

Sealy Independent
School District

District Plan for the Education
of
Gifted and Talented Students

2008-2010

Approved June 18, 2008

Philosophy

The mission of Sealy Independent School District is to ensure that all children in the district have equal access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation. Furthermore, the district believes that it has the profound mission to provide a program that allows students to develop their potential intellectually, physically, and socially in order to be productive, responsible citizens.

The Sealy ISD Gifted and Talented (GT) Program recognizes that academically gifted children often require a different learning climate and/or an accelerated curriculum. These students learn at a faster rate, with greater depth and intensity, and require a more stimulating curriculum. Too often, the general school program does not meet their needs. As such, the Sealy ISD GT program seeks to identify and provide advanced learners with the appropriate classroom instruction and services that help them reach their fullest potential.

State and Local Definition

The state of Texas defines a gifted student as a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:

- exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
- possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
- excels in a specific academic field.

These students require educational experiences beyond those typically provided by the regular school program.

The Sealy ISD GT Program is one which serves students who are currently identified as advanced intellectually and academically. Their giftedness may surface as an outstanding aptitude in one or more of the areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies or in their ability to process information more rapidly. Learning experiences will be differentiated by content, process, and products while addressing the specific affective needs of the gifted learner in grades kindergarten through twelve.

Characteristics of the Academically-Gifted Students

Wide variations of gifted characteristics can be found in students. The list that follows is not all-inclusive, and people may be gifted in one or more of these areas. Generally speaking, a gifted student:

- is intellectually curious, innovative, and playful with ideas;
- has a keen and sometimes unique sense of humor;
- develops at an early age an inner control and satisfaction which may lead to divergent and nonconformist behavior;
- formulates abstractions while very young and shows facility in moving from concrete to abstract levels of thinking and communicating;
- reads at an early age and comprehends with advanced understanding;
- is impatient with detail and drill, which may result in gaps in basic skills for some;
- explores wide-ranging and special interests not usually associated with children of his/her age and relates well to peers and adults who have similar interests;
- copes with environmental situations in resourceful and creative ways;
- demonstrates richness of imagery in formal language and brainstorming;
- rebels against irrelevant learning requirements;
- points out conflicting social values and challenges authority;
- creates and invents beyond the parameters of knowledge in the field;
- can improvise with commonplace materials;
- has high expectations of self and others which may lead to high levels of frustration with self, others, and situations; and/or
- may have a sense of his/her uniqueness which leads to feelings of loneliness.

Goals

Sealy ISD will strive to:

- promote self-directed learning through activities that encourage the students to communicate using critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving;
- provide appropriate opportunities to challenge the students and expand their area(s) of giftedness;
- develop the students' understanding of their unique gifts through the interrelationship of self, peers, parents, and community to become responsible, lifelong learners able to exert a positive influence on society;
- identify students within special population groups such as English as a second language, migrant, Special Education, and the economically disadvantaged;
- foster the individuality of students and encourage expression of their individuality and creativity in their innovative products and/or performances;
- encourage the development of a GT parent advocate group.

Program Design

The Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires schools to provide gifted and talented students with the opportunity to collaborate with others of

similar ability, work independently, and work with other students. Therefore, Sealy ISD has designed its gifted program in the following manner:

- Elementary - The Challenge Program

Identified students are served in a pull-out program in which they are clustered in regular classrooms and are pulled out daily to be served by a GT specialist. The program provides differentiated instruction and an array of learning opportunities emphasizing content in the four core areas. Additionally, a portion of class time will be spent discussing the social and emotional aspects of giftedness. During the spring semester, students will have the opportunity to work on an independent project focusing on their area of strength or interest. Out-of-school opportunities are available to allow students to explore interests outside of the regular school day.

- Secondary – The Gifted and Talented Program

Identified students are served in their areas of strength in the Honors, AP, and PreAP classes in the four academic content areas. At the high school level, the gifted and talented students may also enroll in dual enrollment classes and/or an Independent Study class. Teachers of the Honors, Pre AP, and AP classes and the Independent Study class have received the state-required gifted and talented training. When possible, out-of-school options relevant to the student's strength are available.

Nominations

Nominations will be accepted from parents, teachers, community members, faculty/staff, and students themselves. Nominations will be solicited in the fall of each year via newspaper releases, school print publications, parent letters, and school web publications. Additionally, 100% of first grade students will be screened for the GT Program with a nonverbal ability test. An automatic nomination for the GT Program will occur if a student scores in the 95 percentile or above.

Assessment

After parent permission has been obtained, all nominated students will be assessed using multiple measures, both qualitative and quantitative to determine their aptitude, performance, and productive thinking abilities. Measures will vary depending on the grade of the nominated student. Assessment tools may include, but are not limited to, the following: achievement tests, intelligence tests, behavioral checklists completed by teachers and parents, and student work products, if available. Additionally, Sealy ISD reserves the right to request additional information where accumulated data is inconclusive.

