact. Because AIG Specialists interact with students and teachers in all grades K-8, they serve as a constant presence, facilitating information sharing and ensuring consistent service between these grades.

AIG Specialists maintain student records and transfer them between schools when identified students move between schools within Watauga County. If a student moves out of the school system, the AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor) includes a copy of their AIG portfolio with other transfer information and retains the original student file.

At the end of the school year, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists compile a list of rising Watauga High School (WHS) and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) ninth graders indicating their identification areas and services they received at their K-8 schools. This information, along with AIG student files for rising ninth graders, is sent to the WHS/WIA administrator in charge of AIG services, who works with the WHS/WIA School Counselors to ensure they help AIG students select rigorous and challenging coursework that will continue to meet their needs.

Several supports are offered to AIG students entering WHS or the WIA. A transitional meeting for each K-8 school is held at WHS for rising ninth graders and their parents. Students and their families are able to tour the facility, learn about high school expectations, ask class registration questions, and hear information about possible academic, social, and athletic opportunities. This high school orientation also includes a session specifically designed for AIG students and families, in which the AIG Director, Assistant Principal tasked with AIG, and school counselor(s) share how gifted students' academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs are supported in grades 9-12.

**Practice F**
Addresses the social and emotional needs of AIG students through collaboration among school counseling personnel, regular education teachers, AIG specialists, and others.

**District Response:**
AIG Specialists facilitate collaboration among a variety of groups in order to develop the most complete and nuanced picture of each AIG student and best serve their social and emotional needs.
In their annual presentations to school faculty and staff, AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, the administrator responsible for gifted education, School Counselors, and/or the AIG Director) build awareness by highlighting the unique social and emotional needs of AIG students. AIG Specialists also provide specific training on social-emotional needs as necessary throughout the school year and conduct formal and informal check-ins with classroom teachers (e.g. during grade level or area meetings, in one-on-one conversations) to ensure these needs are being met.

AIG Specialists also collaborate with school counselors, school social workers, and other members of the Student Services Department to provide additional supports in meeting AIG students' social and emotional needs. School counselors provide individual and small group counseling sessions for students who have been referred by classroom teachers, AIG Specialists, and/or the school's assistance team. School Counselors also meet with each rising ninth grader to offer course suggestions, facilitate the high school registration process, and generally assist with this crucial transition. (See Standard 2, Practice E for more information about support for AIG students at key transition points.) As needed and appropriate, AIG Specialists also attend professional development opportunities with School Counselors and classroom teachers in order to build common understanding and language surrounding the social and emotional needs of gifted students.

Meetings to develop formal student plans are another opportunity for collaboration around social-emotional needs. In their annual review of Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) and Individualized Differentiated Education Plans (IDEPs), AIG Specialists consider not only academics, but also social and emotional needs, and relevant support staff (e.g. EC and/or EL teachers, school counselors, psychologists, and/or social workers) are included as needed to assist in these considerations. AIG Specialists also meet with parents annually to discuss the learning environment, differentiated instruction delivery, and success in meeting social and emotional needs, and, if necessary, revise DEPs/IDEPs. AIG Specialists also take part as appropriate in 504 and/or Individualized Education Plan meetings for twice-exceptional AIG students in order to help assemble the most detailed picture of these students' needs.

The social-emotional needs of all students, including the gifted, are also supported through professional learning communities (PLCs) operating within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework. In regular PLC meetings, grade level and/or subject area teams discuss not only students' academic performance, but also observations and quantitative data related to their social-emotional needs, allowing for a whole-child approach that considers and addresses the interplay between academics and behavior. In cases of more intense student needs, PLCs escalate these discussions to school-level MTSS Teams for further problem-solving and intervention planning. AIG Specialists and School Counselors are involved at all levels of these conversations. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.)

At the district level, the WCS AIG Program also collaborates with other groups to best meet gifted students' needs. Through meetings of the Central Services Team, Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and District MTSS Team, the AIG Director is able to share information and collaborate with school principals and district-level administrators regarding social-emotional needs of the gifted. The AIG Director also works with the AIG Advisory Council, which serves as a venue for sharing with stakeholders information about the social and emotional needs of gifted learners and obtaining feedback for how to improve in this area.
Practice G
Develops policies and procedures for a variety of acceleration opportunities, including compacted content, Credit by Demonstrated Mastery, subject and/or grade acceleration.

District Response:
A well-planned array of service delivery options (as described in Standard 2, Practice A and Appendix C) provides most gifted students with avenues for enrichment and extension. However, some gifted students may require more radical differentiation strategies and/or placements. The Watauga County Schools AIG Plan, in conjunction with the Watauga County Board of Education Policy Manual, defines how students are able to access accelerated instruction, if warranted. These options include early entrance to Kindergarten, subject or grade acceleration, Credit by Demonstrated Mastery, dual enrollment, attendance at residential schools, early college or university admission, or other independent study.

EARLY ENTRANCE TO KINDERGARTEN

Parents seeking early entrance to Kindergarten for their student(s) can get information about this process from the AIG Director, Chief Academic Officer, and/or school principal. These children must meet the following criteria as explained in Watauga County Board of Education Policy 4100, Age Requirements for Initial Entry (as well as the cross-referenced components of North Carolina General Statutes 115C-364 and North Carolina State Board of Education policy Standards for Early Admission to Kindergarten, policy ID KNEC-001):
- The child has reached his/her fourth birthday on or before April 16;
- S/he is presented for enrollment no later than the end of the first month of the school year;
- S/he demonstrates an extraordinary level of academic ability and maturity as evidenced by the following documentation to be furnished by the parent(s)/guardian(s) "within the first 30 calendar days of the school's instructional year" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999b):
  -- A score of 98th percentile on an individual aptitude test given by a certified psychologist at parent/guardian expense;
  -- An achievement level "two to three years beyond the child's peers" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999b) as evidenced by a 98th percentile score on a standard test of achievement given by a certified psychologist at parent/guardian expense;
  -- Student work samples documenting performance "well above age peers as evidenced by behaviors in one or more areas such as independent reading, problem solving skills, advanced vocabulary, and some writing fluency" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999b);
  -- Letters of recommendation with specific documentation of physical and social maturity.

In determining eligibility for early entrance to Kindergarten, the principal may confer with relevant staff to assist in making decisions about each case. In addition, the principal will conduct an informal interview with the child to determine his/her level of curiosity and interest in learning, as well as a more structured interview with the parents to explain school expectations. The principal will reach a decision regarding early kindergarten entry within three weeks after receiving the required information from the parent(s)/guardian(s), and the principal may decide to implement a conditional enrollment period of up to 90 days "in order to observe whether the child is able to adjust to the school setting" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999b).

Early entrance to kindergarten does not constitute AIG identification. However, AIG Specialists will
review the files of students admitted to school according to these guidelines after the first ninety calendar days of the child being enrolled in school, if the principal deems it appropriate for the child to continue in kindergarten. If the records indicate gifted potential, then the school Excel Team will proceed with reviewing the nomination as described in Standard 1, Practice B.

SUBJECT ACCELERATION

Subject acceleration options are available should AIG Specialists and Excel Teams deem this an appropriate service match for identified students. In determining whether subject acceleration is an appropriate student-service match, AIG Specialists will consult with classroom teachers and consider a student's level of interest and motivation; grades in the subject area; and previous achievement scores in the subject area, such as those on end-of-grade (EOG) or end-of-course tests (EOC), North Carolina Final Exams (NCFEs), or other summative assessments.

AIG Specialists will also use available resources (e.g. secure released EOG/EOC/NCFE items available through state-provided assessment systems) to determine a student's level of content mastery for any instruction that would be missed due to subject acceleration. Subject acceleration should not be provided for students who do not have a sufficient level of prior knowledge to enable success in the accelerated course; in these cases, curriculum compacting and/or enrichment may be more suitable service delivery options.

As with any student-service match, AIG Specialists, Excel Teams, and all professionals involved should also be attentive to the social-emotional well-being of AIG students when considering subject acceleration. However, all parties involved should bear in mind the large body of research consistently showing acceleration does not harm gifted students and is, in fact, one of the most beneficial service options we can provide when available data indicates the need (Cross, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2015, p. 31, 37-40; Robinson, 2004, p. 59, 61, 64-65; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, p. 223, 229-230), providing consistently positive academic, social, and psychological effects at all grade levels (Rogers, 2015, p. 28).

AIG-identified middle school students may be eligible to take Pre-Math I in the seventh grade and Math I in the eighth grade if it is deemed an appropriate placement by the AIG Specialist, Excel Team, school principal, and middle school instructors. Additional advanced coursework in Math may be provided when necessary and appropriate. These Math services are delivered at the elementary school by highly certified teachers. The student's grades, EOG scores, interest, level of motivation, and score on the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test are all considered.

NC General Statutes Chapter 115C, Article 8, Part 1 states that "when practicable, local boards of education shall offer advanced courses in mathematics in all grades three and higher. When advanced courses are offered in mathematics, any student scoring a level five on the end-of-grade or end-of-course test for the mathematics course in which the student was most recently enrolled shall be enrolled in the advanced course for the next mathematics course in which the student is enrolled." Scoring a level five on a Math EOG or EOC does not in and of itself identify a student as gifted in Math; however, these students will be provided advanced coursework opportunities in Math. In grades 3-6, this advanced coursework will be provided through flexible grouping practices in the general classroom since separate advanced level Math courses are not offered in these grades; in grades 7 and above, qualifying students will take the next advanced Math course in the sequence. For example, a sixth grade student scoring a level five on the Grade 6 Math EOG would then take
Pre-Math I in grade 7, a seventh grade student scoring a level five on the Grade 7 Math EOG would then take Math I in grade 8, and an eighth grade student scoring a level five on the Grade 8 Math EOG would then take Honors Math I in grade 9.

CREDIT BY DEMONSTRATED MASTERY

Another pathway for whole-subject acceleration is Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM). This process, authorized and outlined under North Carolina State Board of Education policy CCRE-001, is a means "by which LEAs shall, based upon a body-of-evidence, award a student credit in a particular course without requiring the student to complete classroom instruction for a certain amount of seat time" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1999a). Courses completed via CDM do not carry grades, GPA quality points, or honors-level credit (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2016); however, the CDM process can be a useful way for some students to satisfy graduation requirements without seat time, thereby creating space in their schedules for more advanced coursework.

