

# **LAMAR SCHOOL DISTRICT GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM HANDBOOK**

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## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Responding to the concern for educational programming for gifted and talented students, the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 106 of 1979. This legislation established the Office of Education for Gifted and Talented Children, headed by an administration to direct the state program. Funds were appropriated to provide financial assistance to school districts to develop and operate programs for gifted and talented students.

Guidelines were developed to provide information to assist districts in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs for gifted and talented students. This document, Education of Gifted and Talented Students: Guidelines for Local Education Agencies, was approved by the State Board of Education in 1981.

Act 445 of 1983, the Quality Education Act, established minimum standards for accreditation of public schools and authorized the State Board to name a committee to recommend regulations, criteria, and minimum standards. The Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools which were adopted by the State Board of Education February 22, 1984, include a provision that all districts must provide a program for gifted and talented students.

Act 34 of 1983, First Extraordinary Session (the School Finance Act) provided funding for districts that was not to exceed \$6 million. Districts which are operating approved programs are eligible to receive funds based on as "add on" weight of .25 for each student identified as gifted and talented (funding to be based on no more than five percent of the district's average daily membership).

In June 1986, the State Board of Education approved the Gifted and Talented Program Approval Standards. This document is continuing to be used as a guide by individual districts in developing and operating gifted and talented programs. It contains standards and recommendations for all components for gifted and talented program. These standards are used to monitor each program every three years. Each program must meet ADE Gifted and Talented Approval standards each year in order to receive the appropriated funding.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

The programs in public schools are built on the fundamental belief in serving the needs of all our students as unique individuals. We believe that gifted and talented individuals have special characteristics and learning styles and that their potential for accomplishment is such that they require special provisions, experiences, and services not provided for in the regular instructional program.

We are committed to providing a program for identifying and meeting the needs and interests of gifted and talented students. The identification and placement of these gifted and talented students will be based on documented objective and subjective evidence of above average intellectual ability, creative ability, skills, and tasks commitment/motivation.

Gifted and talented students are outstanding consumers and producers for knowledge and ideas in any worthwhile endeavor. They may have potential abilities in general intelligence, creative, or productive thinking, exceptional leadership, and specific aptitudes. These abilities must be cultivated, nurtured, and developed. Gifted and talented students must be provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to work with materials that challenges their abilities and encourage them to expand their abstract thinking and reasoning abilities.

Maximizing the potential of gifted and talented students requires commitment of school, community, and home; commitment is essential for progress to be actualized. The gifted and talented program is designed to cultivate within the student a desire for excellence and a sense of productive responsibility to self, family, school, community, and to our changing society.

#### **4.00 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

In order to provide a quality program for gifted and talented students, it is essential to obtain commitment and support from parents, school, and community. Open communication among all stakeholders will promote this relationship. The Gifted and Talented Coordinator will make every effort to inform parents, teachers and staff, school administrators, and community members about program policies and practices.

Information about the program is available to the public on the district website. The information includes the following: a program overview, definition and characteristics of giftedness, program design, the identification process, referral forms, checklists, surveys, and contact information.

An overview of the program, including evaluation results and program goals, activities and other pertinent information is shared with the school board annually.

Announcements for referral opportunities are placed in the local newspaper. They are also posted on the district website and sent through the school mail.

A GT Advisory Council includes parents and/or other community members along with teachers, staff, and administrators that meet through the year. Parents and community members are invited to contribute to the program by volunteering as a resource, sharing ideas/knowledge/experience, and participating on the Advisory Council.

Open House and parent/teacher conferences also provide opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions or share concerns they may have regarding program policies and practices.

## **5.00 STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Lamar School District will provide ongoing staff development for all administrators and staff in the area of gifted education to enable them to assist in serving gifted and talented students in the district. Staff development is based on local education needs of gifted students and altered accordingly.

Opportunities to increase knowledge of the education of gifted and talented students are provided for continuing and new school board members, district administrators, teachers, and support staff on a continuing and regular basis. Information will be shared with district personnel both formally and informally. Formal venues include professional development, faculty/departmental meetings, and reports to the public. Informal venues include emails, professional literature available in the district library, and the district GT webpage.

GT Coordinator will provide informal training such as providing books on gifted education and differentiation, putting information in staff mailboxes, and sending informative emails to entire school staff.

