

Tyrone Area School District Gifted Program

Vision

We believe that our best chance to provide instruction that challenges all students to perform at individual levels of excellence will come from cultivating the common ground between gifted education and general education.

- Students are enrolled in rigorous courses that reflect authentic and genuine advancement.
- Students are active, thinking participants in the world around them.
- Students are exposed to ideas that challenge and affirm their own beliefs.
- Students engage in thinking and activities at a level that challenges and expands their limits.
- Coursework and activities focus mainly on the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, while always reinforcing and assessing the basics.
- Learning activities reach across curricula and subject areas to allow students to make meaningful connections in their learning.
- Students encounter a wide range of reading, writing, and speaking activities similar to those they will encounter after high school.
- Classes are taught in an environment that encourages expression, creativity, discussion, and debate.

Mission

1. To integrate gifted education into the total school program through service options that are flexible, dynamic, and inclusive.
2. To create a learning environment that values and nurtures intellectual ability, creativity, and decision making by providing an array of service options which supports individual growth at varying levels of abilities, needs, and interests.
3. To develop an identification procedure using multiple criteria to appraise student need for differentiated services and the kind of services needed.
4. To provide a comprehensive staff development program to enable teachers to more appropriately serve the needs of advanced learners.
5. To involve parents and other community members in the effort to enrich and extend the learning opportunities for advanced learners inside and outside the school.

6. To differentiate and enrich the core curriculum to challenge the advanced learner. We endorse the following working definition of differentiation (Carol Tomlinson, 1995): "...consistently using a variety of instructional approaches to modify content, process, and/or products in response to learning readiness and interest of academically diverse students."
7. To provide opportunities for acceleration to allow high ability students to move through material at the pace appropriate for their abilities.
8. To use flexible grouping options to give advanced learners peer support and chances to work together without separating them from the rest of their classmates.
9. To progress-monitor student growth as a means of both student and district accountability.
10. To encourage collaboration among teachers in the same and different schools through flexible schedules, staff development, and administrative support.

Referring a Student

In Tyrone Area School District, students can be referred for potential gifted identification in three ways – by teacher/staff, by parent/guardian, by district testing.

If a teacher/staff member or parent/guardian observes characteristics and/or academic/intellectual traits that lead them to believe a student may potentially be gifted, they can contact the Coordinator of Gifted Services (CGS), the child's teacher or school counselor, the building principal, the district's Special Education Director, and/or the district's School Psychologist. If they do not contact the GGS directly, the information from the referring party will be forwarded to the CGS.

Each November the CogAt is used as a Child Find measure of all 2nd grade students. A committee comprised of the CGS, Special Education Director, School Psychologist, Elementary and Middle School Principals, and selected teachers review the results of that cognitive ability test (K-Bit2), along with all assessment data given at the beginning of the year through the mid-year point. Beginning, middle, and end of year assessments may include, but are not limited to: Acadience (DIBELS) Math and Reading, iReady diagnostic and benchmarks, Direct Reading Assessment (for all K students and select students 1-4), DAZE, writing sample, phonological awareness and phonics screeners, letters/sounds/sight words, IXL screener, PSSA longitudinal scores, and reading and math series content specific unit tests, summative test average (in lieu of overall grade in the class). Specific to potentially gifted students, the committee looks for students who are showing skills and knowledge beyond their grade level benchmarks, as well as students whose progress from beginning of the year assessments to mid-year assessments shows an ability to learn large amounts of material to a mastery level and at a pace that exceeds the grade level pacing. Depending on the data, students may be out-of-level tested in content areas to see how far beyond their grade level they are able to achieve.

Additionally, results of district testing at any level, including benchmarking, progress monitoring, classroom assessments, and diagnostics can also result in a student being referred for potential gifted identification. Assessment results are shared with the CGS at data team meetings held three times a year at the K-8th grade level.

Screening and Evaluation

Once a referral of any kind is made, the CGS begins the district's process for identifying potentially gifted students.