The CDM process is open to all students in grades 9-12 as well as students in grades 6-8 taking high school courses; however, the following courses are not eligible for CDM:
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) work-based learning courses (co-op, internship, apprenticeship);
- CTE courses that have a clinical setting as a requirement of the course, such as ProStart, Early Childhood Education I/II and Nursing Fundamentals;
- CTE Advanced Studies courses;
- CTE courses in pilot and/or field test status;
- English Language Learner (ELL) courses;
- Healthful Living required courses;
- AP and IB courses; and
- Occupational Course of Study (OCS) Occupational Preparation I, II, III, and IV courses.

Students must undertake the CDM process during specified Fall, Spring, and Summer testing windows set by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Specific dates for these windows, along with information about the entire CDM process, are posted on the Watauga County Schools website. To earn credit via CDM, students must complete a two-phase process:
- Phase One: A course examination (i.e. an end-of-course test, North Carolina Final Exam, or locally-developed assessment). The student must meet a score threshold set by DPI to move on to Phase Two. These thresholds vary by eligible course and are posted on the district website.
- Phase Two: An artifact demonstrating the student's ability to apply knowledge and skills of the course. In the event a student progresses to Phase Two, a school or district CDM Student Review Panel will be convened to review and evaluate the artifact. As stated in the DPI Implementation Guide for Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2016), the CDM Student Review Panel shall consist of at least two content-area experts, the school principal (or designee), and an AIG or Curriculum and Instruction Specialist. This team will issue a decision regarding whether credit will be awarded; families may appeal this decision, and information on the appeals process is shared prior to beginning the Phase Two process.

GRADE ACCELERATION

Grade acceleration is available should AIG Specialists and Excel Teams deem this an appropriate service match for identified students. Parents/guardians who feel grade acceleration may be
appropriate for their child should discuss this option with their child's AIG Specialist, current classroom teachers, and school principal.

In determining whether grade acceleration is an appropriate student-service match, AIG Specialists will consult with classroom teachers and consider a student's level of interest and motivation; grades in all subject areas; and previous achievement scores, such as those on end-of-grade (EOG) or end-of-course tests (EOC), North Carolina Final Exams (NCFEs), or other summative assessments.

AIG Specialists will also use available resources (e.g. secure released EOG/EOC/NCFE items available through state-provided assessment systems) to determine a student's level of content mastery for any instruction that would be missed due to grade acceleration. Grade acceleration should not be provided for students who do not have a sufficient level of prior knowledge to enable success in the accelerated grade; in these cases, curriculum compacting and/or enrichment may be more suitable service delivery options.

As with any student-service match, AIG Specialists, Excel Teams, and all professionals involved should also be attentive to the social-emotional well-being of AIG students when considering grade acceleration. However, all parties involved should bear in mind the large body of research consistently showing acceleration does not harm gifted students and is, in fact, one of the most beneficial service options we can provide when available data indicates the need (Cross, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2015, p. 31, 37-40; Robinson, 2004, p. 59, 61, 64-65; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, p. 223, 229-230), providing consistently positive academic, social, and psychological effects at all grade levels (Rogers, 2015, p. 28).

If, after reviewing the information described above, the AIG Specialist and Excel Team feel a student would benefit from grade acceleration, the Excel Team makes this recommendation to the school principal, who conducts a conference with the teacher, principal, school counselor, school psychologist, and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s). The superintendent or designee shall review the recommendation before a double promotion occurs. The school principal has the ultimate responsibility for placement and grading of students in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Dual enrollment allows middle and high school students to be enrolled in two levels of schooling at the same time. Students may remain at an appropriate level for the majority of their study and attend an advanced level for a specific course or periods of time. This option may be appropriate for high school students who may be enrolled in post-secondary courses or middle school and high school students who may enroll in advanced courses via distance learning options (e.g. the North Carolina Virtual Public School). Students seeking these placement options must comply with North Carolina Statutes and meet the criteria as described in Watauga County Board of Education Policy 3101, Dual Enrollment.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS & EARLY ADMISSIONS

For some AIG students, full enrollment in institutions outside of Watauga County Schools may be appropriate. The North Carolina General Assembly funds two residential schools, the North Carolina School of Science and Math (NCSSM) and the North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA), that
address the unique needs of highly gifted students with significant interest in these subject areas. Some AIG students may choose to apply to colleges or universities that offer early admission; if accepted, these students may transfer from high school into such programs. The early admission student who completes graduation requirements must adhere to the guidelines presented in Watauga County Board of Education Policy 3460, Graduation Requirements. AIG Specialists and school counselors work to identify potential applicants for NCSSM, UNCSA, and early university admissions, and these students must meet selection criteria to attend.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Highly gifted students also have the opportunity to pursue independent studies on higher level tasks or areas of interest. Appropriate supervising personnel (e.g. AIG Specialists, classroom teachers) will direct these activities, which may result in mentorships, job shadowing opportunities, or any number of other individualized projects.

Practice H
Implements intentional strategies to broaden access to advanced learning opportunities for underrepresented AIG populations, including culturally/ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, highly gifted, and twice-exceptional. These strategies may include talent development efforts.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program provides service delivery options for traditionally underrepresented AIG populations. Each elementary school has a talent development component established for students in Kindergarten through second grade (as outlined in Standard 3, Practice G) that seeks to foster giftedness in all students, including those from underrepresented populations. AIG Specialists may also collaborate with classroom teachers in grades three and above to identify potentially gifted students from underrepresented groups, provide strategies for differentiating instruction to challenge these students, and provide talent development services directly with these students when possible.

Every effort is made for the referral and identification of students who represent their school population. In their annual faculty presentations, AIG Specialists emphasize the importance of paying particular attention to gifted potential in traditionally underrepresented populations and discuss the perspectives on giftedness in these groups, including varied cultural attitudes toward giftedness and ways in which gifted traits manifest. Alternative assessments (e.g. nonverbal testing) may be used for identification purposes, especially when traditional assessments may not accurately capture the abilities or achievement of underrepresented populations. Specialists serving underrepresented populations (e.g. school counselors, school social workers, Exceptional Children and English Learner teachers) will serve as ad-hoc Excel Team members when gifted nominations for students in these populations are discussed.

Through the collaboration of various professionals, the WCS AIG Program provides comprehensive services for traditionally underrepresented populations. AIG Specialists partner with any school support personnel (e.g. school counselors, school social workers, Exceptional Children's and English Learner teachers) to develop and provide services specifically targeting the needs of traditionally
underrepresented populations while also fostering their intellectual interests and academic growth. AIG Specialists and all educators responsible for working with gifted students are expected to be "warm demanders" (as outlined in "The Warm Demander Chart" cited in Sullivan, 2019, p. 24-25) who build authentic relationships with and set high expectations of all students, including and especially those from underrepresented groups, and then provide supports to help students rise to these expectations. These include explicit instruction on persistence and growth mindset as well as structures for students to understand and use academic vocabulary, be empowered to make choices about how they learn and show knowledge, and actively reflect with teachers on the learning process. AIG Specialists (or gifted support staff in grades 9-12 such as School Counselors and administration) must also ensure the materials used in gifted services are representative of and responsive to all populations, not just majority groups, and help raise this awareness with all classroom teachers.

A key aspect of programming for underrepresented populations, especially culturally/ethnically diverse groups, is active, regular, consistent communication between AIG Specialists (or, in grades 9-12, School Counselors and administration) and parents/guardians of gifted or potentially gifted students in these populations. This communication, which may need to be facilitated by a translator, shows families the school system values their role as essential partners in learning, gives them specific strategies to support students at home, and helps them navigate institutional systems they may not be familiar with such as gifted programming or post-secondary opportunities (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, p. 251-252).

The equitable representation and service of gifted students from underrepresented populations is also supported by regular, systematic data analysis. Standard 6, Practice E describes the process for monitoring the representation, performance, and retention of underrepresented populations in the WCS AIG Program. In addition to these techniques, the AIG Director, AIG Specialists, and, in grades 9-12, School Counselors and administration analyze demographic data for representation in various service delivery options (e.g. advanced coursework, subject/grade acceleration, admissions to residential schools, dual enrollment, etc) as well as the performance of demographic subgroups in these services (e.g. as indicated by summative assessment and growth data). This analysis can indicate areas in which underrepresentation continues to occur as well as areas where specific, intentional support is needed to ensure the success of underrepresented students.

**Practice I**
Encourages extra-curricular programs and events that enhance and further develop the needs and interests of AIG students.

**District Response:**
Providing services for advanced learners is a collaborative school effort, is the responsibility of all school personnel, and extends beyond the traditional bounds of the classroom. In addition to academic pursuits, AIG Specialists and classroom teachers offer extracurricular opportunities to further enrich and engage student interests. These opportunities may include mentoring programs, job shadowing, cooperative education, internships, apprenticeships, clubs, competitions, and camps. Examples of specific activities include (but are not limited to) Battle of the Books, Chess Club, Duke TIP, geography and spelling bees, Jr. Beta Club, MathCounts, Mock Trial, Model UN, Odyssey of the Mind, Robotics Club, science competitions, summer enrichment camps, and Yearbook. Specific offerings may vary between schools and school years based on availability. Additional support may
be provided by Digital Learning Coaches, School Library Media Coordinators, cultural arts teachers, and community partners.

Providing extracurricular programs and events is the responsibility of the total school community. The AIG Director collaborates with the Central Services Team, District Leadership Team, and AIG Advisory Council to maintain awareness of various extracurricular opportunities, and AIG Specialists and School Counselors collaborate with parents and other community members to communicate and enhance the offerings available to their gifted students.

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By June 2020, the AIG Director and Specialists will analyze demographic data to identify specific underrepresented populations in WCS and develop specific plans for programming responsive to these groups.
2. By June 2020, the AIG Director and Specialists will develop and enact plans for professional learning related to culturally-responsive pedagogy.
3. By June 2020, the AIG Director will arrange professional learning on the social-emotional needs of gifted learners for all AIG Specialists, School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers.
4. By June 2020, the AIG Director and Specialists will develop guidance documents on the processes for subject and grade acceleration decision making.
5. By June 2020, the AIG Director and Specialists, in collaboration with school and district administration, will develop guidance documents addressing if/when AIG students will be required to complete classwork missed when receiving AIG pull-out services.

**Sources of Evidence:**
1. Demographic analysis and planning document(s)
2. Culturally-responsive pedagogy professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
3. Social-emotional needs of gifted learners professional learning roster(s), collaborative notes, and other materials
4. Completed subject and grade acceleration guidance documents
5. Completed guidance documents on missed classwork for AIG students
Standard 3: Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction

The LEA employs challenging, rigorous, and relevant curriculum and instruction K-12 to accommodate a range of academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

Practice A
Adapts the NC Standard Course of Study (SCOS) K-12 to address a range of advanced ability levels in language arts, mathematics, and other content areas as appropriate through the use of differentiation strategies, including enrichment, extension, and acceleration.

