

MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

POLICY # 612 DIFFERENTIATION

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to emphasize effective differentiation as an essential component of a Minnetonka education and to establish alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development in support of a positive and stimulating learning environment where students feel respected, cared for, and encouraged to explore challenging learning opportunities.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The School Board recognizes that effective classrooms are those in which students experience success and growth because they are engaged in meaningful, challenging learning. This happens when:

- High quality curriculum focuses on essential skills, information and understandings,
- Teachers practice informed instructional decision-making through ongoing assessment of students' differences in readiness, interests and learning profile.
- Teachers plan differentiated learning experiences in response to the needs of individual learners,
- Students work in a variety of flexible instructional configurations (individual, small group, whole group), and
- The classroom environment emphasizes excellence of instruction, love of learning, critical thinking, cooperation, exploration and respect for others.

The School Board further recognizes that there are different levels of readiness, need, desire and interest among students. Therefore, teachers must tailor learning experiences to the needs of individual learners in order to challenge and support all students in the pursuit of their highest levels of academic and personal achievement. The District is committed to helping students explore learning experiences that require greater depth of knowledge and complexity. Differentiated instruction shall be the cornerstone of an actively engaging classroom where students reach their highest expectations for performance and achievement through pursuit of their personalized goals and unique talents.

Student learning in the District shall be based on the effective implementation of the interrelated components of curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development. Successful implementation of these systems results in equity of opportunity, high quality curriculum and instructional resources, on-going assessment to meet individual learner needs, and a positive classroom climate focused on student achievement. Differentiation is addressed through each of these essential system components.

III. DEFINITIONS

Curriculum: a written plan including standards, benchmarks, essential questions, an assessment plan, instructional resources and strategies, and time allocations for emphasis and pacing for the content to be taught.

Instruction: a teacher-led process, which transforms well-planned curriculum into student learning. Instruction is standards-focused teaching for the purpose of providing meaningful learning experiences that enable all students to master academic content and achieve personal goals.

Assessments: multiple tools used to gather information about the student's performance on the standards taught.

Evaluation: the process of making judgments about the level of students' understanding or performance.

Standard: a statement of what the student will be able to know, understand and do.

Benchmark: a clear, specific description of knowledge or skills the student should acquire by a particular point in the student's schooling.

Core Instructional Materials: resources recommended through a District process, approved by the School Board, and used by teachers to provide a required common content for students to achieve intended learning.

Supplementary Materials: resources determined by teachers and principals, as monitored by the Superintendent or designee, which supplement the core materials, and provide for different student needs as required to meet the intended student learning.

Differentiation: the process teachers use to plan learning experiences which intentionally respond to learner differences. Students would have opportunities to work at their levels of readiness (assessed levels of skills and knowledge), in preferred and varied learning modes/styles, and engage their interests in order to achieve curricular goals.

Teachers can differentiate what students learn (content), how they make sense of what they are learning (process), and/or how they demonstrate what they have learned (product).

IV. AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The School Board is accountable, in its governance capacity, for the instructional program and delegates responsibilities as follows:

- A. The Superintendent, through designees, shall be responsible for development, implementation and evaluation of differentiated instruction in all Minnetonka classrooms.

- B. Principals shall be responsible for assuring implementation of the District's model for differentiation in each classroom.
- C. Teachers, under the supervision of principals, shall be responsible for providing effectively differentiated instruction for students.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development program is necessary to enhance a teacher's ability to deliver high quality, differentiated instruction. Professional development activities must be an integral part of broad school wide and district wide educational improvement goals. Professional development must begin with a focus on helping students achieve their learning needs and must clearly define the model for differentiation and the specific strategies for implementing differentiation. Effective professional development must be school-based, collaborative, and differentiated in its delivery. District and site professional development plans for differentiation must include research-based training components of theory, demonstration, guided practice, feedback and coaching.

VI. SYSTEMIC IMPLEMENTATION

Differentiation, by design, requires strong core curriculum focused on all students meeting standards for academic learning. Instructional planning requires strategies and tools for pre-assessment and multiple, ongoing forms of assessment. Instructional planning must include strategies for flexible delivery of learning activities in a respectful and collaborative classroom environment. A systemic approach to attain these components requires:

- A. A clear and articulate vision of how differentiation looks for all students.
- B. A common framework to create definitions and to connect previous understanding and practice with new language of differentiation.
- C. Communication to build understanding and support among all stakeholders including parents, staff and students.
- D. Study and communication to link differentiation research to best practices in all subject areas and grade levels.
- E. Connection to District initiatives and support under the umbrella of differentiation.
- F. Planned leadership and financial resources to align to support differentiation.
- G. A plan for long-term implementation and evaluation.

Legal References:

Minn. Stat. 123B.02, Subd. 2 (General Powers of School Districts)

Minn. Stat. 123B.09, Subd. 8 (School Board Responsibilities)

Cross Reference:

Policy 601 District Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Policy 603 Instructional and Curricular Program Review and Improvement

Policy 606 Instructional Material Review and Selection

Policy M-4 Materials Selection and Reevaluation

Policy C-6 Controversial Issues

Policy M-3 Multicultural, Gender Fair, Disability Sensitive Education

Adopted: November 18, 2004