- 1) Within 10 days of referral, the Coordinator of Gifted Services (CGS) contacts the parents to explain the screening and evaluation process, and if not referred by the parents, the reason for referral.

If the parents have not requested the referral and decline the student's participation, a waiver stating the reasons for the referral and the parent's decision to not move forward with the process is sent home for the parent's signature.

- 2) A parent input form is sent home to gather the parents' observations about developmental milestones, their concerns and goals for their child, and anecdotal information about their child's thinking.
- 3) A teacher input form is sent to every teacher who teaches the child. If the referral is prior to the first semester, the child's previous year content area teachers also receive a form. The form used is a Performance and Ability Indication Scale (adapted from Gifted Rating Scales by Pfeiffer and Jarosewich). This asks the teachers to rank the student as normed to the Top 1%, Top 10%, Top 25%, Top 50% of all the students they have taught in three areas: Intellectual, Academic, and Motivation.
- 4) The GCS meets with the student and explains the purpose of the screening tool to assuage any concerns the student may have before administering the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test - 2nd ed. (K-Bit2). If the student appears apprehensive, the administration is delayed until a parent can be contacted.
- 5) When all screening data has been collected, the GCS summarizes the findings, shares the information with the parent/guardian, and describes the next step in the process: *Gifted Multidisciplinary Evaluation*. Given the information, parents/guardians may choose to rescind, in writing, their referral.
- 6) The School Psychologist's office sends home a *Permission to Evaluate*.

Gifted Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation

Once the *Permission to Evaluate* is signed and returned, the 60 day timeline to complete a *Gifted Multidisciplinary Evaluation (GMDE)* begins. The School Psychologist administers a comprehensive battery of assessments, including individual achievement and cognitive assessments, to assess students via nationally normed, standardized assessments. Our School

Psychologist uses the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test | Fourth Edition (WIAT-4) and the WISC-V Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Fifth Ed. She also uses the Gifted Rating Scales (standardized rating scales).

- 7) The GMDE is summarized by the School Psychologist, who issues a *Gifted Written Report*. This report contains input from the GCS, the regular education teacher, the parents/guardians, assessment data, and the results of a full psychological battery. If there is evidence that the student may need Specially Designed Instruction to achieve at least a year's worth of growth from their start point and/or displays cognitive, affective, or behavioral gifted characteristics, the student is identified as gifted and all participants are invited to participate in the development of a *Gifted Individual Education Plan (GIEP)*, using academic strengths and instructional levels shown in the report.
- 8) Once the GIEP has been drafted, reviewed, and accepted by all parties, a *Notice of Recommended Assignment (NORA)* is signed and implemented within five days (if the meeting was in-person, otherwise within ten days).
- 9) If the *Gifted Written Report* does not show evidence of meeting the PA definition of giftedness, the GCS discusses any necessary steps to meet the student's needs in the classroom (regardless of identification).
- 10) All steps of the process, and dates completed are tracked by the School Psychologist and GCS.

A note about equity of identification –

Because different factors can mask giftedness, special consideration is given to the district's EL, minority, low socio-economic, and SPED population in regard to screening and identification. These populations may require testing accommodations, re-testing in the event appropriate accommodations were not provided at the time of district academic testing, classroom observation by the CGS, translated materials, multiple testing sessions, and/or any other provision necessary to get an accurate, unbiased look at the student's needs.

Services

TASD is committed to providing gifted education services that are designed and implemented in order for gifted students to demonstrate growth and progress. We believe that gifted programming must be integrated into the regular school program so that there is challenge throughout the school day, not just during a few hours a week.

To best serve our gifted students, our district:

- Provides an appropriately differentiated instructional program responsive to student ability and learning needs.
- Assists students in achieving maximum use of potential to achieve personal success.
- Provides a continuum of program service options.
- Addresses the social and emotional needs of diverse gifted students.
- Supports an educational environment that challenges gifted learners and enables students to perform at levels of excellence.
- Facilitates the development of self-directed learners.