District Response:
All educators in Watauga County Schools (WCS) are expected to plan instruction based in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (SCOS) and differentiate instructional content, process, and products according to student readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Effective differentiation for gifted students is a collaborative process between all educators -- AIG Specialists, classroom teachers, and other support staff (e.g. English Learner or Exceptional Children's teachers, etc).

At all grade levels, the role of classroom teachers in differentiating the curriculum for gifted learners is to provide opportunities within the regular classroom for gifted students to build on content they have already mastered by exploring it in new ways, applying it to new contexts, or moving ahead to new concepts. This can be accomplished using research-based strategies such as flexibly grouping students by similar interest and ability, delivering course content to students through higher-level readings and multimedia resources, and providing rigorous, open-ended, choice-driven options for students to demonstrate knowledge such as tiered assignments or project-based learning.

In grades K-8, AIG Specialists further support radical differentiation of the SCOS through the standards-aligned services they provide in addition to regular classroom instruction. By collaborating and communicating with classroom teachers through structures such as grade-level and subject-area Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), AIG Specialists know what standards are currently being taught in general classrooms; they then support and expand on these standards by enriching and extending the curriculum through strategies such as interest-based experiences, thematic and interdisciplinary units, and long-range projects. AIG Specialists may also serve students by working with classroom teachers to compact grade level curriculum so students can begin accessing the next year's content early; still other students may have such extensive standards mastery that they benefit from subject or grade acceleration (as described in Standard 2, Practice G). To help embed standards-aligned differentiation practice throughout each student's experience, AIG Specialists may model or co-teach with classroom teachers.

In grades 9-12, gifted students' course selections, made in close cooperation with School Counselors, are a first step in differentiating the SCOS. In a broad sense, Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses address students' varied interest in and readiness for learning higher-level content through more rigorous processes and products; however, course selection is not differentiation in and of itself. It is vitally important classroom teachers recognize even within a given Honors or AP course, there are still variations in student readiness, interests, and learning profiles, and so further differentiation is still necessary. The strategies mentioned earlier in this practice -- e.g. flexible groupings, rich course
materials, opportunities for robust student products, etc -- are equally applicable in advanced courses. The established presence of 1:1 technology in grades 9-12 further supports a wide variety of options to differentiate content, process, and products for all high school students. In the absence of a high school AIG Specialist, it is the responsibility of the AIG Director to collaborate with high school administrators, the Counseling Department, the Digital Learning Coaches, and other support staff to train 9-12 classroom teachers in differentiation best practices for gifted learners and uphold consistent expectations for their regular use.

While students may be identified as gifted in English Language Arts (ELA) or Math, high quality differentiation strategies can be used regardless of subject area. Furthermore, AIG Specialists and classroom teachers alike should identify ways in which ELA and Math standards connect to one another (e.g. How do we explain mathematical reasoning using speech and writing? Where do we see mathematical concepts at work -- even metaphorically -- in literature?) as well as how these subject areas relate to others (e.g. How are abstract mathematical concepts practically applied in scientific study? How have global historical events impacted and been impacted by high-quality writing, and how does that cycle continue in current events?) Understanding and designing instruction around these interdisciplinary connections creates richer experiences for all students, increases the likelihood they retain knowledge thanks to repeated use across varied contexts, and provides for multi-layered differentiation as students apply strengths and interests in one subject to areas of potential growth in another.

**Practice B**

Employs diverse and effective instructional practices according to students' identified abilities, readiness, interests, and learning profiles, to address a range of learning needs at all grade levels.

**District Response:**

AIG Specialists use each student's collected data (see Standard 1, Practice B) as the basis for an appropriate match to differentiated services. In differentiating instruction for gifted learners, AIG Specialists and classroom teachers consider students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles in order to tailor how to deliver content, how students process it, and the products through which they demonstrate learning (Tomlinson and Allen, 2000, p. 3). For gifted learners, these modifications should create opportunities to connect mastered content to new information and use it in increasingly realistic, complex, abstract situations.

At all grade levels, these differentiation best practices (also outlined in Appendix C) may include (but are not limited to):

- Alternative course delivery options
- Apprenticeships/internships
- Contracts
- Curriculum compacting
- Enrichment events
- Individual/small group investigations
- Learning centers
- Mentorships
- Paideia and/or Socratic seminar discussions
- Problem-, project-, and inquiry-based learning
Throughout the year, educators receive professional learning from AIG Specialists as well as other internal support staff (e.g. Digital Learning Coaches, English Learner and Exceptional Children’s teachers) and external providers on a variety of topics related to differentiation (e.g. differentiation techniques, brain-friendly strategies, student data analysis to inform instruction). Differentiated instruction is also fundamental to an effective multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), so school- and district-level MTSS Teams also assist in providing professional learning and follow-up coaching support on differentiation techniques. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.) AIG Specialists and other support staff also assist classroom teachers in differentiation by modeling and/or co-teaching using these strategies. Through professional learning communities (PLCs), teachers collaboratively discuss the implementation of differentiation strategies, refine their use, and consider the data that informs their planning.

**Practice C**
Incorporates a variety of evidence-based resources that enhance student learning.

**District Response:**
As part of its regular cycle for obtaining core instructional materials, Watauga County Schools (WCS) examines how these resources can be used to support gifted learners in the regular classroom. Additionally, the AIG Director and Specialists augment and differentiate the North Carolina Standard Course of Study through supplementary resources (e.g. Duke TIP Teachers Workshop, Junior Great Books, Partners for Mathematics Learning, units from the William and Mary Center for Gifted Education). The AIG Director and Specialists meet regularly to share best practices and materials (e.g. as found at state and national conferences or highlighted in gifted publications), as well as to provide and/or receive professional learning on their use. Resources are selected based on student interests and needs, supporting research, and the quality of the material itself.

These resources enhance student learning through their use within the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (SCOS) and strong differentiated instruction. AIG Specialists, classroom teachers, and other educators employ these resources to provide students varied means to receive content, process it, and create unique products of their learning (as described in detail in Standard 3, Practices A and B).

**Practice D**
Fosters the development of future-ready skills including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and leadership.

**District Response:**
In creating educational plans for AIG students, AIG Specialists seek opportunities to empower these
students as critical thinkers, communicators, collaborators, creators, and leaders. AIG Specialists collaborate with classroom teachers and other support staff (e.g. Digital Learning Coaches [DLCs] and School Library Media Coordinators [SLMCs]) to design rigorous, relevant experiences fostering these future-ready skills within core instruction and AIG service delivery. Examples of such experiences include active learning experiences in flexible groups, apprenticeships and mentorships, interdisciplinary and thematic units, leadership opportunities, problem- and project-based learning, research-based writing, service learning, and more. Additionally, academic clubs and competitions (e.g. Battle of the Books, MathCounts, Mock Trial, Model UN, robotics competitions, and others outlined in Standard 2, Practices A and I) address all future-ready skills as they provide students authentic, purpose-driven opportunities to work in teams to solve complex tasks.

While future-ready skills are not inherently linked to technology, Watauga County Schools' modern technology landscape further supports educators in designing rich instruction fostering these skills. The availability of classroom-based and 1:1 devices, a consistent learning management system, Google Apps for Education, and other digital curriculum resources allows teachers to incorporate engaging, diverse multimedia content into lessons, differentiate or even personalize learning, and provide students with an authentic, global audience for the products of their learning. DLCs, SLMCs, and other support staff also lend their expertise through co-planning, modeling, and co-teaching to bring a wealth of current, thought-provoking content into classrooms.

The development of future-ready skills through modern content and instruction supports Watauga County Schools' mission to educate all students, including the academically and/or intellectually gifted, for healthy, productive citizenship and lifelong learning.

**Practice E**

Uses on-going assessment, both formative and summative, to differentiate classroom curriculum and instruction and inform flexible grouping practices.

**District Response:**

To gather student data and inform instruction, Watauga County Schools (WCS) uses a robust system of ongoing assessments. This system includes formative (e.g. exit tickets, checklists, pre-tests, student work products, teacher observations, etc), interim (e.g. benchmark and diagnostic assessments, etc) and summative assessments (e.g. teacher-created unit tests, locally-developed final exams, Advanced Placement exams, North Carolina End-of-Grade and End-of Course tests, North Carolina Final Exams, etc).

Digital systems play a critical role in helping educators collect and analyze assessment data. The Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) gathers information on students' testing history and annual academic growth, allowing educators at all levels to assess whether AIG students are being academically challenged. In addition, the WCS Early Warning System (EWS) and the Every Child Accountability and Tracking System (ECATS) collect assessment data into learner profiles that not only facilitate analyzing progress toward academic goals, but also synthesize this information with data related to attendance, behavior, and social-emotional needs in order to consider each student holistically within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

The district trains teachers not only in how to assess students, but how to analyze and act on
assessment data to enable all students to reach their potential. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a fundamental component within an MTSS for groups of grade-level and/or subject-area teachers, along with AIG Specialists, to regularly use structured protocols to facilitate unbiased, effective data analysis conversations. Through these discussions, educators evaluate the overall effectiveness of instruction as well as the implications for differentiation, including the most beneficial flexible grouping arrangements based on student readiness, interest, and/or learner profiles. Through their involvement in PLC meetings, AIG Specialists can provide expert guidance on the differentiation best practices for advanced learners suggested by ongoing assessment data. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.)

Based on formative, interim, and/or summative assessment data, AIG Specialists may implement service options such as flexible groupings (see Standard 2, Practice C), compacted curriculum, advanced coursework, or independent studies (see Standard 2, Practice G). Standard 2, Practice A and Appendix C outline the Array of Services AIG Specialists and classroom teachers may choose from based on assessment data.

**Practice F**
Addresses the social and emotional needs of AIG students through affective curricular and instructional practices.

**District Response:**
The multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model provides a framework within which all educators work to support the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional success of all students. An effective MTSS includes structures such as grade-level or subject-area professional learning communities (PLCs) and school-level MTSS Teams to gather, monitor, and discuss data, including that which indicates student social-emotional needs (e.g. behavior screening data, discipline referrals, etc). These teams and data sources are supported by the expertise and observations of AIG Specialists working with gifted learners. This collaboration is further supported at the district level by the AIG Director's participation on the district MTSS Team alongside the Director of Student Services, who is responsible for School Counselors and Social Workers, and the Director of the Exceptional Children's Program, who is responsible for School Psychologists. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.)

