Zeeland Public Schools

Gifted and Talented Program

*“The ZPS Gifted and Talented program provides fourth and fifth grade students of high intellectual ability an environment which maximizes their learning potential”*

*Our goal is to move from a conceptual definition of giftedness to an operational one.*

*Like Renzulli, we believe the gifted performances require an above average ability, in combination with creativity and task-commitment. Although our program is designed to meet the needs of academically gifted learners, we also incorporate many avenues to combine the creative side of our students, while fostering the dedication and perseverance to have a strong sense of task-commitment.*

As we look at programming and curriculum, we consulted the K-12 Gifted Education National Standards put out by National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC).

“Gifted Education services must include curriculum and instructional opportunities directed to the unique needs of the gifted learner”

Guiding Principles:

1. Differentiated curriculum for the gifted learner must span grades pre-K – 12.
   1. For those students in 4th and 5th grade, a differentiated curriculum will be based upon readiness, content, process and/or product. Students will have an opportunity to make choices in some cases as to content and/or the product that will showcase their learning. We will also differentiate based upon student readiness, allowing students to test out of content that they have demonstrated proficiency in, but also allowing for additional instruction and learning time where warranted.
   2. By definition, a differentiated classroom, “provides specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student’s road map for learning is identical to anyone else’s.” “Teachers must engage students in instruction through different learning modalities, by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity.”
2. Regular classroom curricula and instruction must be adapted, modified, or replaced to meet the unique needs of gifted learners.
   1. By the very nature of ZPS having these two classrooms, we have adapted and modified the instructional venue for our gifted learners in grades 4 and 5.
3. Instructional pace must be flexible to allow for the accelerated learning of gifted learners as appropriate.
   1. We will pre-test students in some units science, social studies and math, allowing them to compact those skills that they have not mastered, while being given credit for mastery in those skills that are already secure. This will be done in those areas that students may have already been exposed to (and therefore mastered) based upon the teacher’s observation. This will also be an option for students who feel that they have mastered the benchmarks in any given unit of study.
      1. If a student demonstrates mastery in a unit of study they will be given an opportunity for additional study in the same unit, allowed to work on their Independent Learning Trail, learn new material under the umbrella of the same general course. For example, students showing mastery in the geometry benchmarks may move onto additional content involving geometry, may research careers that focus on geometry, may be given options that will deepen their understanding of how geometry fits into the world around them.
   2. We will be able to compact curriculum (to move more quickly through a unit of study, or to eliminate skills and content where students’ have demonstrated proficiency by accelerating traditional pacing.
   3. The use of fluid and flexible learning groups will be utilized based upon readiness, interest and/or product.
4. Educational opportunities for subject and grade skipping must be provided to gifted learners.
   1. Students have the opportunity to test out of the regular 6th grade math class, being placed into Honors Math, which puts them a year ahead of their peers in math. PATH (Program for the Academically Talented at Hope) is an option for students in 7th and 8th grade, in math, science and language arts. These students must take the ACT at the end of 6th grade to ascertain eligibility.
5. Learning opportunities for gifted learners must consist of a continuum of differentiated curricular options, instructional approaches and resource materials.

While the NAGC’s guiding principles apply to a K-12 setting, we feel that our job as teachers of the 4th and 5th grade gifted classroom is to provide an educational experience filled with purposeful intentionality, while incorporating those principles that deal specifically with the instructional needs of gifted learners.

We believe that our job is to provide a safe environment where our gifted students are able to meet their potential, understand how they learn best, develop a love of learning, and are provided a multitude of opportunities to grow as a learner and as a human being.

We understand that a student best learns when he or she is challenged.

We understand that we need to meet students where they are in any given subject area, and that we teach students, not content.

We will provide time for independent learning, guiding students as they make their way along their individual learning trails.

We believe that we are engaged in an educational partnership, with the student, the parents and the community.

We know that we must adjust content, pacing, process and products to meet the needs of our students.

The following are examples of ways in which we will do so:

English Language Arts:

* Allow students to demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension strategies, leading to compacting curriculum.
* 4th grade: study of roots. 5th grade: vocabulary building and enhancement.
* Literature will be embedded within social studies, history and independent learning.