The school counselors are responsible for the administration of the testing measures and for the maintenance of the candidate files.

Placement

Two distinct committees, elementary and secondary, will make all placement, furlough, exit, transfer, and appeals decisions. The committee will consist of the Director of Special Programs, campus principal, and one campus educator who has completed the 30 hours of GT training.

Data from the screening measures will be placed on Sealy ISD's Gifted and Talented Profile. During the placement meeting, each student's profile will be presented to the committee anonymously. The committee recommends placement only for students whose data reflect that the GT Program is the most appropriate educational setting for them. This is determined by a preponderance of evidence. The committee does not focus on any single measure. Screening procedures are designed to assure that all students, including those with special needs, those from different cultures, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are provided equal access to the program.

Placement in the GT program is voluntary and requires written permission of the parents or legal guardians. Notification of the committee's decisions will take place when campus committees have met and are ready to remit notification letters.

Students not placed in the program may be re-nominated the following year and will follow the same screening procedures. This allows for further observation and increased student maturity.

Identification Timelines

Level	Nomination Period	Screening/Testing	Identification/ Notification	Begin Services
Kindergarten	November	December/January	February	March 1
Grades 1-12	November/December	January-April	April-May	Fall of next year

Appeals

Parents or students may appeal any final decision of the selection committee regarding selection for or removal from the GT program by contacting the campus counselor prior to the start of the next school year. If possible, additional information will be collected by the counselor and presented to the selection committee. The selection committee will examine the new data along with the data previously collected. The parents and

student will be notified of the committee's decision and, if not satisfied, may appeal to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. The final decision will rest with the superintendent.

Transfers

Students who transfer into Sealy ISD who have formerly been identified as gifted and talented will be placed in the GT program based on conditional acceptance until supporting documentation showing previous GT placement has been received. Within six weeks of enrollment, the selection committee shall determine placement based upon the transferred records, observation reports of the district teachers, and, if possible, student and parent conferences. On occasions where previous school's documentation and teacher observation are conflicting, Sealy ISD reserves the right to request additional information and extend the six-week timeline before the placement committee makes a decision.

Furloughs

A furlough is a period of time in which a student participating in the program may take a leave of absence from program services. A furlough for one semester may be granted to a student when extenuating circumstances prevent the student from being a productive member of the GT program. Extenuating circumstances might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- death of a loved one;
- family divorce;
- illness or injury;
- family separation;
- scheduling conflicts; or
- the placement of a student in an alternative setting that would require absences from the program.

Students who wish to receive a furlough should contact the campus counselor to discuss the reasoning behind the request. Furlough requests will be considered by the placement committee at the appropriate level. The committee's decision will be documented in the student's cumulative folder.

If a student does not return for readmission to the GT Program at the end of the furlough period, the student will be exited from the program. The exited student may apply for admission to the GT Program again at any time in the future, at which time the application will be processed following standard screening and placement options.

Exit Procedures

A request to exit from the GT Program may be initiated by the student, a parent, or the selection committee. The person initiating the request to exit must complete an exit form and identify the reason for the request. Reasons for initiating an exit request may include, but are not limited to any one, or a combination of the following:

- failure to meet a satisfactory standard (70) for two six week periods in each class that the student qualified as gifted;
- failure to demonstrate mastery in any of the four core areas of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) that the student qualified as gifted;
- failure to demonstrate at the secondary level, mastery in any core area of End of Course tests that the student qualified as gifted;
- student and parent/legal guardian request

The request to exit form is submitted to the campus counselor who will then forward a letter to the parent/legal guardian to notify them of the request. After the counselor meets with the student and the parent, the appropriate placement committee will convene and determine action. All involved parties will be notified of the results.

If, during a six-week period, a student is not progressing satisfactorily in the program, the student will meet with the campus counselor to discuss his/her progress and possible intervention strategies. If improvement is not noted after the next six weeks, the student, along with his/her parent, will once again meet with the counselor, and a growth contract will be written specifying areas of concern and improvements required. If the student has not complied with the terms of the contract after the next six weeks period, the student may be exited from the GT Program. Students who are exited will be eligible for nomination following district guidelines each subsequent year for identification for GT.

Assessments

The district shall not perform reassessments; however, the district will re-evaluate GT students in fifth grade during the spring semester. This re-evaluation will determine the students' strengths in an effort to make appropriate educational placement decisions for the secondary level. The re-evaluations shall consist of standardized achievement tests.

Program Description

Sealy ISD will develop appropriate and challenging learning experiences in grades kindergarten through twelve in language arts, math, science, and social studies based on TEKS standards. The focus will be on creative thinking, analysis, research and advanced-level products and/or performances. Opportunities will be provided to accelerate in area(s) of student strengths. The school district will inform parents of available opportunities.

Sealy ISD ensures that no more than 15 percent of state funds allocated for gifted and talented education are spent on indirect costs as defined in the Financial Accounting Resource Guide.

