An Evaluation of the State College Area School District Learning Enrichment/Gifted Services Program

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Background and Introduction

At the request of Dr. Robert O’Donnell, Superintendent, and Mrs. Jeanne Knouse, Director, Learning Enrichment/Gifted Support Program and Student Services, Dr. Catherine Brighton, Associate Professor at the University of Virginia, and Dr. Jessica Hockett, independent consultant, conducted an evaluation of the Learning Enrichment/Gifted Services Program in the State College Area School District. Drs. Brighton & Hockett (hereafter “we”) represent expertise in differentiated instruction, gifted education, curriculum design, professional development, and evaluation.

This evaluation assesses the status of the Learning Enrichment and Gifted Services (LE/GS) Program for the purposes of program documentation and to suggest areas of focus for program development and enhancement.

The Evaluation Process and Data Sources

This evaluation was guided by the overarching question, “To what degree are advanced learners’ academic needs met by SCASD LE/GS programs and services and the general education classroom?” School cancellations interfered with our plan to conduct as wide range of classroom observations as we had planned toward answering the “general education classroom” aspect of this question. However, we were still able to conduct 61 observations, mostly in shorter durations, in our one-day visit.

A list and brief descriptions of quantitative and qualitative data that we reviewed, collected and analyzed for this evaluation follows:

1. General Education and LE/GS Program Documentation Review. We reviewed a range of documents related to the general education and LE/GS Programs, provided by LE/GS staff. Some of these documents were provided in advance of our site visits, others during our site visit, and others upon request as we analyzed other data following our site visit.
SCASD General

- SCASD District Demographic Data
- District Performance Data (SCASD District Profile Brochure; SCASD District Report Card 2008-09; 2009-10; 2010-11; 2011-12)
- State College High School College Planning Guide (2013)
- Counseling/Testing and Preparation: Measures of Academic Progress MAP FAQs; NWEA Parent Toolkit; Classroom Diagnostic Tools: Information for Educators, Parents or Guardians; Classroom Diagnostic Tools; Pennsylvania High School Graduation Requirements; Information for Parents or Guardians, Pennsylvania Keystone Exams; ACT; Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery; Advanced Placement Testing; General Education Development Test; PSAT/NMSQT; SAT; Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

LE/GS Program

- PA DOE Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students General Provisions, Gifted Guidelines (August 2010; pp 1-46)
- SCASD Policy Documents (Section: Programs; Title: Learning Enrichment/Gifted Education; Adopted August 19, 2013; pp. 1-3);
- LE/GS Program Descriptions and Web Content (all levels)
- SCASD Gifted Program Paperwork, including Mathematical Disposition Definitions; GIFTED paperwork timeline; Gifted Process; Gifted Multidisciplinary Evaluation (GMDE)/GIEP/NORA Tracking; Student Transfers to SCASD with Current GIEP; Notice of Parental Rights for Gifted Students (Revised September, 2010; 2012) Office for Dispute Resolution; Due Process Complaint Notice; Permission to Evaluate; Notice of Intent to Reevaluate; Teacher Gifted Evaluation Report Input Form (pp. 1-3); Parent Gifted Evaluation Input Form (pp. 1-3); Notice of Recommended Assignment (NORA); Invitation to Participate in a Gifted Team Meeting; Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP; pp. 1-4)
- LE Teacher Weekly Number [of students served] Estimates (by school, grade level)
• SCASD Learning Enrichment and Special Education Gifted Program Descriptions/Handbooks (February 2, 1987; April 1991)
• SCASD Application for Experimental Program (2009-2010) and letters of approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (August 1009, August 2010, August 2011)
• LE/GS Teacher Schedules (Elementary, weekly basis, n=4; Middle school weekly basis, n=2)
• LE/GS lesson plans/curricular unit frameworks (Elementary, n=10; middle school, n=18)
• Middle School Learning Enrichment Plan contracts (n=4)
• High School Independent Study Contract examples (n=3)
• Lists of example Independent Study offerings in 9 topical areas offered through LE taught by State High faculty
• List of example titles of Independent Study Contracts and associated high school credits allocated across 4 academic years (2010-11; 2011-12; 2012-13; 2013-14)
• Petition for high school credit for Penn State courses application (n=1)
• Advanced Option contract (n=1) Spring, 2013
• List of example of Advanced Option contract titles and associated high school credits allocated across 3 academic years (2011-12 through 2013-14)
• History of Chinese studies at SCAHS over 5 academic years (2009-10 through 2013-14) and Level 2 Chinese syllabus (spring, 2014)
• Unique Case, ARTsmART (n=1) Fall, 2013
• Senior LE student reflections (n=21) December, 2013
• Senior Graduation Project reports from LE Students (n=2) June, 2011; June 2013
• LE grades 9-10 student contracts (n=6); LE grades 11-12 student contracts (n=6); ARTsmART grade 9-12 student contracts (n=7); Monthly student LE-OUT logs (n=8)
• LE/GS ARTsmART newsletters (n=6)

2. **Teacher Survey (Online).** We designed a survey for administration to all K-12 core area general education teachers (n=300). The survey included a variety of item types (e.g., Likert-type, open-ended) and solicited feedback on comfort level with and strategies for discovering and addressing student needs; their approaches for planning curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and perceptions of the LE/GS Program. The response rate was 42% (n=125). Relevant survey results are integrated with findings and recommendations later in this report. The survey and descriptive quantitative results is also appended (Appendix D).

3. **Discussions with SCASD general program and LE/GS program administrators and staff.** Over the course of our site visit, we met with elementary, middle, and high school LE/GS faculty, high school administrators and department chairs, and LE/GS
program directors (current and former) to better understand the historical and current aspects of the program, current faculty members’ perceptions about the program and services offered. These conversations occurred during five meetings (2 breakfast, 2 lunch, and 1 dinner) in small- and large-group formats.

4. **Meeting with SCASD Curriculum Director.** Ninety-minute meeting with SCASD Curriculum Director to discuss historical trends in curriculum revisions, current initiatives to revise curriculum, and other curricular-related efforts.

5. **School site visits.** On the day classes were canceled, we visited 1 elementary building. No students were in attendance but we were able to visit classrooms to observe student displays and talk informally with the building principal. We also observed student displays and met with one middle school teacher in her classroom prior to Parent Advisory/Strategic Planning meeting. (School was not in session.)

6. **Parent Advisory/Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Observation.** On February 2, 2014, we observed and outlined comments arising from 90-minute meeting of K-12 stakeholders. Topics included parent perceptions of the LE/GS program, general thoughts about services for students (mostly offered by parents about their own children), the role of testing and identification for services, and the advocacy role of counselors in the LE/GS program.

7. **Lesson observation walk-throughs.** We conducted observation walk-through visits in 5 elementary schools and 2 middle schools. Altogether, we visited 61 academic classes (42 elementary, 11 middle school), one middle school LE/GS Support class; one middle school technical education laboratory/workshop, five middle school Area classes, and one LE/GS Support class at the high school. Most visits lasted between 5-15 minutes, with several observations extending beyond 20 minutes. While not generalizable to all SCASD general education or LE/GS classrooms, these visits provided contextual information to supplement the other program data provided for this evaluation. We focused on observations on capturing the essence of the lesson goals/focus and activities that were, had, or would occur in the lesson. During the classroom visits, we engaged students and teachers in conversations, as appropriate, and collected other artifacts of lesson implementation and classroom environments (e.g., handouts, photos of bulletin boards).

The evaluation process was open, with full discussions of issues. We were allowed access to any materials requested, and were allowed to speak with any individuals and to visit any sites requested.
Data Analysis

Dr. Brighton and Dr. Hockett gathered her own data. Throughout the process, we compared findings, distinguished emerging themes, and identified particular areas that warranted special attention or focus for the purposes of clarifying and evaluating the LE/GS program design and implementation. Following data collection, we used these data to identify and compile patterns based upon selected categories from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) 2001 program standards outlined below.

All identified areas of strength, opportunities for growth, and recommendations are based on congruent findings yielded by the analyses of all data sources. In cases where discrepant findings did not allow for clear conclusions, those discrepancies are noted. Terms such as “a number of,” “most,” “many,” and “few” are used to denote patterns that are supported by instances within and across data points.

Findings are presented at the District level, unless otherwise noted as specific to elementary, middle, or high school. Generalizations reflect only the documents we reviewed, classrooms we observed, survey data we analyzed, and stakeholders we interacted with as a part of this evaluation: they cannot be generalized to the District or to individual grade-levels or schools. It is important to note that this report is not a personnel evaluation—it is a program evaluation. All findings speak to and result from an evaluation of the program, not of individuals.

Organization of this Report

The Findings of this evaluation are organized into six areas that are closely related to the National Association for Gifted Children Programming Standards (2001):

- Program Philosophy, Definitions, & Rationale
- Program Design
- General Education and LE/GS Program Curricula & Instruction
- Program Interface with General Education
- Identifying & Selecting Students for Program Services
- Program Evaluation

Within each component, we summarize Commendations and present Opportunities for Growth. Because these components are interdependent, some themes emerge more than once, albeit through the lenses of different components.

These are followed by a Summary and specific Recommendations intended to guide future program development and implementation.

The report concludes with Appendices and a file of Resources.
Commendations

1. **Adoption of a more progressive and expanded understanding of intelligence.** The LE/GS program reflects a more progressive approach to considering gifted and talented students than is established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Chapter 16 which relies heavily upon the IQ score. Acknowledgment that students may exhibit advanced abilities beyond standardized test scores is consistent with more contemporary beliefs and research in the field of gifted education.

2. **Inclusive approach to considering giftedness and talent in broad spectrum of SCASD student populations.** Many specific actions are taken to ensure that all students benefit from LE/GS personnel and activities, particularly at the elementary level with Type I enrichment experiences. This approach suggests an inclusive philosophy and broadened definition of giftedness suitable to the university community and overall high-achieving student population of the district.

3. **Dispersed support responsibilities for LE/GS across district personnel.** Program materials specifically outline how personnel across the district (from Board of Directors, Superintendent through LE/GS specialists) are tasked with supporting and serving gifted students. This list of roles and responsibilities spans governance board, administrative leaders, psychological service providers, curriculum specialists, and LE/GS teaching personnel. Explicitly articulating the multi-level program support responsibilities implies a “village” approach to serving these students. (General education teachers, however, are not included among this list.)

Opportunities for Growth

1. **Citing “student needs” as a rationale for the design and existence of programming, services, and curricular focus.** A recurring idea in program documents and among stakeholders was that of the “needs” of gifted students. Despite apparent tacit agreement about the nature and existence of such “needs,” and what these needs are, it is not clear how these needs have been determined, from what research-based or theoretical constructs they are derived, and how they inform program design. In some cases, it appears that characteristics (of which there is no common, agreed-upon list among experts in gifted education) are being confused with needs. District beliefs about how and whether “needs” of gifted students compare to needs of other students is not apparent in program documents. Particularly at the high school level, the interests of students in the LE/GS Program are interpreted as needs, with little or no criteria for which or what kinds of interests are important for the school or teachers to accommodate. Program documents and responses from teachers and administrators also leave the impression that interests of
students in the LE/GS Program are prioritized or privileged over the interests of students not in the program. Similarly, commendable skill in certain areas (e.g., playing the piano, drawing) is being confused with high talent in those areas. While students’ “needs” were cited as a rationale for many aspects of the LE program, in practice, it appears that adults’ (i.e., teachers, parents) needs, interests, and values influence some program components and curricula.

2. Varied, conflicting, and unclear definitions of giftedness. The District’s definition and philosophy of giftedness is unclear. Scores on individually- and group-administered tests are being conflated with or as a definition of gifted (e.g., gifted is a 130+ IQ score, gifted is scoring in the 98th percentile on an achievement test). Pennsylvania State Guidelines define “mental giftedness” as “Outstanding intellectual and creative ability the development of which requires specially designed programs or support services, or both, not ordinarily provided in the regular education program.” The extent to which SCASD agrees with this definition is not clear.) Program documents and district personnel also mention Howard Gardner’s theory of human intelligence (i.e., Multiple Intelligences), which is not a theory of giftedness in and of itself. (See Appendix A for a fuller explanation.) There is a tenuous connection between Gardner’s theory and the District mission, goals, and programming, as well as the connection between Gardner’s theory and the LE/GS program goals, design, curriculum, and (where applicable) identification. District documents also make reference to able learners and talented students. Although not explicitly defined in program documents, references to Renzulli’s Triad Model implies that Joseph Renzulli’s Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness (1977) is now or has been in the past a component of the program philosophy.

