



**Comprehensive
Gifted Program Review for
Bellingham School District
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OVERVIEW

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has developed Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards (2010) which serve as the framework for this highly capable program review process and report. There are six major categories used to define the set of comprehensive standards. Each standard is defined in terms of Student Outcomes and Evidence Based Practices which were used during the comprehensive program review process to design both survey items and interview questions. Therefore, the discussions subsumed under each of the respective standards reflect the results of staff, student and parent survey interview results. In addition, a paper review of relevant school district documents, including school board policies, procedures and evidence of student performance was completed.

For the purpose of this report on Bellingham School District, HCL (Highly Capable Learners) and HCP (Highly Capable Program) serve as the recognized programs for addressing the needs of the district's most highly capable students. For the past several years, such students have been formally served using various forms of a pull-out model. However because of recent changes in the Washington State RCWs and WACs regarding Highly Capable Students, this program review and report reflect the services offered for highly capable students at the middle and high school levels, in addition to the traditional elementary grades.

The following groups were interviewed by Gail Hanninen on October 21 and October 22 , 2013 and involved 73 participants: 8 principals, 10 district administrators, 10 teachers, 18 parents, 5 counselors and 22 students. In addition, survey and written responses are incorporated into the observations reported for each standard. Therefore, 389 surveys reflect responses from the following: 141 teacher/support staff, 62 students in the district's highly capable and 186 parents with students in the selected programs. Finally, individuals have volunteered to serve as members of a Special Task Force which is to address issues relating to the services for highly capable students in Bellingham School District.

STANDARD 1: Learning and Development - Educators recognize the learning and developmental differences of GT students; educators promote ongoing self-understanding and awareness of the needs of GT students; and educators promote cognitive and affective growth in all settings to assure specific student outcomes.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- An overarching commitment of the Bellingham School District and the community to “empower every child to discover and develop a passion, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life” implies the inclusion of the district’s highly capable and **most highly capable students**. Thus, the Bellingham Promise sets the stage for effectively addressing the needs of its highly capable learners as part of that “Promise”.
- During the interviews and from the survey results parents indicated that the highly capable program sometimes, often or almost always contributed to their child’s development of a positive self-esteem. Reference was made specifically by parents regarding the value gained from being with peers who understands their son/daughter areas of interest and how he/she thinks.
- Approximately 77% of the teacher/support staff indicated they sometimes or often develop activities that match each highly capable student’s developmental level and culture-based learning needs.
- Based upon both survey (81%) and interviews, students stated they felt accepted by their classmates.
- Of the teacher/support staff, 81% indicated they sometimes or often engage highly capable students in identifying their interests, strengths and gifts. Specifically, the middle and high school counselors who were interviewed articulated effective strategies for addressing the unique needs of the Highly Capable Learner (HCL) in their schools.
- Based upon survey data and discussions with teachers, 80% indicated that they sometimes, often or almost always designed interventions for students to develop cognitive and affective areas of growth.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- Based upon responses to several items in the survey and questions raised during the interviews, regular classroom teachers and building administrators indicated that the collaboration with the HCL teachers has been limited. Fundamentally, the pattern presented in the data reflects a serious communication disconnect between all components of the system when it involves services to the district’s highly capable students.
- Based upon survey responses, students (19%) indicated that they were often or almost always challenged in their regular classroom in the areas of reading and mathematics. Parents (23%) also concurred with that experience for their child.

- When considering survey results of parents (14%) and their responses during interviews, the prevailing perception is that the highly capable program sometimes provides parents with appropriate and/or meaningful information concerning their child's gifts and talents.
- Based upon survey (26%) and interview responses, the students participating in the highly capable programs stated that activities often or always challenge their areas of interests, e.g. computers, robotics, story writing, etc.
- Frequently a concern raised by students is the issue of regular classroom teachers having the HCL doing schoolwork missed when they participate in the pull-out program. Students stated it was particularly frustrating when they already know the material.

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The school district, building and Highly Capable Program (HCP) leadership is advised to address many of the frustrations associated with the HCP by intentionally identifying, developing and consistently using effective means of communications with teachers, support staff, parents and students.
- For regular classroom teachers/support staff there is a need to clarify what constitutes appropriate activities which assure the affective and cognitive development of all highly capable students. In part, this means incorporating agreed upon definitions for **most highly capable students** high capable students into commonly used professional learning community discussions and teacher observations practices, e.g. TPEP – 5 D CEL 5D+ -- used in the district.
- To assure that the learning and developmental differences of highly capable students are met, the district should closely examine and systematically define programming options which efficaciously promote the cognitive and affective growth needs of both the **most highly capable students**, as well as the highly capable students in grades K-12. Consistent with the NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards, this recommendation also reflects the changes made in the revised WACs.

