MOUNTAIN BOCES EARLY ACCESS PROCEDURES

Background

Colorado law allows school districts the choice to offer the opportunity to identify and serve highly advanced gifted four- or five-year-old children who require comprehensive academic acceleration through early access to either kindergarten or first grade. It is the intent of the law that early access is not intended for all children who are gifted, but rather that there are some children for whom early access is an appropriate educational decision. Children for whom early access is being requested must either be four years of age on Oct 1st for kindergarten or five years of age on Oct 1st for first grade. This procedure is developed to comply with state law and the governing rules pertaining to Early Access found at 1 CCR 301-8 Section 12.08.

Mountain BOCES is a cooperative service agency through which member districts leverage services and cooperatively manage various aspects of the educational process. In the case of gifted education, Mountain BOCES acts as the administrative unit for our member districts. As the administrative unit, Mountain BOCES is responsible for submitting annual gifted education program plans, annual reporting to the Colorado Department of Education, managing state funds related to gifted education, and if districts choose to adopt one, developing the early access procedure. Mountain BOCES has an administrative role which includes development of the procedures, model forms, and dispute resolution process in the identification of and programming for children identified through this procedure. Local districts are responsible for designing programs and services for students identified as gifted. All schools within Mountain BOCES are responsible to comply with this early access procedure as per the plan submitted to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Here is the link to the CDE Early Access Guidelines which the Mountain BOCES follows: CDE Early Access Guidelines Use these guidelines for additional information on the definition of a highly advanced learner, an explanation regarding the difference between early access and early admittance and other resources.

It is the intent of Mountain BOCES and our member districts to begin a child's educational career with a positive experience. This procedure is intended to help guide school districts and parents through a collaborative process that arrives at a decision that is in the best interest of the child. School districts should capitalize on the opportunity to create a lasting and positive impression with families as they enter the K-12 system for the first time. From time to time, there may be special circumstances that require a waiver of some or all of this procedure to comply with the intent of the law. In such situations, local Gifted Education Directors should consult with the Mountain BOCES Gifted Education Director.

Outline of Procedure

- The parent submits the *Application for Early Access* to the local school district Gifted Education Director by April 1. Prior to March 1, applications can be submitted but will not be designated as received.
- Upon receipt of the application, the local school district Gifted Education Director/Coordinator will communicate with the parents about early access and the evaluation process.
- School personnel collect information using rating scales and interviews from existing sources (preschool teachers, other adults knowledgeable of the child, parents).
- School Personnel conduct an observation in the grade for which early access is being sought, interview the child, and conduct any needed informal readiness assessments.
- Based on the information provided by the parents and collected by school personnel, the local school district Gifted Education Director determines if the District will offer a formal assessment or whether based on existing information the child will not be considered for early access.
- Formal and Informal Assessment, is conducted, if required. An additional fee may be required for this assessment.
- A Determination Meeting is held, if required.

In order to be considered for early access, a child must obtain a score at or above the 97th percentile on both standardized intellectual and achievement tests. However, simply achieving a score at or above the 97th percentile is not sufficient to offer early access to the child. The school must consider a variety of other factors and build a body of evidence that fully supports a decision to offer early access.

The State Board of Education Rules governing this procedure require the district to render a decision within 60 calendar days after receiving an Application and Screening Portfolio from the parents. Because a decision to grant early access can be made only with a sufficient body of evidence to identify the child as gifted and from which to make an informed decision related to the impact of granting early access, a district's failure to meet the 60-calendar day timeline will not default in the admission of the child for early access.

Parent Responsibilities

- Parents must submit a completed *Application for Early Access* on or before April 1. Incomplete applications may result in the district deciding that there is inadequate or insufficient information upon which to base a decision to grant the early access request and thereby deny the request for early access. Parents may submit any of the following information to assist the team in reaching a decision.
    - Student Performance Samples that help the district staff determine if the child should receive a formal evaluation for Early Access. Suggested work samples could include:
        - Examples of the child's drawings, writing, and other interests
        - A video of the child reading and communicating
    - Any available test data obtained from a private psychologist or other public evaluation. Because of the dynamic nature of early development, test results must be within three months from the date of the application.
    - Any other supporting information the parent believes will help.
- Return the *Kingore Observation Inventory for Parents*, completed by each parent within 7 days.
- Provide access to the child for observation, screening, and formal and informal assessment, as required.

