

Jenison ACT Program  
Handbook  
2020 - 2021

Jenison Public Schools  
Jenison, MI 49428



ACT  
Jenison

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Gifted and talented students have unique academic and affective needs. Administrators and teachers support a philosophy that emphasizes the need for a challenging learning environment that focuses on high achievement for every gifted and talented student. Programming for gifted and talented students must be responsive to individual needs and must recognize the multiple talents, challenges, and cultural diversity of the district's population.

The Jenison Public School District provides opportunities for optimal learning to ensure that gifted and talented students will perform at levels commensurate with their abilities. Gifted and talented students should be provided dynamic, challenging educational programming at every level throughout their school career.

## **DISTRICT BELIEF STATEMENTS**

The Jenison Public School District recognizes a set of core beliefs regarding gifted and talented students and their education. Those beliefs include:

- Gifted and talented students have unique and varied cognitive and affective abilities and needs.
- Gifted and talented students appear in all populations.
- Gifted and talented students should be provided programming which fosters maximum academic and personal growth.
- Gifted and talented students should learn in an environment where their gifts and abilities are acknowledged, valued, and nurtured.
- Gifted and talented students should be provided appropriate and varied programming options throughout their school career.
- Gifted and talented students require adequate support, including direct instruction, to maximize their academic potential.
- Gifted and talented students need choice throughout their school career.
- Early recognition of and appropriate educational responses to gifted and talented students are essential.
- Providing appropriate programming for gifted and talented students is a responsibility shared by classroom teachers, specials teachers, gifted and talented specialists, administrators, and parents.
- Gifted and talented students must be active participants in and share responsibility for their own learning.

## ACT PROGRAM STAFF

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### **ACT Website**

[www.jpsact.org](http://www.jpsact.org)  
Password for Weekly Challenge Page:  
*JenisonACT*

## ACT — ACademically Talented

In 1985, assistant JJHS principal, Mary Tracey, and Bauerwood principal, Wes Bonzelaar, worked alongside a dedicated group of Jenison parents to create a program for students demonstrating evidence of high intellectual and creative achievement capability. The ACT Program (the acronym a variation of ACademically Talented) was the result of their hard work! The ACT class is designed as an academic enrichment program specifically tailored for gifted and talented children. Meeting each school week, the curriculum promotes advanced academics in the core subject areas of Social Studies, Language Arts, Math, and Science. Third through sixth grade students from Jenison Public and Jenison Christian Schools who qualify for the ACT program are provided learning experiences that encourage them to apply their abilities, creativity, and task commitment to solve personally meaningful problems they encounter in their schools, community, and world.

## ACT PROGRAM — Why We Exist

- To provide an enriched and accelerated program for academically talented and gifted students.
- To provide a responsive learning environment that includes: access to a variety of materials and activities; support for exploration, choice, student need, and psychological safety for all students. (Based on the research of Dr. Barbara Clark, expert on gifted education).
- To be partners with parents in educating academically talented and gifted children.

## **ACT IDENTIFICATION PROCESS**

For purposes of ACT identification, the district uses an invitation process to screen potential ACT candidates. Scores from students' winter Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) benchmark tests are used to determine those students who will receive an invitation to participate in the screening process. On occasion, teacher recommendations are also taken into account. Parents of children who do not receive an invite but who are interested in having their child participate in testing may make formal requests to building principals who will help determine if screening would be appropriate.

Students who participate in the screening process for ACT take the Cognitive Abilities Test in the spring. Students are tested a full grade level ahead. Thus, a current second grader would take a test designed for an end-of-the-year third grader. Composite scores from the Cognitive Abilities Test are used to determine ACT placements for the following school year.

### **Move-In Policy for Students New to the District**

Students who are new to the district are eligible for testing and potential placement in ACT during the first semester of school. Eligibility will be based on the number of spots available and composite scores from the Cognitive Abilities Test. Students who are new to the district who test and receive a placement in ACT will start the placement at the discretion of the ACT teacher. All requests for testing must be made to building principals. After the first semester, students new to the district will be able to participate in spring screening for potential placement in ACT the following school year.

### **2020-2021 COVID-19 UPDATE:**

Currently, we are unable to hold screening for ACT this fall. Testing for new ACT students will be evaluated in the second semester as the Governor's Executive Order and phases change. While we realize that this may come as a disappointment, please know that any student who was scheduled to participate in the screening process for ACT in the spring of 2020 will have an opportunity to test when we are able to move forward with the process. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Clark or your building principal.

The logo for CogAT, featuring the word "CogAT" in a blue, stylized font. The "C" is large and cursive, while "ogAT" is in a bold, sans-serif font. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the "T".

