

Gifted Advisory Committee Meeting #2
4.11.22. by Zoom
Minutes

Attendance:

Karla Crane	Coordinator of Student Services
Kayoko Nettleton	Assistant Coordinator of Student Services
Cristin Haake	Pinon GATE Teacher
Amanda Adams	Barranca GATE Teacher
Aedin Loychik	Barranca GATE Teacher
Liz Janusz	Aspen principal
Victoria Daley	Aspen GATE Teacher
Madison Andrews	Pinon Parent
Collin & Krista Meierbachtol	Aspen Parents
Valerie Fox	Aspen Parent
Ryan Young	Aspen Parent
Shannon Trujillo	Aspen Assistant Principal
Susan Hettinga	Chamisa GATE Teacher
Melissa Kinman	Mountain GATE Teacher
Jackie Aguila-Fernandes	Pinon Parent
Paromeeta Nag	Pinon Parent
Catherine Puranananda	LAHS GATE Teacher
Brittany Vollans	Aspen Parent
Stephanie Gardiner	Aspen Parent
Lauren Coupland	Aspen/LAMS Parent
Walt Wehner	Mountain/LAMS Parent
Stephanie Farley	Chamisa Parent
Sara Del Valle	Mountain Parent
Kristi Mackey	Aspen Parent
Natalie Smith	Aspen Parent
Carter Payne	Assistant Superintendent
Sharon Fogle	Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Crystal Tipton	Pinon Parent
Mitsi Willard	Mountain/LAMS Parent
Gail Randell	Chamisa Parent

The meeting focused on the Los Alamos Public Schools' GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program, particularly at the elementary level, with some discussion of secondary student feedback.

- **Secondary Student Survey Results (see slides):** The meeting included a review of results from a survey of 7th-12th grade students who had been in elementary GATE programs.
 - o A high response rate (29%) was noted, with responses evenly distributed across grade levels.

- o Students' feedback highlighted growth in **academic achievement, critical thinking, SEL, interpersonal connections**, creative projects, real-world applications, and consistent support from dedicated GATE teachers.
- o Students highlighted the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, particularly communication and self-advocacy, in addition to academic benefits.
- o Parents and staff shared observations about the positive impact of the GATE program on students' social-emotional development and critical thinking skills.

Presentation on the use of CogAT Data for Differentiation

- o The original Differentiated Instruction Report is about **50 pages long**, offering **detailed insights** into each student's strengths and areas for support. Teachers found the information valuable but overwhelming in its raw form.
- o In response, the team sought ways to **simplify and enhance usability** while continuing to provide depth when needed.
- o The instructional team identified **nine "stanines"** based on student CogAT scores (quantitative, verbal, and non-verbal sections).
- o Students were grouped (e.g., Group 1–4) to reflect **working memory capacity, independence, and learning needs**:
 - o **Group 1**: Need the most support; struggle with holding and processing multiple pieces of information.
 - o **Group 4 (Stanine 9)**: Highly independent learners with exceptional abilities in certain areas. Gifted students typically scored in Stanine 9
- o A **color-coded class chart** was created for teachers, showing:
 - o Each student's overall group placement.
 - o Specific strengths/weaknesses in verbal, quantitative, or non-verbal areas.
 - o Example: A student in Group 3 with high quantitative skills may benefit from Group 4-level math instruction.
 - o This chart allows **quick reference for instructional grouping** and communication across classrooms.
 - o The full report is still available for **in-depth planning**.
 - o Teachers received a guide detailing **scaffolding techniques** tailored to each group:
 - **Groups 1 & 2**: Need structured support, visuals, and help reducing working memory load.
 - **Groups 3 & 4**: Thrive with **independent exploration, collaboration, and challenge-based tasks**.
 - Focus is on **fostering independence and perseverance**, especially in higher groups where learners are encouraged to **embrace struggle and push through difficulty**.
 - o As students begin more **independent study** and engage with deeper content, tasks become more challenging.
 - o Teachers aim to **normalize frustration** as part of the learning process and support students in **developing perseverance**.