District Responsibilities

Communication

Districts will provide information to their local communities through their website and other appropriate methods. The information will describe the criteria, process, time frames, application portfolio, required assessments, final determination process, advanced learning plan development, and dispute resolution process. Districts will also communicate the process annually to preschool, general, and gifted education personnel--including preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers and principals--regarding the Early Childhood Access Procedure.

Upon official receipt (by April 1st) of the Application from a parent for early access, the local district Gifted Education Director will contact the parent, explain the process for identification, and send the *Kingore Observation Inventory for Parents* to the parent. Because of the importance of establishing positive relationships with families, it is encouraged that this information be shared in a meeting.

The local district Gifted Education Director will obtain information from preschool teachers, including the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS-2), will direct the school staff to conduct a screening (observation, interview and readiness assessment). The observation should take place either in the class in which the child is seeking early access or another setting such as the preschool classroom.

After the rating scales and screening have been completed the local district Gifted Education Director will review the Application and screening information, and, if they deem appropriate, may direct the school staff to conduct a formal evaluation to

complete a body of evidence on which to base a decision whether to grant early access.

If the local district Gifted Education Director/Coordinator determines that there is insufficient information or that the screening information indicates early access would not be appropriate, they will notify the parents of the district's decision not to grant a formal assessment and consequently that the child will not be granted early access.

At any time in this evaluation process the local district Coordinator can consult with the BOCES Gifted Education Director for guidance and support.

Determination Process

If after completing formal assessment in the required areas of cognitive ability and achievement, the child does not obtain scores above the 97th percentile, the district Coordinator or Director of Gifted Education will inform the parents in writing of the district's decision not to grant early access. Sharing this information in a meeting is encouraged.

When a child obtains the required 97th percentile scores on both a standardized cognitive ability and achievement tests, the district will schedule a determination meeting to consider the decision to grant early access request, which will be made by a team who reviews a complete body of evidence that includes information about aptitude, achievement, performance, readiness, social behavior, and motivation.

Parents can be part of the school determination team but are not required to participate. The team will include, at a minimum:

- School Principal
- Gifted Education Personnel
- Teacher of Early Childhood
- The receiving teacher of grade to which the parent is requesting early access
- Additional personnel deemed appropriate by the school to the determination (such as):
  - School Psychologist
  - School Counselor
  - English as a Second Language Teacher
  - Special Education Teacher

Determination Meeting

The intention is for the team to reach consensus on a decision regarding the appropriateness of early access for the child. If consensus cannot be reached, then the School Principal and the BOCES Director of Gifted Education will make the final decision. In order to be placed, a child must have a component or composite score at the 97th percentile on both a standardized cognitive ability and achievement test. However, scores meeting the 97th percentile do not automatically qualify a student for early access.

An ALP will be written within the first month of school and must include an academic goal and a transition goal. Ongoing progress monitoring using the ALP and student performance reports will be shared with the parents and child at least every five (5) weeks during the first year of early access. There should be evidence of clear articulation about how the parents, teachers, school administrators, and the learning environment will contribute to a positive support system.

During transitions, the support team will consist of the receiving teacher and administrator, gifted education personnel, the sending teacher, and any other appropriate persons identified by the Administrative Unit.

Parents will receive a written determination summary that is signed by all members of the determination team. Parents may accept or decline the district's offer of early access.

Dispute Resolution Process

While great care is taken to ensure that a proper decision is made on behalf of all interested parties in the education of a child, parents may make a written request (using the Dispute Resolution Request form) for dispute resolution pertaining to a district's decision related to their early access request. Such a request shall be made in writing addressed to the Executive Director and Director of Gifted Education at the BOCES and postmarked or otherwise documented as received seven (7) calendar days after receiving a decision letter from the district, but no later than June 10th.

Parents disputing the district's decision not to offer a formal evaluation or the results of the formal assessment may obtain a formal evaluation at the parent's expense from a private psychologist documenting scores of 97th percentile score on both standardized cognitive ability and achievement tests other than those administered by the school and from the list below. Results must be within three months of the date of the application.

The Executive Director and Director of Gifted Education will collect the information from the district used to render their decision and from the parents supporting their dispute. Only if the child has met the formal requirement of obtaining a 97th percentile score on both standardized cognitive ability and achievement tests, the Executive Director will arrange a meeting with the parents and the district. The purpose of this meeting is to allow the parents to share their perspective and for the district to reconsider their decision for early access. The participants in this meeting may include additional school personnel, but must include at a minimum:

- Parent
- Executive Director and/or AU Director of Gifted Education
- Local district Gifted Education Director or Principal who has the authority to fully reconsider the decision

The district has the final authority in rendering a decision. Under state law, school board policy, and this procedure, the BOCES Executive Director has no authority to unilaterally order a school district to accept a child for early access.