3. Dissonance in program ideology. Program documents state that the LE/GS Program is based on equity and excellence. This is an often-cited dichotomy in education, attributed to John W. Gardner’s book Excellence (1961) and his question, “Can we be equal and excellent too?” The tension between excellence and equity is usually framed in terms of how to balance the desire to offer the best possible educational opportunities to all students, regardless of background, without quality detracting from equitable distribution and vice versa. LE/GS Program documents take a different tact, stating the program provides equity because ALL students in the district experience LE through guest speakers, field trips, and classroom activities, and excellence for students who have interests or passions that go beyond what our curriculum offers—these students work with us to develop contracts to meet their needs. These statements interpret equity as that which all students receive and excellence as that which only some students receive. In addition, some options managed by the LE/GS program appear to distribute excellent opportunities inequitably. For example, the provision for high school students to take university classes during the school day at their families’ expense appears to privilege students with the resources to pay and/or students whose parents work at the university. (See Appendix B for specific findings regarding the high school program.)
Program Design

Commendations

1. Assimilation of multiple program models attempting to facilitate a wide variety of services and programs for students. As a result of creating a hybrid program from diverse programmatic approaches, a continuum of services is available to students. These services range from the most inclusive (e.g., whole school/grade/class enrichment experiences such as field trips, guest speakers; periodic whole class enrichment experiences such as dichotomous key “model” lessons provided for all students by the LE/GS teachers) to somewhat exclusive (e.g., short-term pull-out support programs such as book groups) to exclusive, identification-driven services (e.g., mini-course experiences, enacting grade or subject acceleration procedures).

2. Provision of program services across school bands, from K-12. Students at all school levels have access to LE/GS services, regardless of the age and grade of the student. It is especially important that students in primary grades have access to appropriately challenging and enriched learning experiences. That SCASD provides such services beginning in kindergarten and spanning through high school graduations suggest a high priority is placed on developing interests and talents throughout a child’s school career.

3. Adequate program funding from state and local fiscal resources. Documentation supports a long-standing district commitment to funding gifted education programming within SCASD. Additional funding has been allocated to ensure that shuttle services are provided for students reducing the possibility that qualified students are denied programming as a result of insufficient transportation.

Opportunities for Growth

1. Lack of clarity in and communication of program model. The LE/GS Program is difficult to describe and understand; its theoretical underpinnings and rationale are also not well-articulated. Documents reveal that the program was initially designed after Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model and Schoolwide Enrichment Models (SEM). The current program appears to be a “hybrid” of Renzulli’s models, the Purdue Three-Stage Enrichment Model, Treffinger’s Levels of Service, and Response to Intervention (RtI) with additional local modifications. Neither program documents nor interviews and conversations with stakeholders provided a lucid picture of program components. The lack of clarity about the program model is exacerbated by obtuse explanations of how the various elements of the program fit together. In essence, this hybrid model with its “multiple moving parts” make the program more complicated for stakeholders. Further, the LE/GS website and program documents are difficult to navigate and synthesize.
2. **Using LE/GS Program as an umbrella for other activities.** Many activities that would be classified in many school Districts as extra-curricular opportunities or aspects of the general education program are considered part of the LE/GS Program (i.e., called Type I or Type II enrichment). This includes field trips, speakers, short-term programs, and special events. There are obvious advantages to putting these activities under the LE/GS umbrella, among them management by dedicated staff. However, doing so also obscures what the program is and for whom or what it is intended. At the high school level, some opportunities categorized as Learning Enrichment are not overseen or run by LE/GS program staff and would likely exist even in the absence of the LE umbrella. Other services “under” LE/GS Support and ART smART should not be managed or under the umbrella of Learning Enrichment, if they are offered at all.

3. **The role of teacher interests and specialties in program design and services.** Certain aspects of the LE/GS Program appear to be driven by the interests and specialties of program staff rather than by program or curricular goals that are aligned with the general education program. This not only results in curricular experiences for students that are disconnected from their other school subjects and unrelated to their areas of academic strength, but also creates a program that is highly dependent on individual staff.

4. **Fidelity of program components derived from Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model.** The LE/GS adaptation of Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model bears little resemblance to the actual model. SCASD’s interpretation of Type II and Type III enrichment, in particular, does not reflect the model’s design and intent. The terms “Type” and “Tier” are used synonymously, when the terms do not mean the same thing (either as applied to the Enrichment Triad or in education). In addition, Type III Enrichment, the driving force of Renzulli’s model and the component that best exemplifies his conception of giftedness, is not evident LE/GS program documents or student work samples.

5. **Function and purpose of high school LE program.** At the high school level, many aspects of the Learning Enrichment Program operate as a kind of College Admissions-Readiness Program for high-achieving and highly motivated students. For students in the program, the LE teacher serves as a second counselor and formidable advocate that provides access to privileged opportunities and resources that not only those students would benefit from or should have. Much of the onus for the program appears to be on the student (student “needs”, student-initiated and student-designed endeavors) and the student’s achievements or activities apart from the program in ways that negatively effect who participates in program opportunities and the rigor of program experiences. Many LE Program options at the high school level are strongly influenced and/or driven by earning course credit or weighted credit.

6. **Equitable access to and exclusivity of high school program options.** Especially given the wide range of options and services that are organized and managed under
LE/GS at the high school level, it's unclear how parents and students are made aware of and encouraged to participate in LE options. Students who have been involved in LE since elementary or middle school are at a considerable advantage with regard to awareness of the program, and it appears the onus appears to be on the student (or parent) to initiate. The name of the program, as well as the program options being associated with "Learning Enrichment" rather than with a particular department, may be limiting program participation. Despite attempts to hold open-call meetings to make parents and students aware of LE/GS options, responses from the Strategic Planning Committee as well as other interactions with teachers and program staff indicated that there are many aspects of the LE/GS Program that parents learn about through advocacy efforts. As described in program documents and by program staff, parents, and students, the LE/GS Support program is neither an enrichment provision, nor a provision that is better-suited to students with certain academic credentials, strengths, or interests.

**General Education and LE/GS Program Curricula & Instruction**

**Commendations**

1. **On-going curriculum review cycles of general education curriculum.** Systems have been established to ensure that each disciplinary area receives critical review and reconsideration on a rotating basis. A curriculum committee consisting of K-12 representatives is working to ensure that the content area is vertically articulated across school bands and grade levels. Over the last 18 months the District has invested resources for professional development for curriculum leaders to critically explore vertically aligned disciplinary curriculum documents, particularly related to PA-CCSS. Teams have attended intensive professional development, and have begun translating those lessons learned into workable curriculum documents for the district. The current year’s energies on English/Language Arts (ELA) curriculum review has resulted in thoughtful conversations about the content and processes for teaching ELA across K-12, common writing prompts, and consistently implemented scoring rubrics for each type of writing.

2. **High level of self-efficacy among general education teachers related to serving advanced learners within the regular classroom.** In the online survey, all teachers responded that they felt very comfortable (72%) or somewhat comfortable (27%) adjusting instructional tasks to address learners’ readiness and abilities; and reported feeling very (67%) or somewhat comfortable (31%) addressing the needs of above grade level students. Fewer, but still a majority of teacher respondents noted feeling very comfortable (29%) or somewhat comfortable (56%) addressing the needs presented by exceptionally advanced students.
**Opportunities for Growth**

1. **Sufficiency of general education curriculum.** State College is a university community that clearly values and supports education. One would expect high expectations and rigorous curriculum and instruction focused on developing interest, creative productivity, and expertise in all students. By contrast, our 61 classroom observations conducted by two researchers on one day in elementary and middle school consisting of 5-15 minutes, review of curricular documents (both general education and Learning Enrichment), and interviews with stakeholders suggested a focus on low-level skills and attainment of facts, and in some cases, a focus on topics or activities tangential to curriculum or discipline-based content. Such curricula are barriers to progress not only for students with exceptional readiness or interest in a subject but also for all students regardless of readiness and interest. In general, we observed that K-8 general education curriculum is in need of revision, upgrading, and uniformity.

2. **Implementation of PA Common Core Standards.** The PA Common Core State Standards in ELA were adopted in July 2010. Yet, we saw little evidence that teachers were aware of the curricular and instructional shifts the standards require. The majority of lesson segments observed in ELA and social studies subjects did not incorporate academic vocabulary or approaches to reading and writing that were aligned with the standards. There were instances of text-based discussion or tasks divorced from meaningful questions rooted in the text itself, and content errors possibly attributable to not knowing or understanding the PA-CCSS well. We also noted inconsistent use of academic terminology between classrooms and grade levels, as well as the use of terms that contradict those in the standards. As noted in the above Commendations, the District is engaged in curriculum upgrading efforts; such efforts are likely to influence classroom instruction in the near future.

3. **Rationale, design, and model for elementary LE/GS Program curricula.** The elementary curriculum varies from site to site and within each grade level. These variations seem to arise more from site-based contexts, LE/GS faculty decision-making, and policies related to mathematics grouping procedures rather than from a consistently applied, district-wide curricular vision. The stand-alone lessons (e.g., trunks with thematic content) seem to be a remnant from the district’s long-standing topically thematic units (e.g., Japan) or teachers’ individual interests rather than extensions of standards-based grade-level curriculum such as currently being developed with vertical teams nor reflective of systematically collected students’ interests. While lessons and activities conducted by LE/GS staff offered to all grade-level general education students as “learning enrichment” may be appealing to students due to their novelty and interactivity, they are not representative of rigorous, discipline-based curriculum that develops talent or advances students’ knowledge, understanding, and skill. Coupled with the low-frequency with which these opportunities occur, this aspect of LE/GS programming is not an optimal use of teachers’ or students’ time. In sum, the quality of the elementary LE/GS program
curriculum meets neither quality criteria for general education curriculum nor quality criteria in gifted program curriculum.

4. **Middle School LEP curricular focus.** The middle school LEP curricula is highly dependent upon school assignment---either ecology or humanities---rather than on providing a consistent program of services based upon the overall program philosophy and goals. Notably, program staff is knowledgeable about the areas they emphasize, and much of the work that students engage in appears to be discipline-oriented and authentic.

5. **High School course quality and distinctions.** A review of the high school course descriptions suggested that different levels of the same course provide students with experiences that differ in instructional quality (e.g., U.S. History and CP U.S. History). It is also not clear what makes an Advanced course advanced. Different departments appear to treat this designation differently. For example, in science, it appears some courses are advanced by virtue of being centered on a more specific of study or discipline with science (e.g., Meteorology, Zoology); whereas, in the English department, advanced seems to be a designation used to distinguish the highest level version of a course where there are other versions. There are also inequities in allocation of course credit and weighted credit for various course experiences offered under, earned through, or managed by LE/GS.

6. **Mismatch between teachers’ reported and observed practices.** The aforementioned survey data on teachers’ self-efficacy for responding to advanced learners (see commendation 2, above) contrasted with some of the teachers’ open-ended survey comments and were inconsistent with much of the limited classroom data we captured classroom visits. Despite abundant examples that survey respondents offered about how the general education teachers provide challenging learning experiences for advanced learners (survey question 3), many reflected significant misconceptions about ways to appropriately challenge advanced learners within the general education program (“Offering opportunities for contests”; “have students design and implement lessons to their classmates”; “bonus questions on assessments”) or described specific actions that only advanced learners receive that more appropriately should be afforded to all students (“I give them open-ended activities”; “students get choices about projects”; “I incorporate higher-order thinking skills”; “Using primary sources”). Several open-ended responses noted general comments about differentiating instruction. However, in general, we observed very little differentiation for readiness, interest, or learning profile, a few classrooms notably excepted. In describing the ways that they provide challenging learning experiences to their most advanced learners (survey question 3), many survey respondents reported practices that suggested misconceptions about and entry-level applications of differentiation. Among these included the idea that differentiation is synonymous with giving students choice, and that differentiation is about providing higher-level thinking and more open-ended tasks for advanced learners (in contrast to lower-level and more closed-ended tasks for on-grade level or struggling learners).
Program Interface with General Education

**Commendations**

1. **Generally neutral to positive teacher perception of LE/GS program services and specialists.** Survey responses suggest that the majority of teacher respondents rate the LE/GS program as having a *very positive* (14%) or *somewhat positive* (37%) influence on the general education program. A sizeable group of respondents (48%) harbored neutral feelings (“*neither a positive nor a negative influence*”), however less than 1% held negative perceptions about the influence that LE/GS has on general education offerings. Additionally, 59% of respondents reported that the LE/GS program increased the teacher’s ability to meet the curricular and instructional needs of the most advanced learners.

2. **Abundant human resources in classrooms.** We observed a number of classrooms with three or more adults present (i.e., as facilitators, as small-group instructors, as monitors, as observers). While not all of these adults may have been certified professionals, we were nevertheless struck by the resources that have been committed to the number of personnel at this level.

**Opportunities for Growth**

1. **Grouping and differentiation in elementary-grades mathematics.** SCASD Elementary schools take different and philosophically conflicting approaches to differentiating for student readiness in math. Program and District staff explained that these variations are the result of differences in student population at different buildings. It is unclear what values, policies, program components, resources, and data are driving school-level decisions about between-class regrouping, pull-out, and subject-area acceleration in mathematics.

2. **Untapped human resources.** Despite seeing abundant adults in classrooms serving a variety of roles—classroom teachers, instructional support teachers, special education paraprofessionals, university interns, and parent volunteers (even recognizing that these may not all have had instructional credentials)—there is untapped potential to maximize student learning, perhaps in conjunction with LE/GS objectives. We observed only one case of a Learning Enrichment teacher acting as “push in” support, and this related to one of the periodic whole-grade enrichment lessons. In this instance, the general education teacher left the room to the LE/GS specialist and so was not “push-in” in the collaborative teaching sense. This issue was raised in numerous ways in open-ended survey comments. (“teachers are so over-scheduled that they don’t have the time to work with me as a teacher”; “I don’t really know what [the LE Program] does. I know that there are not enough “pull out”
programs designed to challenge the most successful students.”). In general, it seems that myriad factors may subtly, if unwittingly, encourage general education to abdicate responsibility for providing challenge to students with advanced readiness, believing it is the responsibility of LE/GS faculty or other specialists.