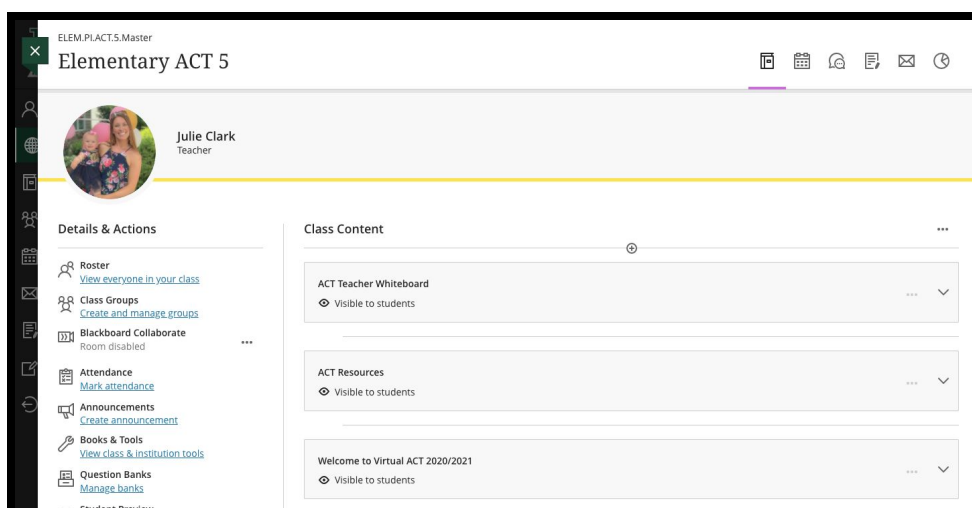
## 2020-2021 VIRTUAL ACT FORMAT

This year, ACT students will use the Blackboard learning platform for ACT. Blackboard is a learning management system that provides powerful, yet simple tools and workflows that help learners and instructors stay organized, easily take action, and engage with content and each other. Each week, students will join a live session with Dr. Clark using Blackboard's virtual classroom, Collaborate. They will connect on their devices to participate live with their classmates and me. While attendance for our live sessions is important, these weekly live virtual sessions will also be recorded so ACT students who are unable to join at the time they happen -- regardless of if they are part of Traditional, Extended Traditional, or JIA learning models -- can still access them and then work from the content reviewed, introduced, and completed during those sessions.

In-between live sessions, there will be other content available through Blackboard, and students' work with that content will be both shared and supported during the live sessions, similar to the "flipped classroom" model. **Participating students will be expected to engage with both the Blackboard content and what is done during the virtual sessions, even if they are unable to be present while sessions are live.** They will also need to connect with and collaborate with partners and group mates for some projects, though they can do so asynchronously through provided tools - typically *Google Docs* and *Google Slides* with Shared editing permissions. There will be tutorials available for those tools, and I will support groups in their collaboration, especially early on.

Periodically, materials needed for hands-on work will be delivered to school buildings and available for pick-up from Pinewood for students to use either for their weekly synchronous (live) or asynchronous work. In addition, during the first semester of school, I will work closely with classroom teachers to provide one high-interest, in-person experience for each grade level (i.e. shark dissection at 5th grade). An in-person experience will also be made available for those students who are working in our Extended Traditional/JIA models.

Please see the following policies for ACT for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year.



**Students access class work in Blackboard.**

## 2020-2021 ACT POLICIES

- 1. Because we meet only once a week, attendance at ACT is important.** Each student who chooses to participate in the program is required to attend his or her ACT class each week unless the absence is excused. Excused absences require written parental request. If, possible, please notify the ACT teacher in advance so work can be adjusted accordingly. *This year, due to the pandemic, it is understood that there may be occasions when students are unable to log-on for live sessions (i.e. if a student is unwell). However, please keep in mind that much of our ACT work is predicated on student interaction through group work. If a child is absent, he/she will be unable to participate with group members. Therefore, every effort that can be made to attend the LIVE online sessions is appreciated as consistent attendance will ensure our class sessions run smoothly. It is expected that absent students view the recorded live session and connect with their group members if project work is currently underway to ensure they are caught up for the next session and are able to contribute to the work being done.*
- 2. Just like in a normal, in-person class, positive student behavior is expected.** During our first virtual class sessions, students will learn how to be a good online learner and will practice how to use tools in Blackboard and Collaborate to ensure they are contributing to class in a positive way. If a problem arises with the ACT student's classroom learning or behavior, the ACT teacher will connect with the student. If problems continue, a conference will be scheduled with the parent and the ACT teacher to seek a solution. A plan of action will be written to address the situation. Further problems with the student's classroom learning beyond this point may lead to removal from the ACT Program.
- 3. Work Policy:** In-between live sessions, there will be other class content posted through Blackboard. Students' work with that content will be both shared and supported during the live sessions, similar to the "flipped classroom" model. **Participating ACT students will be expected to engage with both the Blackboard content and what is done during the virtual sessions, even if they are unable to be present while sessions are live.** Students will also need to connect with and collaborate with partners and group mates for some projects, though they can do so asynchronously through provided tools - typically *Google Docs* and *Google Slides* with Shared editing permissions. There will be tutorials

available for those tools, and I will support groups in their collaboration, especially early on.