STANDARD 2: Assessment - Are used to provide information about screening, selection and identification; Are used to determine the learning progress and outcomes of the gifted students who are served; and Are used as part of the evaluation of the programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- Based upon survey responses (90%), teacher/support staff indicated that they almost always or often use both formative and summative assessment data to make instructional decisions.
- Teachers/support staff indicated that 62% of them sometimes, often or almost always personalize instruction to meet the unique learning needs of each student when it is deemed necessary.
- Based upon survey results (58%) and from the discussions with students, they stated that in the HCP they often or almost always knew when they had met the expectations for an assignment or project.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- Interestingly enough, survey results (teacher/support staff – 39%, parents 54%) indicated that often or almost always, the school informed parents about the identification process for the HCP.
- Interview with parents, teachers, support staff and administrators consistently involved a discussion regarding the inconsistency in the use of clearly defined identification criteria. Of specific concern was the adjustments made in the “cut score” so more students could be involved.
- Specifically, as it relates to the HCL selection and identification process used by the district, attention needs to be paid to more effectively reaching such under-represented populations as students who are from diverse ethnic groups and/or are recipients of Free and Reduce Lunch (FRL) support. Refer to the demographic data included with this report (pp. 17-20).
- The selection and identification procedure needs to be clarified to be in compliance with WAC 392-170-075 Selection of the **Most Highly Capable Students** to be served by the district’s funded program. This does not mean that highly capable or academically able students cannot be provided special programs.
- As reflected in the level of understanding regarding the use of assessment data to drive instructional decisions in the HCPs, specifically, only 13%% of the teacher/support staff indicated they did not know if that alignment occurred or did not occur.
- Regarding the area of progress reporting to parents for student performance in the HCPs, in the interviews and from the survey data, responses heavily weigh in the direction of that “almost never” (56%) occurring.

- When considering whether parents have opportunities to meet with HCP staff regularly, again interview and survey data reflected that sometimes, seldom or almost never occurred (77%).
- As reflected both from the survey responses (44%) and during the interview sessions with students, they indicate that often or almost always, the HCP's activities are challenging.
- Several of the groups interviewed indicated that when it is evident that a student is not meeting the expectations of the HCP, there is no clearly defined process in place for exiting a student from the program

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Revise the current school district's policies and procedures to reflect the changes in WAC 392-170-030(7) – Substance of annual school district plan. This revision in the WAC requires “A description of how the highly capable program will be evaluated that includes information on how the district's highly capable program goals and student achievement outcomes will be measured.
- Review and revise the current school district's policies and procedures to reflect the changes in WAC 392-170-045 – 075 – Nomination process for highly capable students, Parent/legal guardian permission, Assessment process for selection as highly capable student, Nondiscrimination in the use of tests, Selection of Most Highly Capable and Process for appeal. Specific attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of under-represented populations.
- Specific attention needs to be given to the notification of parents regarding when “nominations are being accepted”, e.g. public notices on the district's website and in the local newspapers. In addition, that having parents complete the Renzulli Checklist as a part of the process is inappropriate because that instrument was only validated for use with teachers.
- Specific attention needs to be given to the Nomination Process because the current practice does not support the nomination of students from under-represented populations. Questions were raised regarding the possible disproportionality of students from low socio-economic (HCP=7.7%; District=37.9%) and/or ethnically diverse families not being included in the program because of bias in the selection instruments and process, particularly at the elementary level. A critical component of such a process is the communications of nominations being sought as part of a “public notice”.
- How regular and HCP teachers use formative and summative assessment data to systematically determine the academic growth of the highly capable students' needs to be clarified and aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Such assessment data should reflect student performance in the HCP and collaboratively be shared with parents. In part, this also means that there should be an alignment between the reason for identifying the student as a HCL and his/her areas of service.

