

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding QUEST, Honors and Other Specialized Programs

What is the involvement of third graders in Quest?

Students may be nominated for identification at the end of their third grade year. Quest teachers, curriculum specialists, building principals where applicable, work collaboratively with third grade classroom teachers to support enrichment experiences during class time. Therefore, Quest and classroom teachers have some knowledge of all third grade students and can identify a pool of potential Quest candidates prior to the Quest Nomination Meetings at each school. Through whole-class enrichment experiences, the classroom teacher and Quest teacher are able to observe students working independently and in small groups using creativity, higher-level thinking, and problem-solving skills, all hallmarks of Quest curriculum.

What is the Quest Nomination and Identification Process?

Gifted learning behaviors may emerge at any time during a student's development. As such, student identification for Quest is a continuous process through eighth grade. Quest nomination meetings are scheduled during the second half of the school year for students in grades 3-8. However, nominations may occur for students who are new to the school district or demonstrate behaviors indicating readiness for Quest consideration. **The Nomination Team includes the School Principal, Curriculum Specialist, Quest Program Director, School Psychologist (per State requirements), grade level team, Quest Teacher, Classroom Teacher, and on occasion a Special Education teacher.**

There are no cut-off scores for consideration for Quest. Students nominated for Quest consistently demonstrate three key components of gifted behavior - exceptional academic aptitude, creativity, and task commitment. These characteristics and the interaction between them are well-documented in research literature, notably in the work of Joseph Renzulli, Director of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut. Gifted students generally approach problems in unconventional ways and come up with solutions and products that are outside of a normal framework. Due to their high level of thinking and intensity they may relate to the world uniquely.

A teacher's decision to nominate for Quest is informed by the following: advanced level SBAC scores in several areas, Grade 3 **InView** Cognitive Skills Index scores, consistently exceptional classroom performance, and innovative approaches to learning in one or more subject areas and task commitment. Teachers collaborate with their grade level team and Quest teacher as they consider nominations for Quest each year.

The Nomination Form, completed by the classroom teacher and coordinated by the Quest teacher, informs the Nomination Team about the nominee's academic performance and behavioral characteristics and includes the following:

1. **InView Cognitive Abilities Test**

This standardized, nationally-normed test given to all West Hartford third grade students, measures skills and abilities related to overall academic aptitude. A Cognitive Skills Index (CSI) is derived from five sub-tests that assess the following areas:

- Verbal reasoning- words
- Verbal reasoning – context

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- Sequences
- Analogies
- Quantitative Reasoning

Students identified for Quest often have a target CSI index score of 130 or greater. This score is one part of a student's overall academic learning profile as the Nomination Team reviews multiple forms of evidence demonstrating exceptional academic ability.

2. **Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students**

This series of scales is derived from research on characteristics of gifted and creative individuals (Renzulli et al). The scales, completed by the classroom teacher for students nominated for Quest, include ratings ranging from “never” to “always” on the following:

- Learning Characteristics
- Creativity Characteristics
- Motivation Characteristics

Students considered for Quest show strength in each area (“frequently” or “always” ratings) but not necessarily in equal proportions.

3. **SBAC Scores**

Our use of the SBAC this year is intended to give a “broad picture” of students’ academic progress at an overall “knowledge and skills” level. There are no specific SBAC cut-off scores for a student to be considered for Quest; however, students nominated for Quest generally have high scores within the “advanced” level on more than one subject area of the SBAC (ELA: reading, listening and speaking, writing, and research inquiry; Math: concepts and procedures, problem solving, and communicating reasoning), and CMT science-Grade 5.

4. **Report Cards**

Classroom teachers include the latest report card for review.

5. **District and curriculum-based assessments**

Performance on district assessments is also reviewed, particularly in relation to the overall performance of school/district grade level peers.

6. **Checklist completed by special area teachers** (Art, Music, PE, World Language, Library-Media)

Special area teachers are asked to rate the nominated student’s demonstration of specific learning and behavior characteristics (e.g., ability to be exceptionally focused in area of interest). Teachers also identify any areas of exceptional talent in the visual arts, physical education, technology, language, and music.