- o Emphasis is placed on the idea that **struggle leads to growth** and should be embraced rather than avoided.

In response to parent questions, the Coordinator responded that the CogAT is valid for students **K–12**, though our district primarily uses it for 3rd grade. While **third grade and up** can be tested using the district’s current CogAT purchase (digital format), **K–2 testing is paper-based** and not currently available. If a **new student enters the district in grades 4–12** and hasn’t been tested, they can still be screened using an available seat. The district has used CogAT in **middle school** as well.

The differentiated instruction form is shared with both general and special education teachers. It uses CogAT scores to offer strategies that support all learners, including twice-exceptional students.

Elementary GATE Program (see slides):

Elementary GATE teachers presented on how they differentiate classroom instruction for students.

- Services are provided **not just to GATE-identified students**, but to **any student needing academic challenge**.
- Instruction is **flexible, small group, and differentiated** by grade level, school, and teacher needs.

Math Differentiation

- **Flexible grouping** and **curriculum compacting** are common approaches.
- Use of **Beast Academy** (grades 1–5), which aligns with classroom curriculum:
 - o Students may **skip routine work** and engage with Beast Academy for enrichment.
 - o Teachers follow up with **related, more advanced topics** (e.g., exponents during a multiplication unit).
- **Open Middle Math** is also used, especially for **1st and 2nd graders**.

ELA (English Language Arts) Differentiation

- GATE teachers work with **K–3 students** on deeper literacy skills:
 - o **Reading, writing, vocabulary, comprehension strategies**.
- A shared resource of **extended lesson plans** enriches the district curriculum.
- Emphasis is on **mirroring classroom content**, but with greater **depth and complexity**.

PETS Program (Primary Education Thinking Skills)

- Used with **K–3 students**, PETS develops **critical and creative thinking** via:
 - o **Bloom’s Taxonomy** framework

- Characters tied to different thinking types:
 - **Convergent Thinking:** Comparing, analyzing
 - **Divergent Thinking:** Generating unique ideas
 - **Visual-Spatial Thinking:** Solving with non-traditional reasoning
 - **Evaluative Thinking:** Judging with evidence
- Students create **memory triggers** and engage in **progressively complex activities**.
- Benefits:
 - Highly engaging
 - Students retain concepts over years
 - Reinforces the idea that **intelligence is multifaceted**

An Overview of Current GATE Services was provided by Elementary GATE Teachers

K–5 Services: Weekly intervention and differentiation sessions, including flexible small groups for math and ELA.

- **Math Differentiation:** Includes push-in instruction, curriculum compacting, and use of programs like *Beast Academy* and *Open Middle Math*.
- **ELA Differentiation:** Focus on vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing, and extending classroom instruction using collaboratively developed lesson plans

PETS Program (Primary Education Thinking Skills)

- Emphasis on **early enrichment (K–3)** before universal screening in third grade.
- Teachers observe students over time for evaluation of creativity and critical thinking.
- Push-in support helps **identify underserved populations**, aligning with **New Mexico PED guidance** noting young students are often under-identified.
- Used for **K–3 students**, it enhances **critical and creative thinking** aligned with **Bloom’s Taxonomy**.
- Includes types of thinking like **convergent, divergent, visual-spatial, and evaluative thinking**, represented by memorable characters like *Sybil the Scientist* and *Max the Magician*.
- Activities include memory triggers and hands-on complex problem-solving.
- Students learn that there are **many ways to be smart**.

GATE Pull-Out Programs in Grades 4-6

- Teachers use **overarching concepts or themes** (e.g., power, change) to integrate multiple content areas like math, science, self-advocacy, and leadership.
- Students develop **personal GATE goals** and reflect on them through the year.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

- **Hands-on collaborative projects** are aligned with grade-level curriculum and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) skills.