3. **Middle School Area Program.** Though not an aspect of the LE/GS program, the middle school Area program merited attention for its surface-level similarity to the Enrichment Cluster component of The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli, 1986; 2010), the amount of time allotted to Area, and the wide range of offerings it affords. While the general framework of this program has great potential to develop adolescent students’ interests and abilities, the current program lacks substance and focus. In addition, based on teacher descriptions of how the program works, it seems that students who are performing well academically are given a choice of Area options—not all of which are particularly substantive—while students who are under-performing are relegated to study halls and tutoring sessions.

### Identifying & Selecting Students for Program Services

**Commendations**

1. **Attention to the challenges inherent to labeling and identifying students as gifted.** The LE/GS Program operates within relatively stringent Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines that outline specific identification criteria, measures, and cut scores according to its definition of giftedness. The state’s view of giftedness and identification can be described as more narrow and traditional than broadened and progressive. Commendably, SCASD has long acknowledged and attempted to work within the State’s restrictive definitions and processes.

2. **Application-based selection processes for secondary LE Programming.** A number of programming aspects at the secondary level involve application-based approaches to selection. While not all parts of these processes are exemplary, in general there appears to be less of an emphasis on identification and labeling of students as gifted per se, and more of an emphasis on matching students’ academic strengths and interests to curricular provisions.

**Opportunities for Growth**

1. **Lack of alignment between identification measures, tools, and processes with program services.** Because the program lacks an overarching philosophy to guide each component, the current identification processes are inconsistent with the services that are delivered. In other words, what students are identified for (the activities they undertake) and how they are identified (what measures, tools, and processes are used) are not aligned. There also appears to be conflicting information in program documents about which students are eligible to participate in Type I, II,
III services and whether or to what extent this eligibility involves a screening process

2. **Reliance on parents and teachers in identification/selection process.** Although teacher nomination and teacher-completed observation checklists are widely used in referring and identifying students for gifted programming—and Chapter 16 guidelines condone their use—research in gifted education shows that teacher nomination is often a biased and unreliable method that disproportionately privileges majority culture and middle-class students (Achenbach, 1997; Kaufman & Harrison, 1986; Ricovero, 2000). The process and tools for selecting students to participate in the elementary pullout program were particularly concerning due to issues with this aforementioned selection bias and misalignment between how students are identified and what they are identified for (i.e., program curricula).

3. **Parent and teacher advocacy in student identification/participation.** Parents and Learning Enrichment teachers expressed an appreciation for the individualization and advocacy that the program affords. However, parent comments in stakeholder meetings, as well as review of previous evaluation reports give the impression that the LE Program responds to persistent and/or high-profile advocacy efforts from only some groups of parents. Some of these provisions involve highly individualized tailoring that is neither aligned with program goals or curricular content, not defensible as more appropriate for students with advanced readiness.

4. **Mismatch between documented and discussed identification process.** The LE/GS Program takes pride in being able to make provisions for students without the paperwork required by a Gifted Individualized Education Plan (mandated by Chapter 16 in the Pennsylvania school code). However, this also creates inconsistencies between how identification is documented in program materials and how it is discussed by stakeholders.

### Program Evaluation

**Commendations**

1. **Frequency of program evaluation.** SCASD has undertaken a number of internal evaluations from 1986 to the present. This suggests that the district has an ongoing commitment to improving program quality. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has also conducted program audits focused on compliance with state policies and regulations. Clearer documentation of any programmatic or instructional changes that have resulted from these evaluations will aide future evaluations.

2. **Openness and transparency of evaluation process.** The current evaluation process was consistently proactive, professional, and open. The numerous meetings with stakeholder groups allowed for many perspectives to be shared with the evaluators.
Opportunities for Growth

1. **Limited evidence of program effectiveness.** Previous evaluations and conversations with stakeholders suggested that program effectiveness is inferred largely from parent and student satisfaction. At the high school level, program effectiveness appears to be gauged also in terms of student academic achievements, college acceptances, and extra-curricular accomplishments, despite a lack of evidence linking those accomplishments specifically to the LE/GS program’s goals, outcomes, design, or curriculum. Without evidence of effectiveness—or evidence that what students who are in the program do is more appropriate for those students than for other students who might have participated if given the opportunity to do so—it appears that the LE/GS Support Program in particular is less a comprehensive program than it is a structure that allows time for some selected students to work on college-admissions preparation activities.

2. **Pride in program and focus on compliance with state guidelines as barriers to growth.** There is a strong sense of pride in the LE/GS program among all stakeholders that may act as a barrier to more rigorous self-evaluation. We heard numerous references to how “right” the program is for students and parents and how dependent on individual teacher decisions and personalities it is. While such sentiments create good feelings about the LE/GS Program, they may also prevent attempts to define, gather, and analyze other evidence of program effectiveness that would lead to program upgrades. Another barrier appears to be a longstanding effort to ensure that the LE Program complies with Chapter 16 in the Pennsylvania school code (Special Education for Gifted Students). Compliance is necessary to the existence and continuation of the program, but may also set a low bar for quality and improvements that are not aligned with the most current thinking or most progressive research findings in gifted education. In general, there is a need for all stakeholders to assume more of a “critical consumer” stance toward the program. This perspective is more likely to ensure that consistent and continuous program improvement.

3. **Limited documentation of program participation.** Data regarding how many students participate in the LE/GS Program across grade levels and program type was provided in aggregated form according to how many students were in (what SCASD calls) Type I, Type II, and Type III enrichment. This made it difficult to analyze and draw conclusions about the reach of program components and services and may unwittingly give the impression that more students are being served by program components for which participation requires that students be selected or identified.
Summary

We return briefly to the initial question that guided this evaluation to summarize our findings and conclusions: “To what degree are advanced learners’ academic needs met by SCASD LE/GS programs and services and the general education classroom?” We understand and expect that SCASD will interpret our conclusions and recommendation in light of community values, the District mission, and other data sources, past and present, regarding the LE/GS Program.

The Learning Enrichment/Gifted Services Program in State College Area School District is a well-resourced and visible program that enjoys considerable community support and program staff personal and professional investment. In the face of state guidelines that limit how giftedness is defined and identified, SCASD has taken myriad and creative approaches to trying to ensure that more students benefit from services traditionally reserved for a limited few. This has resulted in a programmatic system that has many moving parts, many of which are difficult to define, connect, and relate.

On the whole, the LE/GS Program is not currently designed to meet advanced learner’s academic needs relative to curricular goals and requires significant revision in order to maximize its potential as a mechanism for academic talent development. Where there are discipline-related components in the program, many are inequitably distributed between grade levels or schools or are not discernible as advanced or more appropriate to the identified or participating students. While many aspects of the program are intended to meet a wide of range students’ needs, a lack of clarity about what those needs are, why they matter, and what those needs mean for program design and curricula is seriously impeding the program’s growth.

Self-reports indicate that many older students who have participated in the LE Program view the program positively and attribute their school and extra-curricular success to the support, encouragement, and opportunities they received. Many parents whose children are in the LE Program likewise think well of its services. However, these data are not evidence of the program’s influence on student growth relative to the disciplines in which they show advanced readiness, talents, or giftedness.

Both the state of the program and the advent of more rigorous national standards provide a rich and timely context for the LE/GS Program to reconsider its mission, goals, and approach. Ideally, this should include greater interface with the general education program and curricula, toward building capacity in all teachers for meeting advanced learning needs. The recommendations that conclude this report provide potential starting points for making significant and necessary changes to the LE/GS Program.
**Recommendations**

Stakeholders often approach a gifted program evaluation report with their own very specific and personal questions, as well as strong feelings about the program that is being evaluated. Recommendations—or “what to do next”—are typically where stakeholders look to find specific outcomes they had hoped for, including specific directions about how to identify gifted students and whether the program should be limited or expanded. Rather than focus on any and all potential areas for improvement, the following recommendations delimit starting points that we believe are most critical to moving the LE/GS Program forward. These are intentionally directed to the “whole” rather than to very specific “parts,” with the hope that an emphasis on the philosophy and design of the program will provide a foundation for the mechanics and specifics.

1. **Refine the LE/GS philosophy and rationale in the context of the district mission, values, and general education program.** The LE/GS Program appears to be predicated on several different conceptions of giftedness, the existence of readily-identifiable gifted children, and importance of meeting gifted children’s needs. This approach represents an “old” way of thinking in gifted education. A more progressive approach would be to root the program (and its associated services and curricula) in the District mission and general education goals and curricula. (See Appendix C for distinctions in approaches.) Sample documents from real school districts that provide this kind of rationale are appended in the Resources section.

2. **Reconsider the role of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory in LE/GS program rationale and design.** The overview and references in Appendix A provide a starting point for program staff and stakeholders to reconsider the role that Gardner’s MI should play both in the LE/GS program rationale and design, as well as in all educational programming. If Gardner’s work is retained as the foundation of programming, questions worth discussing include, “Is LE/GS is conceived as the primary or sole means of further developing all multiple intelligences domains in all students? Some domains in all students? Some domains in some students?”

3. **Avoid using needs claims as a justification for program services or to discuss characteristics of students.** The use of the term “needs” and claims about students’ “needs” can mask unwarranted assumptions and circumvent necessary and close examination of program and stakeholder beliefs and values. We recommend Barry Grant’s essay on this issue ("Justifying Gifted Education: A Critique of Needs Claims and a Proposal", *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, vol. 25, issue 4, pp 359-74), appended to this report, as a well-reasoned explanation that could serve as a committee or staff discussion resource.

4. **Revisit the intended purpose and design of the LE/GS Program at all grade levels.** The important and challenging work of clearly defining a program philosophy, rationale, and relevant definitions/constructs leads naturally to decisions about retaining and upgrading existing program components and services. Minimally, this should include:
Revisiting models that guide the LE/GS Program Design. Because the LE/GS Program has drawn from various models in general and gifted education, it is critical for program documents to clearly describe what models are being used, how the models fit together and relate to program philosophy and goals, and how and why those models are being adapted from their original or intended forms. Thoroughly document any additions or revisions to the program model over time, as those changes occur.

Applying the would-could-should test. A. Harry Passow’s three-question would-could-should “test” for discerning the appropriateness and exclusivity of gifted programming is a valuable tool for discussing the LE Program and curricula: “Would other students of this age, if they knew the expectations, want to do it?” “Could other students of this age do it?” and “Should other students of this age be benefitted from doing it?” Passow conjectured that if the answer to any of these questions was ‘yes’ than the experience was not appropriate to be reserved only for gifted learners.

Distinguishing components and features of the program that are designed to be systemic from those that can be tailored to staff strengths and interests. The LE Program should not depend on or be designed after the specific strengths and interests of the LE Specialist staff in any given year.

Redesigning the middle and high school LE Programs possibly using a department-based approach. Many aspects of the LE Program at these levels would be best managed and designed within subject-area departments, rather than by an enrichment program.

Aligning all identification tools and processes with program goals and curricula. Although the state’s policies may continue to guide or drive how and whether formal identification is used, all assessments, tools, and processes should make sense with what the student is being identified for (versus what they are being identified as).

Communicating program design, purpose, and participation in a clear, consistent, and public manner. This includes establishing and using common and consistent terminology across and within all levels of programming.

5. Continue to devote resources to the development and “upgrading” of high-quality, standards-aligned general education and LE Program curricula. An implicit justification for gifted programming/services is the insufficiency of the general education or course curriculum. Many components of the LE/GS program arguably should not be necessary if the general education program curriculum and instruction were more rigorous. Fortunately, the PA Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards provide strong foundations from which to design such curricula. Any and all curricular related to LE Programming should likewise be designed using the disciplinary frameworks as a starting point.

6. Study and adopt a model for within-class differentiation. Data across all sources revealed the need for a common definition of and model and strategies for meaningful differentiation. Administrators, LE Program staff, classroom teachers, and parents all
conceive of this term in different and sometimes conflicting ways, with many stakeholders using the term *differentiation* as synonymous with between-class ability grouping and tracking. Regardless of model, an emphasis on differentiation for high-end challenge as a professional development focus *within the context of* standards-aligned curriculum, classroom assessment, and high-quality, interactive instruction for all students.

7. **Convene a stakeholder group to study options for differentiation and grouping in elementary mathematics in light of District values, District definition of/model for differentiation, and teacher capacity.** Stakeholder responses at all levels suggested inconsistencies and disagreement over how to best address student readiness differences in math, with some schools practicing between-class regrouping. All decisions about how to group students for instruction imply certain beliefs and assumptions about teacher capacity, curriculum and instruction, and how students learn best. We therefore recommend an open investigation into the best ways for SCASD elementary schools to ensure that all students grow in their mathematical understanding, knowledge, and skill. A “Grouping Glossary” is appended as a resource for providing visuals of and explanations for how grouping can be conceived and practiced. SCASD will need to decide which approach(es) provide the best fit, and why. For equity, the model should not be school- or teacher-dependent.