7. **Samples of the student’s classroom work as well as enrichment work based on collaboration between Quest teacher and grade level teams**

8. **Curricular areas of strength to be considered for curriculum compacting as well as areas of interest**

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As students are holistically reviewed, one specific test or score does not qualify or disqualify a student from consideration for Quest. After review of all of the above information, the Nomination Team decides whether the student will be formally identified or continue to be monitored for potential future identification and program participation. The classroom teacher will contact parents regarding student acceptance in the program. Parents receive a letter from the Quest Program inviting the student's participation in Quest, and a parent orientation meeting is held in September-early October.

What is the formal process to apply for participation into Quest, when a parent feels that his/her child is appropriate for Quest and the teacher has not nominated them? If denied participation, what are the reasons, including test scores?

If parents wish to have their child considered for Quest participation, parents may contact their classroom teacher, the principal at their child's school, the Quest teacher, or the Director of Gifted and Talented, Ms. Thompson. As with students nominated by their classroom teacher, the child's classroom performance would be evaluated following the school-based nomination and identification process. Parent nomination does not guarantee acceptance into the gifted education program

How are students identified for Math Quest?

Math Quest identification includes a formal assessment. The assessment is given at the end of third grade for Math Quest 4, and the end of fourth grade for Math Quest 5. Students must qualify each year for placement the following year. Students placed in Math Quest (MQ) have demonstrated their ability to work at least two grade levels above their current grade placement.

School newsletters include announcements to parents with upcoming Math Quest testing dates. Students are recommended for testing by their classroom teachers based on class performance, district assessments, and strong performance on the SBAC. Parents may also request that their child take the Math Quest qualification test.

The qualification test assesses foundational skills in mathematics, higher level math reasoning, and problem solving skills, mastery of which would be necessary for success in Math Quest. The recommending classroom teacher completes a Math Scale from the series, *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students*, (Renzulli, et.al.) for each student. The Quest Director, the District Elementary Mathematics Curriculum Specialist, and Math Quest teachers meet with the Secondary Math Supervisors to review the profile of any students who scored as many as 2-4 points below the qualifying cut-off score. This review team evaluates each individual student's profile, taking time to examine the student's work on the placement test in order to gain insight into the student's mathematical thinking and make an individualized recommendation based on the full weight of evidence before them. In this regard, the determination for Math Quest placement is not solely based on the MQ qualifying assessment. In May, a letter is mailed to families of all students who took the MQ assessment notifying them of Math Quest placement determination.

How can parents find out more about the Quest and Math Quest identification process?

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Parents/guardians with any questions about the Quest or Math Quest nomination or identification process should communicate with their child's classroom teacher, the principal, the Quest teacher at their school, or the Quest Program Director, Ms. Mary Thompson. Quest teachers in each elementary and middle school are available to answer any questions. The Quest Program website is located in, www.whps.org, "Instruction and Curriculum" or "Offices." Identification of students and subsequent participation in Gifted and Talented services is confidentially held between the school district and the student's family in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes.

Honors Mathematics Placement

The Office of Elementary Education and the Secondary Mathematics Department Supervisors have defined a collaborative process for the identification of fifth grade students who will participate in the honors mathematics program offered in grade 6. Further, the Department Supervisors oversee the recommendation and testing for enrollment into the honors program throughout middle and high school. The selection process for placement into honors is open to all students through either recommendation or request. Recommendations for placement are carefully reviewed by the Secondary Mathematics Department Supervisors based on multiple indicators which include teacher observation of students' habits of mind, performance on a placement test targeting critical thinking skills, and performance on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) which serves as an indicator of skills. Teacher ratings and scores are placed into a rubric to allow for a range of different levels of performance to reflect and respond to individual student differences and enable a broader range of students to qualify for placement outright. Students who fall just short of the targeted performance levels are automatically reviewed by the Department Supervisors for honors placement consideration.

