



# Nebraska Department of Education

## High Ability Learning

November 2021

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### High Ability Learning and MTSS: A Natural Connection



Gifted and talented services are generally “one size fits all.” We know that gifted students are unique and have varying needs. Putting them into cookie-cutter gifted programs may not allow all students to reach their maximum potential and grow. Although many programs do not have much variety in terms of services, one article notes, “It is important to realize that we must differentiate within a

gifted group. Even though gifted students may have been identified as gifted, there are still strengths, weaknesses, and a tremendous range of actual performance levels within this group,” (Hughes & Rollins, 2009). Specific to high-achieving students, Wright, Horn, & Sanders found that in addition to teacher effectiveness, prior achievement level was the next largest factor for growth (1997). They found that students who were high scoring often made the lowest gains among their peers, meaning that gifted students often were not receiving challenging opportunities that would allow them to make academic gains commensurate with their peers (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). With the strong focus on test scores and reaching grade-level standards, we see a large focus on ensuring students with lower achievement scores are reaching the minimum expectations. This often leaves gifted students bored and without challenge.

Additionally, we do not often evaluate the effectiveness of interventions used for gifted students. While educational accountability is a hot topic, there are very few accountability measures for gifted programs. Data monitoring and educational planning is often used for students who are in Special Education or not meeting achievement criteria, but not for those who need additional support because they have mastered the content. The lack of reporting and accountability for gifted education perpetuates the issue of unknown effectiveness and tangible change for gifted students.



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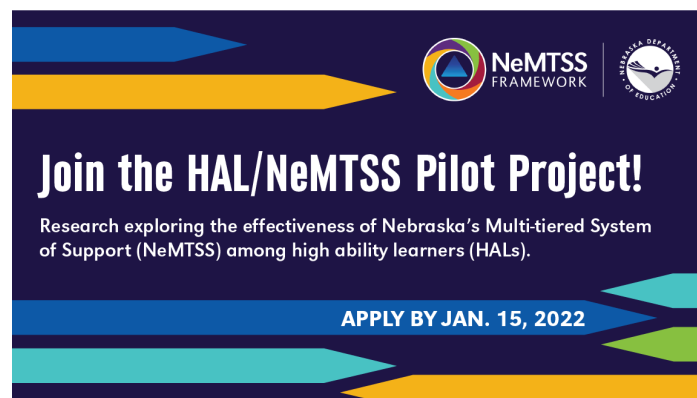


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Not meeting student needs has social emotional implications such as social isolation, poor self-esteem, and exacerbate tendencies toward depression and anxiety (DeLisle, 1986). Academically, students who are not challenged are at risk for underachievement, boredom, negative attitudes toward school, and disruptive behavior (Galbraith & DeLisle, 2015; Lovecky, 2011). This means that it is imperative to ensure appropriateness of fit for gifted students, and especially their perception of the challenge.

The listed issues above bring us to our question: is using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for advanced learners an effective strategy to promote academic growth in gifted students? MTSS has been primarily used to identify and support struggling students and identify for special education. While the mode has primarily been used this way, recent models have extended to include high ability learners in the MTSS system. While there are several models of MTSS for gifted learners, there is very little data and research to support the models. This question is important because the effectiveness of the system determines the appropriateness of MTSS for high ability students. If the system is appropriate, using the existing MTSS systems in schools to help support gifted students helps schools to best serve all learners.

## HAL/MTSS Pilot Project: *Streamlining Systems and Improving Outcomes*



The Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Teaching, Learning and Assessment is gearing up to conduct research on the effectiveness of Nebraska's Multi-tiered System of Support among high-ability learners (HAL) — and we invite you to participate! The team is currently looking for Nebraska schools interested in being part of the HAL/NeMTSS Pilot Project, a two-year study that will launch at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. The goal of the pilot project is to better understand how to effectively integrate HAL services into an existing MTSS system to help all students reach their full potential.



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### **Why is this study needed?**

High ability programs are often seen as separate entities, making it difficult to bridge gaps and provide effective services for gifted students. Most schools use an MTSS system for special education students, which provide a system of services into a familiar framework based on student needs.

This project seeks to include advanced learners in the MTSS framework to help classroom teachers differentiate their teaching practices to serve more students.

The results will be important to practitioners, so they better understand how to adapt practices, but also to administrators and other school leaders, to understand the consequences of using MTSS with advanced learners.

The study is not meant to be a burden on Nebraska educators; it is intended to help integrate systems and streamline processes, while ensuring research-based practices are being implemented properly and with fidelity.

### **What to expect**

There is no cost for schools or teachers to participate. All testing and training will be paid for, and participating teachers will be compensated for their time.

Participating schools can expect:

- Two years of support and professional learning from experts in the HAL field, including Toni Szymanski and Laurie Croft.
- Access to professional learning opportunities and meetings, 3-5 hours per month.
- Assistance with monitoring fidelity and implantation of research-based best practices in differentiation for HAL.
- Books and materials to facilitate discussions.
- Compensation for time.

### **Participation Requirements**

- 2-year commitment to the project
- Articulated identification system for HALs
- Teachers who are willing to attend professional learning and apply new strategies to their classroom
- Administrative support
- Allow classroom observations and teacher interviews

### **Interested?**

If your school is interested in participating in this project, please apply by Jan. 15, 2022.

Complete application form. For more information, visit <https://www.education.ne.gov/hal/hal-mtss-pilot-project/> or contact Sheyanne Meadows, High Ability Learning Specialist at [sheyanne.meadows@nebraska.gov](mailto:sheyanne.meadows@nebraska.gov).

Application: <https://forms.gle/J8zcAqRANd5FrP318>



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