

UNITED ISD GT/AA PROGRAM GUIDE



Goal

The goal of the United Independent School District Gifted/Talented and Advanced Academics Program is to enable GT and advanced academics students to progress beyond the *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills* (TEKS) of the general education curriculum by providing in-depth learning experiences that explore complex subjects and issues.

Objectives

The United ISD Gifted and Talented (GT) Program Objectives are:

- To empower students to think analytically and critically
- To foster creativity and facilitate research based on student interest
- To mirror the demographics of the district as a whole
- To increase the parental involvement of identified students

The Advanced Academics Objectives are:

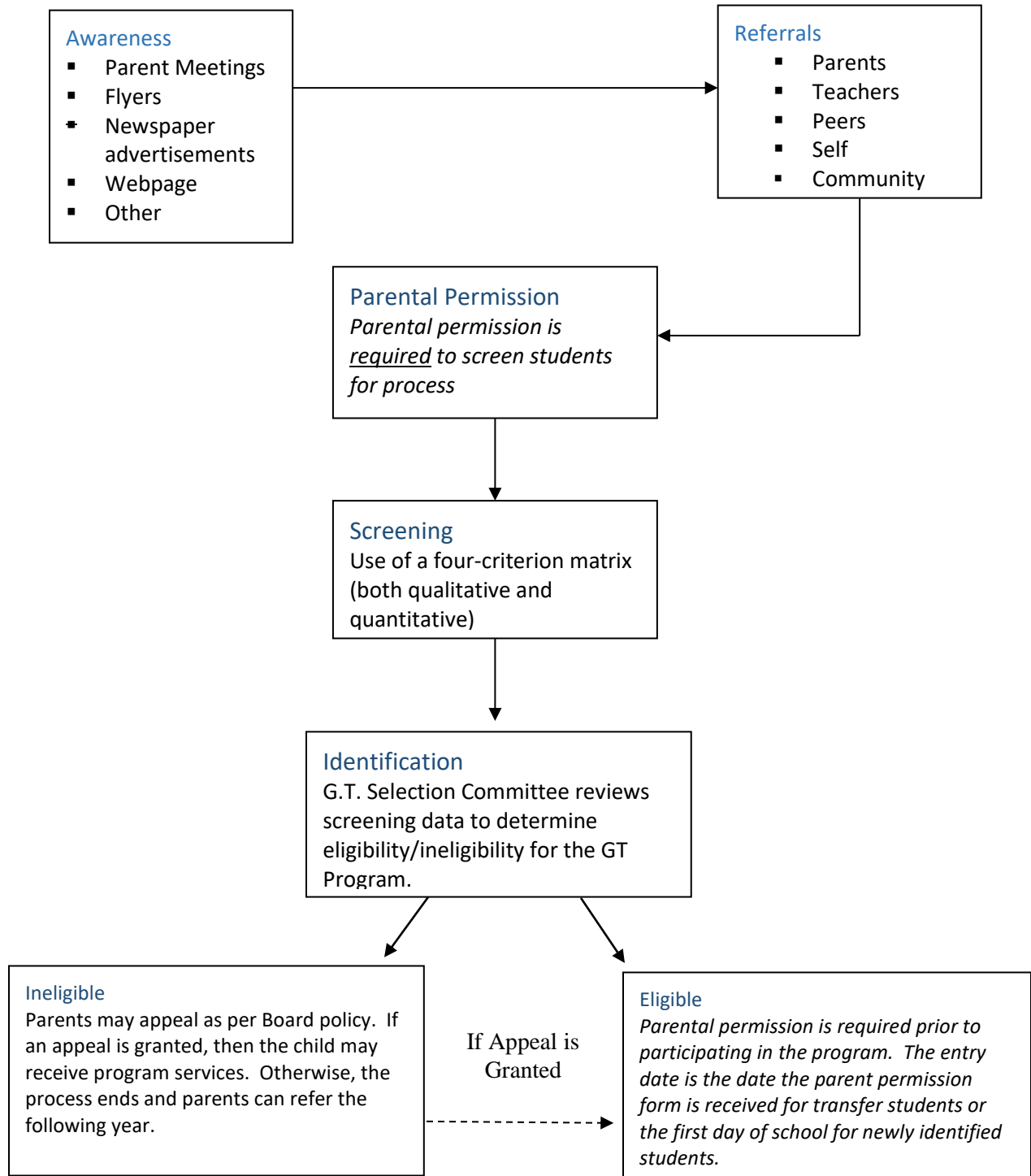
- To prepare students for the rigor of post-secondary education
- To increase the parental involvement of Pre-AP and AP students
- To mirror the demographics of the district as a whole
- To increase the number of students enrolled in AP courses and to increase the number of students obtaining scores of 3, 4, or 5 on AP Exams
- To increase the number of students pursuing post-secondary courses of study
- To increase the number of students securing employment in technical, medical, or science-related fields