STANDARD 3: Curriculum Planning and Instruction - Educators apply research based C & I models which are appropriate for GT students; Educators respond to the needs of the GT students by planning, selecting, adapting and creating culturally relevant curriculum; and educators use a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- When considering survey results, teachers/support staff 88% indicated that they often or almost always use local, state and national standards to align and expand curriculum and instructional plans.
- Based upon survey data (56% - 67%), teachers indicated that they often or almost always used critical, creative and problem solving thinking strategies in their classrooms to challenge highly capable students.
- For HCL at the elementary school level, community resources are being accessed and include: Science Fair, Young Authors and Whatcom Museum.
- Students described the pull-out program at the elementary school level as offering more topics which were of interest to them. In contrast at the middle school level, the focus was only on technology or Future Problem Solving.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- Teachers, students and parents communicated that there is a need for vertical planning so that specific content areas as well as programs articulate and assure a clear continuum of learning opportunities. Therefore, it is critical that the purpose, goals and objectives of each program are clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders.
- Building administrators, teachers and support staff perceive that at the elementary level, there needs to be purposeful communication between the HCL and the regular classroom teachers, specifically as it relates to the Common Core State Standards, the critical opportunities HCL program provides highly capable students and the clarification of expectations for such students.
- The parents' perception regarding the level of familiarity of administrators and teachers with the availability of high quality resources and materials that are appropriate for highly capable students is limited.
- In terms of parents having a chance to observe some of the various activities the HCP provides for their child, 16% (often or almost always) indicated they had a range of opportunities for doing so. In part, this response would appear to reflect more the grade level of the student.
- Parents (21%) indicated that from their perspective, the HCPs provide challenging and culturally relevant curriculum which engages the students.

- As determined by the interview and survey responses, parents (9%) indicated that the HCL program provides them with community resources and opportunities that are designed to meet the unique needs and interests of their child.
- Both during focus group sessions with students and from their responses to survey questions, evidence supports that in the HCPs they often or almost always (53% to 56%) do activities which require them to use critical thinking, creative thinking skills and problem solving.
- Based upon interviews and survey data, it was evident that there is an inconsistent use of a comprehensive scope and sequence curriculum to develop differentiated plans for students served by the HCL program.

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Most importantly, the district's K-12 HCP needs to develop a clear statement of purpose, goals and objectives, and to align its curriculum with the Common Core State Standards. Such information needs to be shared with all grade level teachers and parents. In addition, such alignment needs to reflect levels of differentiation which appropriately challenge each highly capable student.
- The level of instruction for all students would be enhanced if all regular classroom teachers more systematically used critical and creative thinking strategies and problem-solving activities with fidelity. . The systematic use of the CEL 5D+ by the building administration supports the effective use of such strategies. To further support this need, efforts addressing those topics can be intentionally incorporated into the professional development provided when doing textbook instructional materials adoptions.
- Continue to enhance the level of community resources being used and enrich the learning experiences provided to highly capable students by using parent volunteers to develop such opportunities based upon students having completed an interest inventory and/or by participating in interest-based interviews.

STANDARD 4: Learning Environments - Are conducive to intellectual safety, trust and self-exploration; Support positive communication, social skill and leadership development; and enhance student performance in cognitive and affective areas.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- In discussions with teachers and based upon survey results 73% indicated that they often or almost always maintain high expectations for all students with gifts and talents as evidenced in meaningful and challenging activities.
- Teachers and support staff perceive (86%) that they do model appreciation for and sensitivity of students' diverse backgrounds.
- From both the survey and interviews, students and parents shared that the HCL programs do provide a safe learning environment for such students, thus allowing them opportunities to discuss, explore and expand their ideas with other students who have similar academic interests and abilities.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- School schedules are driven by specialists, e.g. music, orchestra, choir, drum line, etc., which may result in a highly capable student having to make a choice between pursuing an interest in music or attending honors/AP classes that are academically more challenging.
- Students elaborated upon how the learning environments in regular classes did not support their need to be more interactive with the teacher and other HCL students; thus, nurturing their need to think deeper, explore ideas, and raise higher level questions in a safe learning environment is compromised.
- Based upon a review of teacher survey responses (65% - no response or almost never) and comments, it was most evident that regular classroom teachers are frequently unaware of the nature of an effective learning environment for the district's most highly capable students.
- At the elementary school level, the evidence shows a broad range of practices and beliefs from school to school which often reflected in an unclear understanding of the unique learning and social needs of highly capable students and ways for providing support for such students in a safe learning environment. In part, teachers stated that they need to focus more on meeting grade level standards and not on serving needs of highly capable students.