This year, independent ACT work could be completed at home. For those students choosing the Traditional model, independent work might include finding time within their current schedule (with approval from their classroom teachers) to complete work for ACT. For example, if students are finished with in-class work early, they could potentially log onto Blackboard to work on ACT content, pending classroom teacher approval. **Please note, any asynchronous ACT work will not exceed 1 hour of time, unless students choose to work longer.**

4. **Student Growth:** Once students have received a placement in the ACT Program, they do not need to be tested again. Occasionally, however, some students do not maintain the high levels of proficiency expected of ACT students, and they may even fall below the initial program qualification criteria. If, at any point in time, a student is not progressing in his or her growth in the general education classroom and/or on district assessments, a conference will be scheduled to explore the impact of ACT Program participation and set continuation requirements for the student. Decisions about discontinuing ACT participation will not be made in haste and only with input from families, teachers, principals, and the ACT teacher.

**2020-2021 COVID-19 Update:** If a student and his or her family decide that virtual ACT is not working for them this school year and they wish to no longer participate in the ACT Program for the 2020-2021 school year, the parent must notify his or her building principal and the ACT teacher in writing. **Spots will be held for students who are unable to participate in virtual ACT due to the pandemic until we are able to return to our normal programming.** A written request for readmittance into the following year's program is required.

## ACT SCHEDULE

This year, ACT will be held as a zero hour. Due to space and supervision needs, we are unable to host ACT during the students' regular school day. Students will be logging in from home to participate in ACT.

The schedule is as follows:

**Mondays from 7:10 - 8:10** -- 4th Grade, All Schools (including Extended Traditional and JIA)

**Tuesdays from 7:10 - 8:10** -- 6th Graders from Bauerwood, Pinewood, Bursley, & Sandy Hill

**Wednesdays from 7:10 - 8:10** -- 5th Graders from El Puente, Rosewood, & JCS, Pinewood

**Thursdays from 7:10 - 8:10** -- 5th Graders from Bauerwood, Bursley, Sandy Hill, JIA, & Extended Traditional

**Fridays from 7:10 - 8:10** -- 6th Graders from El Puente, Rosewood, JCS, Extended Traditional, & JIA

Dr. Clark is also available for prescheduled office hours, as needed, with individual students. \*\*\*More information to follow.\*\*\*





## ACT CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

### THINKING SKILLS

Inferential Reasoning  
Inductive Reasoning  
Analogy  
Cause/Effect  
Deductive Reasoning  
Categorical Reasoning  
Probability  
Fluency  
Flexibility  
Originality  
Elaboration

### RESEARCH SKILLS

Planning Research  
Conducting Research  
Product Development  
Presentation  
Public Speaking  
Digital Citizenship  
Digital Learning

### AFFECTIVE SKILLS

Understanding Self  
Understanding Others  
Collaboration  
Problem Solving  
Decision Making  
Time Management  
Independence  
Initiative  
Social Responsibility  
Goal Setting  
Self-Assessment

## ACT FIRST UNITS OF STUDY

### 4th Grade

#### **Wagon Train West: A Journey on the Oregon Trail**

Choose your identity. Order and pack your supplies. Make life or death decisions as we reenact what it was like to be a pioneer on the Oregon Trail. This ACT unit meets writing and social studies standards. It is a decision-making simulation in which students work on their team building and collaboration skills as they try to “survive” the arduous journey west. We did not have an opportunity to participate in this ACT favorite unit last year, so we will pick up with our journey this fall!



### 5th Grade

#### **Surfing with Sharks**

By far an ACT favorite, students in fifth grade look forward to the *Surfing with Sharks* unit each year because students get to dissect a spiny dogfish shark! Leading up to this fantastic experience (which is often not completed until high school or beyond!), the students research different species of sharks, learn about the physical and behavioral characteristics of sharks, and explore the external and internal anatomy of the spiny dogfish shark, all while using the appropriate anatomical terms.



## 6th Grade

### Forensic Science Sleuths

This intriguing unit will turn the ACT sixth graders into forensic scientists as we learn all about this career. Addressing both science and language arts standards, this unit finds the students working collaboratively to

- Research different forensic careers
- Collect and analyze crime scene evidence
- Learn the skills needed to become a crime scene investigator
- Solve mysteries using forensic science skills