Based on the available qualitative and quantitative data, AIG Specialists lead the way in responding to gifted students’ social-emotional needs and guiding other educators in doing so. AIG Specialists lead conversations with and provide targeted direct instruction to groups of gifted students on their unique social-emotional needs, including establishing peer relationships, forming healthy self-concept, adopting and maintaining a growth mindset, and avoiding academic perfectionism or underachievement (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, p. 17-21). Other support specialists such as School Counselors, Psychologists, and Social Workers are also uniquely positioned and trained to assist in this kind of conversation and teaching with small groups of gifted learners.

To empower all educators to assist in social-emotional support, AIG Specialists and School Counselors also provide professional learning as needed in the social and emotional needs of gifted students. This training can happen throughout the school year in a variety of contexts (e.g. PLC and faculty meetings, district-wide trainings, etc). See Standard 4, Practice C for more information on
professional learning related to the WCS AIG Program.

**Practice G**  
Cultivates and develops the potential of young (K-3) students through purposeful and intentional differentiated curriculum and instruction.

**District Response:**  
AIG Specialists provide talent development services to all K-2 students in order to foster their potential and begin identifying early indicators of giftedness. These services may include enrichment and extension activities on topics such as lateral thinking and creative problem solving skills (e.g. as outlined in the Primary Education Thinking Skills curriculum) as well as explicit instruction related to social-emotional issues such as setting realistic self-expectations for academic performance, maintaining a mindset of persistence (“grit”) and growth, and forming healthy self-concept and peer relationships. In delivering these services, AIG Specialists may work with whole classes and collaborate with classroom teachers to identify flexible groups.

In addition, AIG Specialists discuss observations of K-2 students with their teachers in order to identify highly gifted K-2 students who would benefit from formal identification and individualized services (as documented in an Individualized Differentiated Education Plan). The AIG Director reviews school rosters and AIG Specialists’ schedules to ensure time is available for K-2 highly gifted and talent development services.

AIG Specialists meet on a monthly basis to receive updates and discuss curricular matters, including best practices and instructional strategies for the K-2 setting. Staff development will also be provided as appropriate to all K-2 teachers and AIG Specialists addressing the specific needs of and effective differentiation strategies for this population. The AIG Director and Specialists also purchase and use supplemental materials developed for nurturing giftedness in K-2 students and serving those already identified.

**Practice H**  
Develops and implements differentiated curriculum and instruction through collaboration among regular education teachers, AIG personnel, and other related instructional staff.

**District Response:**  
At each of Watauga County Schools’ K-8 schools, AIG Specialists collaboratively plan differentiated curriculum and instruction with classroom teachers and other school support personnel (e.g. Digital Learning Coaches, English Learner and Exceptional Children’s teachers, School Library Media Coordinators) on an ongoing basis. This collaboration may occur in person (e.g. via Professional Learning Community, grade level/subject area, or one-on-one meetings) or virtually (e.g. via the learning management system or Google Drive). AIG Specialists may further collaborate with classroom teachers by modeling appropriate gifted strategies and/or co-teaching lessons.

Besides their primary focus on collaboratively planning and delivering instruction, AIG Specialists may also collaborate with other educators in the following ways:
- Annually providing orientation to the Watauga County Schools AIG Plan for personnel at their assigned school. (See Standard 1, Practice E for more detailed information on the content of this orientation.)
- Actively participating in transition meetings at appropriate points in AIG students' academic careers (Pre-K to Kindergarten, second to third grade, and eighth grade to high school) to assist in adjustment to new learning environments. (See Standard 2, Practice E for more information on how AIG students are supported at key transition points.)
- Providing talent development services for all K-2 students (see Standard 3, Practice G) and underrepresented populations in grades 3-8 (see Standard 2, Practice H).
- Publicizing extracurricular enrichment opportunities (see Standard 2, Practice I) through newsletters, school web pages, parent meetings, and informational flyers.

At the district level, the AIG Director supports and advocates for differentiated curriculum and instruction through participation in regular meetings of district-level teams such as the Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team. These meetings allow for regular conversations with key stakeholders such as school principals, the Director of the Exceptional Children's Program, the Director of Student Services, the Chief Academic Officer, and the superintendent.

The AIG Director and Specialists attend regional meetings, the state gifted conference, and other gifted information meetings provided by the Department of Public Instruction. The AIG Director meets monthly with AIG Specialists to provide updates on gifted education, review best practices and instructional strategies for gifted learners, and clarify any questions about the plan and/or service delivery options. The AIG Director and Specialists also meet regularly with the AIG Advisory Council to review the program's implementation and offer suggestions.

**Practice I**
Develops and documents a student plan that articulates the differentiated curriculum and instruction services that match the identified needs of the K-12 AIG student, such as a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP). This document is reviewed annually with parents/families to ensure effective programming, provide a continuum of services, and support school transitions.

**District Response:**
The Watauga County Schools AIG Program uses a uniform Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) and Individualized Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP) to document services for gifted students. These documents are created annually based on available data (described in detail in Standard 3, Practice E) and in collaboration with the full range of education professionals to ensure appropriate student-service match and smooth transitions from grade to grade. The services documented in a DEP or IDEP are based on each student's academic, intellectual, and social-emotional strengths and needs as well as grade-level and subject-area curriculum standards and opportunities (as described in Standard 2, Practice A). AIG Specialists invite families to conference about and sign the DEP/IDEP at the beginning of each school year and are available at any time to meet with families to discuss services.

AIG Specialists complete a Yearly Performance Review (as outlined in Standard 1, Practice F) for each student they serve to ensure the differentiated services provided continue to appropriately
match each student's academic, intellectual, and social-emotional strengths and needs. The AIG Director completes a selective audit of AIG student records annually to ensure the DEP/IDEP process is being followed.

AIG documentation for students transitioning to Watauga High School (WHS) or Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) is sent to and reviewed by a designated high school administrator, who then provides a list of AIG students to the appropriate School Counselors to ensure awareness of identified AIG students and their needs. The AIG Director, high school administrator tasked with AIG, and WHS/WIA Student Services Department also collaborate to ensure all high school teachers know their AIG student roster and best practices for differentiating for these students. For AIG students at Watauga High School, course selections become the DEP. Course selection is accomplished with input from the student, parents, and counselor. Students are encouraged to take the most rigorous coursework available to meet their individual needs. Counselors provide information to parents regarding the unique social, emotional, and behavioral needs of AIG students, and they provide counseling sessions to support AIG students in these areas.

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By June 2020, the AIG Director, AIG Specialists, and WHS/WIA Student Services Department will collaboratively develop a consistent set of social-emotional learning resources and plan for their use with AIG students at all grade levels.
2. By June 2020, the AIG Director, WHS/WIA administrator tasked with AIG, and the WHS/WIA Student Services Department will examine the feasibility of implementing a Differentiated Education Plan document for AIG students in grades 9-12.
3. By June 2021, the AIG Director and Specialists will collaboratively develop a consistent set of resources for K-2 talent development and plan for their use, including professional learning for K-2 classroom teachers on this topic.
4. By June 2021, the AIG Director and Specialists will collaboratively develop a repository of resources for AIG differentiation (e.g. model lessons and units), make these available to all WCS teachers, and provide professional learning on this topic.

**Sources of Evidence:**
1. Clear, detailed plan for use of specific AIG social-emotional learning resources
2. Documentation of meetings discussing 9-12 AIG Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) and/or, if possible, a completed 9-12 DEP document
3. Clear, detailed plan for use of specific K-2 talent development resources
4. Completed repository of AIG differentiation resources accessible to any WCS educator
Standard 4: Personnel and Professional Development

The LEA recruits and retains highly qualified professionals and provides relevant and effective professional development concerning the needs of gifted learners that is on-going and comprehensive.

Practice A

Employs an AIG-licensed educator as lead coordinator to guide, plan, develop, implement, revise, and monitor the local AIG program and plan.

District Response:

As of 2019, Watauga County Schools’ (WCS) AIG Director does not hold AIG licensure. However, the current AIG Director plans to earn licensure no later the end of the current AIG Plan cycle (i.e. 2022). To ensure the WCS AIG Program is guided by expertise and best practices in gifted education, the AIG Director collaborates closely with the WCS team of licensed AIG Specialists, licensed colleagues throughout the region and state, and state-level support staff in the NC Department of Public Instruction Division of Advanced Learning and Gifted Education.

The following duties of the AIG Director ensure the quality implementation of the WCS AIG Plan:
- Keep current with events and trends in gifted education, including matters of law, best instructional practices, new resources and materials, and other issues;
- Oversee the AIG budget, advocate for additional program funding as necessary, and use funds to foster the success and continuous improvement of the AIG program (e.g. by purchasing quality supplemental materials and providing for conference attendance);
- Coordinate AIG-related staff development opportunities;
- Review AIG Specialists’ schedules and make recommendations if needed;
- Consult regularly with AIG Specialists to ensure that assigned duties and courses align with their gifted learners’ needs;
- Collaborate with the Director of Accountability and School Improvement to coordinate countywide assessments of students for identification;
- Periodically observe school Excel Team meetings and serve as an ad hoc member as needed;
- Work with the district Data Manager to maintain an accurate student headcount and review all information prior to submission;
- Make site visits to observe AIG Specialists and provide instructional feedback;
- Meet regularly with the AIG Specialists to provide updates and share best practices;
- With the AIG Specialists, communicate about the AIG program to all stakeholders;
- Facilitate the district AIG Advisory Council as described in Standard 5, Practice C;
- Communicate and collaborate with other AIG Directors (e.g. by attending regional and state AIG Directors’ meetings and the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented conference);
- Audit AIG student files each summer for properly completed documentation;
- Coordinate the evaluation of the AIG program;
- Lead the AIG Plan revision process and evaluate its effectiveness;
- Communicate about and advocate for the WCS AIG Program through participation in regular meetings of district-level teams including the Central Services Team, Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, and District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team;
- Present regular updates on the effectiveness and goals of the WCS AIG Program to stakeholder
groups such as the Watauga County Board of Education and district-level teams.

Additional information on the roles and responsibilities of the AIG Director can be found in Appendix E: Personnel Roles and Responsibilities.

**Practice B**
Engages AIG-licensed specialists in tasks that explicitly address the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

**District Response:**
Each of Watauga County Schools' AIG Specialists is either fully certified in Gifted Education or in the process of receiving that certification. This specialized training and overall pedagogical expertise promotes best gifted education practices throughout the district. In order to maintain a high-quality AIG program, Watauga County Schools expects AIG Specialists maintain teaching licensure and Gifted Education endorsement per requirements set forth by the NC Department of Public Instruction.

