

# Gifted Academically Talented Education Handbook



**ST. JOSEPH**

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SCHOOL DISTRICT

**2024-2025**

## Gifted and Talented Innovation Center

Hillyard Technical Center  
3434 Faraon Street  
Saint Joseph, MO 64505  
(816) 671-4170

Director: Jill Huntsman

Assistant Director: Chris Gagnon

Administrative Assistant: Danielle Silvey, Roxanne Schmerbach, and DeAnna Phillips

Nurse: Stacy Kovac

### Personnel

Staff Name	Title
Dr. Kendra Lau	Director of School Improvement
Jill Huntsman	Director, Hillyard Technical Center
Chris Gagnon	Assistant Director, Hillyard Technical Center
Ashley Zeiler, M.Ed., Ed.S.	GATE Teacher, 3-8, Hillyard Technical Center
Sarah Mason, M.Ed	GATE Teacher, 3-8, Hillyard Technical Center
Ashley Pospisil, M.Ed.	GATE Teacher, 3-8, Hillyard Technical Center
Elisabeth Alkier, M.Ed	GATE Teacher, Bode Push-In and Middle School
David George	TAG Literature, Central High School
Shane Heard	TAG Literature, Lafayette High School

## **GATE Mission**

The mission of the St. Joseph School District Gifted Program is to provide a learning community that maximizes the potential of gifted students with unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs through a highly challenging curriculum and specialized instruction that enable students to contribute to the demands of an ever-changing society.

## **GATE Vision**

Our vision is to be an exemplary gifted program, to advocate for, inspire, and meet the needs of all students in the St. Joseph School District Gifted Program.

## **GATE Core Beliefs**

Gifted students are unique and are as different from one another as they are from the population as a whole.

- Gifted children may exhibit uneven intellectual, emotional, and physical development.
- Gifted children have potential that is extraordinary and idiosyncratic.
- Gifted students are generally not gifted in all areas and may not be “straight-A” students.

Gifted students exist in all cultural groups, within all economic levels, among populations with other special needs, and in all areas of human endeavor.

- Gifted students may be twice exceptional, having gifts and disabilities.
- Gifted students display different characteristics based on their cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds.

Gifted students learn differently and require exceptional educational experiences to grow academically and achieve their highest potential.

- Gifted students need instruction tailored to their unique abilities, interests, and learning styles.
- Gifted students need an academically challenging, accelerated, and enriched curriculum.
- Gifted students need to explore many fields of study, to “fall in love” with ideas, and to study subjects in depth.
- Gifted students must engage in learning that requires persistence and task commitment.
- Gifted students need the opportunity to use and develop their creativity.

Because of heightened intellectual and social-emotional intensities, gifted students need support and encouragement from individuals who recognize, validate and nurture their giftedness.

- Gifted students are a special needs population and can be “at risk.”

- Gifted students benefit from the expertise of both classroom teachers and specially trained gifted education teachers.
- Gifted students benefit from contact with intellectual peers and mentors.
- Gifted students benefit from parents who help them achieve meaningful social, emotional, and academic goals.
- Gifted students are children who need to be valued for who they are.

### **What is the definition of [Giftedness](#) according to the [National Association for Gifted Children](#)?**

*“Students with gifts and talents perform – or have the ability to perform – at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential.” (NAGC 2018)*

### **What is the definition of Giftedness according to Missouri statutes?**

Gifted students are defined in Section 162.675, RSMo, as "students who exhibit precocious development of mental capacity and learning potential as determined by competent professional evaluation to the extent that continued educational growth and stimulation could best be served by an academic environment beyond that offered through a standard grade-level curriculum."

In identifying students for the gifted program, the St. Joseph School District follows the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requirements. The [gifted education for the State of Missouri](#) page explains policy and procedures for gifted education.