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Repeatedly, the overarching issue impacting each program standard centers around not having in place effective systems of communication. For example, reference was made to Skyward. Is the potential of that tool being used by staff, administrators and parents to enhance the understanding of each student's achievements and potential? In addition, what are effective ways of communicating with parents using such technology?

- All building administrators and teachers who have students participating in the district's HCPs need to be better informed about how to appropriately differentiate learning activities and environments and how such modifications can effectively be used with fidelity to meet the unique learning needs of highly capable students. In addition, to enhance staff development, building level administrators can support the implementation of such appropriate learning opportunities through the implementation of such models as the CEL 5D+ and the Common Core State Standards.
- To clarify and effectively address the learning needs of each identified **most highly capable student**, there is a need to more systematically define and address those needs by putting in place a continuous student learning plan (WAC 392-170-078 to 080 – Program services, Educational program for highly capable students).

STANDARD 5: Programming - Is a properly funded continuum of services; offers a variety of programming and learning options that are collaboratively developed and implemented; enhances student performance in cognitive and affective areas; includes articulated policies and procedures which support multi-year plans and coordinated programming and services; and involves communications with family and community members to meet student needs and program goals.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- The Bellingham School District does contribute a significant amount of local dollars to support the current level of highly capable program services.
- Parents communicated strong support for the needs of their highly capable son/daughter being met in the district's elementary, middle and/or high schools; regardless which part of Bellingham the school is located.
- Particularly at the high school level, it was very apparent that many of the students are strong advocates for the value of their HCP experiences during the elementary and middle school years. They specifically discussed the importance of developing a work ethic. Also, they expressed there being value in the teachers having higher expectations because you are an HCL.
- For the 2013-14 school year, the following models/programs are intentionally being used to support the learning needs of the district's HCL: pull-out, cluster grouping, Future Problem Solving, AP and curriculum extensions and support materials.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- Even though Bellingham School District is providing educational options at the elementary, middle school and high school levels for highly capable student, not all of the programs are intended nor designed to meet the requirement defined as a continuum of services (WAC 392-170-078).
- The issues of random and arbitrary communications between service levels (elementary, middle school and high school) were clearly described by administrators, teachers, students and parents. Parents clearly articulated the lack of transparency on the part of the district in their communications to parents.
- Evidence points to a need for there to be opportunities to do vertical curriculum alignment, which in part may be accomplished in specific content areas through the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Specific attention should be given to the issue of addressing the questions regarding the impact of the adoption of new mathematics textbooks/curriculum at the secondary level. Of specific interest is the impact on HCP students who have been accelerated in mathematics at the elementary/middle school levels.
- Regular communications which engage parents and community members in planning, programming, evaluating and advocating for the needs of the district's highly capable students is not systematically used. Certainly, the formation of a task force to address the issues and recommendations presented in this report is an

appropriate step in addressing this need. The same principle is true for regular education teachers. Building principals noted that if the classroom teacher has buy-in and is connected, then they will verbally support the HCP, e.g. communications with HCP teachers regarding activities, student performance and progress, areas of interests, etc.

- Based upon survey (41%) and interview results, students clearly communicated that the HCL program often or almost always provides them with opportunities to explore their strengths, interests and values. The elementary program was more consistent in meeting this need than the use of Future Problem Solving at the middle school level.
- For the past few years, there has been an inconsistency in the criteria used for selection of the HCL and in the way services were to be delivered to such students. Specifically, at the elementary level, some form of pull-out program has been provided for selected highly capable students. At the middle and high school levels any offerings for HCL are embedded in regular classes. However, the degree of articulation between the different levels is unclear.

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A continuum of services needs to be defined by the district and by so doing will include a variety of formal and informal options. Specifically, WAC 392-170-012 states – For highly capable students access to accelerated learning and enhanced instruction is access to a basic education.
- A continuum of services for the **most highly capable students** should include an increase in the level of interactive and meaningful communications between highly capable specialists and regular education teachers and support staff.
- WAC 392-170-078 describes the program services districts shall make “to students who participate in the district's program for highly capable students. Once services are started, a continuum of services shall be provided to the student from K-12. Districts shall periodically review services for each student to ensure that the services are appropriate.” Parents need to be consistently involved and be a partner in the development of their child’s highly capable student’s learning plan.
- The district needs to examine a range of research based models and delivery service options to determine if the quality of educational opportunities provided to the district’s **most highly capable students** could be achieved more efficaciously. Consideration needs to be given to more effectively identifying and serving highly capable students in under-represented populations.