8. **Study models for staff reallocation.** Given the abundance of human resources in classrooms, there are numerous possibilities for more strategically allocating and utilizing these resources to improve the overall quality of the instructional program. See Grant Wiggins’ innovative ideas (see Resources) for clever reconsideration of teacher assignments, possibly to include LE/GS teachers.

9. **Create a timeline and plan for ongoing internal and external program evaluation that collects multiple forms of evidence of program effectiveness.** Ongoing and voluntary program evaluation is critical for any program to thrive, change, and grow. We recommend creating a timeline and plan for such evaluation, targeting formative and summative evaluations conducted internally and externally every 2-3 years. Evidence of effectiveness should be strongly connected to revised program goals and curricula and include data sources beyond student, parent, and teacher perceptions.
Report References


Appendix A

Overview of Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (MI) Theory

Multiple Intelligences Theory

Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (MI) is a theory about what human intelligence is and how it develops. Gardner conceived his original theory through his work with people who had suffered brain damage, positing that human cognitive ability is comprised of seven sets of capacities, or “intelligences.” For Gardner, an intelligence is a “biopsychological potential to process information in certain ways, in order to solve problems or fashion products that are valued in a culture or community” (Gardner, 1999, 33-34).

According to the most recent iteration of MI theory (Davis, Seider, Christodoulou, & Gardner, 2011), there are eight intelligences:

- **Verbal-Linguistic** – the ability to perceive and generate spoken or written language
- **Logical-Mathematical** – the ability to appreciate and use numerical, abstract and logical reasoning to solve problems
- **Musical** – the ability to create, communicate and understand meanings made out of sound
- **Visual-Spatial** – the ability to perceive, modify, transform and create visual and/or spatial images
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic** – the ability to use all or part of one’s body to solve problems or fashion products
- **Interpersonal** – the ability to recognize, appreciate, and contend with the feelings, beliefs and intentions of other people
- **Intrapersonal** – the ability to understand oneself, including emotions, desires, strengths and vulnerabilities, and to use such information effectively in regulating one’s own life
- **Naturalistic** – the ability to distinguish among critical features of the natural environment

Gardner believes that these intelligences exist first as latent potential in all normally-developing individuals, and that all normally-developing individuals will achieve some degree of facility in each area. However, the level of that achievement differs by individuals, specific intelligences, or groups of intelligences. So, an intelligence is a way of describing capacities that all people have to some extent, as well as for describing differences in these abilities between and within individuals. Gardner believes that factors that influence how adept an individual is with certain intelligences may include genetics, early exposure to a field, and practice.

**MI as a Conception of Giftedness**

Gardner has written about MI as a way of thinking about giftedness, creativity, and talent development, particularly with respect to eminently talented individuals. In the
simplest terms, giftedness in the MI framework is high ability within one or more intelligences. Gardner does not define explicitly in psychological terms what this looks like in children, and prefers to reserve any use of the label gifted for later adolescence and into adulthood, after the individual has adopted a specific domain or attained expertise in a talent area.

MI in Education

Gardner’s MI Theory has held special interest for educators since it was first published in 1983. This positive reception was surprising to Gardner, who had viewed other psychologists as the primary audience for his ideas and had devoted only a few pages in his book to possible implications of his theory for schools (Gardner, 2004).

MI’s appeal for teachers (and parents) is easy to understand. MI represents a broader, more inclusive conception of intelligence beyond I.Q. or test scores that distinguishes between traditional “school smarts” and other kinds of abilities that are valued and recognized in the real world.

Unfortunately, there are very few examples of substantive applications of MI to school or program design, and few rigorous empirical studies of either the theory itself or educational approaches modeled after it. In addition, there are few to no valid and reliable measures or tools for distinguishing ability or achievement levels in many of the intelligence areas (Callahan, et al, 1995). Learning science also has not yet articulated or defined of skill attainment or development of expertise in each of the multiple intelligences areas. In other words, for MI areas that are not closely associated with a particular discipline or field (intrapersonal, naturalistic), there is little sense of how those intelligences actually develop or how teachers would go about developing or stewarding those intelligences in meaningful ways.

Carol Tomlinson (2003) refers to both MI and Robert’s Sternberg Triarchic Theory of Intelligence as “intelligence preferences” or ways of thinking that fall under learning profile differentiation (versus interest- or readiness-based differentiation). She and others, including Gardner, have developed certain strategies for designing lessons and tasks differentiated for MI (Armstrong, 2009; Gardner, 1993; Tomlinson, 2003). While there are many strong examples of lessons and tasks that incorporate MI (cf., Armstrong, 2009), classroom-level misapplications are also at least partly responsible for developing and exacerbating misconceptions about the theory. This is perhaps most obvious when teachers attempt to offer MI product options they believe are dictated by a Multiple Intelligence domain (artwork for Visual-Spatial intelligence), with little consideration of whether the product makes sense with learning goals or the task itself.

MI in the State College Area School District LE/GS Program

Much of the confusion around MI in education at-large is related to Gardner’s use of the term “intelligence.” The term is often conflated with high ability, giftedness, learning style, or interest--interpretations that can lead to misguided applications of the theory. In SCASD, there are several ways that MI is being misapprehended in such ways.
1. **Definition of MI.** Gardner's eight intelligences are listed on the program web site as examples of “demonstrated skills, interests, or aptitudes,” but a definition that approximates Gardner's conception of an intelligence or information about the theory’s development, relevance for use in SCASD or in the LE/GS program is not provided. Given Gardner’s reticence regarding elementary-level students being identified as “gifted,” using this theory warrants further consideration.

2. **Using MI as a criterion for identifying and selecting students for some LE/GS Program services and opportunities.** Although students’ multiple intelligences are cited and used as a criterion for certain opportunities in the LE/GS program, there does not appear to be a uniform, systematic, and well-reasoned process or tools for discerning these intelligences. In practice, a student’s MI profile is inferred from a combination of test scores, extra-curricular activities, teacher observation, and self-reporting. It also appears that only students who are considered academically able are formally profiled for their multiple intelligence areas. This raises questions about whether MI is used as a lens for seeing all students, or as a way of defining strengths and interests for students identified for other LE/GS services.

3. **Alignment between MI Theory and Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model.** Program documents and descriptions do not provide a clear connection between MI and the Enrichment Triad Model. Minimally, a rationale for the Triad would include references to MI and/or an explanation of why the Triad Model is an optimal vehicle for developing or extending student strengths as viewed through the lens of MI.

   Any school or program that attempts to use Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory as a way of viewing and developing skills, talents, or interests in students must first consider the curricular implications of such a model—namely, whether and to what extent schools are responsible for developing those intelligences in all or some students.

   In considering ways to improve the LE/GS Program, stakeholders are advised to re-examine the most recent iterations of Gardner’s theory, his and others’ perspectives on uses and mis-uses of MI, up-to-date reviews of related research, and examples of programs designed with MI as a framework.
Appendix A References


Additional Resources


### Program Component: Learning Enrichment Program: Issues & Concerns and Recommendations

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<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
<th>Issues and Concerns</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LE/GS Support</strong></td>
<td>- The LE/GS Support Program provides time during the school day for students to meet with an LE teacher and other students to work on academic tasks, extra-curricular pursuits, or college admissions activities. Individual student’s time and activities are articulated in a contract that the student and LE teacher outline together. Students keep a log of their activities and produce a reflection at the end of the semester. Some of the other high school LE Program options are linked to LE/GS Support in that students work on tasks from those endeavors during LE time (e.g., advanced options or leadership positions).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>a)</strong> Aspects of LE/GS impress us as a kind of privileged study hall in which students who are approved to participate are provided with opportunities, resources, and encouragement that all students could, would, or should benefit from. Student reflections on their LE/GS experiences support this conclusion and also raise questions about whether LE Support is viewed and treated as a kind of free time.</td>
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<td>- <strong>b)</strong> The rationale for LE Support (“student needs”) lacks substance, direction, and clarity.</td>
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<td>- <strong>c)</strong> Students in LE Support gain a counselor in their LE Teacher. This teacher provides significant guidance and support for all areas of the student’s academic and extra-curricular life (e.g., securing internships, finding out about summer programs, assisting with the senior graduation process, writing college recommendations). It is not clear why this support is more appropriate for students in the LE Program than for other students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>1)</strong> Consider whether LE Support is an equitable and necessary program component, and one that merits a selection process.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>2)</strong> Examine LE/GS Support in the context of all students’ enrichment options. Consider transitioning LE Support to something more akin to Renzulli’s Type III products.</td>
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<td><strong>LE-OUT</strong></td>
<td>- Similar to above, but concerned with activities that involve leaving campus. Other components of the LE Program are managed by or permitted under the auspices of the LE Program. Many of the activities for which students are permitted to leave campus and pursue should not be managed by or permitted under the auspices of the LE Program. Some activities are also questionable to permit on school time.</td>
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<td><strong>1)</strong> Examine questions of permissible off-campus activities within the context of guidelines for all students.</td>
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<td><strong>2)</strong> Discontinue LE-OUT for activities that do not constitute enrichment or talent development or Renzulli’s Type III products.</td>
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**Appendix B**
such as PSU Courses also fall "under" LE-OUT. (at all.)

b) Student logs and teacher survey responses indicated that LE-OUT is often used to leave early. Some student logs indicated that students go home to do homework when they are not engaged in their identified activity.

classify and label permissible off-campus activities with more inclusive and more accurate language (e.g., internships, medical accommodations, community services). Manage student participation in these activities outside the purview of the LE Program.

Similar to LE Support, it is difficult to distinguish ART SMART from an open study hall or collaborative studio environment. It appears to be less of a program than it is a space and place for students to work on whatever they choose.

Activities such as time (on campus or off) to practice piano, work out, rehearse for a show, and work on a school- or privately-sponsored extra-curricular activity are questionably permitted.

Consider whether ART SMART is an equitable and necessary program component, and one that merits a selection process. Revise the rationale and goals for ART SMART.

Advanced Option appears to be driven largely by the perceived "need" for students to earn weighted credit for unweighted courses or for courses that are not offered at the level at which or on the topics that students might like to take them. Put differently, Advanced Option is seemingly a way for students to add extra-curricular activity to their transcripts or college application purposes. It does not appear to be a vehicle for stewarding or advancing skills, knowledge, or understanding in a discipline. In particular, this is true in the case of Advanced Option for non-existing courses, which appears to be a way for students to add extra-curricular activity to their transcripts or college application purposes. It does not appear to be a vehicle for stewarding or advancing skills, knowledge, or understanding in a discipline.

In summary, ART SMART Teacher, with all due respect and understanding, there is a dedicated Advanced Option class for non-existing courses, but ART SMART and ART SMART-OUT operate in the same way as LE Support and LE-OUT.
It is unclear why a non-existing course becomes advanced under Advanced Option. The Advanced Option guidelines suggest that a course becomes advanced when a student is under the classification of advanced option. Examples include Basic Crafts, Anatomy & Physiology, and Film and Media.

Similarly, examples of contracts and projects carried out under the Advanced Option are not distinguishable as necessarily advanced. That is, they do not adhere to clear and rigorous criteria, reveal evidence of meeting advanced discipline-based standards, or represent closer approximations of college-level or real-world work. The projects are "more" work but not "more advanced" work.

The designation used for Advanced Option on student transcripts obscures what Advanced Option is and how/whether it is distinct from the course it extends or with which it is completed. Many high schools begin this conversation in the context of developing more uniform and defensible grading practices.

Minimally, align Advanced Option requirements with advanced research skills in the related discipline. (Note: Examples provided demonstrated research skills commensurate with the grade level, but not advanced research skills.)

If Advanced Option must be distinguished on a student's transcript, label and distinguish it (and the different forms of it) clearly.

Increasingly, all high schools face decisions about whether and to what extent they will permit some form of dual enrollment (i.e., students taking courses at a high school and a college simultaneously). It is not unusual for high schools to permit online or face-to-face college courses when the school does not have enough courses in a required or desired course sequence. For example, a sophomore with exceptional math abilities has already taken all available math courses a high school offers, and the school pays for the student to take an appropriate course at a local college, either during or outside of the school day at the school's expense. SCHS, its standards, and the courses offered at Penn State University Courses (Dual Enrollment)

Penn State University Courses (Dual Enrollment)

Students take and receive weighted credit for a course at Penn State that SCHS does not offer. Students can take the class during or outside their SCHS school day. When the student is taking a PSU class during the SCHS school day, the student can go to the PSU library or labs, or can come work in the LE room. Students' families incur the expense of the courses.

(1) Undertake a serious examination of the provision in Policy 1 in light of current standards to determine whether or not Advanced Option is and how/whether it is provided, including advanced research skills in the related discipline. Read the description used for Advanced Option to determine whether it is about work, more advanced work, or some combination of both. The description should include basic criteria, such as advanced discipline-based standards, or is it about work, more advanced work, or some combination of both? The description should also be clear and rigorous criteria, reveal evidence of meeting advanced discipline-based standards, or represent closer approximations of college-level or real-world work.