### **What are the implications for educators?**

Exceptionally capable learners are children who progress in learning at a significantly faster pace than other children of the same age, often resulting in high levels of achievement. Such children are found in all segments of society. Beginning in early childhood, their optimal development requires differentiated educational experiences, both of a general nature and, increasingly over time, targeting those domains in which they demonstrate the capacity for high-performance levels. Such differentiated educational experiences consist of adjustments in the level, depth, and pacing of curriculum and outside-of-school programs to match their current achievement and learning rates. Marked differences among gifted learners sometimes require additional and unusual interventions. Other support services include more comprehensive assessment, counseling, parent education, and specially designed programs, including those typically afforded to older students.

### **What is the St. Joseph School District’s Philosophy?**

We, the St. Joseph School District’s GATE Program staff, want to do everything possible to provide a safe and respectful learning environment for all students. Likewise, we believe all students deserve to be treated with the utmost respect and dignity, especially when they are having trouble in school. Our goal,

therefore, is to approach each situation fairly and consistently, with the goal being to positively assist the student with their personal development.

- All SJSJ GATE students should have access to high-quality education, including fair, reliable, and valid assessment tools used to determine ALL SJSJ students' potential gifted needs.
- All SJSJ GATE students deserve access to a curriculum that extends and enhances their grade-level curriculum that is both accelerated and functions to strengthen deeper learning.
- All SJSJ GATE students deserve high-quality instruction, a high-quality curriculum written for gifted students' needs, and highly qualified and certificated staff.

## Characteristics of Gifted Children

A young child who has many of the following characteristics is likely to be gifted, but other children will show some of these characteristics, and a gifted child will not show all. Many of these characteristics also apply to older gifted children.

### Advanced development

Developmentally, the young, gifted child frequently reaches the 'milestones' such as walking and first speech earlier than average. They tend to have a more sophisticated vocabulary than their peers, may love to define words, usually love books, and may be self-taught readers at preschool and kindergarten ages.

### Early intellectual ability

Young, gifted children often have an excellent memory and may be able and eager to learn simple math, science, and social studies concepts. They may develop an all-consuming interest in one topic -e.g., dinosaurs - and have an awe-inspiring understanding and knowledge about the subject. They may seem interested in almost everything, sometimes rushing from one topic to another.

### Thirst for knowledge

Many gifted children have a real thirst for knowledge, like the true scientist or philosopher who wants to 'find out' about the world, just for the sake of it. Sometimes, there seems to be a solid drive to explore, learn about and master the environment. Often, the contents of cupboards, etc., need to be investigated, and toys and activities may be mastered rapidly and discarded.

### Very high level of activity

The young, gifted child can be highly active and frequently have a reduced need for sleep. Although still very exhausting for parents, unlike hyperactivity, it is an activity with a purpose, and a remarkably long concentration span may be shown when something is of particular interest.

Note: Due to their ability to see far more into what is, for most, a simple situation, and possibly due to their fear of failure, the young, gifted child may hold back in a new situation as if to check out all the implications. They may speak late but then in complete sentences, possibly walk late, initially appear very shy in new social settings, and may require full details before offering help or answering questions.

### Sensitivity

Some young, gifted children can be susceptible; general anger or criticism is taken personally; they suffer along with the starving children on TV, the injured animal, etc. When overloaded with impressions, they may become introverted and withdrawn.

### Asynchronous development

Children may be gifted in a narrow field or may have "all-round" high ability, but often there is a large discrepancy between their intellectual, physical, and emotional development. Capable of abstract thought before being able to deal with these concepts emotionally, they may become over-concerned with death, the future, sex, etc. Manual dexterity usually needs to catch up to their intellectual expectations, resulting in frustration at the inability to complete envisaged tasks. Ten minutes after a near-adult conversation, they may come whining about some small hurt, needing to be comforted like the four-year-olds they are.

### Early ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality

This may lead to discussions on the inevitability of death, the frequent need to analyze stories to see which parts "really could happen," and awkward questions about Santa and the tooth fairy!

### Early insight into social/moral issues

Some young, gifted children have a well-developed social conscience and may become very concerned about wars, pollution, and other kinds of injustice and violence. They often see through adult hypocrisy and cover-up and may display fear and anger to discover that adults can be inconsistent and unreasonable.