Student Expectations

As a result of participation in the GT/AA Program, students are expected to:

- Grow in understanding of universal themes, issues, or problems through subject-related activities planned to develop these understandings.
- Develop thinking skills (critical, creative, problem-solving, and logical) that will enable them to take their rightful place in solving social, ecological, and technical problems of the future.
- Develop independence in acquisition of knowledge and in learning to apply information in new situations and use it to develop new products.
- Develop an understanding of their giftedness and an appreciation for others through studies of individual differences and through interaction with both intellectual and social peers.

Identification Process



Steps to Identification

Referrals

A teacher, counselor, administrator, parent, peer, or community member may refer students, or the student may initiate the referral. Stakeholders may request forms from the campus counselor in September or October each year and are due back in the counselor's office in early or mid-October. Counselors will conduct testing at the beginning of the school year. Parents will receive notification no later than May regarding student eligibility.

Screening Process for Grades 1-12

The district utilizes a four-criterion matrix in the identification process:

- 1. Nonverbal Ability Test:** Students take the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT) . It is a timed 30-minute test. The campus counselor administers this test. Pearson scores the tests.
 - 2. Reasoning Ability Test:** Students take the CogAT, administered by campus counselors, and scored by Riverside.
 - 3. Teacher Jotdown:** Teachers referring students complete a form, noting her/his observations of the students' characteristics showing potential giftedness
- OR**
- Parent Jotdown:** A parent referring a child completes an observation form citing potential gifted characteristics.
- 4. Grade Averages:** The grade average will be determined by the core subject areas at the end of the fall semester. The core areas include language arts/reading, math, science, and social studies.

The student's total matrix score is composed of the four criteria.

*Upon parental request, new students from outside of the district who enroll in UISD in August and have not been formally identified in their former district will be screened within the first 30 working days beginning with the first class day in August. After the 30-day window (in the fall semester), new students from outside of the district will follow the regular GT timeline upon referral.

*Upon parental request, new students from outside of the district who enroll in the spring semester will begin the identification process by the first 30 working days beginning with the first class day in August of the upcoming school year.

*Counselors shall distribute district permission forms to obtain parental consent or guide parents on use of an online portal. Upon receipt of the original signed permission forms, the GT/AA Office shall disseminate the appropriate testing materials to the counselors, who shall return the tests.

Identification Process

- Identification is an ongoing process.
- The GT Selection Committee (comprised of several local educators trained in nature and needs of gifted students) will meet to review each identification matrix. Students meeting the minimum score indicated on the identification matrix will be recommended for the program.
- Once identified, students will participate from year to year without re-identification unless the student exits formally from the program. However, the student's participation in a particular subject may be reevaluated based on the most appropriate placement for that child.
- Students in kindergarten have the opportunity to take a screening test and the option for further testing in October. Parents receive notification of student eligibility before March 1.
- Newly enrolled students who qualify for the gifted program in another district must present proper GT documentation from their previous district for review. All documentation will be subject to verification by the GT and/or AA Department, not the campus. Students will be accepted into the UISD GT Program upon reception of the signed Letter of Eligibility.
- All parents shall receive written notification of their child's status. All students recommended for the GT program must have parental permission for program participation on file prior to admission into the program and prior to coding in our information system as GT.

Appeals

Any student (or parent of a referred student) not qualifying for the GT program may appeal the GT Selection Committee's decision within ten school/business days from the date of written notification. The GT Department receives appeals, and additional information may be requested for students whose scores warrant consideration.

