

# Best Practices in Gifted Education

Prepared for Laguna Beach Unified School District

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# BEST PRACTICES & LITERATURE REVIEW

# Introduction

*Hanover Research consulted expert literature and empirical research to answer the following key questions:*



**What definitions and processes should districts use to ensure that GATE screening procedures identify gifted students from all backgrounds, including low-income and English learner students?**

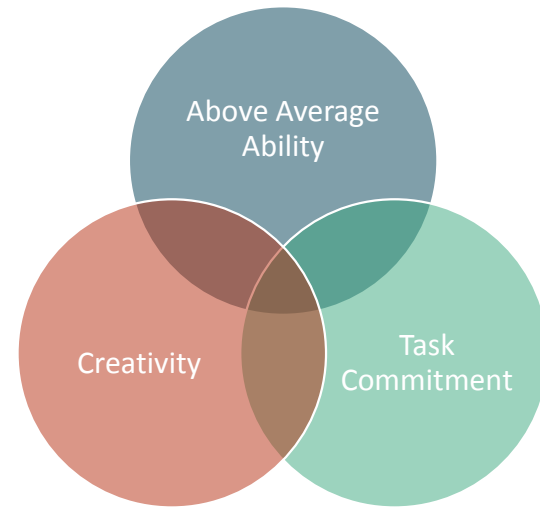
**How can districts design GATE programs to serve the needs of a diverse gifted population in a manner that complies with California DOE and expert recommendations?**

**How can classroom teachers differentiate instruction to support small groups of gifted learners in the general education classroom?**

# Equitable Identification - Definitions

## What is giftedness?

- Giftedness is not limited to exceptional academic achievement.
- Gifted students display a combination of academic ability, creativity, and task commitment, among other qualities.
- Giftedness may not always be evident in student grades or test scores.



Source: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

## National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Definition

*Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).*

# Equitable Identification - Definitions

## California Categories for the Identification of GATE Students

*The following categories are used for identification of the pupil's extraordinary capability in relation to the pupil's chronological peers:*

(a) **Intellectual Ability:** A pupil demonstrates extraordinary or potential for extraordinary intellectual development.

(b) **Creative Ability:** A pupil characteristically:

1. Perceives unusual relationships among aspects of the pupil's environment and among ideas
2. Overcomes obstacles to thinking and doing
3. Produces unique solutions to problems

(c) **Specific Academic Ability:** A pupil functions at highly advanced academic levels in particular subject areas.

(d) **Leadership Ability:** A pupil displays the characteristic behaviors necessary for extraordinary leadership.

(e) **High Achievement:** A pupil consistently produces advanced ideas and products and/or attains exceptionally high scores on achievement tests.

(f) **Visual and Performing Arts Talent:** A pupil originates, performs, produces, or responds at extraordinarily high levels in the arts.

Source: California Department of Education

# Equitable Identification - Definitions

**Researchers note a difference between “smart” (or high-achieving) and “gifted” students.** High-achieving students work through grade-level material easily. Gifted students display more intense curiosity and engagement with the world around them.

	SMART	GIFTED
Questioning Style	Ask questions that have answers	Ask questions about abstract ideas, concepts and theories
Learning Speed & Application of Concepts	Learn step-by-step	Jump from step 2 to 10 (showing work in math; tutoring)
Emotional Outlook	Get past an upsetting incident fairly easily	Experience heightened, sometimes all-consuming emotions
Level of Interest	Ask questions and are curious about many things	Show intense curiosity about nearly everything and immerse themselves in areas of interest
Language Ability	Learn new vocabulary easily and choose words typical for their age	Extensive and advanced vocabulary and understand nuances, wordplay and puns
Concern with Fairness	Show concern about fairness	State firm opinions about fairness related to persons and equity more intensely and on a more global scale

Source: Davis School District

# Equitable Identification - Screening

**Minority students and low-income students are chronically underrepresented in gifted education programs.** Researchers identify several reasons for the disparity in GATE program enrollment:

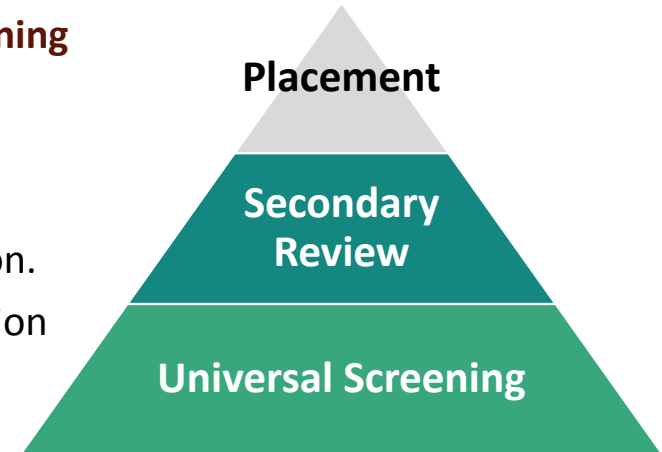
- Traditional methods of identifying gifted and talented students, such as IQ, achievement tests, and teacher recommendations **generate inconsistent results.**
- **Cultural biases and English fluency requirements** in many assessments make it difficult for students from diverse cultural backgrounds and English-learners to demonstrate giftedness.
- Students, teachers, and school professionals may have **low academic expectations** for culturally and linguistically diverse students.
- Minority and low-income students often **lack a parent advocate** to push for inclusion in a GATE program.

Sources: Intercultural Development Research Association, *Exceptional Children*, The Hechinger Report

# Equitable Identification - Screening

**Experts advise districts to implement a multi-phase screening protocol:**

- **Universal screening** using valid, unbiased assessment instruments.
- **Secondary review** using multiple sources of information.
- **Placement** of students in an appropriate gifted education context.



In particular, districts should use multiple measures of giftedness, including those listed below:

	INSTRUMENT TYPE
OBJECTIVE	Tests & Assessments
	Student Cumulative Records.
SUBJECTIVE	Nominations: Self, Peer, Teacher, Administrator, Parent
	Teacher Observations & Ratings: Learning & Motivation Scales.
	Portfolios & Performances
	Student Educational Profiles

Source: National Association for Gifted Children



# Program Models

**GATE programs use a variety of program delivery models.** Often, districts use both classroom-based differentiated instruction and separate classes/programs in combination. The California Department of Education identifies the following GATE program service options:

- Special Day Class (pull-out program)
- Part-Time Grouping
- Independent Study
- Acceleration
- Postsecondary Education Opportunities
- Services for Underachieving Gifted Students
- Services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students
- Cluster Grouping
- Enrichment Activities

Source: California Department of Education

# Program Models

**Districts can use more than one GATE program model in combination.** Program model types may vary by grade level.

**Program Models by Grade Level**

	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	HIGH
<b>General Classroom</b>	General classroom enrichment		
	Curriculum compacting, modification, and differentiation		
	Cluster Grouping		
<b>Outside General Classroom</b>	Within-grade and across-grade pull-outs	Within grade level and across grade level advanced courses	Advanced Placement
			Honors classes
	Enrichment clusters	Academies of inquiry and talent development	International Baccalaureate
			Self-designed courses or independent study
	Special enrichment programs: Young writers, Saturday and summer programs, Future Problem Solvers, Odyssey of the Mind, Destination Imagination, Math League, Science Fairs		
	Individual options: internships, apprenticeships, mentorships		
	Acceleration options: early admission, subject acceleration, grade skipping, college classes		

Source: University of Connecticut

# Program Models

**At the middle school level, GATE programs may include both in-class models (e.g., cluster grouping) and specialized classes for gifted students.** For example:

- **Poway USD** offers both heterogeneous cluster grouping and homogenous ELA and humanities classes for GATE students at the middle school level.
- **Los Alamitos USD** middle schools offers three-period GATE core classes comprising reading, language arts, and social science.
- In **Culver City USD**, middle school GATE students are provided the opportunity to participate in the Scholars Program in English Language Arts and in accelerated pathways in mathematics.