STANDARD 6: Professional Development - Involves all teachers, counselors, support staff and administrators in research-based practices which increases their expertise in the pedagogy and practice of GT education; familiarizes the professional community with resources available to meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of GT students; and aligns with the NAGC-CEC Teacher preparation Standards for Gifted Education.

➤ **STRENGTHS**

- Several initiatives are underway in Bellingham School District, e.g. “the Bellingham Promise,” Common Core State Standards, CEL 5D+ (TPEP), differentiation of curriculum, PLCs, Response to Interventions (RtI), curriculum adoptions (mathematics), etc..
- Professional development for teachers on differentiation of the curriculum for highly capable students was recently provided by Whitworth University. Additional professional development is being offered by the district’s TOSAs who are assigned to the HCP.

➤ **CHALLENGES**

- Because several initiatives are underway at the same time, the implementation of each with fidelity is a serious challenge. Subsequently, there is a need for building administrators, teachers and support staff to understand what the long range plan is relating to professional development provided by the district and how the different initiatives interrelate. One outcome could be a positive impact on the education of the district’s **most highly capable students**.
- Survey results clearly supported a reality that neither the HCL staff are available (5%) to present on special topics relating to the learning and instructional needs of HCL; nor are teachers and support staff (74%) provided with professional devilmnt that addresses such unique learning needs. Specific training should relate to developing a clear understanding as to the nature and needs of the highly capable students.
- Response to Intervention (RtI) is also a model that can be used at the building level for defining the necessary level of learning opportunities required for the **most highly capable students** to be appropriately challenged.
- There is an inconsistency in teachers using strategies supporting academic rigor in their classrooms and it varies from teacher to teacher and to an even great degree from school to school. The strong commitment of building level administrators to supporting and assuring that there is greater consistency in teachers using strategies which support every student learning at his/her highest level is critical to reducing the discrepancies in practice from school to school.

➤ **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A description of ongoing professional development for educators of students who are highly capable and general education staff is to be included in the school district plan submitted to OSPI [WAC 392-170-030(6)]

- The level of learning experiences for all students, including highly capable learners, would be significantly enhanced if all (K-12) building administrators would employ the CEL 5D+ model to support instructional staff in using with fidelity such strategies as meaningful student engagement, differentiation, critical and creative thinking and problem solving strategies.
- The district is advised to intentionally include information relating to the teaching of highly capable students when providing professional development for the use of regularly adopted instructional materials, e.g. reading, mathematics, social studies and science textbook series. Be ever mindful that such adoptions include instructional materials, resources and professional development which appropriately challenge advanced learners and the **most highly capable students** in the regular classroom.
- In responding to the requirements of the revised WAC 392-170, the district is provided an opportunity to use several of the current initiatives which are underway. For such purposes, specific reference is made to the development of the CCSS which can include provisions for advanced learners, implementation of CEL 5D+, use of grade level PLCs and use RtI for defining tiered level of services for highly capable learners.

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Highly Capable - Teacher/Support Staff

1. Indicate the level you work:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Elementary	54.6%	77
Middle School	19.1%	27
High School	26.2%	37

Highly Capable - Student Survey

1. Indicate the grade you are currently in:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Kindergarten	0.0%	0
First Grade	0.0%	0
Second Grade	0.0%	0
Third Grade	8.1%	5
Fourth Grade	12.9%	8
Fifth Grade	11.3%	7
Sixth Grade	21.0%	13
Seventh Grade	29.0%	18
Eighth Grade	9.7%	6
Ninth Grade	6.5%	4
Tenth Grade	0.0%	0
Eleventh Grade	0.0%	0
Twelfth Grade	1.6%	1
		62

3. Which is your primary race/ethnicity? Check ONLY ONE:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
American Indian/Native American	1.7%	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.3%	2
African American/Black	1.7%	1
Hispanic/Latino	1.7%	1
White/Caucasian	81.7%	49
Multi-racial	10.0%	6

