

Montgomery County Public Schools

Middle School Magnet (Criteria Based) Process- Frequently Asked Questions

Data/Criteria

1. What data was used to evaluate my student?

The review process uses a multiple measures approach that include both district-level and externally developed measures of students. The data that was included: Grade 5 report card, school assessments: percentile ranks for the Measures of Adequate Progress in Reading and Math, state assessment: PARCC achievement levels for reading and math data*, student services^, non-scored student questionnaire, and an external assessment: (Cognitive Test of Abilities Test (CogAT) full battery. The process for selection is race-neutral, name and school blind.)

* PARCC is used to see a more comprehensive look at the performance of the student over time.

^ services such as receiving special education services, ESOL- English for Speakers of Other Languages, 504 accommodations plan and Free and Reduced Meals

2. What do the CogAT® percentile scores mean?

The CogAT® Test measures the level and pattern of cognitive development of a student compared to age mates and grade mates. CogAT® measures students' learned reasoning abilities in the three areas most linked to academic success in school: Verbal, Quantitative and Nonverbal reasoning

The CogAT® measures three different cognitive abilities.

- The *verbal* section measures a student's ability to remember and transform sequences of English words, to understand them and to make inferences and judgments about them.
- The *quantitative* section measures a student's understanding of basic quantitative concepts and relationships.
- The *nonverbal* section measures a student's reasoning using pictures and geometric shapes. This section reduces the impact of language on the student's score.

3. What do the MCPS percentiles mean? How are MCPS percentiles determined?

National norms are designed to compare and rank test takers in relation to one another based on those who took the test nationally. Local norms are designed to compare and rank test takers in relation to one another based on those who took the test locally – within MCPS. Local norming provides information about students in relation to their academic peer groups in MCPS. MCPS CogAT percentiles are locally normed percentiles established based on the three sections of the CogAT. Gifted and talented experts recommend the use of local norms as an equitable approach to ensure equity and access in identification of students for program access. Additionally, the current draft of Gifted and Talented Definitions from the Maryland State Department of Education includes the use of local norms as part of its gifted and talented identification process. The socioeconomic status of elementary schools was used to determine the locally normed score on the CogAT (MCPS Percentiles). In establishing MCPS Percentiles, students in schools with minimal poverty were compared to one another, students in schools with moderate poverty were compared to each other, and students from schools highly impacted by poverty were compared to each other.

4. Why did MCPS use local norms? How were they created?

Based on guidance from the National Association for Gifted Children, the use of local norms was undertaken to ensure equity and access in identification of students for program access. The locally normed percentiles on the CogAT assessment were created from the distribution of Standard Age Scores(SAS) for students based on the socioeconomic status of elementary schools. SAS are provided by the vendor for all students and allow for the comparison “of the rate and level of cognitive development of a particular student with others in the same age group.” This process of determining local norms based on the SAS follows the local norming approach implemented by CogAT developers. As indicated in the CogAT Score Guide, “Standard age scores use the power of national norms to control for the effects of age.” Additionally, given students tested were in the same grade and tested around the same time, the effects of grade are also controlled with SAS. To determine the locally normed percentiles, students with the highest SAS in the group were assigned the highest percentile rank and those with the lowest SAS were assigned the lowest percentile rank.

5. How did you use the CogAT® scores to evaluate my student for each program?

National and MCPS percentiles were calculated for students who tested. The review used the MCPS percentiles. National and MCPS percentiles may look different because students are being compared to different groups. Students are being compared to two different groups-- a national group of students who tested to derive a national percentile, and MCPS students who tested to derive the MCPS percentile. For the magnet selection review process, the MCPS percentiles were used. The selection committee-reviewed for a pattern of performance and a demonstrated need for accelerated and enriched instruction using internal and external measures. This process considered the availability of an academic peer group at the local middle school.

Two percentiles are presented for your student; the MCPS percentile compares your student with other MCPS Grade 5 students who took the CogAT, and the national percentile compares your student with other Grade 5 students nationally who took the CogAT. The percentiles for the verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal batteries that you received indicate the percentage of students who are also the same age as the student whose scores fell at or below the score obtained by the student.

6. Why does my student have an “X” in their CogAT® percentile report?

In order to receive a CogAT® percentile the student needs to complete a certain number of questions. If your student did not complete the minimum number of questions in a section, they will not receive a score to calculate a percentile for that section. Since CogAT® is a timed assessment, it is possible some students did not finish enough of the questions in a given section of the test for a score.

7. Can you clarify what “availability of an academic peer group” means?

One of the criteria considered was the availability of an academic peer group within the local school. This is demonstrated when there is a cohort of 20 or more students in the same middle school with a similar academic profile and ability which serves as an academic peer group. Students who perform at high levels may or may not be invited to the program based on the availability of a similar academic peer group at their middle school.

8. My student's scores for the various criteria are in the 90+ percentiles and/or higher levels, why did my student not get selected?