(2) Undertake a serious examination of the provision in Policy 1 in light of current standards to determine whether or not Advanced Option is and how/whether it is provided, including advanced research skills in the related discipline. Read the description used for Advanced Option to determine whether it is about work, more advanced work, or some combination of both? The description should include basic criteria, such as advanced discipline-based standards, or is it about work, more advanced work, or some combination of both? The description should also be clear and rigorous criteria, reveal evidence of meeting advanced discipline-based standards, or represent closer approximations of college-level or real-world work. The Advanced Option degree program's graduates, including basic criteria, such as advanced discipline-based standards, or is it about work, more advanced work, or some combination of both? The description should include basic criteria, such as advanced discipline-based standards, or represent closer approximations of college-level or real-world work. The Advanced Option degree program's graduates, including basic criteria, such as advanced discipline-based standards, or represent closer approximations of college-level or real-world work.
Independent Study Contracts

Independent Study is an option for earning SCHS credit for Penn State courses that are not offered at SCHS and that are beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

Students pursue an interest or subject area that is not offered at SCHS and that is beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

“Students pursue an interest or subject area that is not offered at SCHS and that is beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.”

Students can ask either a teacher, including an LE teacher or guidance counselor, neither of whom have instructed the student in an academic course, to write the teacher recommendation.

Independent Study is different from other kinds of study in that the student is expected to develop the structure, organization, and rigour of the learning experience, including the process for completing a grade or a credit.

1. Independent Study is an option for earning SCHS credit for Penn State courses that are not offered at SCHS and that are beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

2. Independent Study is an option for earning SCHS credit for Penn State courses that are not offered at SCHS and that are beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

3. The rationale for permitting students to earn SCHS credit for Penn State courses they are taking at PSU is unclear.

4. Study is an option for earning SCHS credit for Penn State courses that are not offered at SCHS and that are beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

5. Study is an option for earning SCHS credit for Penn State courses that are not offered at SCHS and that are beyond what is offered in the SCHS curriculum.

6. Students can apply to take independent study credit after the teacher, academic course, or the LE teacher have instructed the student in an academic course.

7. Students can apply to take independent study credit after the teacher, academic course, or the LE teacher have instructed the student in an academic course.

8. Students can apply to take independent study credit after the teacher, academic course, or the LE teacher have instructed the student in an academic course.

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28. Students can apply to take independent study credit after the teacher, academic course, or the LE teacher have instructed the student in an academic course.

29. Students can apply to take independent study credit after the teacher, academic course, or the LE teacher have instructed the student in an academic course.
Students are awarded course credit during the course of
Established criteria are selected, not on a case-by-
case basis. Classroom teachers and department chairs
Conversations with LE Program staff
(2)
(1)
Conversations with LE Program staff
(2)
(1)
Consider departmental management of all
*LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)*

1) Reconsider which events, speakers, trips, etc. should be
2) Establish selection criteria for speakers, etc.
3) Consider whether or not the course, the student is
   taking it independently. 
   *LE teachers identify and coordinate a wide range of on-
   course and course credit is added to transcript with a
   course number to define goals and assessments. The
   (Student credit is added to transcript with a
course number to define goals and assessments. The
   taking it independently. 

Described as “unique student situations” around
which a LE Program-assembled team meets to discuss

Unique Cases

a) Based on the example provided, Unique
cases are just that—
"unique"—those cases we examined and
considered as an initial:

b) While Unique Cases are just that—
"unique"—those cases we examined and
considered as an initial:

1) Reconsider which events, speakers, trips, etc. should be
2) Establish selection criteria for speakers, events, etc. that are
   offered through LE.

Office and related district-level
decisions to the same level as SCHS.
SCHS-approved courses.

**LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)**

1) Consider departmental management of all
   LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)
2) Establish selection criteria for speakers, events, etc. that are
   offered through LE.
3) Reconsider which events, speakers, trips, etc. should be
4) Consider departmental management of all
   LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)

Take credits that are assigned during the course of
SCHS-approved courses.

The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on

Independent Study is unclear.

The way Independent Study is listed on student transcripts gives the impression that
SCHS offers the course, and the student is
independent. 

Based on the example provided, Unique
cases are just that—
"unique"—those cases we examined and
considered as an initial:

1) Reconsider which events, speakers, trips, etc. should be
2) Establish selection criteria for speakers, events, etc. that are
   offered through LE.

Office and related district-level
decisions to the same level as SCHS.
SCHS-approved courses.

**LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)**

1) Consider departmental management of all
   LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)
2) Establish selection criteria for speakers, events, etc. that are
   offered through LE.
3) Reconsider which events, speakers, trips, etc. should be
4) Consider departmental management of all
   LE-Sponsored/Managed Events (Field Trips, etc.)

Take credits that are assigned during the course of
SCHS-approved courses.

The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on
Student transcripts. The new Independent Study is listed on

Independent Study is unclear.

The way Independent Study is listed on student transcripts gives the impression that
SCHS offers the course, and the student is
independent. 

Based on the example provided, Unique
cases are just that—
"unique"—those cases we examined and
considered as an initial:
LE Travel

Overnight or multi-day trips to sites, points of interest, and/or other cities and states.

LE Travel

I. Discontinue the travel component of the LE Program unless a well-reasoned, defendable rationale can be articulated or developed.

1. The travel component of the LE Program is not mentioned or described in program documents.

2. There is no apparent rationale or goals for the travel component of the LE Program beyond "student interests." It is unclear why the travel component of the LE Program beyond students' interests, if any.

3. There is no apparent rationale for goals for the type of trips taken by LE students.

4. It is unclear whether LE funds are used for the travel component. (Student reflections suggested that LE staff accompany students on these trips.)

5. It is unclear whether or to what extent LE travel is used for the LE Program.

II. Support for or rationale for travel component.

a) The LE Travel component is not mentioned or described in program documents.

b) There is no apparent rationale or goals for the travel component of the LE Program beyond "student interests." It is unclear why the travel component of the LE Program beyond students' interests, if any.

III. Discontinue the travel component of the LE Program unless a well-reasoned, defensible rationale supported by connections to program goals and course curricular can be articulated or developed.

"Student interests" if any, or other criteria for deciding the kind of trips to take, and how these criteria are identified.

and/or other cities and states.
Continuum of Approaches to Gifted Education

Traditional

(As described in Peters, et al., 2014)

Advanced Academic Framework

(Peters, Mathews, Makel, McCoach, 2014)

"Curriculum First" Model


Appendix C
Appendix D: Survey Results
1. Please rate how comfortable you are with addressing the academic needs presented by students who have the characteristics listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat uncomfortable</th>
<th>Uncomfortable</th>
<th>I don't know/I'm not sure</th>
<th>Rating Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student who demonstrates ABOVE GRADE LEVEL subject-matter knowledge, understanding, or skill</td>
<td>66.7% (82)</td>
<td>30.9% (38)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student who demonstrates EXCEPTIONALLY ADVANCED subject-matter knowledge, understanding, or skill</td>
<td>28.9% (35)</td>
<td>56.2% (68)</td>
<td>12.4% (15)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>2.5% (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student who is struggling with a particular skill or concept</td>
<td>80.3% (98)</td>
<td>19.7% (24)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)</td>
<td>68.0% (83)</td>
<td>32.0% (39)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student who is an English Language Learner</td>
<td>24.0% (29)</td>
<td>59.5% (72)</td>
<td>12.4% (15)</td>
<td>2.5% (3)</td>
<td>1.7% (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question
skipped question
2. How comfortable you are with adjusting your lessons according to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know./I'm not sure what this means.</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>72.1% (88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat comfortable</td>
<td>27.0% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat uncomfortable</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know./I'm not sure what this means.</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>66.4% (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat comfortable</td>
<td>28.7% (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat uncomfortable</td>
<td>4.1% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know./I'm not sure what this means.</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>54.9% (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat comfortable</td>
<td>38.5% (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat uncomfortable</td>
<td>6.6% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. List and/or briefly describe ways that you provide challenging learning experiences to your most advanced learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 of 11
### 4. How often do you use pre-assessment to find out what students know, understand, and can do BEFORE a unit begins?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to all units</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to most units</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to some units</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't use pre-assessment.</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 114
skipped question 9

### 5. How often do you use the following strategies, techniques, and methods to assess students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy (e.g., essays, reports, articles)</th>
<th>Every day, or nearly every day</th>
<th>Once or twice a week</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a year</th>
<th>Never/I don't know what this is.</th>
<th>Rating Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exit cards/slips</td>
<td>6.4% (7)</td>
<td>26.6% (29)</td>
<td>30.3% (33)</td>
<td>16.5% (18)</td>
<td>20.2% (22)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-teacher conferencing</td>
<td>28.1% (32)</td>
<td>25.4% (29)</td>
<td>29.8% (34)</td>
<td>14.9% (17)</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
<td>30.7% (35)</td>
<td>51.8% (59)</td>
<td>7.0% (8)</td>
<td>6.1% (7)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td>9.9% (11)</td>
<td>69.4% (77)</td>
<td>18.0% (20)</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written products (e.g., essays, reports, articles)</td>
<td>17.7% (20)</td>
<td><strong>35.4% (40)</strong></td>
<td>33.6% (38)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>3.5% (4)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>2.7% (3)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>42.5% (48)</td>
<td>29.2% (33)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance tasks/assessments</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
<td>30.1% (34)</td>
<td><strong>32.7% (37)</strong></td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 114
skipped question 9
6. List any other methods, strategies, or techniques that you use to assess students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. How often do your students work in the following types of groups within your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Description</th>
<th>Every day, or nearly every day</th>
<th>Once or twice a week</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a year</th>
<th>Never/Not applicable</th>
<th>Rating Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture, direct instruction, and/or discussion with the class as a whole</td>
<td>59.3% (67)</td>
<td>33.6% (38)</td>
<td>6.2% (7)</td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual students working on independent tasks</td>
<td>61.6% (69)</td>
<td>22.3% (25)</td>
<td>14.3% (16)</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small heterogeneous groups (readiness, ability, achievement) working on the same tasks</td>
<td>49.6% (56)</td>
<td>38.1% (43)</td>
<td>8.0% (9)</td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td>3.5% (4)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small heterogeneous groups (readiness, ability, achievement) working on different tasks</td>
<td>27.7% (31)</td>
<td>36.6% (41)</td>
<td>19.6% (22)</td>
<td>6.3% (7)</td>
<td>9.8% (11)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small homogeneous (readiness, ability, achievement) groups working on the same tasks</td>
<td>36.8% (42)</td>
<td>36.8% (42)</td>
<td>16.7% (19)</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>7.9% (9)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small homogeneous (readiness, ability, achievement) groups working on different tasks</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>5.3% (6)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| answered question | 114 |
| skipped question | 9 |
### 8. How important are these factors in helping you determine what to teach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Rating Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textbooks</strong></td>
<td>8.0% (9)</td>
<td>25.0% (28)</td>
<td>34.8% (39)</td>
<td>32.1% (36)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PA Common Core State Standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.9% (44)</td>
<td>45.1% (51)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other national/professional organization standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.1% (24)</td>
<td>44.7% (51)</td>
<td>27.2% (31)</td>
<td>7.0% (8)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District standards/benchmarks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.4% (62)</td>
<td>36.8% (42)</td>
<td>7.9% (9)</td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District curriculum materials</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.5% (45)</td>
<td>44.7% (51)</td>
<td>12.3% (14)</td>
<td>3.5% (4)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PSSA and/or Keystone Exam(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.0% (19)</td>
<td>42.9% (48)</td>
<td>25.9% (29)</td>
<td>14.3% (16)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key concepts/principles of core disciplines</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.7% (43)</td>
<td>50.9% (58)</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>2.6% (3)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher-selected themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.5% (20)</td>
<td>43.0% (49)</td>
<td>32.5% (37)</td>
<td>7.0% (8)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student questions/interests</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.2% (31)</td>
<td>45.6% (52)</td>
<td>25.4% (29)</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General readiness level of students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.8% (63)</td>
<td>38.1% (43)</td>
<td>6.2% (7)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**answered question** 114