To effectively address AIG students' academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs, AIG Specialists are tasked with the following duties:

- Annually provide AIG Plan orientation, including screening, identification, and placement procedures, for faculties, administrators, and parents;
- Serve as chairperson of the site-based Excel Team, maintaining accurate minutes including a record of students nominated and placed in the AIG program;
- Maintain a file for each identified gifted student that includes placement qualifications, updated testing information, academic records, and annually completed Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) or Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEPs) and Yearly Performance Reviews (YPRs);
- In a regular and timely fashion, update and reevaluate the qualifications of students whom the Excel Team placed on a “wait and watch” status;
- Provide gifted education professional development for classroom teachers and other educators;
- Participate in local, regional, state, and/or national professional learning related to gifted education;
- Collaborate with K-2 classroom teachers to provide talent development services;
- Collaborate with classroom teachers to plan and deliver differentiated instruction for gifted students;
- Provide and facilitate differentiated instruction through a variety of service delivery options for gifted students based on student and teacher needs (e.g. inclusion, pull-out, exploratory blocks, interest groups);
- Collaborate with support staff (e.g. English Language and Exceptional Children’s teachers, School Counselors, School Psychologists, School Social Workers) to address the needs of students from special populations;
- Sponsor various competitions (e.g. Battle of the Books, Mock Trial, Model UN) and extra-curricular enrichment events (e.g. Space Camp, Chess Club, Robotics Club);
- Inform stakeholders of AIG events through a variety of media (e.g. brochures, newsletters, parent events, and school websites);
- Communicate annually with parents regarding their child's academic progress through the DEP/IDEP and YPR;
- Coordinate with the District Data Manager and AIG Director to maintain an accurate AIG student headcount;
- Attend regular AIG Specialist Team meetings with the AIG Director to receive updates and share
best practices.

Additional information on the roles and responsibilities of AIG Specialists can be found in Appendix E: Personnel Roles and Responsibilities.

**Practice C**
Establishes specific and appropriate professional development requirements for all personnel involved in AIG programs and services, including classroom teachers, special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators.

**District Response:**
Watauga County Schools (WCS) recognizes comprehensive, sustained professional development is central to successfully implementing its AIG Plan and thus providing each gifted student with the best possible educational experience. While specific professional development offerings vary in their topics, their overall goals are the same:
- Promote awareness of and positive attitudes toward gifted students' unique characteristics and needs;
- Develop teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction and ability to implement it for gifted students;
- Contribute to the overall quality of the total school community in support of gifted students.

As part of WCS' commitment to the AIG Program as part of the total school community, the AIG Director and Specialists offer professional development throughout each school year to all professionals involved in gifted education -- e.g. classroom teachers, special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators. The focus and frequency of these offerings are determined through formal and informal needs assessments (e.g. WCS AIG Program stakeholder surveys, the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, student data analysis, and conversations with administrators, classroom teachers, and AIG Specialists). Because these varied professionals support gifted learners in varied ways, professional learning offerings must be tailored to these roles as described below.

All educators receive professional learning on the following topics:
- The legal mandate for AIG services (i.e. as provided in Article 9B), the guidance provided by the North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, and the implementation of these standards through the WCS AIG Plan;
- The process of nominating, identifying, and serving AIG students from all backgrounds, including underrepresented populations;
- The role of gifted education within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

Classroom teachers receive additional professional learning on the following topics:
- Best practices for differentiating instruction for gifted learners (see Standard 3, Practice B for more details);
- Strategies for collaborating with AIG Specialists, including co-teaching best practices;
- Use of specific instructional resources with gifted students;
- Recognizing and supporting the social-emotional needs of gifted learners (e.g. managing perfectionism, avoiding underachievement, developing healthy self-concept; see Standard 2, Practice
F for more details) within the classroom setting.

Special education (AKA Exceptional Children) teachers, English Learner teachers, and other educators who support specific populations receive additional professional learning on the following topics:
- The potential for giftedness in all students, regardless of any specialized identifications or services they may receive;
- Their role in meeting the unique needs of gifted students within the populations they serve (e.g. twice exceptional students, gifted English Learner students);
- Their role in advocating for gifted identification and service among the populations they serve;
- Strategies for collaborating with AIG Specialists, including co-teaching best practices;
- Use of specific instructional resources with gifted students.

School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers receive additional professional learning on the following topics:
- Recognizing the social-emotional needs of gifted learners;
- Supporting these social-emotional needs throughout the school and in the home, including through communication and collaboration with parents.

School and district administrators receive additional professional learning on the following topics:
- The necessity of gifted education to ensure the academic, intellectual, and social-emotional success of gifted students;
- The role of administrators in the successful implementation of the WCS AIG Plan, including creating structures for AIG personnel and other educators to collaborate and advocating for gifted education within their schools and communities.

As of June 2019, the Northwest Regional Educational Services Alliance (NWRESA) is developing local coursework to support cohorts of interested elementary, middle, and high school educators in becoming better prepared to teach AIG students and potentially obtain AIG licensure. As a NWRESA member district, WCS is committed to full participation in these cohorts and will identify classroom teachers to participate. These teachers can then support AIG Specialists in providing professional learning and advocacy in schools.

The AIG Director and AIG Specialists collaboratively develop plans for their own professional learning based on needs indicated by available data as well as state licensure renewal requirements. The AIG Director encourages AIG Specialists to attend the annual conference of the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented, as well as other relevant experiences such as the annual North Carolina Technology in Education Society conference or offerings from the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. When possible, the AIG Director supports attendance at such professional learning experiences through the use of district AIG funds.

**Practice D**
Provides general education services by personnel who have earned an AIG add-on license or have met the LEA requirements for that position.

**District Response:**
Watauga County Schools (WCS) ensures the quality of personnel serving AIG students through two priorities:
- Maintain licensed AIG Specialists in every K-8 school;
- Hire teachers deemed highly qualified in their subject area by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

While not all general education classroom teachers are formally licensed in gifted education, their highly qualified status signifies sound pedagogical understanding upon which the AIG Director and AIG Specialists build knowledge of gifted education strategies through ongoing professional learning (see Standard 4, Practice C) in which all educators are expected to participate. Collaborative planning between highly qualified classroom teachers and licensed AIG Specialists ensures quality service delivery for identified gifted students through inclusion, pull-out, and various grouping options.

Educator teams at all levels (e.g. grade-span and/or subject-area professional learning communities, School Multi-Tiered System of Supports and/or School Improvement Teams, the District Leadership Team) should monitor available data to determine the effectiveness of general education classroom teachers working with gifted students. Relevant data may be gathered from formative, interim, and summative assessments, as well as student growth data reported through the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). This data analysis should inform how AIG students are clustered and scheduled, as well as how teachers are supported through professional learning and collaboration with AIG Specialists.

Since AIG licensure is not a position that can be designated as highly qualified, the Director of Human Resources and the AIG Director review potential candidate files when an AIG Specialist position becomes available. An interview list is created based on candidate qualifications including teacher certifications and experience. The AIG Director, the Director of Human Resources (or designee), and the site-based administrator conduct interviews. Any teacher without AIG licensure hired for an AIG Specialist position is given two years to attain full licensure. Any teacher hired with existing AIG licensure is responsible for maintaining their license in accordance with DPI guidelines and the WCS AIG Plan.

**Practice E**

Aligns professional development opportunities with local AIG program goals, other district initiatives, and best practices in gifted education.

**District Response:**

In Watauga County Schools (WCS), training on gifted education is aligned with and embedded within district-wide professional development goals. The WCS Curriculum and Instruction Team prioritizes, plans, and delivers professional learning based on a variety of information, including:
- Student proficiency and growth data;
- Faculty, staff, and student survey results (e.g. on the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey and locally-developed follow-up surveys);
- School, district, and state initiatives (e.g. the WCS Strategic Plan, the WCS AIG Plan, individual School Improvement Plans);
- Current pedagogical best practices and trends (e.g. as gathered from professional reading, attendance at regional meetings and state/national conferences, etc);
- Professional standards;
- The North Carolina teacher evaluation instrument;
- Other formal and informal needs assessments.

Based on this information (as well as any other relevant data), the Curriculum and Instruction Team establishes district-wide staff development goals and plans implementation. Professional learning offerings are delivered during days scheduled annually for this purpose, as well as throughout the school year in both in-person and virtual settings. The Curriculum and Instruction Team's regular meetings provide an avenue for discussion, assessment, and continuous improvement of professional development.

Through participation in the Curriculum and Instruction Team, the AIG Director is able to directly impact the integration of gifted education into broader professional learning contexts. Where appropriate, the AIG Director also advocates for the involvement of AIG Specialists in district-level professional learning offerings (e.g. trainings on new curriculum resources). Each individual school may also plan additional professional learning offerings based on its specific instructional needs, and AIG Specialists are included in these sessions as well.

Currently, professional learning priorities in WCS include the related topics of the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework for total school improvement, the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) in this framework, and the necessity of high-quality differentiated instruction within these structures. These needs are fundamentally intertwined: high-quality differentiation informed by the collaborative work of PLCs creates effective core instruction, the bedrock of an MTSS framework. (For more information on the role of the WCS AIG Program within a multi-tiered system of supports, see Appendix D.) Training educators on these elements -- differentiation and PLCs in support of an MTSS -- directly aligns with WCS AIG Program goals in several ways:
- High-quality differentiation ensures every AIG student is appropriately challenged in the regular classroom;
- Effective PLCs provide consistent venues for gathering, discussing, and acting on student data, which supports collaboration with AIG Specialists to identify and serve AIG students and monitor the impact and equity of the AIG Program;
- A robust MTSS creates specific, consistent structures to monitor and respond to the unique academic, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of AIG students throughout the school.

The AIG Director, as a member of the District MTSS Team and Curriculum and Instruction Team, continues to actively participate in the planning and delivery of this professional learning and integrate the perspective of gifted education throughout.

**Practice F**
Provides opportunities for AIG specialists and other teachers to plan, implement, and refine applications of their professional development learning.

**District Response:**
Watauga County Schools (WCS) recognizes collaboration among educators is essential to high-quality learning. As evidenced in the WCS Strategic Plan, the district is committed to creating structures to facilitate this collaboration. Through these structures, AIG Specialists work as a team
and with educators in their schools to implement professional learning in support of the WCS AIG Program.