Kindergarten Students:

All Kindergarten students have the opportunity for pre-screening with the CogAT Screener upon parental permission. Testing is done at the campus level in September. Counselors submit tests to the district office for scoring or online through Riverside. Even though students may take the CogAT screener and not meet the prescribed criteria, all students have the opportunity for referral during the regular identification process. The identification process for Kinder must be complete and students must receive services before March 1.

Transfer Students

Out of District Transfer Students

- A student who has been identified as gifted and talented in another school district may be considered for placement in the gifted and talented program at United ISD. The transfer student may be admitted into the program pending verification and review of the GT documentation by the GT Department.

Intra-district GT Transfers

- The GT Dept. is responsible for providing the necessary GT documentation upon request as students transfer within the district.

Reassessment

Once identified, students will participate from year to year without re-identification unless the student ~~is~~ formally exits from the program. However, the student's participation in a particular subject may be reevaluated based on the most appropriate placement for that child, especially in the transition years from elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school. This evaluation may be based on the 5th and 8th Grade Gifted Student Inventory Forms. Teachers complete these forms at the appropriate grade levels and submit them to the district GT/AA Department.

Furlough

The GT Selection Committee may place students who are unable to maintain satisfactory performance within the structure of the gifted and talented program on furlough, or temporary exit. The purpose of such a furlough is to provide the student with an opportunity to attain performance goals established by the selection committee. A furlough may also be granted at the request of the student and/or parent. For students with extenuating circumstances, a furlough form must be agreed upon and signed by parent, student, campus administrator, and the GT Department representative. The student's furlough status shall be reviewed periodically to determine the appropriate placement. At the end of the furlough, the student's progress shall be reassessed, and the student may reenter the gifted program, be removed from the program, or be placed on another furlough.

School administration will be responsible for providing a list of students not enrolled in at least one Pre AP/AP or dual credit college course per semester to the AA Dept. Students not enrolled in at least one of the aforementioned courses may be placed on furlough.

Exit

Student performance in the program shall be monitored. A student shall be removed from the program at any time the GT Selection Committee determines that it is in the student's best interest. If a student or parent requests removal from the program, the Selection Committee shall meet with the parent and student before honoring the request. A student who has exited wishing to reenter the GT program must again proceed through the GT identification process.

Kindergarten Initial Screening

August-September

- All Kindergarten teachers (without core GT training) are required to begin 30-hour GT training.
- 30-Day Identification Process for 1st-12th grade students new to the district

September-October

- Kindergarten identification process begins.
- Campuses offer the CogAT screener to all Kinder students.
- Counselors issue GT Kinder Parent Permission

GT Identification Process for Grades K-11

October-November

***Note: The deadline for referring students is early or mid-October.**

- District provides campus training on G.T. assessment and services upon request.
- Counselors disseminate the Parent Permission for testing letters.
- Counselors collect Parent Permission for testing letters and administer the CogAT to referred students.
- CogAT are **due** to the district GT office or to Riverside online.
- The GT Dept. communicates with Riverside regarding scoring services and reports.

December

- Counselors may submit parent and teacher observation forms (jotdowns) to the GT Dept. if not collected through the online GT portal.
- All Kinder teachers must have completed the 30-hour core GT training.

January

- Counselors begin NNAT testing based on GT referrals.
- GT/AA office retrieves first semester averages.

February

- Kinder eligibility/non-eligibility letters distributed to parents

March – April

- March 1—Identified Kinder students begin receiving GT services **before March 1**. G.T. Selection Committee meets to finalize the process.

May

- 1st-11th grade eligibility/non-eligibility letters distributed to parents

Learning Opportunities

Elementary Schools

Every elementary campus offers differentiated GT instruction emphasizing the elements of depth and complexity and global themes in grades K-5 in the classroom. Students conduct research in order to create original products and performances. Curriculum for these students encompasses and extends beyond the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Middle Schools

GT students are grouped with intellectual peers in the four foundation curricular areas in advanced courses. In addition, eighth grade students are offered Pre-AP Algebra I and English College Academic Readiness (ECAR). An array of appropriately challenging project-based learning experiences is provided for gifted/talented students through the incorporation of the *Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP)*.

