

Kindergarten – Grade 8 Gifted Program and Standards in the Lincoln Park School District

In 1998, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) developed and released the *Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards*. NAGC recognized that the evaluation and retooling of a successful gifted program is an evolutionary process. The standards provide a framework for this process. In 2005 New Jersey adopted these standards as part of NJAC 6A:8 challenging school districts to reexamine their current programming and make changes where necessary. The Lincoln Park School District took steps to begin the process and the current changes to the gifted and talented education program, reflect that process. The program will now be called the “Academic and Cultural Curriculum for Exceptional Student Scholars” or “ACCESS.” This new title reflects the change in curriculum and focus for the program.

The following guide is information regarding how those standards are being addressed in the current program.

Meeting the Standards

1. *A comprehensive and cohesive process for student nomination must be coordinated in order to determine eligibility for gifted education services.*

The Lincoln Park School District’s nomination process is multifaceted. The first step in the process is providing in-service training to the teachers in district emphasizing the differences between “gifted” students and “bright” students. Teachers are also trained in the process of identification and nomination of students, which helps them to see beyond academic strength to see indicators of superior ability in many areas of development.

A matrix/profile of individual strength and need is developed and is composed of:

- a teacher recommendation
- report card grades for one school year
- standardized achievement test scores
- a parent nomination that includes a section which addresses the gifted learners interests, learning style and needs
- IQ score

Students who meet the cut off score on the matrix are tested to determine that their skills are at least one year above their chronological age. Students who score in this range are invited to attend the program.

2. *Instruments used for student assessment to determine eligibility for gifted education services must measure diverse abilities, talents strengths, and needs in order to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate any strengths.*

The Lincoln Park School District uses instruments that measure diverse abilities, talents strengths and needs. These measures are used to determine if a student is functioning at least one year above his/her peers. A combination of standardized tests, criterion referenced tests and IQ are used.

3. *The development of appropriate gifted education programming requires comprehensive services based on sound philosophical, theoretical and empirical support.*

A continuum of programming is available to gifted students in Lincoln Park. The Academic and Cultural Curriculum for Exceptional Student Scholars (ACCESS) is designed to meet the needs of students in grades K through 8. It is part of the regular educational school day. Group size is small and programming is designed to build on basic academic skills and knowledge learned in the classroom.

4. *Gifted education services must include curricular and instructional opportunities directed to the unique needs of the gifted learner.*

Gifted students need instruction that responds to their extra curiosity, to their urgency for meaning, to their advanced vocabularies, to their interest in complexity, to their fast comprehensions, to their vast memories. Gifted children need choice-- individualized and self-regulating experiences that are appropriate to their self-motivated independence. They need higher-order thinking activities that give their abstract minds a workout. They need advanced levels of subject matter because they can learn them and short instructions because they will understand them immediately and quick paces through difficult material because they don't need many things repeated. Gifted kids do need research; they don't need workbooks and games. They do need a variety of learning experiences; they don't need just more amounts of the problems in the textbook (NGAC, 2000).

All students do not need these kinds of differentiation. Gifted kids do. Gifted children need instruction and programming that would defeat and obstruct many other students. The language of differentiation, in gifted research, features terms such as "choice, rigor, complexity, depth, individualization and faster pace."

These are critical concepts. Lincoln Park is beginning a program that is more rigorous than programs past. It is striving to present topics with complexity at a faster pace. Is it the "keep them having fun" approach? No. Can our best and brightest rise to the occasion? Definitely.

5. *Gifted learners are entitled to be served by professionals who have specialized preparation in gifted education, expertise in appropriate differentiated content and instructional methods, involvement in ongoing professional development and who possess exemplary personal and professional gifts.*

The Lincoln Park School District provides staff with professional development in identification of gifted students, curriculum development for gifted students and other training opportunities both within the district and outside of the district. Our ACCESS teachers are part of the Morris County Gifted and Talented Consortium, which provides training, and networking and sponsors several activities throughout the school year. We believe that our ACCESS teachers have exceptional expertise in all subject areas and possess "exemplary personal and professional gifts."

6. *Program evaluation includes the systematic study of the value and impact of services provided.*

The current gifted and talented program in the Lincoln Park School District has undergone evaluation by a parent/teacher advisory committee. The committee met monthly for two years to study the then HEP

program, and to make suggestions for its improvement and compliance to current state code. It took into account the various facets of the process and helped to improve the program, which we now provide.

Researchers have found that 10% to 15% or more of any schools population can be labeled as gifted and talented (Bruce, 2000). These students are capable of high performance in general intellectual aptitude, academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability. If our best and brightest students are not appropriately challenged than we will have failed them. Our program in Lincoln Park will not rely solely on games and competitions but will provide gifted students with a rigorous education that will be challenging and engaging with an eye towards developing global citizens.