AIG Specialists collaboratively plan implementation of their professional learning through means such as:
- Meeting monthly with the AIG Director to clarify issues regarding service delivery options and receive updates concerning gifted education initiatives;
- Sharing ideas, resources, and best practices via instructional technology (e.g. Google Drive, the Canvas learning management system);
- Participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) with regular education teachers and other professionals;
- Attending grade level and/or subject area meetings to stay abreast of current goals and units of study;
- Collaboratively planning lessons or units with regular education teachers;
- Meeting with other school personnel who provide and/or consult on services to gifted students;
- Participating in staff development offered by and to regular education teachers so they are knowledgeable about new strategies, programs, and initiatives and can be of support to classroom teachers.

AIG Specialists subsequently apply their professional learning through various means:
- Providing direct service to gifted students as outlined in the Array of Services (see Standard 2, Practice A and Appendix C);
- Modeling best gifted education practices for other teachers;
- Co-teaching with general classroom teachers;
- Assisting general classroom teachers in designing differentiated activities;
- Providing general classroom teachers with appropriate differentiation resources.

To support collaborative implementation and refinement of professional learning, the AIG Director works with school administrators to examine AIG Specialist responsibilities and scheduling. As available, additional funding will be requested to support the attendance of AIG Specialists at professional development opportunities and state meetings/conferences in the area of gifted education.

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By June 2019, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Team and school principals, will select classroom teachers to participate in AIG coursework provided through the Northwest Regional Educational Service Alliance (NWRESA).
2. By June 2022, the AIG Director will obtain the AIG licensure add-on.
3. By June 2022, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will develop a specific AIG professional learning plan tailored to various professional roles that includes face-to-face offerings and self-paced digital modules based on the AIG Booster Shots series.
4. By June 2022, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists, in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Team and school principals, will explore the development of local AIG professional learning requirements for classroom teachers.

**Sources of Evidence:**
1. Roster of teachers selected for NWRESA AIG coursework and documentation of their completion
2. AIG Director's NC teaching license with AIG endorsement
3. Clear, detailed AIG professional learning plan with specific materials and resources
4. Documentation of meetings discussing local AIG professional learning requirements and/or, if possible, an outline of these requirements
Standard 5: Partnerships
The LEA ensures on-going and meaningful participation of stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the local AIG program to develop strong partnerships.

Practice A
Develops partnerships with parents/families that are intentional and meaningful to support the following needs of AIG students:
* academic and intellectual
* social and emotional

District Response:
The AIG Specialists in each school are the first line of contact for building and maintaining partnerships with parents of gifted students. AIG Specialists use methods such as the following to communicate and partner with parents:
- Meeting with parents annually to evaluate services as outlined in the DEP/IDEP and make any necessary changes to achieve the optimal student/service match;
- Collaborating with classroom teachers to share student progress information through teacher conferences, phone calls, emails, progress reports, report cards, newsletters, and student-led conferences;
- Presenting AIG information at Open House and PTO meetings;
- Posting program updates and upcoming events on a school AIG website;
- Providing an AIG brochure to parents of AIG students;
- Periodically sharing with parents information about special AIG events (e.g. Scholars Weekend, Duke TIP, summer camps, etc.; see Standard 4, Practice I for more information).

Extracurricular events and other services for AIG students may incorporate community partnerships. Parent involvement is also essential to these types of activities, and AIG Specialists seek active partnerships with parents to this end. Such services include:
- Apprenticeships/mentorships;
- Community outreach and service projects;
- Band, choral, music, and performing arts opportunities;
- Guest speakers and career fairs;
- Student presentations to authentic, public audiences;
- Various competitions (Science Fair, Spelling Bee, Math Fair, etc).

The AIG Director works to facilitate and strengthen community partnerships at the district level through activities such as:
- Showcasing AIG initiatives via print and digital media outlets (e.g. press releases, social media);
- Maintaining the district AIG website, where the AIG Plan and supplementary documents are stored;
- Encouraging schools to include the AIG program as part of their School Improvement Plans;
- Leading regular meetings of the AIG Advisory Council (described in detail in Standard 5, Practice C);
- Regularly seeking feedback on the WCS AIG Program from parents;
- Arranging parent information sessions on social-emotional needs of gifted learners (e.g. through
Duke TIP);
- Generally advocating for gifted education with members of the Watauga County community.

**Practice B**
Shares with stakeholders, including all students’ parents/families, information regarding the local AIG program, the local AIG plan, and other policies relating to gifted education.

**District Response:**
The WCS AIG Program makes a concentrated effort to operate with transparency and inform all stakeholders, especially parents of gifted students, of the local AIG Program and Plan. School and district AIG websites provide information about the AIG program, possible service delivery options, and contact information for each school. The local AIG Plan and supplementary documents (e.g. appendices, presentation slides, documentation of progress toward program goals, stakeholder survey results) are posted on the district website, and print copies are available upon request. The AIG Director and AIG Specialists communicate to stakeholders any changes to the AIG Plan or related policies (e.g. North Carolina AIG Standards or law) through various means (e.g. district and school websites, newsletters, Parent Nights, conferences, email lists, etc). The AIG Director meets each month with the AIG Specialists to share plan and policy updates and provides the same information to administrators through monthly AIG updates. Presentations for the Board of Education occur as needed per Board and/or AIG Director request. The county-wide AIG Advisory Council (as described in Standard 5, Practice C) is instrumental in sharing information concerning the gifted program.

Annual DEP/IDEP review meetings with parents of AIG students offer the AIG Specialists a time to update information, listen to concerns, and answer questions concerning the AIG Program and Plan. Updates for school personnel occur annually with a review of AIG procedures by the AIG Specialist as well as in regular grade-level or subject-area team meetings which the AIG Specialist attends. As necessary, the AIG Specialist will present AIG information at scheduled faculty meetings. The AIG Specialists and AIG Director maintain an open door policy, welcoming parents, faculty, or any other stakeholders to meet with them as needed to discuss questions about the AIG Program or Plan.

**Practice C**
Establishes and utilizes an advisory group to develop, implement, and monitor the local AIG program and plan. This advisory group is representative of the diverse populations of the district and is at least comprised of community members, AIG parents and families, AIG teachers, and other instructional and support staff.

**District Response:**
The AIG Advisory Council plays a vital role in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the AIG Program. Its purpose is to promote gifted education in Watauga County, support enrichment opportunities for students, and assist in the monitoring and revision of the WCS AIG Plan. The AIG Advisory Council is also a key avenue for fostering community partnerships (as outlined in Standard 5, Practice A).
The Council is led by the AIG Director, meets quarterly, and consists of the AIG Specialists, the Watauga High School / Watauga Innovation Academy administrator in charge of gifted education, and parent representatives from each school. In seeking parent representatives, the AIG Director and AIG Specialist also aim to represent various community partnerships (e.g. through parents employed at Appalachian State University or other major local employers) and district demographics (e.g. parents of twice exceptional students or from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds). Principals and Board of Education members also have standing invitations to attend any AIG Advisory Council meeting. Recommendations from the AIG Advisory Council are reviewed by the AIG Director and the Chief Academic Officer for referral to appropriate teams and further action.

To engage the AIG Advisory Council in monitoring of and feedback on the WCS AIG Plan, the AIG Director regularly shares updates about AIG programming and invites other relevant stakeholders to do so. The AIG Director also compiles annual AIG stakeholder survey results and shares them with the AIG Advisory Council, inviting them to process this data and discuss next steps it may suggest. The AIG Director also directly involves AIG Advisory Council in the AIG Plan revision process by asking members to read, comment on, and discuss each section of the current plan, including the places in which it is effective and its opportunities for improvement.

The Watauga County Schools AIG Program also seeks input from a range of stakeholders. Annually, the AIG Director and Specialists deploy surveys aligned with the NC AIG standards to AIG students, their parents, their classroom teachers, and each school principal. AIG Specialists also complete a standards-aligned self-assessment annually. The AIG Director and Specialists review and analyze the response data to guide program planning and goal setting, with changes made as personnel and finances permit. In an effort toward continuous program improvement and excellence, this information is shared with the Watauga County Schools administration and AIG Advisory Council. The AIG Director and local administrators assist with monitoring the plan through teacher observation and conferences.

**Practice D**

Informs parents/families and the community of opportunities available to AIG students on an ongoing basis and in their native language.

**District Response:**

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program disseminates information about opportunities for AIG students through its school and district websites, as well as AIG brochures and newsletters. These materials are provided primarily in English; however, WCS employs a Spanish translator who can translate AIG documents when necessary. Should translation into other languages be necessary, the AIG Director will coordinate with the Director of Accountability and School Improvement, who supervises English Learner (EL) teachers, to arrange for translation services.

WCS also employs a Family Resource Coordinator who engages with families from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The AIG Director will collaborate with the Family Resource Coordinator to identify effective means to meet directly with these groups and provide information about the WCS AIG Program, including through translation services and translated print materials.

To further ensure equitable opportunities for AIG students who are English learners (ELs), AIG
Specialists are encouraged to meet periodically with EL teachers for possible student referrals. Collaborative lessons may be planned by the AIG Specialist and the EL teacher, if needed. The EL teacher may also assist when necessary during Excel Team meetings.

**Practice E**
Partners with community stakeholders, such as institutions of higher education, local business and industry partners, and others to enhance and gain support for AIG programs and services.

**District Response:**
Watauga County Schools strives to develop sustained community partnerships that enhance and contribute to the array of available services. The AIG Director actively seeks to foster such partnerships, but the total school community -- Board of Education members, the Superintendent, principals, AIG Specialists, classroom teachers, and even students -- is involved in doing so. Key community partners include Appalachian State University (ASU), Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) and local businesses. Through the volunteers, space, and donations these organizations provide, they publicly recognize the importance of the WCS AIG Program and advocate for gifted education.

Community partnerships enhance the AIG Program by providing AIG students with a broader range of authentic, rigorous, engaging learning experiences. In some cases, these opportunities extend beyond the school walls by providing mentoring, job shadowing, internships, distance learning, dual enrollment, and apprenticeship experiences. Partner programs include (but are not limited to):
- Apprenticeships, job shadowing, and mentoring
- ASU Public School Partnership
- Community Grants (Bright Ideas and Watauga Education Foundation)
- Career and Technical Education (Advanced Studies)
- Dual enrollment
- Duke TIP
- Early college admission
- Field trips (e.g. college visits)
- Governor's School
- Mountain Alliance
- NC School of the Arts, NC School of Math and Science
- Online and/or distance learning courses
- Summer Ventures in Math

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By August 2019, the AIG Director and WHS/WIA School Counselors will develop a webpage designed specifically for AIG students in grades 9-12.
2. By September 2019, the AIG Director and AIG Specialists will review AIG Advisory Council membership to ensure diverse representation from WCS personnel, external community partners, and all demographic groups.
3. By June 2020, the AIG Director will collaborate with the district Spanish Interpreter/Translator to develop Spanish translations of the AIG Plan and supplementary materials.
4. By June 2020, the AIG Director will analyze district demographics in order to identify other languages for translation and arrange for translation of the AIG Plan and supplementary materials into these languages.