**Research finds that low-income and minority students are underrepresented in middle school and high school advanced courses (e.g., AP, Honors).** Experts recommend that districts ensure equitable access to advanced coursework in middle school to ensure students are prepared for rigorous academics in high school. Specifically, districts can:

- Use standardized test scores to place students in accelerated mathematics courses (e.g., Pre-Algebra).
- Conduct targeted outreach to ensure that qualified students are aware of their eligibility and the benefits of taking rigorous courses.

# Curriculum & Instruction

**Effective GATE programming involves well-trained instructors, appropriate and challenging learning experiences for students, and a school environment that promotes both academic and social success.** Experts, as well as the [NAGC Program Standards](#) and the California Department of Education [Recommended Standards](#) for GATE programming, make the following recommendations:

- Districts develop a **mission statement** to guide the GATE program.
- Services are constructed so that there is a **continuum of services** to meet the needs of individual gifted students.
- Gifted programs should focus on developing **students' character and curiosity**, rather than pure academic skill.
- Programs include supports for students' **social and emotional development**.
- Districts ensure that teachers and GATE specialists have **access to professional development** in how to support gifted students.

# Classroom-Based Differentiation Strategies

Experts and state education departments recommend that teachers use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to develop appropriate learning experiences for gifted students.

## MULTIPLE MEANS OF REPRESENTATION

Give gifted students a choice of ways to approach acquiring information.

Provide options for resources in addition to textbooks.

Accommodate gifted students' needs for flexible grouping.



## MULTIPLE MEANS OF ACTION AND EXPRESSION

Offer layers of scaffolding for gifted students with low need for supports.

Provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate what they know.

Provide models for superior products for the lesson or unit.

Collaborate with gifted specialist / coordinator for follow-up or extensions.



## MULTIPLE MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT

Vary the pace at which content is delivered.

Provide problem-solving activities to motivate gifted students.

Allow for integration of issues, themes, and concepts across content areas.

Source: Ohio Department of Education

# Classroom-Based Differentiation Strategies

Experts recommend the following three instructional approaches to facilitate differentiated instruction:

- **Acceleration:** includes early entry to Kindergarten, skipping grades, advancement to higher level classes in a particular subject area.
- **Curriculum Compacting:** elimination of repetitive or unnecessary content for gifted students and replacing it with enrichment opportunities.
- **Cluster Grouping:** students work in small groups alongside peers of similar ability.

Districts may choose to organize grade-level mainstream classrooms so that gifted students are concentrated in a single classroom, such as in the example below.

	GIFTED	HIGH AVERAGE	AVERAGE	LOW AVERAGE	FAR BELOW AVERAGE
Class A	6	0	12	12	0
Class B	0	6	12	6	6
Class C	0	6	12	6	6

Source: *Journal of Education of the Gifted*

# PROGRAM ASSESSMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

# Program Assessment & Recommendations

## ➤ SCREENING

- It remains unclear how the district defines giftedness, and LBUSD relies primarily on measures of academic achievement to determine eligibility for its GATE program. The district should clearly articulate the meaning of giftedness while also considering evidence of students' creativity, leadership, and fine arts abilities.
- LBUSD relies primarily on universal screening to determine GATE eligibility. Students that do not qualify using the screener can be nominated for additional opportunities for assessment. The district may consider, however, incorporating additional requirements for initial GATE identification that includes subjective indicators of student ability.

## ➤ OPPORTUNITY

- LBUSD provides gifted students with a variety of learning opportunities that promote individual interests and problem-solving, and considers students' social-emotional development when developing individual learning plans (ILP). The district appears to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to GATE teachers.

## ➤ PROGRAM MODEL AND INSTRUCTION

- LBUSD employs a variety of program models to deliver GATE services, including cluster grouping and advanced courses.
- LBUSD teachers differentiate instruction through acceleration, adding depth, increasing complexity, and providing opportunities for novelty. However, LBUSD parent comments suggest the district could do more to distinguish GATE instruction from general education instruction.





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