Math:

* We will use flexible programming; moving through the 4th and half of the 5th grade GLCEs in the 4th grade. In fifth grade students will master the remaining 5th grade standards, as well as the 6th grade GLCEs.
* We will differentiate instruction after ascertaining skills that have been mastered by individuals.

Math (cont.)

* In some areas we will compact the curriculum and accelerate the pacing based upon the needs of individual students.
* We will incorporate problem solving challenges, Continental Math League problems and Math Pentathalon games which all foster creative problem solving.

Science:

* We will offer Fun Science Friday and Science Olympics, which allow students to investigate and experiment scientific principles and concepts on a regular basis, often times adding rigor to the traditional 4th and 5th grade curriculum.
* Compacting of the curriculum in areas where appropriate.
* We have consolidated the two years of science GLCEs, allowing for a more in depth study of particular areas of study at each level.

Creative Problem Solving:

* Destination Imagination – use the Instant Challenges within our classrooms each week.
  + Destination Imagination is a national program that fosters creative problem solving. Instant Challenges are those that are completed in teams within a short time period.
* Lateral thinkers and critical thinking puzzles and strategic games are used regularly.

Global Awareness:

* Incorporation of world issues, community service and global awareness through Every Monday Matters. Every other Monday, we will research both local and global issues (ie. World hunger, homelessness, environmental issues) looking not only at the issue, but what we can do to help alleviate the problem.

Open Door Policy:

* We want our parents to feel welcome in our classrooms at all times. We will use our parent volunteers to enhance their child’s learning environment, and opportunities. This includes asking parents to share their expertise to small or whole groups.

Independent Learning:

* Each student will embark on his or her Independent Learning Trail. There will be time allocated each week to the notion that students must have an opportunity to learn about those things that interest them and be able to determine the means by which they will share what they have learned.
* End of the Year Showcase. Each student will prepare a product of their choosing, showcasing what they have learned about any particular subject during the course of the year. The showcase will be held in conjunction with our GT Parent night, explaining the program to parents of 3rd graders who have qualified for the following year.

Technology:

* We will utilize technology throughout the year in many ways. We will use and create Web-Quests, publish pod casts, create movies and digital stories, incorporate programs such as PowerPoint within products and projects throughout the year.

Presentations:

* Students will be engaged in both informal and formal oral presentations, to both small and larger audiences.
* Every other year, we put on a program, typically music-based, for our parents and the student body.

Character Building Activities:

* Character Assignments will be sent home regularly. These include tasks that encourage cooperation, respect, kindness, responsibility and accountability.

***Identification and Qualification:***

All third graders in our district are given the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). We primarily use the CogAt to determine qualification, and then support that data with information from subsets of the ITBS.

* The CogAt is a group administered ability test which assesses students’ abilities in reasoning and problem solving using verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal (spatial) symbols.
* The ITBS is an achievement test which measures students’ knowledge in core content areas.

We look at students who have a high score (97 or higher) in any specific area of the CogAt, trying to include students who might have significant abilities in that area, but who may not be as high in another.

We also look at the individual SAS scores (which have a .89 - .92 correlation to an individually administered abilities test), trying to identify students who had a score of 125 or higher in individual and/or combined areas.

Because of the new norms, changing tests and therefore changing scores, we really need to have as much information about certain students as possible. There are still students who have automatically qualified to be invited. Those are students who:

* score a 97, 98 or 99 CogAt composite
* score a 95 or 96 CogAt composite with 5 additional scores of 94 or higher in any of the following sub-categories: CogAt verbal, non-verbal or quantitative, ITBS reading total, language total, math total, core total or composite.

Students who are also being considered are those who have scored a 97, 98 or 99 in any one area of the CogAt. For these students, we are not looking at anyone who has lower than a 90 composite. Students who have a composite less than 94 are the students for whom we really need additional information on. We then ask their classroom teachers to provide us with the following:

* a completed Teacher Input form
* A completed Teacher Inventory of Learning Strengths (scored with a 3.3 or higher)
* samples of student work, which should include:
  + a copy of the student’s writing
  + a copy of any page from his/her reading response journal
  + a sample of a recent math paper

We also will look at students who are recommended to the program by their current teacher. Qualification may require additional outside testing, which is an expense to the family involved.

K. Scaturro 2008