BOCES Responsibilities

- Communicate the Early Childhood Access Procedure through the BOCES website
- Collaboratively work with member districts to refine the procedure, as needed
- Support districts as needed throughout the Early Access Process
- Implement the dispute resolution process when requested

Evaluation Techniques and Assessment

Assessment of young children requires expertise, consideration, and planning. Establishment of positive rapport is essential to providing a valid assessment, and time and care must be spent establishing a relationship prior to administering formal assessments. Appropriately licensed school psychologists are required to conduct the formal aptitude assessment and should plan for several sessions to assure the child is appropriately assessed. When a formal evaluation is required, it is strongly encouraged that the district makes every effort to complete the formal assessment and provide the school with a written report within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving the Application for Early Access. This timeline allows for scheduling of the determination meeting and a placement meeting prior to the end of the school session.

Informal Assessment Techniques that may be used to obtain the required body of evidence:

- Kingore Observation Inventory for Parents
- Preschool and Kindergarten Behavioral Scales (PBKS-2)
- Results Matter data
- Iowa Acceleration Scale – 3rd Edition
- Individual School Reading Inventories
- Individual School Academic Placement tests
- Scales for Rating the Behavior Characteristics of Superior Students-R (SRBCSS-R)
- Young Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (Y-CAIMI)
- Observation of the child in the classroom setting
- Interview of the student, parents, and preschool staff
- Other information deemed appropriate by the Administrative Unit or School District

Formal Standardized Aptitude Tests, one of which is required:

- Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-III (WPPSI-III)
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fifth Edition (WISC-V)
- Differential Abilities Scale-II (DAS-II)
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, Fifth Edition (SB5)

Formal Standardized Achievement Tests, one of which is required:

- Woodcock-Johnson III Normative Update (NU) Tests of Achievement (WJ III NU)
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition (WIAT-III)

Placement Process

If the early access request is granted, a conference is scheduled with the parents and any appropriate school personnel to develop an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) for the school year of enrollment. The e list below. Results must be within three months of the date of the application.

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- Parent
- Executive Director and/or AU Director of Gifted Education
- Local district Gifted Education Director or Principal who has the authority to fully reconsider the decision

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Model Forms

School districts should either use or add to the following model forms to facilitate the process.

- Application for Early Access-Application for Early Access
- Recommended Timeline and Checklist-**see below**
- Determination Meeting Summary-Determination Meeting Summary
- Dispute Resolution Request-Dispute Resolution Request Form

Recommended Timeline and Checklist for Early Access

Because of the infrequent nature and short timeline for completing the early access process, it is encouraged that districts adhere to following timeline checklist.

Child's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

List Dates Here	**Checklist**
_____ Day 1	☐ Parent submits the *Application for Early Access* prior to April 1. Note: for the convenience of families, applications can be submitted prior to April 1, but will be officially received as of April 1.
_____ Day 1	
_____ Day 3	☐ Local district Gifted Education Director dates the Application for Early Access as received.
_____ Day 3	☐ Local district Gifted Education Director communicates with family about the screening and evaluation process.
_____ Day 3	☐ Local district Gifted Education Director sends the Kingore Observation Inventory for Parents and Preschool and Kindergarten Behavioral Scales (PBKS-2).
_____ Day 10	
_____ Day 15	☐ Local district Gifted Education Director directs the receiving school staff to conduct a screening to include an observation, interview the child, and school readiness assessments.
_____ Day 15	☐ Local school staff conduct readiness screening and submits results.
_____ Day 30	
_____ Day 45	☐ Local district Gifted Education Director reviews Application and screening information and determines whether to conduct the formal evaluation or to deny the request based on the screening information.
_____ Day 45	
_____ Day 60	

- ☐ Local Director informs the family of the decision to either deny their request or conduct the formal evaluation.
- ☐ Complete formal evaluation.
- ☐ Conduct Determination Meeting including a written summary signed by all participants at the meeting.
- ☐ Provide parents with a copy of the summary.
- ☐ If early access is granted and the family wishes to accept the offer, the local district Gifted Education Director will direct the school staff to establish a transition team and develop an Advanced Learning Plan for the student.