5. By June 2020, the AIG Director will collaborate with the WCS Family Resource Coordinator to identify culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse community stakeholder groups and present information on the WCS AIG Program to these groups (with the assistance of a translator, if necessary).

**Sources of Evidence:**

1. Completed WHS/WIA AIG webpage
2. AIG Advisory Council roster with description of each member's role
3. Spanish translations of WCS AIG Program documents
4. Other non-English versions of WCS AIG Program documents
5. Meeting agendas, minutes, or other materials from AIG Director meetings with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse community stakeholder groups
Standard 6: Program Accountability

The LEA implements, monitors, and evaluates the local AIG program and plan to ensure that all programs and services are effective in meeting the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

Practice A
Develops a written AIG plan to describe the local AIG program, in accordance with state legislation and SBE policy (N.C.G.S. 115C-150.5-.8 {Article 9B}), which has been approved by the local board of education and sent to SBE/DPI for review and comment.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools AIG Program operates under a locally-developed AIG Plan approved by the Board of Education. The plan is written in accordance with state legislation, meets the recommended criteria of the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and is aligned to the North Carolina AIG Program Standards.

In accordance with DPI requirements, the AIG Plan is revised and resubmitted every three years. As part of this revision cycle, Watauga County Schools seeks input annually from all stakeholders in this process (as described in Standard 5, Practice G). This input is gathered through self-assessment by the AIG Specialists, surveys completed by AIG students, parents, classroom teachers, and principals, and discussion among the AIG Specialist Team and AIG Advisory Council. Based on this data, the AIG Plan is revised, submitted to the Watauga County Schools Board of Education for approval, and then sent to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and State Board of Education for review and comment.

The AIG Director stays abreast of any changes in state gifted education policy through contact with DPI (e.g. through attendance at regional and statewide meetings) and communicates this information to relevant stakeholders (e.g. AIG Specialists, district and school administration, Advisory Council members). The AIG Director also provides stakeholders with periodic updates on the AIG Plan development and implementation process, including reports to the local Board of Education upon request.

Practice B
Monitors the implementation of the local AIG program and plan in accordance with current legislation and state policies to ensure fidelity of implementation for all AIG program components.

District Response:
The AIG plan for Watauga County Schools adheres to North Carolina’s AIG legislation, Article 9B, and the North Carolina AIG Program Standards. The successful, faithful implementation of the plan is monitored by the AIG Director in collaboration with district and school administration.

The AIG Director works with multiple stakeholder groups to ensure awareness and faithful implementation of the AIG Plan. In monitoring the local AIG Program, the AIG Director may take
steps such as:
- Collaborating with AIG Specialists to develop and deliver AIG Plan awareness sessions;
- Delivering annual updates on the WCS AIG Program, including data on academic proficiency and growth and social-emotional needs, to groups such as the WCS Board of Education, District Leadership Team, AIG Advisory Council, and AIG Specialist Team;
- Ensuring AIG Specialists develop equitable schedules that administration and classroom teachers adhere to;
- Conducting school visits with AIG Specialists and their administrators;
- Discussing as necessary administrator observations of AIG Specialists;
- Facilitating regular meetings of the AIG Specialist Team and AIG Advisory Council;
- Discussing and seeking input on issues related to gifted education with district and school administration at Central Services and District Leadership Team meetings;
- Facilitating the development, deployment, and analysis of AIG feedback surveys (as described in Standard 5, Practice G);
- Conducting an annual review of internal AIG records.

**Practice C**
Develops and monitors a budget using allotted state funds, and local funds if applicable, to address the needs of the local AIG plan in accordance with state policy.

**District Response:**
The primary factor driving the Watauga County Schools AIG budget is the belief that the presence of a certified AIG Specialist in as many schools as possible is in the best interest of our identified AIG students. To this end, the largest annual expenditure in the AIG budget goes toward salary and benefits for AIG Specialists. This funding is possible due to permissible conversion of state funding sources from Program Report Code (PRC) 34 to PRC 10. This budget priority helps ensure high-quality services for identified AIG students, meaningful gifted education professional learning and collaboration for all faculty and staff, and consistent implementation of the WCS AIG Plan in all schools.

Additional AIG budget funds are used to support AIG Plan implementation, including purposes such as providing AIG Specialists paid professional learning (e.g. contracted guest speakers, state or national conferences) and procuring supplementary resources used in service delivery. Any use of additional AIG funds is driven by purposeful gifted instruction design, informed by available student data, and aligned with the North Carolina AIG Program Standards. The AIG Director and Specialists consider effective use of available funds through discussion of AIG Plan implementation in monthly meetings as well as their annual self-assessment. The AIG Director receives a finance report each month for review and works in conjunction with the Finance Department to ensure state funds are used appropriately.

To supplement the AIG budget, the AIG Director and Specialists seek out grant writing opportunities (e.g. through the Appalachian State University Public School Partnership, Bright Ideas, and/or the Watauga Education Foundation). Any grant proposals are written in alignment with the WCS AIG Plan and program goals, and their implementation is monitored by the AIG Director and Specialists in accordance with the terms of any awarded grants.
Practice D
Maintains, analyzes, and shares student achievement, student growth, and annual drop-out data for AIG students.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools AIG Program is committed to equitable identification and service regardless of a student's identity or background. To this end, we gather and analyze a wide variety of data and provide regular reports to relevant stakeholder groups.

The AIG Specialists and Director, in collaboration with the Director of Accountability and School Improvement, analyze performance data for identified gifted students on an annual basis. This analysis includes achievement on end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) tests, North Carolina Final Exams (NCFEs), Advanced Placement (AP) tests, the ACT and/or SAT, as well as student growth data reported by the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). This data is disaggregated by school, grade, teacher, and student, as well as by various subgroup classifications (e.g. students with disabilities, English learners, race, ethnicity). This analysis allows the AIG Specialists and Director to consider whether the academic needs of all students are being equitably served and respond accordingly by adjusting individual student services, improving collaborative differentiation strategies with classroom teachers, and adapting district-wide AIG programming and planning.

Prior to end-of-year assessments, the AIG Specialists and Director also use data collection and analysis systems (e.g. the Watauga County Schools Early Warning System and/or the Every Child Accountability Tracking System, also known as ECATS) throughout the school year to determine if AIG students are at risk. These systems gather data related to attendance (i.e. number of days or class periods missed), behavior (i.e. number of office discipline referrals), and academics (e.g. universal screening and benchmark assessment results, course grades) and identify students who may be at risk according to research-based thresholds. The AIG Specialists and Director can then use this information to inform service delivery, including collaboration with other professionals to meet student needs, as well as overall program planning.

A Watauga High School (WHS) / Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) Assistant Principal and the Director of Student Services maintain and analyze dropout information. The AIG Director annually cross-references dropout data with the high school AIG headcount, is present at or obtains information from exit interviews for AIG-identified dropout students, and collaborates with the Director of Student Services, the WHS/WIA Assistant Principal tasked with gifted education, and the WHS Counseling Department to prevent future AIG student dropouts whenever possible.

The AIG Director provides annual updates on the state of the WCS AIG Program, including analysis of the data sources referenced above and corresponding recommendations, with groups such as the Board of Education, Curriculum and Instruction Team, District MTSS Team, District Leadership Team and AIG Advisory Council. AIG Specialists also provide data updates to appropriate school-based teams such as School Improvement Teams and/or School MTSS Teams. During any discussion of AIG student data, the AIG Director, Specialists, or any other personnel maintain student confidentiality compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
**Practice E**  
Monitors the representation, performance, and retention of under-represented populations in the local AIG program, including students who are culturally/ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, highly gifted, and twice-exceptional.

**District Response:**  
The AIG headcounts conducted in November and April of each year provide an essential look into the demographics of identified AIG students in Watauga County Schools. AIG Specialists collaborate with the District Data Manager to verify their student rosters are correctly recorded in the district's student information system; the District Data Manager then generates and submits headcount reports, including demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, and disabilities, to the Department of Public Instruction and the AIG Director.

Upon receiving headcount reports, the AIG Director then analyzes this data to determine the ratio of each subgroup to the WCS AIG headcount as a whole and then compares these to the subgroup ratios for the entire population of Watauga County Schools. Historic demographic analyses from prior headcounts are also compared in order to determine if trends exist. The AIG Director shares this analysis with AIG Specialists and other groups (e.g. the Curriculum and Instruction Team, District Leadership Team, District MTSS Team, AIG Advisory Council), which can use this data to determine whether students are equitably identified and retained in the AIG Program and adjust practices accordingly.

The AIG Director and Specialists monitor academic performance of underrepresented populations as part of the overall academic data analysis for the AIG Program. This process, described in detail in Standard 6, Practice D, involves gathering available academic data throughout the school year (e.g. from universal screening data, benchmark assessments, and course grades) as well as at its conclusion (e.g. from end-of-grade, end-of-course, or Advanced Placement tests, North Carolina Final Exams, and ACT or SAT results) and disaggregating this data to determine the proficiency and growth of subgroups within the AIG population. Historical academic achievement and growth data is compared across consecutive school years in order to determine what trends are present. The AIG Director and Specialists can adjust practices accordingly and report findings and action steps to relevant stakeholder groups.

**Practice F**  
Maintains current data regarding the credentials of personnel serving AIG students.

**District Response:**  
The Watauga County Schools Human Resources Department maintains up-to-date licensure information through the Human Resource Management System (HRMS). Each teacher hired as an AIG Specialist must either possess current North Carolina AIG licensure or work with the Assistant Superintendent and AIG Director to develop a time-bound plan for obtaining add-on certification by completing coursework through an accredited college or university or successfully completing the Gifted Education Praxis test. Pending their availability, locally- or regionally-developed AIG coursework (e.g. through the Northwest Region Educational Services Alliance) may also be used to
obtain AIG credentials, though this would not constitute a North Carolina teaching license endorsement.

Practitioner G
Elicits regular feedback from students, parents/families, teachers, and other stakeholders regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the local AIG program.