GT Coordinator will guide curriculum documentation and provide feedback as needed.

Secondary Content, Pre-AP, and AP teachers will maintain appropriate certification in designated teaching area.

GT Coordinator will attend educational cooperative meetings.

## **6.00 PERSONNEL**

- The selection of the gifted and talented personnel shall follow the guidelines set forth by the Lamar Public School District Board of Education for the hiring of school personnel.
- Applications for the positions will be taken following state and district guidelines.
- Applications will be reviewed by the administrative staff and recommendations made to the District Board of Education.
- The District Board of Education will approve all recommendations before selections are made.

The following criteria should be considered by the administrative staff when making recommendations to the board:

- Knowledge and understanding of the cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics, needs, and problems found in gifted students as a result of their atypical mental development
- The ability to develop flexible, individualizing, enriching curriculum appropriate to meeting the individual gifted pupil's needs and nurturing group interaction
- The ability to create an environment in which the gifted can use their strengths, explore their personal and interpersonal development, risk new areas of thought and action, feel challenged, and actually be more of who they are
- The ability to teach the gifted learner the skills of higher level cognitive thinking, integration of mind and body, self actualization, intuitive development, and self evaluation
- The ability to nurture creativity in all aspects of thinking, feeling, intuiting, and expressing talent through products
- Meet gifted teacher/coordinator minimum requirements set by the Arkansas State Department of Education
- High energy level and commitment to meeting the needs of the gifted and talented learner
- Ability to work with faculty and to "sell" the program

## **JOB DESCRIPTION**

- Plans a program to meet the individual needs of gifted and talented students.
- Guides the learning process toward the achievement of established goals and objectives.
- Maintains a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and employs instructional strategies appropriate to the characteristics, needs, interests, and abilities of identified gifted students.
- Uses a variety of processes to evaluate the program and student progress with predetermined criteria.
- Establishes and maintains effective relationships with students, staff, parents, and community patrons.
- Attends professional meetings and in-service workshops.

- Uses a variety of teaching strategies that effectively incorporate higher conceptual levels in the areas of content, process development, product development, and affective skills.
- Encourages group discussion, independent thinking, and self-directed learning techniques.
- Provides opportunity and instruction in creative thinking development, e.g. fluent, flexible, original, and elaborate thinking; risk taking, curiosity, imagination, alternative approaches.
- Assists other classroom teachers by the sharing of ideas and materials, and sharing information on the nature and needs of the gifted. Stays well informed of current research and new developments related to the field of gifted education. Records in students folders date service begins and ends for the year.

## 7.00 IDENTIFICATION

Lamar School District utilizes the definition of giftedness as proposed by the Arkansas Department of Education:

*Gifted and talented children and youth are those of high potential or ability whose learning characteristics and educational needs require qualitatively differentiated educational experiences and/or services. Possession of these talents and gifts, or the potential for their development, will be evidenced through an interaction of above average intellectual ability, task commitment and/or motivation, and creative ability.*

A student may be considered for placement at any time in grades K-12. The process for identifying students has several stages including referrals, data collection, and placement.

### REFERRALS

Referrals are sought from a wide variety of sources to ensure that all potentially gifted and talented students have an opportunity to be considered. District personnel and community members are made aware of the referral process via the school webpage, local newspaper, and email. To refer a student, a referral form must be completed and submitted to the GT coordinator.

Students may be referred for gifted and talented screening in several ways including:

1. Teacher referral
2. Parent referral
3. Administrative recommendation
4. Community nominations
5. Peer/Self-referral
6. GT teacher (based on whole group enrichment observation)

### DATA COLLECTION

Once a student is referred for GT services, a permission to test and a letter explaining the testing process (including criteria for placement) is sent home to parents.

Gifted and talented program screening involves gathering data from several sources concerning student ability. The GT teacher/coordinator will collect data from as many objective and subjective sources as possible for each student whose name is submitted for referral. No one item in the data will be used to admit to the program or exclude from the program. Data collection will come from standardized tests given in group settings

in classrooms, from individual tests given by the GT teacher, sample work collected during whole group enrichment, and by information, forms, and interviews conducted during the identification process.