### Greater reasoning power and manipulation

Young, gifted children use their verbal abilities rather than actions for communication. Generally, it is possible to reason with them from a very early age. Their verbal ability, extraordinary reasoning powers, and understanding of human relationships may sometimes be used when arguing with and trying to outsmart parents and teachers. Their abilities may lead them to discover the advantages of dishonest behavior, such as lying and stealing, at an early age. Although credit needs to be given for convincing, logical arguments, regular discipline must apply to the gifted child, as it is a very insecure feeling for someone so young to realize they can manipulate adults.

### Social skills

Most gifted children are also socially very able and get along well with others, frequently showing strong leadership abilities. However, even from an early age, they may see themselves as 'different.' Other children may not understand their more sophisticated vocabulary and advanced sense of humor, which may lead to feelings of inferiority and rejection. For this reason, gifted children may associate more with older children and adults. It can be essential for some gifted children to find other gifted children with whom to communicate. Although having someone who truly understands them is essential, this may not be easy.

### Individuality

Many gifted children may be seen as "weird" or unconventional; they may have great fantasy and creativity and develop their unique learning styles. These children must not be constantly organized but have a chance to do their "own thing", a time for solitude, reflection, and creativity.

### Importance of adults

Gifted children may not be interested in very structured activities or meeting others' standards, often preferring to develop their projects. Despite this, adult guidance is critical -to help them determine in which situation it is necessary to conform and when it is okay to be "different," to put realistic limits on an often-overambitious project, to lend a hand when manual dexterity doesn't meet mental visions and to avoid self-criticism becoming destructive. Help may be needed to set realistic standards.

### Perfectionism

Often gifted children set high standards for themselves and become frustrated and angry when they discover they may not have the manual dexterity to complete envisaged projects. Sometimes, knowing they cannot complete the task to their standards, they may refuse to do it.

## GATE Eligibility Process

The St. Joseph School District's program for gifted children extends the school curriculum.

### Screening

To ensure equitable screening, the SJSD administers the Naglieri General Ability Tests to all second-grade students in the spring. Based upon the results of this test, in combination with their iReady Diagnostic scores, further testing may be needed for qualification. Local norms are used to improve identification for all segments of the SJSD student population.

Teachers, parents, and building principals can send in requests for students to be tested via the Lead Gifted Teacher, Ashley Zeiler. She will process current scores and determine if further testing is necessary.

## Once Testing Is Completed

Students must meet the minimum eligibility criteria set by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Three of the four criteria for placement into GATE must be present based upon DESE Standards:

- **General Mental Ability** – 95th percentile or higher General Ability Index (GAI) or Full-Scale IQ
  - Scores can come from a Full-Scale IQ or Naglieri General Ability Test
- **Academic Ability** - 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher on at least one subject within national achievement tests (composite total Reading or total Math from i-Ready or equivalent testing)
- **Creativity/Critical Thinking Assessment** - Torrance Test of Creativity or Creativity Scale from Renzulli Teacher Rating Scales
- **Teacher Rating Scales** - Renzulli Teacher Rating Scales, Advanced in both Reading and Math MAP scores, or Gifted Specialist classroom visit and/or interview

### The Student Meets the Criteria for Placement

When a child meets the GATE criteria for placement, a letter is sent out to inform parents and families. The principal of the child's sending school building and GATE teachers are notified. The GATE teacher will also discuss orientation with the parent or guardian.

### The Student Doesn't Meet the Criteria for Placement

If a child does not meet the criteria, a letter will be sent to their parents and families. Test scores will be added to the student's cumulative file and can be accessed through their building principal or gifted department lead teacher. If requested, the parent or guardian can contact the gifted lead teacher for further clarification on the test results.

### Appealing the Testing Outcome

If the school or parents wish to appeal a decision, they can do so after a waiting period of **two** calendar years *from the initial testing date*. Retesting can only occur after **two** calendar years from the initial testing date. The appeal can come from the student's teacher or parent via the principal of the building. The building principal will then send the student's name and information to the St. Joseph School District Academic Services Department and Ashley Zeiler, Lead Gifted Teacher at the Gifted Innovation Center at Hillyard Technical Center. Ms. Zeiler will review the appeal and any additional pertinent information provided. The individual appealing/requesting retesting will receive a letter indicating the action and further steps.