- o Examples:
 - *Water filtration* tied to the novel *A Long Walk to Water*
 - *Mayan civilization models* for history
 - *Taco Trucks* project for math with real-world decimal use
 - *Complex machine building* in 4th grade
- Emphasis on **collaboration, negotiation, and communication** skills.
 - o For example, some PBL activities were brought back into the general education classroom, allowing all students, including Talent Pool students, to participate. This initiative also emphasized the development of collaboration, negotiation, and communication skills across a broader student group.

Competitions & Extended STEAM Projects

- Students participate in activities like:
 - o **Electric car design competitions**
 - o **Odyssey of the Mind**
 - o **National History Day**
- **STEAM activities** (lava lamps, tangrams, robotics, Lego building, robotic mice) are used in full-class settings to build **higher-order thinking** and **mentor relationships**.

Parents comments fell into the following areas:

- **Emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Parents highlighted the importance of SEL within the GATE program. They specifically mentioned the value of improved communication and self-advocacy skills. A parent shared her positive experience with the program for her third-grade child with an IEP. She highlighted the abruptness of previous changes and emphasized that the program has been a "saving grace" for her daughter, motivating her to attend school. She stressed the need for students to know the program schedule week-to-week for predictability. She underscored the critical role of social-emotional learning for differently-abled students, arguing that while they may be academically gifted, they need explicit instruction in social skills.
- **Safe and Supportive Environment:** Parents shared that the GATE program provides a safe and comfortable environment where students can express their needs and differences, and connect with like-minded peers.
- **Push-In vs. Pull-out Support:**
 - Parents voiced strong support for the **pull-out model**, citing its benefits for social-emotional learning (SEL), focused academic challenges, and peer connections.
 - Concerns were raised that increasing **push-in services** could stretch GATE teachers too thin and diminish the quality and consistency of support.
 - The district clarified that **pull-out services have not been eliminated**, and staffing is done based on projected student numbers rather than strict caseloads.
 - The pull-out aspect of the elementary GATE program was seen as beneficial, allowing students to feel comfortable and receive attention from both teachers and peers. There appeared to be concern that the pull-out program was being discontinued at the

elementary level. There was a misunderstanding at some schools about when Pull-out services would begin. GATE teachers have been pushing into 3rd grade classrooms to serve both identified and unidentified gifted students. Since the screening was done in the fall this year, some teachers began delivering the fourth grade model in February. Given the large numbers of eligible 3rd graders (30% of enrollment), this created a disruption to the classroom schedules. Scheduling of pull-outs as appropriate can be done at the beginning of the school year when students begin fourth grade when master schedules are developed.

- **Preparation for Academic Challenge:** Parents appreciated how the GATE program, especially at the elementary level, focuses on SEL, which they believe prepares students to handle the academic rigor of middle and high school. A parent commented that academic challenge is important for these students to practice dealing with frustration, not just for competitions.
- **Appreciation for K-3 Support:** One parent specifically acknowledged and appreciated the GATE program's focus and time spent in K-3, recognizing that this age group is often underserved in gifted education.
- **Suggestion for Pre-K Support:** The same parent also suggested considering support for gifted children in pre-K classrooms. The preschool programs are funded through a separate grant so these students do not receive K-12 services.
- **Concerns about the Middle School Program:** Parents brought up concerns about the middle school program noting that it is different from the elementary program. Presentations on the middle and high school programs are planned for the third meeting, where parent input will also be gathered.

Closing

- The meeting concluded with thanks to the attendees for their time and input, and appreciation for the GATE teachers' work in differentiating instruction.
- The district acknowledged the importance of both **academic challenge and SEL support**.
- They committed to reviewing reports of abrupt changes to services.
- They reassured families that **individual needs will continue to be considered through IEP meetings**, and that the model remains **a combination of push-in and pull-out**.
- Meeting minutes and slides will be sent out to parents. Parents are encouraged to email with further comments and concerns.
- Parents were encouraged to attend the next meeting on **May 8** to discuss secondary program improvements and share further input.