## PLACEMENT

Student placement into the GT program is decided by the district's placement committee. This committee is comprised of at least five professional educators, including an administrator, and chaired by the GT coordinator. Student placement decisions are based on multiple criteria and no single criterion or cut-off is used to include or exclude a student from services. The child need not meet every criterion for inclusion and teacher ratings may override poor test scores; however, good, normative information may outweigh negative teacher ratings. Procedures used in the identification process are non-discriminatory with respect to race, cultural or economic background, religion, national origin, sex, or handicapping condition. The committee reviews all student data gathered by the GT coordinator and makes placement decisions based on a case study approach.

Placement decisions will be one of the following:

- Student will continue placement in regular classroom program with possible modifications suggested. Some students are marked to continue to observe/watch.
- Student will be placed in GT program at the appropriate grade level.
- More data is needed for a committee decision.

Parents and teachers are made aware of placement decisions via letter or email. Any instructionally useful information obtained through the data collection process is shared with necessary parties regardless of placement outcome. Parents must sign and return a permission slip allowing services to begin.

The files of all identified GT students are maintained until that student graduates.

## RECORD OF G/T PARTICIPATION

The gifted and talented program at the Lamar School District will note student participation in the program on the transcript of each participating student. All data is maintained as long as the student is a student on record at Lamar schools.

## **APPEALING PLACEMENT COMMITTEE DECISIONS**

A decision of non-placement may be appealed. To appeal a decision made by the committee, concerned parties must contact the GT coordinator along with any new data not collected during the original data collection process. The GT coordinator will call a meeting with the placement committee to review the appeal and review any new data. The placement committee is comprised of at least five professional educators, including an administrator, and chaired by the GT coordinator. Placement decisions made by the committee are final.

## **PROGRAM OPTIONS**

The program design for gifted and talented students for grades kindergarten through twelfth grade is intended to provide a curriculum that is both differentiated and appropriated for the specialized needs of students who are advanced in their thinking and learning processes. Gifted and talented students are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to work with materials which challenge their abilities. This is accomplished through using various approaches appropriate to the designated grade level. The GT teacher strives to create an environment that fosters risk taking, creativity, research, problem solving, and decision making. All instructors involved receive training through the Arkansas Department of Education and/or advanced degree training.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

- Promote the awareness of the unique needs of gifted students among parents, school staff, and the community
- Provide opportunities to communicate and exchange information with the school community about gifted characteristics, identification, and services
- Make gifted resources available to parents, school staff, and the community
- Initiate and or attend parent-teacher conferences with teachers, counselors, and administrators about the needs and concerns of gifted students
- Differentiate curriculum and instruction in order to provide opportunities for rigor, challenge, and enrichment for intellectually gifted students to meet their emotional, social, and intellectual needs
- Provide a variety of learning opportunities
- Provide opportunities to develop skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc.
- Offer students opportunities for problem-solving, goal-setting, college/career exploration and preparation, leadership development, mentorship, and volunteerism
- Provide students with experiences through many and varied enrichment events (seminars, field trips, etc.)
- Provide opportunities to enhance research skills
- Offer students opportunities to explore areas of interest
- Provide effective staff development opportunities for teachers, counselors, and administrators
- Provide information and training that will enable teachers counselors, and administrators to serve the diverse populations of the schools
- Share strategies on differentiating in the classroom

## **PROGRAM OPTIONS BY GRADE LEVEL**

*K - 3 Enrichment:* The gifted teacher provides K-3 enrichment lessons for 45 minutes every week. These lessons extend/enrich the regular classroom curriculum. During this time, students are carefully observed, and student work samples are collected from students who show potential giftedness.

*3rd - 4th Pull-Out:* Identified gifted students are pulled from the regular classroom for 150 minutes a week. During this time, students are given the opportunity to work on a variety of skills (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc.)

*5th- 6th Pull-Out:* Identified gifted students are pulled from the regular classroom for 105 minutes a week. During this time, students are given the opportunity to work on a variety of skills (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc.) The other 45 minutes is served through secondary content in the regular classroom.

*7th - 12th:* Identified gifted students are served through their secondary content classes. The gifted teacher will meet with students monthly for 30 minutes. Students have the option of taking Pre-AP or AP classes.

In addition to coursework, monthly meetings are held with the GT coordinator to address affective needs.