High Schools

High school students receive services through Pre-AP and AP courses as described below and through the core curriculum:

- *Pre-Advanced Placement* – The Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) courses are designed to introduce concepts and assessment methods to prepare students for success in Advanced Placement courses and increase the academic challenge.
- *Advanced Placement* – The Advanced Placement (AP) courses allow students to participate in college-level courses and possibly earn college-level credit while still in high school. Students are strongly encouraged to take the exam(s) for the AP course(s) in which they are enrolled. A score of 3, 4, or 5 is considered to be a qualifying score. The amount of college credit granted depends upon the individual college or university for which the student is applying.
- *Concurrent Enrollment* – High school students in their junior year meeting specific criteria (as set forth in district policy) may enroll concurrently at the local university or community college.
- *Distance Learning* – High school students may participate in distance learning for dual credit.
- *Specialty School Enrollment* – High school students may opt to enroll at one of the district specialty schools upon meeting eligibility criteria.
 - J.B. Alexander High School Magnet for Health & Science
 - United South High School Magnet for Global Business and Advanced Technology
 - L.B. Johnson Early College High School
 - United High School Magnet for Engineering and Technology
 - United South High School Early College Academy
- *Early High School Graduation* – High school students have the option of graduating under the early high school graduation provisions as outlined in school board policy.

- *High Schools Texas Performance Standards Project* - High school students are provided a continuum of learning experiences that lead to the development of advanced-level products and/or performances through various courses.

Curriculum

The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of gifted/talented students by modifying the depth, complexity, and pacing of the curriculum and instruction ordinarily provided by the school as stated in the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*.

Teachers facilitate curriculum content connections around broad-based themes.

◇ Kindergarten	Beginnings/Explorations
◇ First Grade	Changes
◇ Second Grade	Structures
◇ Third Grade	Order
◇ Fourth Grade	Patterns
◇ Fifth Grade	Systems
◇ Sixth Grade	Discoveries
◇ Seventh Grade	Communication
◇ Eighth Grade	Influences
◇ Ninth Grade	Forces
◇ Tenth Grade	Relationships
◇ Eleventh Grade	Conflict
◇ Twelfth Grade	Power

Studies will facilitate connections to these universal and significant themes. The activities will be of interdisciplinary value and will represent and integrate the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) with more advanced and enriched subject matter. Several models including the Kaplan Model and the *Texas Performance Standards Project* will be utilized in order to provide learning experiences that build understanding of generalizations and problem solving. The curriculum promotes higher order critical and creative thinking skills, depth and complexity of content, research skills, and advanced products.

Learning Experiences

Students in the United Independent School District have the opportunity to participate in a variety of learning experiences during the course of the year and the summer. These may include, but are not limited to summer camps, programs, or events such as:

- MRGB AHEC – Mid Rio Grande Border Area Health Education Center, in coordination with the UT Health Science Center Laredo Regional Campus, sponsors a one-week College Academy. <https://www.mrgbahec.org/>
- TAMIU Sponsored Activities – Laredo’s local university, Texas A & M International University, holds a financial aid fair and YES camp, a course for college credit in economics. High school students visit frequently for college preparation events.
- TAMIU TexPREP - Texas Pre-freshman Engineering Program offers an opportunity for high-quality local and area middle and high school students to be exposed to college-level mathematics, science and engineering studies.
<https://www.tamtu.edu/precollege/texprep/index.shtml>
- LC Sponsored Activities – Laredo College offers college courses at various high schools.
- Science Fair – UISD Regional Science Fair provides an opportunity for GT students to demonstrate their research skills
- Distance Learning Projects – UISD schools are linked to each other and to LC to provide courses via distance learning.
- TAGT Summer Opportunities – Office of GT/AA disseminates information/applications for summer programs outlined in the brochure provided by the Texas Association of the Gifted and Talented.
- Baylor Medical School (Doc Prep) – Students experience the medical school environment by attending Baylor College of Medicine for five days in the summer.
- UT Health Science Center San Antonio – Med Ed exposes students to medical research through workshops and field trips. <https://outreach.uthscsa.edu/programs/>
- UT OnRAMPS
https://s3.amazonaws.com/scschoolfiles/1556/ut_onramps_brochure_2020_4282020.pdf

Professional Development

Staff development is an integral part of the Gifted and Talented Program. Opportunities for professional development are provided through the GT/AA Department, Region One Service Center, TAMIU (Texas A & M International University), TAGT (Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented), the College Board, and other conferences/workshops held across the state.