**skipped question** 9
9. How do each of the following factors influence your ability to meet the needs of your MOST ADVANCED LEARNERS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Hinders me</th>
<th>Neither hinders me nor helps me</th>
<th>Helps me</th>
<th>Rating Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about classroom management</td>
<td>16.5% (18)</td>
<td>69.7% (76)</td>
<td>13.8% (15)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own training and experience</td>
<td>5.5% (6)</td>
<td>16.4% (18)</td>
<td>78.2% (86)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of instructional materials</td>
<td>30.0% (33)</td>
<td>24.5% (27)</td>
<td>45.5% (50)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of subjects you must teach</td>
<td>30.0% (33)</td>
<td>50.9% (56)</td>
<td>19.1% (21)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your content knowledge</td>
<td>4.5% (5)</td>
<td>21.8% (24)</td>
<td>73.6% (81)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge and experience with various instructional strategies</td>
<td>3.6% (4)</td>
<td>13.6% (15)</td>
<td>82.7% (91)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge and experience with various assessment strategies</td>
<td>4.5% (5)</td>
<td>22.7% (25)</td>
<td>72.7% (80)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of planning time</td>
<td>53.6% (59)</td>
<td>29.1% (32)</td>
<td>17.3% (19)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expectations</td>
<td>1.8% (2)</td>
<td>59.6% (65)</td>
<td>38.5% (42)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent expectations</td>
<td>10.0% (11)</td>
<td>61.8% (68)</td>
<td>28.2% (31)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of student needs in your classroom</td>
<td>50.9% (56)</td>
<td>34.5% (38)</td>
<td>14.5% (16)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and support of other teaching/support staff</td>
<td>4.5% (5)</td>
<td>35.5% (39)</td>
<td>60.0% (66)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-level mandates and initiatives</td>
<td>22.9% (25)</td>
<td>58.7% (64)</td>
<td>18.3% (20)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-level mandates and initiatives, including testing programs</td>
<td>35.8% (39)</td>
<td>53.2% (58)</td>
<td>11.0% (12)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 111
skipped question 12
10. Rate your level of comfort with explaining what the Learning Enrichment Program is.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel VERY COMFORTABLE explaining the LE Program.</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel SOMEWHAT COMFORTABLE explaining the LE Program.</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel NEITHER COMFORTABLE NOR UNCOMFORTABLE explaining the LE program.</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE explaining the LE Program.</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel VERY UNCOMFORTABLE explaining the LE Program.</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 111

skipped question 12
11. Rate the nature of the influence that the Learning Enrichment Program has on what you do in your classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment Program has a <strong>VERY POSITIVE</strong> influence on what I do in my classroom.</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment Program has a <strong>SOMEWHAT POSITIVE</strong> influence on what I do in my classroom.</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment Program has NEITHER A <strong>POSITIVE NOR A NEGATIVE</strong> influence on what I do in my classroom.</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment Program has a <strong>SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE</strong> influence on what I do in my classroom.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment Program has a <strong>VERY NEGATIVE</strong> influence on what I do in my classroom.</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 111

skipped question 12
12. Rate the influence that the Learning Enrichment program and staff has on your ability to meet the curricular and instructional needs of your most advanced learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment program and staff INCREASES my ability to meet the curricular and instructional needs of my most advanced learners.</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment program and staff HINDERS my ability to meet the curricular and instructional needs of my most advanced learners.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Enrichment program and staff HAS NO EFFECT ON my ability to meet the curricular and instructional needs of my most advanced learners.</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>46</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

answered question | 111
skipped question | 12

13. What are the strengths of the Learning Enrichment Program? (Please list or describe.)

<table>
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<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>51</td>
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14. What are the weaknesses of the Learning Enrichment Program? (Please list or describe.)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Response Count</th>
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<td>62</td>
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</table>

62 answered question
61 skipped question

15. What suggestions do you have for improving the Learning Enrichment Program? (Please list or describe.)

<table>
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<th>Response Count</th>
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<td>52</td>
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</table>

52 answered question
71 skipped question

16. What is your current job assignment?

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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. K-3 teacher</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 4-6 teacher</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 7-8 teacher</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 9-12 teacher</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Other</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

111 answered question
12 skipped question
17. Including this year, how many years have you worked in State College Area School District?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5-10 years</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- answered question: 111
- skipped question: 12
Resources
AHSD 25 Advanced Learning Mission, Rationale, and Definition of Advanced Capability

Mission
To provide a continuum of advanced learning opportunities within and beyond the core curriculum that provides challenge for all children.

Rationale
Because all students in AHSD 25 have the right to make continuous progress toward and far beyond grade-level standards, AHSD 25 provides a continuum of services for advanced learning, both within and beyond the regular classroom. Some of these target the ongoing development of expertise in specific academic subjects, while others support the generation of solutions to problems of personal or real-world significance.

Definition of Advanced Capability

The District actively seeks evidence of advanced capability to discover any and all students who would likely benefit from provisions for high-end challenge. Namely, we seek:

- **Students with high performance in an academic subject(s).** These are students who demonstrate significantly advanced knowledge, conceptual understanding, and skills in one or more content areas. These students may demonstrate the capacity to move through previously unknown material more quickly, or with greater interest, passion, or insight than their peers. The District recognizes that there are students who may not currently demonstrate high performance in or across subject areas but who, given the necessary opportunities, resources, and encouragement, may display high performance. This may include students whose abilities are masked by learning challenges or disabilities, students from low socio-economic or culturally diverse groups, or students whose first or at-home language is not English.

- **Students with high readiness for advanced problem-solving innovation.** AHSD 25 provides all students with opportunities to engage in problem-solving innovation (PSI). PSI is a process through which students explore authentic, discipline-based content and skill to identify and solve real-world problems and create products/solutions for real audiences.

At any time, a student may show high readiness for advanced PSI. The student may

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1 This includes students identified by Renzulli (1977) as creative producers and Sternberg (1985) as possessing high synthetic and/or practical intelligence.
o seek out problems (e.g., through questions) independently or frequently
o frequently challenge “the way things are”
o analyze or critique situations in depth or at length
o identify problems that are new or unusual
o show motivation or capability for developing increasingly authentic/sophisticated products or solutions
o show motivation or capability for working in ways that are more like real-world professionals/disciplinarians
o demonstrate a desire to affect change (e.g., to the way things are, how people think or act)

These two categories of advanced capability are not mutually exclusive, nor do they represent homogeneous groups of learners. Services and processes for discovering advanced capability reflect our belief that intelligence is multi-faceted, malleable, and immeasurable by any single or single type of assessment. AHSD 25 does not promote definitions or views of capability that suggest intelligence is a static or fixed trait that develops evenly or predictably over the course of a child’s school career.
District 181 Philosophy of Teaching & Learning

Who We Teach and Where They Learn

Community Consolidated School District 181 embraces a vision of being a school district where all children experience success and grow in excellence. Our students come to school with shared and unique experiences, strengths, interests, and learning profiles. They learn from and with one another in safe, caring, and supportive learning environments that respect and celebrate individual differences, foster creativity and critical thinking, encourage intellectual risk-taking, and provide opportunities for collaboration.

High-Quality Curriculum & Instruction for All Students

D181 is committed to providing all students with the highest quality curriculum and instruction. This quality is a hallmark of every class, subject, grade level, and school. The District works to ensure that all students experience learning goals, content, and materials that are, at minimum, authentic to the discipline being studied, framed by concepts and important ideas, cognitively and affectively engaging, thought-provoking and relevant to their lives. All students must learn to persist in the face of challenge by engaging with meaningful tasks that set high, yet achievable expectations. Instruction provides opportunities for students to strengthen high-skill and high-interest areas, develop areas of relative weakness, practice metacognition and self-assessment, and apply learning to new situations.

As part of carrying out our mission to educate each child in an environment of excellence that provides a foundation for contributing to a complex global society, District 181 is committed to fostering the academic, social, and emotional growth of every learner. All learning environments include students who vary greatly in their experiences, readiness, motivation, and learning profiles. These differences are assets to student learning and to developing productive, empathetic, and ethical citizens who can thrive in an ever-changing global society.

Classroom teachers and specialists work individually and collaboratively to proactively differentiate instruction for the full range of student readiness, interests, and learning profiles that are present in every instructional setting. Differentiated instruction involves establishing clear learning goals, planning from ongoing assessment, using flexible grouping, and designing tasks to adjust what students learn (content), how they learn it (process), and how they demonstrate what they have learned (products).

Commitment to Student Growth

1 Based on an analysis in Hockett (2009)
3 Based on Tomlinson (1999; 2003)

Board Approval May 29, 2012
District 181 empowers all students to make continuous progress toward and beyond grade-level proficiency. Through a culture that promotes a growth mindset\textsuperscript{4} about teaching and learning, District 181 provides a broad range of opportunities, provisions, and services for developing the academic talents of all students through Response to Intervention (RtI) and a continuum of services for all students. District 181 believes that at any given time a student may benefit from a support or service to meet an instructional need.

\textsuperscript{4} Based on Dweck (1999; 2006)
D181 Provisions for Advanced Learning

Mission

To provide ongoing support and opportunities for students to work and think like practitioners, professionals, and experts in the real world through the delivery of advanced content, the development of increasingly sophisticated skills, and the creation of authentic products.

Definition of Advanced Learning Needs

District 181 recognizes that there are students for whom the general education program may not consistently support the development of their academic performance. In these cases, a student may benefit from curricula, instruction, or learning experiences that replace or supplement those that are provided as a matter of course.

Through an ongoing process of using classroom-based assessments and universal screenings that are specific to the particular provision or service, the District recognizes several kinds of particular advanced learning needs:

- **Students with high performance in an academic subject(s).** These are students who demonstrate significantly advanced knowledge, conceptual understanding, and skills in an academic subject, such that the general education program may not be able to consistently support the development of their academic performance in one or more content areas. These students may demonstrate the capacity to move through previously unknown material more quickly, or with greater interest, passion, or insight than age-mates.

- **Students with high potential in an academic subject(s).** These are students who may not currently display significantly advanced knowledge, conceptual understanding, and skills in an academic subject or across subject areas, but who may display high performance, given the necessary opportunities, resources, and encouragement. This may include students whose abilities are masked by learning challenges or disabilities, students from low socio-economic or culturally diverse groups, or students whose first or at-home language is not English.

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\(^{3}\) Descriptions of high-performance and high-potential drawn from Callahan & Miller (2005), Lahman (2005), Tolulson & Hockett (2008)

Board Approval May 29, 2012
Provisions for Advanced Learning Needs

1. In the general education classroom
   
   Differentiated instruction for advanced learning is foundational to the educational experience of every child in District 181. Best practice and research across education inform the ways teachers create tasks, instructional activities, and assessments that develop more advanced understanding, knowledge, and/or skills within a discipline.

   This kind of differentiation for advanced learning can involve:

   - Addressing authentic problems and audiences
   - Working and producing in increasingly expert-like ways
   - Delving into content in greater depth
   - Exploring content in greater breadth
   - Moving at a quicker or slower pace
   - Grappling with concepts, problems, issues, or outcomes that are ambiguous or abstract
   - Creating products or solving problems that are transformational (i.e., that try to change people's minds, provoke change, reveal new or unusual insights)
   - Working more independently or needing less support
   - Examining ideas behind the ideas (e.g., philosophical underpinnings, conflicting or supporting theoretical/research evidence)
   - Detecting increasingly patterns or connections within and across disciplines
   - Analyzing and formulating rules, ethics, or governing principles
   - Pursuing “known” and “unknown” unanswered questions
   - Engaging in problem-solving innovation through inquiry-based learning

Instructional teams use a variety of informal and formal classroom assessment tools to gauge student readiness for and interest in tasks that are differentiated for advanced learning. Throughout the school year, all students will work with such tasks as they grow and learn.

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Board Approval May 29, 2012
What If? Staffing
By Grant Wiggins
http://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/2014/03/08/what-if-part-1-staffing/

What if we hired and placed teachers completely differently?

I have been thinking about this issue for a long time. The assigning of one person to one classroom, in isolation from all other teachers, has always seemed to me to be a profound error. It hampers ongoing professional development, it breeds egocentrism, and makes it far too hard to get appropriate consistency across teachers concerning instructional quality, assessment, and grading.

So, what if we hired 4 teachers for 3 classrooms? That would have enormous benefit:

1. A teacher could always be free to help another teacher manage a project, provide feedback to a colleague, work with kids in a more personalized coaching way.
2. A teacher could always be free to do ‘learning walks’ - to visit many other classes to find good practices that could be brought back to the other team members.
3. Someone could always be free to attend planning meetings or scoring of student work sessions made up of representatives from each team
4. Hiring could be more differentiated. One team member could be strong in a needed subject (e.g. science at the elementary level or literacy at the HS level) that is a typical weak spot in individual teachers. Or a team member with design skills could be the chief planner for the team. Or one teacher could be great at student-led inquiry work while another was a top-rate lecturer or coach, so they could hand off the teaching when a different style was used.
5. Someone would always be free to visit other schools or do off-site professional development, with no loss of learning time for kids.
6. One member of the team could watch time-intensive student presentations while the other teachers taught.
7. Junior teachers could be mentored on a regular basis by senior team members.
8. The team leader would be responsible for ensuring that best practices and consistency in assessment were taking place in all classes.
9. There would be only occasional need to find and pay subs., thus ensuring that maximal learning time was rarely compromised; and offsetting the cost of the 4-to-3 system.
Anyone who has co-taught knows the power of it (I have done it a few times, both as a classroom teacher and in working with Jay and my colleagues in UbD training.) You learn from one another, you gain some perspective, and you learn to truly work as a team. (Far too many educators do not know how to work efficiently and effectively as a team to accomplish shared goals because they have so little practice in it.)

Here's part two of the idea, borrowed from Alverno College. Each MS and HS teacher is hired to fulfill two roles: a subject area slot and a core competency slot. For example, Alverno requires all students to meet mastery learning requirements in 8 areas (e.g. Communication, Creative Thinking.) So a Professor has two distinct roles: Professor in a subject (e.g. Philosophy) and member of a Competency Committee (e.g. Communication). Thus, the Competency Committees are inherently cross-disciplinary in membership, where all members are in charge of designing lesson ideas and assessments for their Competency area.

Imagine, therefore, committees in K-12 schools designed to handle the key phrases of the Mission – critical thinking, problem-solving, global citizenship, etc. in which a teacher serves on one of the Mission-focused Committees. Now, the secondary school is far less fragmented and staff are far less isolated in their own subject area and discourse.

Of course, this can only work under a variety of conditions (e.g. a large enough staff with multiple grade-level or subject classes, start-up funding to offset initially increased costs, etc.), but I trust that it gives readers some ideas to play with in their own setting.

