
Gifted & Talented Education

NEWS



December 2009

Hello Parents

As you may have read in the newspaper last year or heard me mention at past parent meetings, the GATE department is implementing many goals.

1) Increase identification

Not all parents are aware of TUSD's gifted testing opportunities and services. To help alleviate this we mailed a testing invitation postcard to all parents of K-8 students. This has resulted in approximate increases of 6% in K-5 requests and 194% in grades 6-8 requests. Next year we will improve our communication with parents of current GATE students who do not need to retest but who may want to test again. We also continued from last year our opt-out testing recruitment of high achieving students whose parents may not have had a chance to return the postcard invitation. We also piloted total grade level screenings of kinder, 1st, 5th, and 8th grade students. Altogether, by the end of January, we will have screened/tested over 20,000 students.

2) Explore assessment options

Thank you to all that participated in the NNAT2 pilot testing. Over 1400 students participated in an attempt to determine if the NNAT2 helped identify underrepresented students. According to the Accountability and Research department, the NNAT2 tended to identify fewer students as gifted. As a result, we are continuing the use of the Raven Progressive Matrices test. As a department, we will continue to pursue reliable and valid gifted assessment options that can be implemented within the scope of our current budget.

3) Provide classroom curriculum tools and student extensions

Using state grant monies earmarked for gifted programs, the GATE department created 4 thematic literacy kits for grades 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th that include dozens of information book titles and class sets of books at, below, and above reading grade levels. Examples include 1st grade - Life Cycles: New Plants; 2nd grade - Air and Weather; 3rd grade - Exploration; 4th grade - Electrical Circuits; and 5th grade - American Revolution. Self-contained teachers and traditional classroom teachers participating in the gifted endorsement initiative have reported an increase in achievement and motivation as students devour the materials. Staff will be meeting on December 8 to discuss possible curriculum kits for middle-school.

Another initiative is the coordinated efforts of our pull-out GATE teacher staff, who provide service to all elementary schools, a menu of options for students wanting to continue their learning outside of pull-out class time. We hope all GATE pull-out students take the time to try the options provided with each unit of study. Not only will students benefit academically, but the options will also help prepare students for middle-school projects and expectations.

4) Increase professional development and mentoring

Beginning last school year, the GATE department is continuing to provide GATE staff with workshops, articulation, and mentoring opportunities to improve services, curriculum, and instruction. Specifically, the department is beginning its third cohort of teachers in the Spring seeking their gifted endorsement. This means that by the end of spring 2010, about 30 teachers will have obtained the necessary 135 contact hours toward their gifted endorsement, another 30 will have 90 contact hours, and another group of 30 will have 45 contact hours. The goal is to have over 300 classroom teachers with gifted endorsements over the next five years.

5) Offer timely placement

We conducted GATE testing earlier this year to be more aligned with magnet school and open enrollment opportunities. It is my understanding that first round offers for magnet programs will be sent out by March 1. The goal is to have 1st round GATE self-contained placement offerings and open houses in time for an early March response deadline. If all goes according to plan, as a parent you will likely have the results of GATE testing and magnet school offerings when making your enrollment decisions for the 2010-11 school year.

Above is just a sample of the department's efforts to improve services. Please check back in the near future for other updates.

Sincerely,
David Niecikowski, MAED/CI, Coordinator
Gifted and Talented Education