The State of Texas requires the following professional development:

New GT Teachers – All teachers of the gifted must have a minimum of 30 clock hours of training in the following prior to assignment to teach GT or advanced courses.

- ✓ Nature and Need of GT Students
- ✓ Social and Emotional Needs of GT Students
- ✓ Screening, Assessment, and Identification of GT Students
- ✓ Creative and Divergent Thinking
- ✓ Differentiation of Curriculum (2-day training)

Experienced GT Teachers – Regardless of initial training route, all GT teachers providing services must receive six hours of professional development in GT topics annually. The period for receiving this training will be from June through October each year during which GT services are provided. Attendance at GT-related institutes may satisfy the requirement for GT six-hour updates.

**Teachers completing the thirty-hour initial training the previous school year are not required to take an additional six hours of training during the summer prior to starting the school year.*

Administrators and Counselors – Administrators and counselors responsible for making program decisions must have a minimum of six hours of GT training in Nature and Needs and Program Options. Counselors must complete training in social and emotional learning (SEL).

***Teachers submit records of all training to the GT Department.*

Coordination with Other Programs

In an effort to recognize giftedness in our diverse student population, the GT/AA Department works collaboratively with Directors/Coordinators of the Bilingual and Special Education Departments as well as the Region I Service Center.

Parent and Community Involvement

The success of the Program of Gifted and Talented/ Advanced Academics depends greatly upon the involvement of our students' parents and our local community. The GT Department meets periodically with parents to discuss the needs of GT students and the identification process. A GT Parent Awareness Committee may be formed in order to review program initiatives and to set goals for improvement and enhancement of the program. This committee consists of parent and teacher representatives from our schools.

Parents of GT students are informed through a variety of means such as:

- ✓ GT Brochures
- ✓ This Local Plan (Manual) for GT
- ✓ The UISD Gifted and Talented/Advanced Academics Web Pages
- ✓ Local Newspaper Advertisements
- ✓ Updates of Changes in Legislation
- ✓ Updates of Changes in District Local Policy
- ✓ Informal Meetings at UISD Campuses
- ✓ GT Parent Awareness Committee (GTPAC) Meetings
- ✓ GT Advisory Committee Meetings
- ✓ Presentations on the Needs of Gifted Students/Identification
- ✓ Campus Counselors and Teachers

Parents of Pre-AP and AP students are informed through a variety of means such as:

- ✓ AP Student website: <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/>
- ✓ The UISD Gifted and Talented/Advanced Academics Webpages
- ✓ *AP Exam Policies and Guidelines:*
<https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/exam-policies-guidelines>
- ✓ Advanced Placement (AP) Family Nights
- ✓ Updates of Changes in Legislation
- ✓ Updates of Changes in District Policy
- ✓ Informal Meetings at UISD Campuses
- ✓ AP Program brochures
- ✓ GT Parent Awareness Committee (GTPAC) Meetings
- ✓ AP Coordinators, Counselors and Teachers

Evaluation of Student Performance

The impact of the program on student performance is measured in various ways. Effectively trained teachers are the key to our program. The GT Coordinator or Director of Advanced Academics may observe teachers and provide constructive feedback. If necessary, the AA Director or Coordinator meets with the GT teachers at each campus not only to offer assistance on instructional issues (including the *Texas Performance Standards Projects*) but also to keep them abreast of current developments in the GT Program.

Parents are invited to provide feedback through an online survey on the GT Webpage.

Student growth on the *Texas Performance Standards Projects* is an indicator of success.

The District GT Coordinator and AA Director meet with campus administration and GT/Pre-AP/AP teachers to gather input when considering student success in the program. They also collaborate with parents/community members in an effort to provide a more rigorous and authentic GT/AA Program.

Formal Evaluations

Formal evaluations are conducted periodically as needed or as recommended by district auditors and other educational stakeholders.