Readers, do you know of or have you been involved in more creative uses of staff than are typically found in schools?
Grouping Glossary
Dr. Jessica A. Hockett


Grade-Level Achievement/Performance/Ability Grouping
Students are assigned to grade level classrooms (or course levels) by achievement or performance such that high, average, and low achievers/performance are in different classrooms. The students may or may not be re-grouped for different subjects.

Cluster Grouping
A “cluster” is a group of students with a common trait (e.g., English Language Learners) purposely placed in the same classroom for instructional purposes. Specific to gifted education, cluster grouping is an arrangement in which students identified as high-performing or gifted are placed with similar-ability peers in the classroom of a teacher who either has training in differentiating curriculum and instruction for high ability learners, or who otherwise wants to do so. Cluster groups are often formed on the basis of subject-specific strengths, or on general school performance.
**Multi-Age Classrooms (a.k.a., multi-grade, split class, nongraded)**
Classrooms deliberately comprised of students of different ages and/or grade levels in one classroom under the same teacher.

![Multi-age Classrooms Diagram](image)

**Cross-Grade Grouping (a.k.a., the Joplin Plan)**
Students at two or more grade levels are re-grouped for one or more subjects (most often reading and/or math) according to ability or readiness.

![Cross-Grade Grouping Diagram](image)

**Subject-Area Grade-Level Acceleration (for individual students)**

![Subject-Area Acceleration Diagram](image)
**Subject-Specific Between-Class Grouping (Re-grouping)**

Students at a grade level are re-grouped for a subject (e.g., reading, math), usually according to ability or readiness. Students can be placed at or before the beginning of the year, at the end of each marking period based on performance, or at the outset of each unit based on pre-assessment results. Each class at the grade-level might be working from the same curriculum with differences in pacing, complexity, or depth; working from parallel curricula (which could also vary by pace, complexity, or depth); or working from different curricula.

**Pull Out**

*Pull out* refers to the practice of identifying students for services that remove them from one or more regular classroom subjects and place them in alternative setting for services (typically used at the elementary level). *Pull out* can also describe any separate individual or small-group instruction in a specific subject area that takes place outside the physical space of the general education classroom.
**Push In**

Push in refers to a service option through which a specialist works in collaboration with the classroom teacher in the teacher’s classroom to meet the instructional needs of students identified by a particular trait. More ideally, the specialist and classroom teacher work as co-teachers to meet a range of student needs in a single lesson, for the duration of a project or tasks, or over the course of an entire unit.

![Push In Diagram](image)

**Within-Class Grouping**

Within-class grouping refers to any time a teacher has students working with, alongside, or from at least one other student. (However, technically, the decision to instruct students in whole group or to have students work individually is also a grouping decision.) Teachers can put students into groups for many reasons, including learning or practicing a skill/concept, completing a task, or having a discussion. Some well-known models and “mechanisms” associated with grouping are Guided Reading/Math, Writer’s Workshop, and The Daily Five. Cooperative learning, jigsaw, and Complex Instruction are a few instructional strategies that involve students working in groups.

**Within-Class Flexible Grouping**

As defined by Carol Tomlinson, within-class flexible grouping involves students consistently work in a variety of grouping configurations over a relatively short period of time that vary by size (partners, trios, dyads), element of student learning (readiness, experience, interest, learning profile), and composition (homogeneous or heterogeneous). Groups may be formed by “chance,” formative assessment results, student choice, or other factors the teacher has considered. Tomlinson also defines flexible grouping as **intentional teacher movement of students within a relatively short period of time, among a variety of contexts related to students readiness, interests, and learning profiles, with the intent to “audition” students in varied ways, allowing both students and teacher to see other students and themselves through fresh eyes.**

SEE EXAMPLE ON FOLLOWING PAGE.
References to needs, special needs, counseling needs, differential educational needs, and the like are common in gifted education publications. These phrases may be the primary or only justification for counseling practices and special education services for the gifted. This essay critically examines the features and assumptions of needs claims, one type of justification for special services for the gifted, and argues that they rest on unstated theories and unavowed moral values, define a paternalistic relationship between teachers and gifted students, and, most significantly, encourage the impression that gifted students deserve things that other students do not. Proposals for more adequate forms of justification that make explicit and defend the moral, theoretical, and empirical bases of advocacy claims are offered.

Introduction

Needs claims pervade the field of gifted education. The mission statement of the dominant professional organization in gifted education, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), refers to the “unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents” (http://www.nagc.org). References to needs, special needs, counseling needs, differential educational needs, and a remarkable range of other needs occur in many articles and books on counseling and education in the field. The prevalence of needs claims in gifted education is not surprising. Needs claims—claims that a group possesses a need or needs a certain service—are a common type of justification for educational practices. Though they are common, they are not, as others have argued, sound (e.g., Dearden, 1961; Fitzgerald, 1977; Flew, 1977; Woodhead, 1987). The ease with which needs claims are made and counselors’ and educators’ responsiveness to them goes hand in hand with a failure to think through moral, empirical, and theoretical issues in counseling and education. Where justification—evidence, reasoning, and a defense of moral values—is required, often there is only

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a needs claim—a simple assertion—sometimes joined with an argument that barely touches the surface of the issues involved.

This poor form of justification has special dangers for gifted education. A field that engenders hostility (Treffinger, 1998), charges of fantasy mongering (Margolin, 1994), and elitism (Tannenbaum, 1998) and is continually vulnerable to funding cuts (Renzulli & Purcell, 1996) and open to attacks on its very existence (Sapon-Shevin, 1994; Tannenbaum, 1998) cannot afford to justify special services to gifted students with claims that are so easily criticized. Needs claims that embody values widely accepted among gifted educators may, to those who do not share the values, look like bald expressions of elitism and favoritism—constructions meant to serve a dominant ideology (Margolin, 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

This paper analyzes the use of needs and related arguments in the gifted literature, shows why needs claims cannot be good justifications for gifted education, and examines alternative forms of justification for gifted education. I will show that there are three problems with needs claims:

1. Needs claims represent as matters of fact what are matters of values, speculation, and opinion.

2. Needs claims define a paternalistic and authoritarian relationship between those serving needs and those getting needs served that is, at least, unexamined and, at most, harmful to those served.

3. Most important, the use of needs claims encourages the unnecessary, divisive, and counterproductive impression that gifted students deserve things other students do not deserve.

Every needs claim has at least one of these problems. This paper focuses on the advocacy or applied literature where most needs claims are made. It also addresses the relationship between research on characteristics of gifted children and needs claims.

Examples of Needs Claims

Needs claims in the gifted literature are simply claims that the gifted have a need or need a service. Gifted children and academically talented students are said to have “special needs” (Tannenbaum, 1998, ¶ 4); a “need” “for self-protection” and “a need to make and keep friends” (Ford, 1989, p. 132); “academic and emotional needs that require special counseling” (Olszewski-Kubilius & Laubscher, 1996, ¶ 1); “unique social/emotional needs”
Needs Claims: Values, Speculation, and Opinion

Needs claims look like statements of fact, observations, or reports by experts. They lead us to think that, if we carefully examined some gifted children, we too would see that they have needs for self-protection and love, that they need better study skills and more assertiveness, and so on. Graduate students I’ve taught have read these statements as if they were factual claims, no different from “penicillin is an effective treatment for infections” or “on average, men are taller than women.”

Theoretical psychology does use the concept of needs. The concept figures prominently, for example, in the theories of Murray (1938) and Maslow (1968). Murray saw needs as types of motivation and “forms” that organize thinking and perceiving. Maslow maintained that everyone has needs for air and water, safety, belonging, love, esteem, and self-actualization that emerge in a certain sequence. Cross (1997) argued that “perhaps the most significant theory underpinning much of the research in gifted education is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” (Endogenous section, ¶ 1), but he mentioned only one study (Karnes & McGinnis, 1996) that used
Maslow. I have found only two examples in the gifted literature in which “need” might be or is employed as a theoretical term. Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982) seem to echo Maslow in their assertion that “gifted children have the same basic human feelings and needs for belonging and self-respect as other children, although the gifted child may feel these needs more keenly and may want emotional satisfaction more intensely than other children” (p. 30). In her research on self-perceptions and needs, Ablard (1997) explicitly stated that she chose scales from the Adjective Check List (ACL) because they were related to Murray’s theory of personality, and she used needs in a way consistent with Murray’s theory.

Needs claims, then, could be tied to theories that would give them validity, but rarely are. They appear to be empirical claims, but are not. Needs are not just there. We cannot look at someone and see a need looking back at us, as it were. We properly “see” needs only [a] by the light of a theory or belief about what people or a group of people are like and [b] on the basis of beliefs about what is required to achieve a goal or end state. In the first case, usually stated as the claim that gifted students “have a need,” the merit of the claim rests largely on the merits of the theory or generalization. For example, it is not misleading to say that gifted children have “unique social/emotional needs” (Klein, 2000, ¶ 4) if these needs are elaborated and explained by reference to a theory that has good empirical support and if the needs can be identified in gifted children.

In the second case—usually claims that the gifted “need to”—the merit of the claim rests on [a] empirical evidence that the recommended action actually accomplishes the stated goal and [b] the moral value of the goal and the ethics of reaching the goal in the way the author advocates. For example, it is not misleading to say that gifted children have “unique social/emotional needs” (Klein, 2000, ¶ 4) if these needs are elaborated and explained by reference to a theory that has good empirical support and if the needs can be identified in gifted children.

Feldhusen (1982) made explicit a presumed causal connection between meeting “needs” and achieving a goal: “All of these [special educational] needs are linked to educational achievement or to success factors in adulthood” (p. 37). If, in fact, the special needs are linked to achievement and success and if these goals and the ways of achieving them are morally defensible, then this is a sound claim.

Empirical evidence can bolster needs claims by showing that gifted students do indeed possess characteristics that indicate a need in light of a theory or that specific actions have a reasonable
probability of accomplishing a certain goal. Given how common needs claims are, it is surprising to discover that actual research on the needs of the gifted is not very extensive. Gust (1997) reviewed 270 abstracts on the social and emotional needs of gifted individuals published between 1952 and 1996. Fifty-nine were research based. This number includes “descriptive studies . . . instrument development and factor analyses” (Research articles section, ¶ 1). Gust concluded that “it would appear that the majority of research published on this topic is not empirically based and may be based on either opinion or folklore” (last sentence).

If need claims are rarely theoretical claims and cannot be empirical claims, what are they? In many cases, needs claims are simply value judgments couched in factual language. We can see this, for example, in Ford’s (1989) claim that

[ gifted ] students need to develop a sense of internal control. They need to develop a personal source of motivation so they can break free from what they perceive as limitations being imposed on them. They need to develop a system of evaluating their own work so that they can truly excel at tasks rather than just working for grades. (p. 133)

Self-direction and resistance to conformity are fine values. But they are values. They are not characteristics inherent in gifted children or goals for personal growth inherent in the universe. In this case and many others, the needs of the gifted are the values of the authors of needs claims about the gifted.

Most of the needs claims quoted above can be understood in this way. The claim that gifted children need “to recognize [their] intuitive energy and ability” (Clark, 1988, p. 269) can be restated as “I believe it would be good if gifted children were able to recognize [their] intuitive energy and ability.” The claim that gifted children have a need “to be developing accurate and realistic self-concepts and identifying and accepting all aspects of their personalities” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 74) can be restated as “I believe gifted children would be better off if they accepted themselves and understood themselves better.” And so on.

The value ladenness of needs claims is obvious when we notice that the gifted never need anything that the average, middle-class family in the United States would find untoward, and they need things that are almost always consistent with current public school goals and values. The gifted need to acquire information, be understood, loved, understand themselves, and accept themselves; but they don’t need, say, training in Buddhist meditation, acceptance of
their finitude, critiques of capitalism, or help in identifying the per-
ils of life in a nuclear family. The gifted need what the makers of
needs claims value.

We could regard needs talk as just a manner of speaking or even
a kind of literary tic were it not for the power of such statements
and the importance of what they leave unsaid. Fitzgerald (1977)
described the appeal of the use of needs:

The very ambiguity of the concept of “need” in large part
explains its plausibility in use. The notion “need” has such
currency, especially among popularizers and propagandists,
and gains such persuasive force, because on one hand it
involves imperatives and on the other because it appears to
root them in common sense and in empirical reality. Once we
have called something a “need,” in common usage it would be
odd without considerable explication either to deny that it is
good or that it should not be satisfied. (p. 195)

Needs claims side-step questions of values and means by simply
assuming the correctness of unstated values, theories, hypotheses,
and speculations. The allure of needs talk in gifted education is that
it encourages the belief that it is the way things are that makes it
necessary for a group of people to have certain services. An entire
chain of reasoning, from observation, to theories and conjecture, to
moral reasoning, is bypassed in a single word. Certainly some needs
claims reflect common values about education and life, for exam-
ple, the gifted need “help identifying their values and priorities”
(Kaplan, 1983, p. 75), but this does not relieve the advocates of such
claims from the responsibility of justifying their claims. In any
case, these claims are open to the criticism that they are paternal-
istic and authoritarian.