## Variations of the Typical GATE Referral Process

### **Gifted Program Student from Another District**

A student in a gifted program in another district must be screened to determine if the student qualifies based on the St. Joseph School District's criteria. The student's previous school records (including all information about the gifted evaluation process, gifted placement, gifted progress, etc.) must be sent to the St. Joseph School District Academic Services Department and Ashley Zeiler, Lead Gifted Teacher at the Gifted Innovation Center at Hillyard Technical Center for review. The parents/families will be notified if the student meets the qualifications. If the student does not meet the initial eligibility criteria, more testing may need to be conducted to determine eligibility for the program.

### **Returning SJSD Schools GATE Student**

Once a student has qualified for the gifted program in SJSD, the student maintains eligibility status. If a student has withdrawn from the program and the parent desires the student to return, the student does need to be rescreened. The parent must give written notification of the student's desire to return to GATE to the child's school, the Academic Services Department, and Ashley Zeiler, Lead Gifted Teacher at the Gifted Innovation Center at Hillyard Technical Center. At that time, testing will be scheduled to re-enroll the student in the program.

### **Student Who Did Not Previously Qualify**

A student previously referred to the gifted program but did not qualify must send a letter to their building principal or have a recommendation from a parent or a teacher. Unless there was some problem (the child was sick, death in the family) during the testing, the student must wait two years from the previous testing before appealing their results.

### **Private/Parochial/Homeschooled**

Students who reside in the St. Joseph School District boundaries but attend a private or parochial school, online virtual academy, or who are homeschooled may be referred by a parent or teacher to determine if a student is eligible for gifted education services. For any student referrals, contact the Academic Services Department and Ashley Zeiler, Lead Gifted Teacher at the Gifted Innovation Center at Hillyard Technical Center. Referred students will follow the regular screening process. Those who qualify for further testing will follow the procedure indicated in the "Testing" paragraph. However, the district does not provide transportation to a GATE site for students from private, parochial, homeschool, or virtual academies.

# GATE Policies and Procedures

## Arrival and Dismissal Procedures:

- Students ride the bus to GATE from their homeschool and are bussed back to their homeschool after GATE.
- All car riders should be dropped off at Hillyard Technical Center using the loop in front of the building. We ask that you respect the **8:45 a.m. drop-off time** if you drop off your child by car instead of using the district buses. Students will not be allowed within the classroom before 8:45 to respect the teacher's time to plan and be prepared for the day.
- **Dismissal time will be 2:00 p.m**

## Change in Student Dismissal Plans

- All students' welfare and safety are our primary concerns.
- If there is a change in a child's dismissal plans, *a parent or guardian must notify the school office and GATE staff **no later than 1:00 p.m.*** on the day of the dismissal change.

## Movement at Hillyard Technical Center

- All students' welfare and safety are our primary concerns. We understand that high school and adult students are in our building, and we do everything we can to ensure student safety.
- Each time a class is moved to our satellite classroom, they are accompanied by a GATE teacher in the hallways and are not left unattended.
- Our double doors to our Center will remain closed throughout the day for security and safety purposes.
- Students who need to use the restroom while in our remote classroom will have a teacher or member of our building staff come to escort them to our GATE restroom. They will not be allowed to use the restrooms with the high school students.

## Attendance

There is no required attendance; however, this class fosters a significant community and autonomous learning where student contribution is vital. Student attendance will be tracked, and parents will be contacted if their child does not attend GATE. It is the parent's choice when students do not attend and it should be communicated well before the missed class period, not the child.

We want to ensure that students are safe and that parents know where their children are. Each week of GATE is equivalent to missing a core subject for five class period days. Students become significantly behind each time they miss class. With the speed and rigor of our lessons, it is crucial that students attend class weekly.

It's crucial to be punctual and avoid leaving early to develop practical time management skills and become proficient in independent learning. This will also help students to engage in higher-level conversations and improve their overall understanding of the subject matter.