### Acceleration

At this time, Lamar School District only offers content-based acceleration. Content acceleration opportunities include Pre-Advanced Placement, College Board Advanced Placement, and Endorsed Concurrent Enrollment Course in high school and college.

## **CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION**

The Lamar School District recognizes that GT students need a differentiated curriculum. An appropriate curriculum should be based on their unique needs and interests. It must be diverse, advanced, and complex enough to reflect the abilities of the gifted and talented student. The content of the curriculum should provide interest, challenge, and extend/replace the regular curriculum. It is not “more of the same”.

Curriculum opportunities are planned with the abilities, accomplishments, and interests of the GT students in mind. Differentiation occurs through adaptations in content, process, or product.

Content may include differentiation via:

- Level of complexity
- Pace of learning
- Degree of abstractness
- Topics not ordinarily part of the regular curriculum (or at that level)
- Organized by themes and ideas
- Multidisciplinary
- Student as teacher and/or self-directed

Process may include differentiation via:

- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Independent study
- Problem-solving
- Logic
- Investigative or research

Products may include differentiation via:

- In-depth studies with appropriate product outcome
- Using new and/or different techniques, material, and forms
- Creative, artistic, and/or theatrical
- Self-chosen specific areas of interest or talent development
- Different types of communication and/or audiences

## **CURRICULAR FOCUS BY PROGRAM OPTION**

### *Kindergarten-2nd Grade*

Kindergarten, first, and second grade students are served through whole group enrichment. Services are provided in a whole group setting. Curriculum address thinking skills and creativity, as well as integration of the Common Core Standards.

### *3rd-6th Grades (Identified Students)*

Students study topics not normally taught at their grade level. These topics encourage abstract thinking and are introduced at a faster pace and more complex level. Process skills and creativity are a large part of the curriculum as well. Products are the result of learning investigations and are shared with other classes and parents. Curriculum selections are guided by the district's scope and sequence as well as integration of the Common Core State Standards. Emphasis is placed on higher order thinking skills, creative and critical thinking skills, research, and special projects. In addition to curriculum selected by the GT teacher, students are provided opportunities to conduct individual research projects and group projects.

### *7th-12th Grades (Identified Students)*

Identified gifted students in grades 7-12 are provided services through secondary content differentiation, Pre-Advanced Placement, Advanced Placement, and/or college concurrent credit.

In addition to coursework, monthly meetings are held with the GT coordinator to address affective needs.

## **ANNUAL REVIEW OF STUDENT PLACEMENT**

Students in the gifted and talented program are evaluated each spring. Based on the evaluation, the student may continue to receive services or be recommended for placement on an action plan for improvement. In reviewing these students, the following criteria are considered:

1. Student performance both in GT class
2. Student input
3. Parent input

If at any time through the school year a problem is encountered with student progress in the GT classroom, he/she will be placed on an action plan. This action plan will outline areas of improvement and a date will be selected for progress review. The placement committee will re-evaluate student performance at the check in date to determine if gifted services are still in the best interest of the student.

## **EXITING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM**

An exit from the program may be parent, student or ***gifted*** teacher initiated. However, a student initiated exit must be supported by the parent.

Parent/Student Initiated: parent need only sign an exit form for the student's permanent file.

GT Coordinator/Teacher Initiated: if information obtained through a student's annual review of placement reveals that participation in the gifted program is no longer in the best interest of the student, exit procedures will be followed by the district. District exit procedures include a conference with the student and parent. Information obtained during the student's evaluation is presented and an action plan for improvement is created. This action plan includes a deadline, at which the student's progress in the action plan will be re-evaluated by the placement committee. No changes in student services will be made without review and approval by the placement committee. Parents are made aware of placement committee decisions via letter or conference if requested.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN**

The purpose of the evaluation plan at Lamar School District is to insure that the GT program is flexible and changes to meet the needs of its population. For this reason, stakeholders are provided the opportunity to evaluate all components of the program on a yearly basis (identification, staff development, program options, program goals and objectives, curriculum, community involvement, program expenditures, and the evaluation process/plan). The district's evaluations are based on program objectives set by the district.

Results from the evaluations are used in planning for the next school year or making changes in long term goals. They are shared via the school webpage and the annual report to the public.