

PC-TAG Advocacy Update: TAG Math Track Q&A

2019-2020 School Year

PC-TAG Advocacy Chair, Angelique Whitehurst, and President, Laura Haag, met with Principals Moran and Gilbert in August 2019 to discuss the math track at MIS/HPMS, as it relates to TAG-identified students. Dr. Wright, Mathematics Department Chair at HPHS, provided input on questions relating to the high school. This document summarizes that information, focusing particularly on the transition from 6th to 7th grade.

- There is a strong commitment on the part of MIS/HPMS leadership to expand the availability of accelerated math in the middle school.
- Appropriately identifying those students who have the **potential to be successful** in 7th grade Algebra is the overarching objective with respect to TAG math students.
- In fall 2018 the administration created a reference document, [Options for Math Acceleration for TAG Students](#). It describes the assessment criteria and various math tracks for grades 6th-12th. This document can be found on the MIS/HPMS Counseling [web page](#).
 - Four assessments are considered: STAAR test, MAP test, Class grade in TAG Math 6th, and a locally developed placement test.
 - These criteria are weighted equally.
 - Administrators and faculty review, on a case-by-case basis, any outliers in the data, or if a student's score falls just short.
- Parents who disagree with their student's placement have a chance to provide input in an appeals process.
 - If your child is placed in Algebra 1 TAG in 7th grade, parents have a choice to elect not to have their student accelerate.
 - If your child is not placed in Algebra 1 TAG in 7th grade, parents may appeal, as per the instructions on your student's placement letter. There are two levels of appeals.

Q&A

Q. When are the placement tests given?

A. The STAAR test is administered in the late Spring according to a pre-determined Texas state testing date. MAPS tests occur three times during the year: Fall, Winter and Spring. The achievement test is administered in the late spring. All testing occurs during the school day.

Q. What if my TAG student has accommodations? Will he/she get those for the placement test?

A. Yes, all accommodations will be in place for the placement test.

Q. When and how do I hear about my student's placement?

A. The district will send an email to parents in June, notifying them that placement letters are available to view in Skyward.

Q. My student took the MAPS test at the end of 6th grade, saw his score on the screen, and told me he wouldn't be in Algebra in 7th grade because of his score. Is he correct?

A. NO. The purpose of the four categories is to attain a global picture of both achievement and potential. Falling short in one category does not always preclude placement in 7th grade Algebra. Outliers in the data are taken into account, and historic score trends may be reviewed to understand potential anomalies.

Q. Why doesn't the district consider cogAT scores?

A. The cogAT test is not intended to test mathematics achievement.

Q. Why did my neighbor's child get placed in 7th grade Algebra I TAG with a placement test grade of 82, when the cutoff is 90?

A. Four assessment criteria are used to determine placement. If a student falls short in one area, the outlier is evaluated to determine if this single data point is mis-representing mathematics achievement and potential.

Q. Do parents get to weigh in on the decision?

A. Yes, once all the quantitative data is available, parents can provide additional input in the form of an appeal (if your child was not placed in Algebra I). Having all the quantitative data allows the parent to marry it with any additional qualitative data that may compensate for where a student scored poorly.

Q. Is there any way for me to anticipate if my kid will qualify to accelerate?

A. The district will consider historic test scores (MAPS), STAAR results, class grades and the placement test. The first three will be available by the end of May. Thus, you should be able to start to get an idea if your child is a good candidate for acceleration and think through the different math trajectory scenarios at this point.

Q. What if I'm not sure if I should appeal?

A. Principal Gilbert can discuss the specifics to consider with regard to fit for your student.

Q. How rigorous is Algebra I TAG in 7th grade?

A. Algebra I TAG is a high school level course that is taught to TAG-identified 7th graders. This means the pace of the course is fast. In 7th grade, class periods are shortened, further compressing the teacher-student contact hours. Students must be able to keep up with the coursework on a daily basis, which requires both motivation and an aptitude for learning and mastering the material.

Q. What is the downside to accelerating a student, who may not be prepared?

A. The grades earned in Algebra I TAG 7th and subsequently Geometry TAG in 8th grade will appear on the student's HPHS transcript. The grades will not be weighted into the student's high school GPA but will be part of their permanent transcript.

Additionally, acceleration in 7th grade sets a student up for highly advanced math in high school (terminating with Multivariable Calculus senior year). If math turns out not to be an emphasis for the student's academic trajectory (for example, a student who wants to focus in drama or language arts), he/she may be unnecessarily placed in difficult classes that are not relevant for their future college or career goals.

Another downside is that a student who has been accelerated but isn't ready, feels a great deal of stress because they see others around them succeeding but they are struggling.

Q. Where can I learn more about the high school math options?

A. The Highland Park High School Academic Planning Guide (APG) is [available online](#). It outlines the various math tracks at the high school and provides detailed descriptions and prerequisites for every math class offered.

Q. How do I know if my student should be on the track to Multivariable calculus?

A. The track that starts with 7th grade Algebra I TAG terminates with a student taking AP Calculus BC their junior year (according to the APG, this full-year course is equivalent to two semesters of college calculus, and students are required to take the AP Calculus exam), and Multivariable Calculus their senior year (per the APG this is for students who are advanced in mathematics; no level change is available and no drops are allowed after 6 days of the course). The latter is typically a third semester college level course and carries the same GPA weight as an AP course. Students taking this course in college are typically on a STEM career path.

The track that starts with 8th grade Algebra 1 TAG terminates in AP Calculus BC or AP Calculus AB their senior year.

Q. If my student isn't placed in Algebra I TAG in 7th grade, are there other future opportunities to accelerate?

A. The APG and the Kiltie Student and [Parent Information Guide](#) discuss additional options for completing coursework. A popular option is to take Geometry during summer school at HPHS. This course is accelerated and allows the student to receive 1 year of Geometry credit. This course carries a standard weight.

Q. What if my student needs to move off the accelerated track?

A. After Algebra I TAG in 7th grade, a student has no other option than to take 8th grade Geometry TAG. From there, the student will progress to Algebra II as a freshman and Pre-Calculus as a sophomore. Students typically need to continue in the lock step progression of the accelerated track but have the option to drop down to the non-TAG or non-PAP versions of these classes. Parents should carefully review the APG to understand the options and implications for junior and senior year, if the student drops down to non-TAG or non-PAP classes or does not want to take Multivariable Calculus senior year.

Q. How do I appeal a decision I don't agree with?

A. The process has two steps. In the Level 1 appeal, parents provide written input. This input is reviewed by school administrators and math teachers. In addition, all the math data available is re-evaluated, in light of your input. This would include detailed examination of MAPS scores and class assessment scores to determine a student's historic growth and to identify any erroneous data points that may skew quantitative data (e.g. a bad nine weeks that brought a grade average down). The goal of this process is to fully account for all of the details regarding a student's math career and ensure the most appropriate placement. If your request is denied at the Level 1 appeal, you may undertake a Level 2 appeal in which you will speak directly with Mr. Gilbert about specific reasons why you think your child is an appropriate candidate for Algebra I TAG in 7th grade. This appeals process adheres to strict deadlines in June, which are published along with the notification letter.

Q. What if my child is placed in 7th grade Algebra, but I do not think he/she should take the course?

A. If you think that the accelerated track is not appropriate for your student, you can request that he/she be placed in TAG Math 8. No appeals process is necessary.