## Birthdays

***Birthday parties are allowed at the Gifted and Talented Innovation Center.*** Birthday treats can be sent in and shared with all students within the GATE classroom, but they must be purchased in stores.

- Balloons, flowers, and gifts ***should not*** be brought or delivered to the GATE Center. Transportation does not allow balloons or other items that cannot fit on a child's lap to be carried on the bus.
- We appreciate the judgment of all parents in making decisions that positively impact all students at the GATE Program.

## Communication Between Home and School

We believe at the GATE Program that the best education for our children occurs when parents and teachers work together. Open communication is a vital link between home and school. Each elementary student will have a student device issued from the Saint Joseph School District that is required for GATE, an iPad, and a CANVAS online platform sign-in to complete their coursework. Please check your child's inbox on CANVAS or Microsoft Teams for any messages from the teachers between classes or see the newsletters sent home via email for information on assignments, upcoming events, due dates, etc. You can assist in the communication process by:

- Reading all notices sent home from the GATE Program.
- Calling the teacher, sending a note, or e-mailing when questions or problems arise.
- Attending conferences, programs, open houses, and curriculum nights.
- Reading the weekly teacher newsletter closely each week.
- Checking the district and school websites regularly.
- Following social media accounts (Facebook) for the latest updates.

The GATE teachers are available for a conference with parents by appointment. Conferences will be arranged whenever the parent or the teacher perceives a need and during parent/teacher conferences. To protect instructional time, a parent may request to visit the classroom or to have a conference by contacting the teacher in advance by note, phone call, or email.

## Early Dismissal

The GATE Program adheres to the St. Joseph School District's early dismissal schedule. Students will be transported back to their home school early on their respective days.

## **Field Trips**

Field trips are educational experiences related to the curriculum and require travel from the building. Parent permission is required before a student may participate in a field trip. Parents will receive written information such as each trip's purpose, time, cost, and location. At times, parental assistance is appropriate for support. Parents who volunteer to supervise small groups of children during field trips must adhere to all volunteer guidelines.

To ensure appropriate supervision of GATE program students during school field trips, *siblings not of school age (preschoolers and younger siblings)* **may not** attend school trips.

## **Traditional Classroom GATE Homework Policy**

While students are in the GATE Program, they are not required to make up work missed from the regular classroom from their GATE Day. However, they must demonstrate an understanding of the concepts presented. Long-term assignments and projects due to the traditional classroom on GATE Day still need to be turned in. Students should work with the classroom teacher to determine when the project will be turned in for the appropriate grade. A student having difficulty keeping up with their regular classes while attending the GATE Program is encouraged to discuss their concerns with their classroom teacher and GATE teacher.

## **Virtual Academy/Private/Parochial GATE Homework Policy**

Students in these settings will complete assignments based on their school environment. Many partner schools have mimicked our policy, but be sure to check with your teacher and/or principal for clarification.

## **Inclement Weather or School Closures**

During inclement weather or instances when the building is closed, the GATE Program will be closed when the St. Joseph School District is closed. If schools have an early dismissal due to inclement weather, GATE Program students will be transported to their home school for dismissal. On these days, students will be expected to log on to their CANVAS portal to check for assignments and participate in activities and classroom discussions. Parents will be notified of student work on school closure dates, including any possible Zoom or Teams calls during the day.

## **Lost and Found**

Students should have their names written on individual jackets, sweaters, coats, hats, gloves, scarves, bags, backpacks, lunch boxes, and other personal belongings. A container of lost and found items is maintained at the GATE Program. Please have your child check the lost and found objects regularly. Items remaining in the lost and found at the end of each semester will be donated.

## Lunch

Lunch times at the Gifted and Talented Innovation Center will be provided at the beginning of each school year via the GATE Program newsletter and the school's website.