The Challenge Program Maggie B. Selman Elementary/Maggie B. Selman Intermediate

The gifted specialist at the elementary level works with the gifted students and their teachers to provide enrichment as needed. In grades one through five, identified students are clustered in a regular classroom with a teacher who has completed the state required gifted training. In addition to being a resource for classroom activities, the gifted specialist meets daily with groups of students to extend and enrich grade-level TEKS and strengthen higher-order thinking skills. Students are provided with the opportunity to develop individual interests and abilities by participating in thematic units of study that extend and enrich the core curriculum. Students may also receive extended enrichment activities through Sealy ISD's Challenge Lab. This lab is available throughout the school day to enhance students' learning beyond the differentiation offered in the classroom and to celebrate academic achievement.

Once identified, kindergarten students will participate in a daily pull-out program led by the gifted specialist. Following state policy, gifted services for kindergarten students will begin no later than March 1 of each year.

The Gifted and Talented Program Sealy Junior High/Sealy High School

At the secondary level, all students identified as gifted and talented have the option of advanced classes (Honors, Pre AP, or AP) in all core areas. These advanced classes contain students who have been identified as GT as well as other high achieving students. All other students are mixed heterogeneously. The GT students are given assignments that require them to work alone, with others, or as a class.

Sealy Junior High – Beginning in 2008-2009, sixth grade students will enroll in the core class(es) of their identified strength. Students who do not enroll in the advanced class of their identified strength will be exited from the GT program. Along with the advanced class options, GT students are given the opportunity to participate in a social studies class specifically designed for gifted students.

Sealy High School – Pre AP courses offered in the secondary schools are rigorous and demanding. These accelerated, college preparatory classes will provide challenging research opportunities for students with high interest in academic exploration and will include numerous out-of-class assignments. Pre AP classes are designed to extend and enrich the content of the regular curriculum while preparing students for success in Advanced Placement (AP) classes.

AP courses are sponsored and approved by The College Board. Each AP course has a curriculum of college-level work taught at the high school level by specially trained teachers. AP courses are designed to give students an opportunity to place out of college course work by scoring within the college accepted range on a national exam given in May of each year. Gifted and talented high school students will be expected to take Pre AP and AP courses whenever these courses are offered in the area that they have been identified as gifted.

At the high school level, the needs of junior and senior gifted students may also be met through independent study. This class allows the student to complete a project in a field in which he/she has developed an interest. The student is assigned to a teacher who acts as a mentor to help guide the student through his/her research. By the first week of May, a sophisticated product and/or performance will be presented by the student to evaluators from within and outside of the school district who are knowledgeable in the field that is the focus of the product.

Other options for secondary students include credits by examination and early High School Graduation.

Curriculum and Instruction

Differentiated instruction is required for students identified as gifted/talented in the state of Texas. Where advanced classes are not offered, students will have educational experiences commensurate with their areas of strength that are qualitatively different from the general education program. GT students are taught and assigned work that matches the student's instructional level in his/her identified areas. Modified curriculum focuses on depth, complexity, problem solving, thinking skills (higher level, critical, creative, and cognitive), questioning, and real-world application of core knowledge and skills. Student-selected topics of interest enhance the student's learning. Curriculum modification and instructional differentiation should focus on production, allowing students to exhibit their learning through abstract and concrete products.

Since GT curriculum is inherently individual and unique, Sealy ISD recognizes the need to provide teachers of the gifted and talented with dedicated time to develop and refine an appropriately differentiated curriculum. Therefore, Sealy ISD will allocate funds to provide these teachers with release time for curriculum development. Sealy ISD will work closely with Education Service Center specialists to develop, refine, and evaluate its curriculum for GT students. Working through each campus site-based decision-

making committee, further assignments and tasks will be assessed and implemented for curriculum development for GT.

Professional Development

All teachers serving GT students will have the state-mandated 30 hours of GT training. These initial hours will be accepted from Education Service Center Institutes or through university or college credit. Teachers will be expected to acquire six hours of advanced training annually. The staff development may be used in coordination with the curriculum development days described above. Administrators and counselors are required six hours of training in the nature and needs of gifted and talented students and program options.

Family-Community Involvement

Because education for the academically talented requires a strong partnership between parents and teachers, and cooperation with the community, the Gifted and Talented Program will promote the active involvement and support of parents and community through the following:

- Parents and community members will participate in the identification process by nominating prospective students for the program;
- Parents and community members will be invited to serve as resources and mentors for the program;
- Parents will receive an individual student report at the end of every six week period containing a summary of activities from the previous six weeks and a preview of the future six weeks' events.
- Information regarding the program will be dispersed through school print publications, newspaper releases, parent letters, and school web sites;
- Parents will have the opportunity to participate in the GT Advisory Committee and have input in program organization;
- Parents and community members will be invited to a spring GT Showcase where students can display and explain their class/independent projects.
- Parents will be given the opportunity to complete a program evaluation survey each year; and/or
- Parents will be given the opportunity to increase their awareness of the unique qualities of a gifted child.