Highly Capable Program Parent Survey

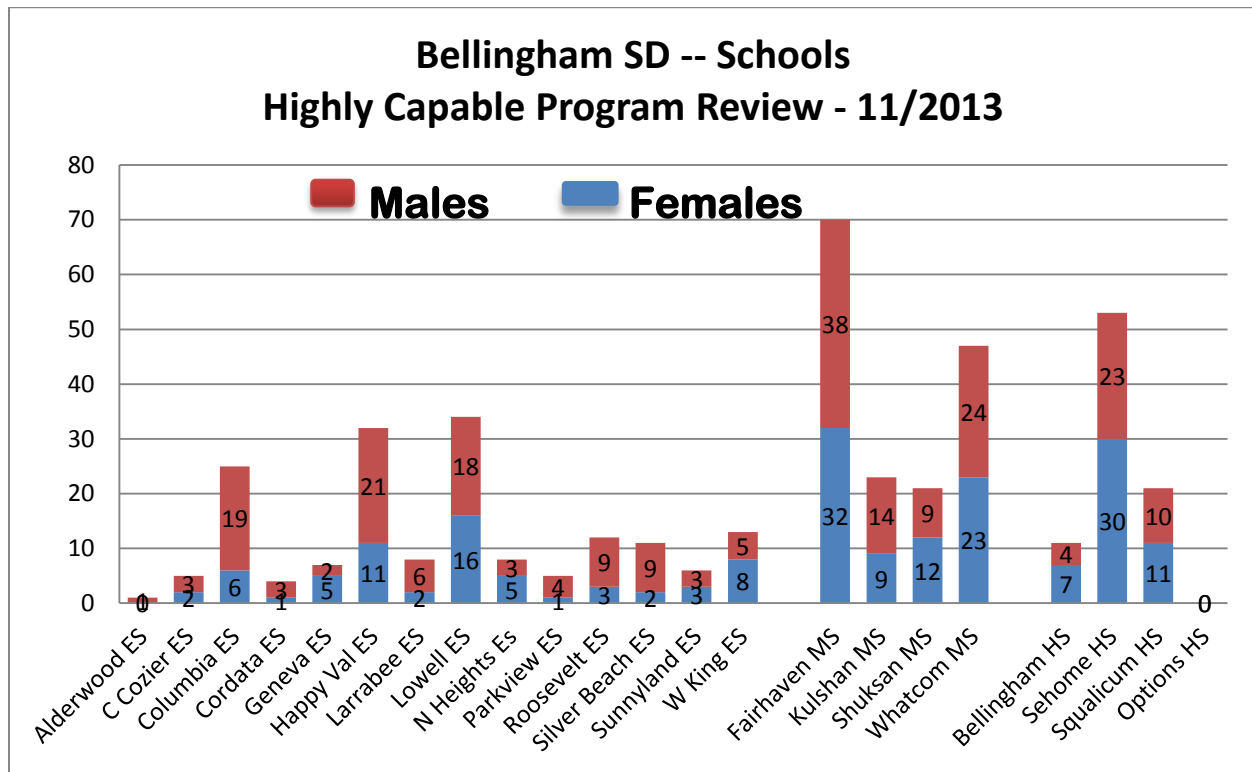
1. Indicate the grade level(s) of your child(ren) who are receiving or have received services from the Highly Capable Program:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Kindergarten	1.1%	2
First Grade	2.2%	4
Second Grade	2.7%	5
Third Grade	14.1%	26
Fourth Grade	17.4%	32
Fifth Grade	19.0%	35
Sixth Grade	19.6%	36
Seventh Grade	22.8%	42
Eighth Grade	9.2%	17
Ninth Grade	10.9%	20
Tenth Grade	4.3%	8
Eleventh Grade	4.3%	8
Twelfth Grade	6.5%	12
<i>answered question</i>		184
<i>skipped question</i>		2

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT

HIGHLY CAPABLE PROGRAM REVIEW -- 11/2013

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS – Highly Capable Students X School