This year, the process looked at all grade five students. This provided information about your student's performance in addition to their academic peer group. This process considered over 7,300 Grade 5 students. Your student, while high performing, may have an academic peer group at the local school and may not have emerged as an outlier within the group. You are encouraged to work with your local middle school for programming options and grouping practices.

Wait Pool

9. Are the students in the wait pool ranked?

The wait pool is not ranked. It is a collection of students who are qualified applicants that will be reviewed further if spots in the program become available. The original screening committee establishes the wait pool at the time of screening. Though it varies from year to year, there are generally about 60-150 students in the wait pool.

10. When will the wait pool students be reviewed again?

The entire wait pool is reviewed again at the appeals screening in early March. At this time, we will know who has accepted our initial invitations to attend the magnet program. Based on this information, we will offer invitations to students in the wait pool to fill those spots.

11. How many students will be invited from the wait pool?

Though it varies from year to year, about 20-30 spots are offered to wait pool students at the appeals screening in early March due to attrition. In August, we will do our final student counts before the new school year. At that time, additional seats are generally available.

12. How will I know if I am selected from the wait pool?

Every student in the wait pool will receive a letter by late March with the decision of the appeals committee. The letter will indicate one of two decisions. Either your student is to remain in the wait pool or is being recommended for placement into the magnet program. It is unnecessary to contact the program coordinator regarding the status of the wait pool. Students invited from the wait pool will be contacted.

13. Do you take students from the wait pool throughout grades 6, 7 and 8?

We generally do not make any more recommendations from the wait pool after the beginning of Grade 6.

Appeals

14. What is the process for an appeal?

Students in the wait pool are automatically reviewed during the appeal process- therefore is it unnecessary to appeal unless there are compelling circumstances that may indicate an impact to your student's performance. If you wish to appeal the decision(s), submit an electronic appeal letter addressing one or more of the following reasons for seeking review of the decision:

- There is new information that was not available at the time of initial review of student information that significantly changes the academic profile of the student.
- There is a hardship or unique circumstance.

Teacher recommendations, external tests and sample work will not be considered.

If your student was initially identified for the wait pool, you do not need to submit an appeal. The appeal committees will automatically review all wait pool candidates as part of the Level I appeals process.

15. What information is useful for an appeal?

The appeals committee is looking for information that shows a significant change in student performance or student services since the close of marking period one in Grade 5. (IEP classification, 504 documentation, hardships, etc.)

16. What information is not needed for an appeal?

The appeals committee members are not qualified examiners and therefore will not interpret outside psychological assessments or external assessment reports (e.g. A+ learning or CTY). Additionally, advocacy letters submitted from MCPS staff will not be considered in the appeals process as they were not used a part of the original selection process. Please do not send student awards or samples of student class work.

17. Where do we send the appeal letter?

Appeal letters should be sent using the online appeal form: <http://bit.ly/MCPSlevel1MS>

Your student's student ID number is a required part of this form. Appeals are due by the end of the day on **Friday, February 7, 2020**. The appeal decision will be mailed to you by late March.

18. Who reviews the Level I appeal?

Members of the original selection committee do not participate on the appeals committee. A new appeals committee is assembled comprising staff members from different stakeholder groups. The program coordinator does not have input into which appeals are approved or denied.

19. What are the possible outcomes of an appeal?

- ***An appeal may be denied.*** For a student in the wait pool or a student not selected for the program, this means that there is no change in his or her status.
- ***An appeal may be approved.*** For a student in the wait pool, this means the student would be invited to the program. For a student who was originally not selected, this means the student would be placed in the wait pool.

Local Middle Schools

20. Is there a plan for expansion of the magnets to other schools?

There is not a plan to expand the current magnet program model (criteria based) at this time. However, the Division of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction (AEI) in collaboration with the Secondary Curriculum Office has expanded enriched and accelerated course access to local middle schools. Courses include:

- Applied Investigations to Mathematics (Grade 6)
- Historical Inquiry into Global Humanities (Grade 6)

During the middle school registration process for rising Grade 6 students, middle school staff will review Grade 5 student performance data and make recommendations for placement in the enriched and accelerated courses (where available). Parents of Grade 5 students recommended for placement in one or both courses will receive information from the school in late January, 2020.

21. When will I know if my student was recommended for the enriched and accelerated courses at my home middle school?

During the middle school registration process for Grade 5 students, middle school staff will review Grade 5 student performance data and make recommendations for placement in the enriched and accelerated courses (where available). Parents of Grade 5 students recommended for placement in one or both courses will receive information from the school in late January, 2020.

22. Will my student be considered for the local enriched and accelerated courses if they did not take the CogAT?

Most middle schools will offer one or both enriched and accelerated courses for rising Grade 6 students. Grade 5 students will be considered for the local enriched and accelerated courses (Applied Investigations to Mathematics and Historical Inquiry into Global Humanities) for their home middle school*. Middle school staff will review other available performance data to consider additional recommendations for student placement in the course(s).

**The MSMC and magnet schools offer enriched and accelerated opportunities to their students. If you have questions about offerings, contact your school during the registration process.*