District Response:
The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program annually gathers feedback on its programming through surveys administered to AIG students, their parents, their teachers, and their principals, as well as through an AIG Specialist self-assessment. Each of these surveys are aligned with the North Carolina AIG standards. AIG Specialists also complete an annual AIG Performance Review, which is submitted (along with any supporting documentation) to the AIG Director by July 1 of each year. Once survey results are received, the AIG Director and Specialists analyze school- and district-level data, discuss its implications on practice, and share this information with appropriate stakeholders (e.g. school and district administration, the AIG Advisory Council, and the WCS Board of Education).

In addition to annual surveys, the WCS AIG Program uses a variety of other means to continuously gather feedback. During annual conferences, parents of AIG students can provide written feedback via their student's Differentiated Education Plan / Individualized Differentiated Education Plan. AIG Specialists also maintain open parent communication (e.g. in person, via phone and/or email) throughout the school year and meet regularly with classroom teachers to seek their feedback and design instruction accordingly. Regularly scheduled meetings of the AIG Advisory Council offer another venue for feedback. The AIG Director also seeks feedback through established district-level team meetings such as those of the Curriculum and Instruction Team, the District Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Team, and the District Leadership Team. Similarly, the AIG Specialists obtain feedback through established school-level meetings including those of School Improvement Teams, grade levels and subject-areas, or other professional learning communities (PLCs). The AIG Specialists and Director maintain an open door communication policy, allowing concerns and suggestions to be handled efficiently and effectively.

Practice H
Utilizes multiple sources of data to review and revise the local AIG program and plan during comprehensive program evaluation.

District Response:
Watauga County Schools seeks to continuously improve its AIG Program through decision making informed by qualitative and quantitative data from various stakeholder groups. These sources of data may include (but are not limited to):
- Student academic performance and growth data (e.g. formative assessment data, course grades, End-of-Grade, End-of-Course, and North Carolina Final Exam results, Educator Value-Added Assessment System reports);
- Annual AIG feedback survey data from identified AIG students and their families, classroom teachers, and principals;
- AIG Specialist self-assessments and AIG Annual Performance Reviews (as described in Standard 6, Practice G);
- AIG professional development feedback and requests from classroom teachers;
- Discussions during stakeholder meetings (e.g. school faculties, District Leadership Team, AIG Specialists, AIG Advisory Council);
- Updates received during regional, state, and/or national meetings (e.g. regional and statewide AIG Directors’ meetings, North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented annual conference).

Additionally, the AIG Director and Specialist use the "Ideas for Strengthening the Standard" and "Sources of Evidence" sections within the WCS AIG Plan to set specific, detailed program goals and describe the evidence of these goals being successfully met. The AIG Director and AIG Specialists can then develop plans to meet these goals, assess progress, and communicate this information to school and district administration, the AIG Advisory Council, and other stakeholder groups.

The AIG Director, AIG Specialists, and AIG Advisory Council regularly discuss these goals and data sources to identify current successes and possible improvements in the WCS AIG Program to ensure the best possible outcomes for all gifted learners in WCS. Data sources are analyzed across academic years and graduation cohorts to identify patterns and trends.

The AIG Director relays any changes to school and district administration and the AIG Advisory Council. The AIG Director presents any recommended changes in the AIG Plan to the local Board of Education for approval and informs all stakeholders about any AIG Plan revisions.

**Practice I**
Disseminates all data from evaluation of the local AIG program to the public.

**District Response:**
The AIG Director and Specialists seek to ensure the operation of the Watauga County Schools AIG Program is transparent to the public. A primary means of this transparency is the AIG Program website, which houses the following information (all of which is available in print upon request):
- The AIG Plan and its appendices;
- Contact information for the AIG Director and Specialists;
- Information on the current goals of the WCS AIG Program;
- Annual WCS AIG Program evaluation data;
- Other resources to support and assist gifted students and their families.

The AIG Director presents AIG Program evaluation data (as outlined in Standard 6, Practice H) and progress toward program goals to the AIG Specialists, school and district administrators, the AIG Advisory Council, and the local Board of Education. Program evaluation data is presented in aggregated forms in order to protect the confidentiality of individual survey respondents. Testing and Accountability information is posted on the district website and made available to other media sources.

**Practice J**
Safeguards the rights of all AIG students and their parents and families through established written policies, procedures, and practices. The LEA plan includes: informed consent regarding identification and placement, reassessment procedures, transfers from other LEAs, and procedures for resolving disagreements.

**District Response:**

The Watauga County Schools (WCS) AIG Program recognizes its duty to safeguard the rights of its students and their families. To this end, the AIG Director and Specialists follow policies and procedures to protect student privacy, resolve disagreements, ensure the provision of appropriate educational services, and appropriately destroy confidential records. These policies and procedures are developed in accordance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 115C, Article 9B, 115C-150.8 (Review of Disagreements). Parents are informed of these policies and procedures through the public posting of the AIG Plan on the district website, as well as communication with their school’s AIG Specialist.

**INFORMED CONSENT REGARDING IDENTIFICATION AND SERVICES**

Parent(s)/guardian(s) who feel their child may be gifted should discuss this with the classroom teacher and AIG Specialist (or, in grades 9-12, the School Counselor). These educators will meet with families to provide an overview the AIG Plan, review available student data, and discuss possible referral for Excel Team consideration if appropriate.

When a school Excel Team identifies a student as gifted based on the criteria in Standard 1, Practice B and the AIG Specialist has developed a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) or Individual Differentiated Education Plan (IDEP), the AIG Specialist schedules a meeting with parent(s)/guardian(s) to discuss the AIG Program, review the student’s services, and sign the Student Placement Form and DEP/IDEP. AIG Specialists then meet with families annually to review DEPs/IDEPs, providing an opportunity for families to ask any questions or share any feedback they may have. Families may also contact their AIG Specialist and/or the AIG Director at any time for assistance, questions, or feedback. Parent(s)/guardian(s) may opt out of receiving AIG services if desired, and the AIG Specialist would document this decision.

**REASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

In the course of the screening and referral process, Excel Teams may require additional assessment data to reach identification decisions. This may include readministering the same form of assessment a student had previously taken (within timeframes permitted by the assessment guidelines) or administering an alternative assessment form to gather additional information in the same area. In any case of additional assessment beyond the third grade universal aptitude screening, AIG Specialists will notify parent(s)/guardian(s) using the Consent for Evaluation form, which specifies the type of assessment(s) needed. (The Consent for Evaluation form will not indicate the specific assessment to be used since this may vary based on the professional judgement of the assessor.) Parent(s)/guardian(s) may deny permission for additional assessments and should discuss this decision with the AIG Specialist.

If, after receiving and reviewing additional assessment data, the Excel Team determines gifted education services are not appropriate, the AIG Specialist will communicate this decision to the
parent(s)/guardian(s). If the family disagrees with this decision, they may choose to proceed with the Procedures for Resolving Disagreements outlined later in this section.

TRANSFERS FROM OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Students entering WCS who have been previously identified as gifted must meet the criteria as presented in the WCS AIG Plan for formal identification. Excel Teams will reach a decision when all required documentation has been received and reviewed, no later than 45 school days from the date of transfer. AIG Specialists will communicate this decision to parent(s)/guardian(s) as described previously in this section.

PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS

To resolve concerns and questions regarding the identification and service options for AIG students, families should contact the classroom teacher, AIG Specialist, and principal to establish a meeting to discuss issues of referral, identification, or services. The procedure for resolving disagreements will proceed as follows:

Level I: School Site Review -- If parent(s)/guardian(s) have a disagreement concerning search and nomination, identification, or services, they may request in writing a meeting with the principal and AIG Specialist. Other personnel may be requested to attend this meeting as deemed appropriate. This meeting should occur within ten (10) days of receipt of the written request.

Level II: Administrative Review -- If the disagreement is not resolved at the site level, the parent(s)/guardian(s) may appeal in writing to the AIG Director within ten (10) days of the school site decision. The AIG Director and the Superintendent or his/her designee will review the case and respond to the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the principal in writing within ten (10) days of receipt of the appeal.

Level III: School Board Review -- If agreement cannot be reached administratively, the parent(s)/guardian(s) may appeal in writing to the Watauga County Board of Education within ten (10) days of the administrative review. The school board will offer a written decision to the parent(s) within thirty (30) days.

Level IV: Administrative Law Hearing -- As stated in North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 115C, Article 9B, 115C-150.8 (Review of Disagreements), if mediation fails to resolve the disagreement satisfactorily, the parent(s)/guardian(s) may file a petition for a contested case hearing under Article 3 of Chapter 150B of the North Carolina General Statutes. The scope of the hearing will be limited to consideration of:
- Whether the local school administrative unit improperly failed to identify the child as an academically/intellectually gifted student, or
- Whether the local plan of services for the student has been implemented appropriately.

Following the hearing, the administrative law judge will make a decision based on the findings of fact and conclusions of law. The decision of the administrative law judge becomes final, is binding on all parties, and is not subject to further review under Article 4 of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. Attorney fees are the responsibility of the parents.

DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS
The Watauga County Board of Education recognizes that the confidentiality of records of AIG students must be maintained and that non-current records of AIG students should be destroyed. The confidential records of identified AIG students may be destroyed no earlier than five (5) years after an identified AIG student has graduated or exited the program due to opt-out or relocation outside of WCS. Watauga County Board of Education Policy 3580, “Destruction of Non-Current Records of Students with Disabilities,” outlines the process for the destruction of Exceptional Children's records; the AIG Program follows these guidelines for destruction of AIG student records.

Eligible records will be destroyed annually, and the AIG Director will disseminate public notice of annual records destruction (e.g. through local newspapers and on the WCS website) 90 days prior to this destruction. Families may request copies of records prior to their destruction and/or may request documents be destroyed ahead of schedule; the AIG Director will honor these requests as promptly as possible.

**Ideas for Strengthen the Standard:**
1. By August 2019, the AIG Director will update the district AIG website with program goals, evaluation data, shared presentation slides, and other informative ancillary materials.
2. By June 2021, the AIG Director and Specialists will develop an AIG Student Bill of Rights.

**Sources of Evidence:**
1. Updated district AIG website
2. Completed AIG Student Bill of Rights
Glossary (optional):

Appendix (optional):
Watauga County Schools AIG Plan 2019-2022 Appendix C - Array of Services.pdf (Appendix - Standard 2:3)
Watauga County Board of Education AIG Letter of Commitment.pdf (Local Board Approval Document)
Watauga County Schools AIG Plan 2019-2022 Glossary.pdf (Other Forms)
Watauga County Schools AIG Plan 2019-2022 References.pdf (Other Forms)