**Needs Claims: Paternalism and Authoritarianism**

If we see the needs of the gifted as mostly expressions of the values
of authors of needs claims about the gifted, then another feature of
needs claims becomes apparent: Needs claims are claims about the
well-being of others that are made without the others’ sanction or
consultation. In some cases, such as those related to the physical
well-being of infants and young children, this is not a problem. We
wrap up our babies and take them for their measles vaccination
without asking their permission. In matters related to schooling,
children and adolescents are often able to give informed consent.
Whether they should be able to make significant choices about their education is a question that should be debated openly, not begged in needs claims. For example, in claiming that gifted children need “to develop independent study skills and the assertiveness it takes to strike out on their own” (Galbraith, 1985, p. 15), the author is advocating a good for gifted children (and, according to Fitzgerald’s 1977 analysis, doing so without appearing to). Galbraith (1985) also defined a relationship between herself and the children she serves as one of knowing better than they do what is good for them or at least, somehow, knowing what is good for them. Stating what others need puts one in the position of seeming to know better than the persons concerned what should be done to and for them. Self-respecting persons often and rightly find offensive these sorts of statements.

I know my wants and desires, or I can be confused or ambivalent or in the dark about what I want. All this I can report. But what I need, what I require to accomplish a goal or what one of my characteristics is in a normative scheme, I may have no idea about, depending on whether I am privy to the researcher’s ideas and able to apply them to myself. If I am not, someone else is in a position to tell me what is good for me. As Flew (1977) argued,

an emphasis upon needs, as opposed to wants, gives purchase to those who see themselves as experts, qualified both to determine what the needs of others are, and to prescribe and enforce the means appropriate to the satisfaction of those needs. (p. 214)

Gifted children can, of course, report on their experiences, their desires, their hopes for their education, and so forth. But, they cannot report on their needs unless they are in the unusual position of being privy to the researcher’s values or theoretical scheme and are skilled in applying these to themselves.

Analogously, researchers cannot derive needs from self-reports or other empirical data without arguing a link between their data and a theory or their data and values. We can see the absence of either link, for example, in an article by Wright and Leroux (1997). They measured the self-concepts of gifted children in a special program and interviewed them about their experiences in the program. They concluded that students have a “need for self-understanding and social skills as well as cognitive processing skills” (p. 93), as if this need were discovered in the words and responses of the students. Ford (1989) explicitly made the same error. She wrote that “from . . . interviews [conducted with gifted students] a variety of
needs clearly emerged” (p. 134) and then offered suggestions for how to improve the lives of gifted students.

In some cases, wants and desires or other affective states are called “needs.” For example, Galbraith (1985) asked students “what they liked best about their gifted class” (p. 18). One response that focused on “affective needs” was “I like the way our teacher gives us the time to talk about our feelings if we feel upset or angry.” This preference is called a need, and an obligation or guideline for teaching gifted students is derived from it. What if the student had said “I like being obnoxious”? The body of research on characteristics of gifted children is one thing; claims about needs based on this research are another matter entirely.

The use and acceptance of needs claims can discourage dialogues with students about what they want and promote the creation of mythologies or fantasies about gifted students. Feldhusen (1982, p. 38) argued that “many writers . . . have noted the gifted child’s interest in atlases, encyclopedias, and dictionaries. . . . Thus they have a need to acquire a lot more information, and reading is certainly one of the major and more efficient ways to do that” (p. 38). He created a mythology about gifted students by reducing a variety of phenomena that have many motivations to a single “need” characterizing all gifted students. This discourages us from regarding students as the directors of their own learning or as partners in the process of school learning. Why bother talking to students about what they want and what interests them when we know what they need and can program the satisfaction of their needs into their schooling? If we asked students about their reading and inclination to acquire information, we would get lots of answers. These answers would reveal a variety of motives and individual differences, easily stated in a language of wants, desires, and preferences: “I like to read novels, but not biographies”; “I have a burning desire to find out how things work”; “Reading offers temporary respite from the emptiness of my life”; “I love maps because they help me to develop my fantasies about life in other places and dimensions”; and so on. These answers could all lead to a different relationship with a teacher or different curricula. This is lost in the “need for acquiring information.”

**Needs Claims: Divisive and Counterproductive**

The claim that the gifted have special needs gives the impression that the nongifted do not need anything special, that the average student is just fine with whatever schools offer. One of Sapon-
Shevin’s (1994) attacks on gifted education targeted precisely this impression. We probably don’t mean to imply this (indeed, to say the gifted need something does not necessarily imply that the nongifted do not need it), and the field does have visions of improved schooling for all children; however, our frequent talk about the needs of the gifted cannot help but lead those outside the field to think that only the gifted deserve special services.

For example, in an article on suicide and gifted children, Farrell (1989) claimed that the gifted “need . . . increased psychological support” (p. 137) and suggested this could be obtained through required individual and group counseling, one goal of which would be preventing suicide. The author says nothing about nongifted students needing mandatory psychological counseling, giving the impression that their lives are worth less. Ford (1989) wrote that, “[gifted] youngsters need support in understanding the nature of competition and the motivations of others so that they can become more comfortable granting public exposure of their skills and possible failings” (p. 132). Are gifted youth the only youngsters who could benefit from such support?

The notion of needs is often used to characterize differences between groups and to justify treating them differently. Indeed, the claim that gifted students require special services because they have special needs is one of the most popular justifications for gifted education (cf. Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1995). Here are three versions of this justification: “The only defensible rationale in our democratic society for additional expenditures is student need” (Richert, 1991, p. 82). “Gifted students, because of their differential abilities and varying levels of talent, have special educational needs” (Feldhusen, 1982, p. 37). “The purpose of special provisions for exceptional children, whether educational or counseling, is to respond to their unique needs. . . . A continuum of services should be made available to the gifted, similar to that which is available for the disabled” (Silverman, 1993, pp. 7–8). Betts (1988), Richert (1991), and others have made similar arguments. The basic structure of the argument is that

A. Gifted students are different from nongifted students in some way(s).
B. The difference indicates a need.
C. The need must be met.

Because this is a very popular argument, it is important to see why it is a bad argument.

Premise A is probably false. Given the variety of types of giftedness, the variety of criteria identifying gifted students, and the indi-
vidual differences within the group of all students who are or could be identified as gifted, there is probably not one single characteristic that all gifted students possess and all nongifted students lack. There is, instead, great heterogeneity in both groups and a continuum of degrees of difference on any characteristic. Even if A is true, and even if a difference claim is made only about a subpopulation of gifted students, B does not logically follow.

Group differences imply the presence of needs only if (a) needs refers to a theoretical concept (ideally one with empirical support) and if (b) the presence of specific characteristics indicates a need in the terms of the theory. As I argued above, the few needs claims in the gifted literature that refer to theories refer to theories of motivation. Statements about differences in types of motivations are statements of type A, that is, differences in motivation are just differences in characteristics. Indeed, some writers (e.g. Winebrenner, 2000) skip step B and treat needs as characteristics. Even if B is true, C does not logically follow.

Characteristics of persons and group differences have no necessary implications for the services persons should receive or for the activities they should undertake. A difference alone, no matter how significant, does not in itself warrant special treatment. From the fact, say, that a young man can run the mile in under 5 minutes, it does not follow that he should receive special athletic training. From the “fact” that gifted children are different from nongifted children in that they read more, or are more sensitive, or process information more quickly, or have qualitatively different ways of experiencing the world, or employ higher level thinking skills, or worry more about global problems, and so forth, it does not follow that they should receive special treatment in school. The existence of differences between two groups of people implies nothing about what we ought to do or what either group deserves.

A difference only makes a moral difference—one that obligates others to treat the groups differently or establishes a difference of desert—in the light of valued means and ends and of ideas and research on how the means accomplish the ends. A difference between two groups is the beginning of an argument for why the groups should be treated differently, not the end. Rationales for treating one group differently than another must establish that it is fair or good or right to treat the different groups differently based on moral principles, not just that the groups are different. This is true even if the difference is couched in terms of needs.

Even if we use needs in a theoretical or quasi-theoretical sense, there is still no necessary implication for what we should do. A
child's motivation is just a motivation. A child's “need” “for self-protection” or “need to make and keep friends” (Ford, 1989, p. 132) are just characteristics of the child. How we should respond to the child is entirely another matter. We can clearly see this when we look at “negative” characteristics of children. It is common in the field to claim that children who are capable of learning quickly “need” to be in classes where they can learn quickly. Using the same logic, it is also true that gifted children who have very strong perfectionist tendencies “need” to be in situations where they can feel perfect. This is obviously wrong. When we do not approve of a recommendation, we can see more easily the flaws in its logic. And we can see that it is a recommendation, a value, a piece of advocacy. Dearden (1961) succinctly described how value judgments in education cannot be avoided by appeals to needs:

[Needs] seems to offer an escape from arguments about value by means of a straightforward appeal to the facts empirically determined by the expert. But it is false to suppose that judgments of value can thus be escaped. Such judgments may be assumed without any awareness that assumptions are being made, but they are not escaped... Value judgments are inescapable in determining what ought to be done in education; and if, therefore, discussions are to be framed in terms of “need,” then the valuation basis of the concept and the subservience of the relevant research findings of this should be explicitly recognized. (pp. 62–63)

Alternatives to Needs Claims

As the foregoing analysis shows, needs claims are an inadequate mode of justification for special educational and counseling services for the gifted that rest on unsubstantiated empirical claims, unstated theories, and unavowed moral values. It is precisely on the basis of what needs claims conceal—theory, evidence, and moral values—that a defense of gifted education must be made. Once these are revealed, there is no need to talk of needs, or, if we do, then we are sure that the need has a sound basis.

Any rationale for gifted education ought to make its values and assumptions explicit and attempt a defense of its values and assumptions [Woodhead, 1987]. The conversation about education for the gifted changes significantly when we do this. What was hidden becomes explicit and open to public scrutiny and debate. Some arguments for gifted education, to be sure, do make their values and
evidence explicit. Laycock (1979) described two common arguments for special services for the gifted: “society needs their talents, and they deserve to develop them” (p. 88). The former states that cultural enrichment and survival are good for society; the contributions of the gifted are required to achieve these; and, therefore, for its own good, society should help gifted persons develop their talents. The latter argument states simply that “in a society committed to the development of the individual, each person has the right to an education that will lead to his or her fullest growth” (p. 88).

Both arguments contain explicit value statements: Cultural enrichment, survival of society, and personal growth are stated clearly as goods. The reader is in a position to decide whether these are goods and how important they are. The first argument also makes an empirical claim: The contributions of the gifted are required for the society to survive and prosper. We can ask if this is true. (The 1995 Howley et al. critique of the “gifted as the nation’s greatest natural resources” argument suggests that it is not.) Both arguments are, however, very vague, leave many questions unaddressed, and do not have any specific implications for how the gifted should be schooled. What is the nature of the purported “right,” particularly in the context of compulsory schooling? What does “fullest growth” mean? What does “gifted” mean? How important are the contributions of the gifted? Are they so important that lots of money should be spent on them? Are they only a little important and would the gifted make them without special programs? What is a good society? And so on.

And we might ask, “Why stop at dividing the world into just the gifted and nongifted?” When we “push” arguments for special services for gifted students, they lead to the conclusion that all schooling should be individualized based on the characteristics, abilities, and interests of each student. The logic of difference that led to the creation of gifted and nongifted leads to their division into smaller and smaller groups, and we end up with schooling for individuals, not groups. This does not necessarily lead to Sapon-Shevin’s (1994) “vision of an inclusive future” in which keeping all same-aged children in the same physical space is a moral imperative. Feldhusen’s (1995, 1998) Talent Identification and Development in Education (TIDE) approach, Treffinger’s (1998) Levels of Service (LoS) programming, and Renzulli’s (1998, 1999) Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) are examples of educational theories within the gifted and talented tradition that advocate principles and practices applicable to all public school children.

A more ambitious approach to developing an educational theory for the gifted starts from general principles, regardless of their applic-
ability to current public school practices. Such a philosophy states and defends a view of the good life and good society, a view of what people are like, and a view about how to achieve the good life and good society. An excellent example of a philosophy of education of this type is expressed in Roeper’s (1991) *Educating Children For Life* (cf. Roeper, 1995). Roeper, who devoted many years of her life to a school for gifted children, proposes a philosophy and method of education that addresses all students and makes no reference to “needs.” It contains a philosophy of life and education, explicit ideas on what people are like, and a vivid picture of the practices that are part of her school. Briefly, the core values of her educational philosophy are self-actualization and interdependence. These broad values are the touchstone for defining learning goals (e.g., an awareness of the moral dimension and complexity of life and the interconnection between subjects), the political and social organization of the school (e.g., non-hierarchical), and other values (e.g., equal rights, respect for all). The result is a self-consistent whole in which philosophy, goals, and practices are integrated. The goals within school are the ideal goals in life; and the learning community is a model for an ideal society in which the members have equal rights, appreciate their interconnectedness and mutual dependence, and develop themselves as whole beings. It is a model of a justification for a form of gifted education.

**Conclusions**

Good causes deserve good reasons. This article has shown that needs claims, a common justification for special services for gifted children, are bad reasons. They are unsound, unintentionally deceptive, and leave the field vulnerable to accusations of elitism and unfairness. The brief survey of defenses of gifted education that do not use needs claims shows clearly that “needs” are not required to defend forms of gifted education. Better, more transparent, more articulate, less divisive, less paternalistic, and more convincing justifications are possible. We need more of them.

**References**


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