All students who are identified as gifted are assigned to a gifted support case manager. This professional educator is trained by the CGS, attends state-approved trainings at our Intermediate Unit (or others, if not offered at ours), and attends the Gifted Network meetings at our IU when possible. The gifted support teacher is responsible for working with GIEP team to annually (and as needed) review and revise GIEP, collaborate with regular education teacher(s), arrange career exploration (High School) with local businesses, and be an advocate for the students' needs.

At all grade levels, GIEP goals are written to the PA standards at the students' instructional levels, with measurable progress objectives. Gifted services are all integrated into a student's classes/coursework and school day, unless the GIEP team determines that pull-out enrichment is necessary to meet the student's needs (this is rare).

In grades K-6, all gifted students are cluster-grouped for content area classes with students who are either identified as being gifted with strengths in that area or non-identified peers who demonstrate significant strengths, similar retention and acquisition rates, and high motivation to learn. Within those classes and groups, students are taught skills, concepts, and knowledge that is aligned to the same learning outcome as other groups but at a higher grade level or standard. Beyond this differentiation, gifted students' Specially Designed Instruction is individualized to the student. Examples of SDI previously used with students include unit/skill/topic pre-testing to compact curriculum, blended learning, or independent/paired inquiry-based learning projects to allow a student to dive deeper into a topic or skill when they can demonstrate skills/knowledge at their instructional level, individualized direct instruction specific to gaps resulting from acceleration, and reduction of practice when mastery is demonstrated.

In grades 7-12, gifted students are served much the same as in grades K-6, with the primary differences being the career exploration (beyond the state-required artifact completion), being grouped for their advisory class (with the gifted support teacher in grades 9-12), and focused long-term schedule mapping to ensure time in the late high school years is available for Dual Enrollment (DE), Concurrent Enrollment (CE), and online advanced coursework. The GIEP is not written to dictate curriculum or scope and sequence options, as Honors, DE, CE, and online advanced coursework are available to all students. Neither does the GIEP team overrule requirements to permit a gifted student to be scheduled into a course they have not met the requirements for; however, if a gifted student is not demonstrating expected academic performance and/or motivation, the GIEP team explores root causes and may refer the student for intervening services. Regardless of placement in any particular course, differentiation, acceleration, and enrichment through SDI continue similarly to the K-6 grade band. Clubs, competitions, and participation in special events/activities are offered to all students, regardless of identification.

Professional Development

Annually, training about gifted students, the district philosophy, services, and framework for all professional teaching staff and paraprofessionals. This training includes a focus on differentiation in product, process, and content as well as the equalizer metaphor developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson. Conceptual understanding, critical thinking, high-level questioning by students, problem-solving, stimulating intellectual curiosity, and synthesis of information are all emphasized. Misconceptions, myths, and unacceptable practices are also explored and explained.

Public Notification

In order to inform the public about identification process and the continuum of gifted services to meet identified students' needs, we offer the following public notices:

- A section on our district website under Student Services that narratively describes the purpose and philosophy of gifted education, the use of differentiation, and the screening process. This will be updated upon completion and acceptance of the Gifted Assurances Report. The Notice of Parental Rights is also provided. In 2022, the contact information for the district Coordinator of Gifted Education, the anecdote "Is it a Cheetah?" and a chart comparing the difference between the characteristics of a gifted student versus a high-achieving student was added. We have also posted the PDE Gifted Guidelines (2014 version) and the PDE FAQ about Gifted Services.
- Each year the budget is publicized, including a line item for gifted education.
- Each year information about Chpt. 16, the district philosophy, and the purpose, identification, and services for gifted students is in each building's Student/Parent Handbook. This information is reviewed annually by the Coordinator of Gifted Services to maintain accuracy.
- A letter is sent home to parents of 2nd grade students prior to administration of the CogAt test, which the district uses as a Child Find measure.