- Due to current restrictions, parents **cannot** join their students for lunch at the Gifted and Talented Innovation Center. We will notify parents if a change occurs, allowing parents to join us in the building.
- Students will bring lunches to the Gifted and Talented Innovation Center each GATE Day. We do not have food service available at Hillyard Technical Center, so students **must have lunch** when they enter the building.
- If they get a sack lunch from their home school, it will be cold. One week before their GATE Day, it must be ordered to ensure the lunches are packed and ready for the students to grab before leaving their home schools.
- If your student is a virtual/private/parochial learner attending GATE in person, they **must bring their lunch** from home.

## Medications/ Illness

A school nurse will be on staff at Hillyard Technical Center to assist with student medications, including EpiPens and inhalers. Please contact our nurse Stacy Kovac ([stacykovac@sjsd.k12.mo.us](mailto:stacykovac@sjsd.k12.mo.us)), with any questions or concerns about your child's health and safety at the Gifted Innovation Center.

## Progress Reports

The GATE program completes Progress Reports that will go home with students twice a year. During fall conferences, we meet with new families to discuss our progress reports and how they are scored as they are not like traditional classroom grades.

## Behavior

We, the staff of the GATE Program, want to do everything possible to provide a safe and respectful learning environment for all students. Likewise, we believe all students deserve to be treated with the utmost respect and dignity, especially when they are having trouble in school. Our goal, therefore, is to approach each situation fairly and consistently, with the goal being to positively assist the student with their personal development.

### Behavior Support Process

All students are expected to follow the GATE Program *Expectations*: be **Professional, Respectful, and Responsible**.

- If students choose not to comply with the expectations, they will be redirected to correct the behavior. The student will then review the procedure for the situation, which will include re-teaching (teacher) and practice (student).

- If the student continues to need assistance, they will be directed to a safe seat, and a *Processing Sheet* may be used to assist in re-teaching. The teacher will discuss the problem and help the students brainstorm alternative choices with more practice of the expected behavior.
- If students disrupt the class, they will be escorted to a Buddy Space. While in the Buddy Space, the student may need to complete the *Processing Sheet* and/or any unfinished assignments.
- If the disruptive behavior continues, it may be necessary for the student to be removed. When the student has regained composure and demonstrated that they can return to the classroom successfully, they will be allowed to do so. However, if attempts to de-escalate the behaviors are unsuccessful, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken, and parents will be notified.

If the student continues to have difficulties learning/exhibiting appropriate behaviors and following the GATE Program Expectations, interventions and/or an individual behavior plan will be implemented. **The goal at the GATE Center is for each student to be SUCCESSFUL - both behaviorally and academically!**

## Student/Family Information

Please notify the GATE Innovation Center and the home school office when student contact information changes, including but not limited to home address, home phone number, cell phone number, work phone number, email address, name and place of parents' employment, or those numbers listed as emergency contacts. School personnel must be aware of all changes for your child's safety.

Parents/guardians may also be notified via the district calling system in case of emergencies, early dismissals, etc.

## Transportation

Transportation is provided to and from the GATE Innovation Center by the St. Joseph School District for students enrolled in St. Joseph School District. Home-schooled, virtual academy, parochial, or private school students who are residents of the St. Joseph School District will provide their transportation.

## Remote Learning

*Remote Learning is temporary.* It is online learning that occurs when the shift from face-to-face needs to happen. Some remote learning examples would be inclement weather days or mandated quarantine days.

The time expectations for Remote Learning (referring to their regular education):

- 2nd-3rd - 60 to 75 minutes daily, 10 to 15-minute increments
- 4th-5th – 90 minutes to 2 hours daily, 20-minute increments
- 6th-8th – 3 hours daily, 30 minutes per class, with built-in breaks

Remote Learning may include Microsoft Teams sessions as a whole group. GATE will be utilizing Microsoft Teams instead of Zoom this year. The online MS Teams session may be recorded.

## Visitor Information and Security

Visitors include any people who are not staff or current students. All visitors must sign in at the front office, have an ID ready, go through the RAPTOR system, and sign out when leaving. Visitors are currently being discouraged as it can disrupt the learning process.

All Visitors to the GATE Innovation Center should enter/exit through the **main doors of Hillyard Technical Center**. Visitors must show proper ID and receive a Visitor's badge before entering the classroom spaces.