The district does not use a passing score or cut-off score for any of the individual measures named as criteria in the placement process, but instead looks at a range of performance across multiple measures. The SBAC represents one such measure and the placement criteria weigh student performance on the SBAC along a continuum of scores that range from proficiency to goal to advanced. Likewise, a range of performance on the placement test and students' habits of mind contribute to an individual student's overall profile that informs the Department Supervisor's recommendation for placement. Parents are always afforded the right to override a placement recommendation; however, the process of recommending remains important in order to provide parents with information to make an informed decision.

At the elementary level (grade 5 into 6), parents are notified through the school as to when the placement test will be administered. Teachers generally recommend their students for testing and invite feedback from any parents who would like their child tested (or not tested). At the middle levels, the Department Supervisors test all students with the understanding that some students make developmental jumps at later stages. Placement decisions are targeted to coincide with schedule planning in the Spring of the school year, however, Department Supervisors monitor student performance on the SBAC (results are generally available in July or August) in order to reevaluate borderline situations. The department has adopted an inclusive philosophy that aligns to the district goal of students taking at least one college level or Advanced Placement course before graduating and is also mindful to have our honors course reflect the diversity that exists in our school population.

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What are the specific criteria used to identify children for the Honors Math Program?

The secondary mathematics department supervisors use three separate criteria for identification for the honors mathematics program: a teacher rating on the student's habits of mind, the student's score on a district developed honors placement test, and the student's score on the SBAC. Student performance on each of these criteria is rated along a continuum which is used to determine a score between 0-9. Students who score 7 or more points are automatically enrolled into the honors program. Students who score between 5-6 points are reviewed by department supervisors to determine eligibility for the honors program.

The Habits of Mind sought for the honors program includes an ability to think abstractly, an enjoyment of problem solving, a high degree of task commitment, an ability to work independently, a student's communication ability, motivation, and attendance to class work and homework. The Honors Placement Test measures students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills and offers what students could perceive as non-routine problems. Scores of 85% or above on this measure are considered strong performances; scores between 63-85% are considered average to above average. Scores below 63% are considered below average for this population of students. The SBAC test is a standardized external measure that measures students' basic math proficiency. As such, honors candidates are expected to demonstrate an overall strong performance on this measure

How do know if and when my child will sit for the Honors Math Placement Test?

Grade 5 teachers administer the Honors Math Placement test the middle of February. Parents are sent reminder notifications through the school as to when the placement test will be administered. This notification will include instructions to parents to advise the classroom teacher if a parent wants to guarantee that a child is tested or request that a child not be tested. Grade 6 and 7 teachers administer the Honors Math Placement test during the middle of March. All students in grade 6 and 7 are tested absent a parent's request to exclude them. The department has adopted an inclusive philosophy that aligns to the district goal of students taking at least one college level or Advanced Placement course before graduating and is also mindful to have our honors course reflect the diversity that exists in our school population.

How are parents notified of the results of the placement process?

Secondary Mathematics Department Supervisors send letters to all parents of students tested advising them of the results of their child's placement relative to mathematics. Because the number of honors sections has an impact on other aspects of a middle school schedule, to include the final determination of the number of sections, letters are generally not sent until the end of May. Efforts to move up the notification are underway which could result in notification by the end of April. Placement decisions are targeted to coincide with schedule planning in the Spring of the school year, however, Department Supervisors monitor student performance on the SBAC (results are generally available in July or August) to in order to reevaluate borderline situations.

What is my recourse if my child is not selected for Honors Math?

Department Supervisors have established a process to review and potentially reevaluate their placement recommendation. This process begins with a parent phone call to the Department

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Supervisor to discuss the student's performance, long-term educational planning relative to mathematics, and avenues to achieve those goals. The Math Department Supervisors are Ms. Patricia Susla (Bristow, King Philip and Hall, 860-929-5147) and Ms. Michelle Graveline (Sedgwick and Conard, 860-929-5051). This conversation is important to understand the level of support the parent may need to provide to help the child to be successful and to understand the different pathways that are available within the secondary mathematics program.