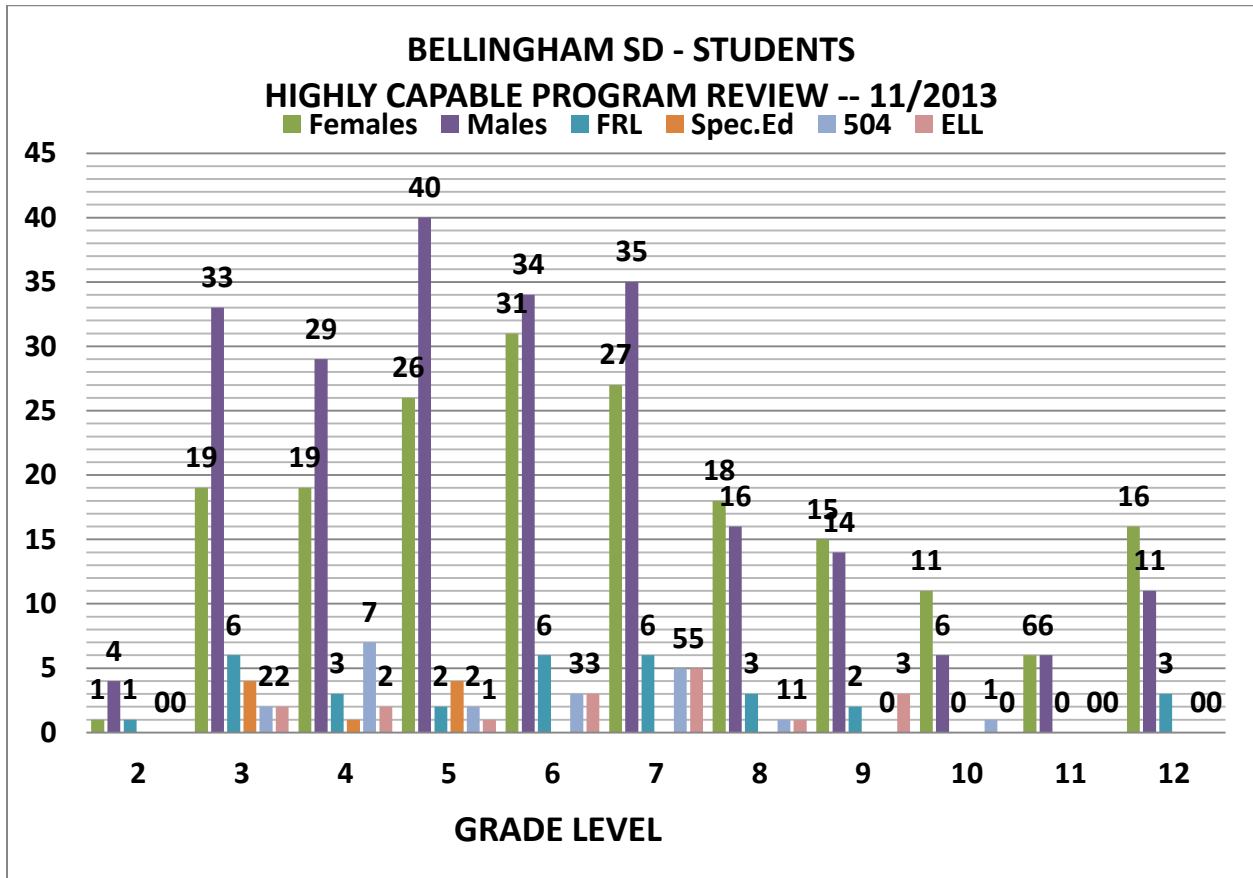


School	F	M	# Students
Alderwood ES	0	1	1
C Cozier ES	2	3	5
Columbia ES	6	19	25
Cordata ES	1	3	4
Geneva ES	5	2	7
Happy Val ES	11	21	32
Larrabee ES	2	6	8
Lowell ES	16	18	34
N Heights Es	5	3	8
Parkview ES	1	4	5
Roosevelt ES	3	9	12
Silver Beach ES	2	9	11
Sunnyland ES	3	3	6
W King ES	8	5	13
Fairhaven MS	32	38	70
Kulshan MS	9	14	23
Shuksan MS	12	9	21
Whatcom MS	23	24	47
Bellingham HS	7	4	11
Sehome HS	30	23	53
Squalicum HS	11	10	21
Options HS	0	0	0
TOTAL	189	228	417

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT

HIGHLY CAPABLE PROGRAM REVIEW -- 11/2013

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS – Highly Capable Students X Grade Level



Gr.	#	F	M	FRL	Spec. Ed	504	ELL
2	5	1	4	1	0	0	0
3	52	19	33	6	4	2	2
4	48	19	29	3	1	7	2
5	66	26	40	2	4	2	1
6	65	31	34	6	0	3	3
7	62	27	35	6	0	5	5
8	34	18	16	3	0	1	1
9	29	15	14	2	0	0	3
10	17	11	6	0	0	1	0
11	12	6	6	0	0	0	0
12	27	16	11	3	0	0	0
Total	417	189	228	32	9	21	17