



# Gifted and Talented Programs

# District Leadership Forum

**Becca Debus**

*Research Associate*

**Matthew McCarthy**

*Research Manager*

**Daniel Gordon**

*Senior Research Manager*

## LEGAL CAVEAT

EAB Global, Inc. ("EAB") has made efforts to verify the accuracy of the information it provides to members. This report relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and EAB cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or any analysis based thereon. In addition, neither EAB nor any of its affiliates (each, an "EAB Organization") is in the business of giving legal, accounting, or other professional advice, and its reports should not be construed as professional advice. In particular, members should not rely on any legal commentary in this report as a basis for action, or assume that any tactics described herein would be permitted by applicable law or appropriate for a given member's situation. Members are advised to consult with appropriate professionals concerning legal, tax, or accounting issues, before implementing any of these tactics. No EAB Organization or any of its respective officers, directors, employees, or agents shall be liable for any claims, liabilities, or expenses relating to (a) any errors or omissions in this report, whether caused by any EAB organization, or any of their respective employees or agents, or sources or other third parties, (b) any recommendation by any EAB Organization, or (c) failure of member and its employees and agents to abide by the terms set forth herein.

EAB is a registered trademark of EAB Global, Inc. in the United States and other countries. Members are not permitted to use these trademarks, or any other trademark, product name, service name, trade name, and logo of any EAB Organization without prior written consent of EAB. Other trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos used within these pages are the property of their respective holders. Use of other company trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos or images of the same does not necessarily constitute (a) an endorsement by such company of an EAB Organization and its products and services, or (b) an endorsement of the company or its products or services by an EAB Organization. No EAB Organization is affiliated with any such company.

## IMPORTANT: Please read the following.

EAB has prepared this report for the exclusive use of its members. Each member acknowledges and agrees that this report and the information contained herein (collectively, the "Report") are confidential and proprietary to EAB. By accepting delivery of this Report, each member agrees to abide by the terms as stated herein, including the following:

1. All right, title, and interest in and to this Report is owned by an EAB Organization. Except as stated herein, no right, license, permission, or interest of any kind in this Report is intended to be given, transferred to, or acquired by a member. Each member is authorized to use this Report only to the extent expressly authorized herein.
2. Each member shall not sell, license, republish, distribute, or post online or otherwise this Report, in part or in whole. Each member shall not disseminate or permit the use of, and shall take reasonable precautions to prevent such dissemination or use of, this Report by (a) any of its employees and agents (except as stated below), or (b) any third party.
3. Each member may make this Report available solely to those of its employees and agents who (a) are registered for the workshop or membership program of which this Report is a part, (b) require access to this Report in order to learn from the information described herein, and (c) agree not to disclose this Report to other employees or agents or any third party. Each member shall use, and shall ensure that its employees and agents use, this Report for its internal use only. Each member may make a limited number of copies, solely as adequate for use by its employees and agents in accordance with the terms herein.
4. Each member shall not remove from this Report any confidential markings, copyright notices, and/or other similar indicia herein.
5. Each member is responsible for any breach of its obligations as stated herein by any of its employees or agents.
6. If a member is unwilling to abide by any of the foregoing obligations, then such member shall promptly return this Report and all copies thereof to EAB.

# Table of Contents

---

<b>1) Executive Overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Key Observations .....	4
<b>2) Identification</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Approaches to Gifted Education .....	5
Preliminary Identification .....	6
Assessments .....	7
Holistic Identification Processes .....	9
Program Withdrawals .....	10
<b>3) Delivery of Services</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Instructional Models .....	12
Independent Projects and Extracurriculars .....	13
Personal Education Plans .....	14
Social-Emotional Supports .....	16
Training and Professional Development .....	18
Parental Support .....	19
<b>4) Program Evaluation</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Assessment Methods .....	21
Outcomes .....	22
<b>5) Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Project Challenge .....	23
Project Sources .....	23
Research Parameters .....	24
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	<b>25</b>

# 1) Executive Overview

---

## Key Observations

**To avoid under-identification of underserved student populations, use a broad body of evidence to identify students as gifted and talented.** Across profiled school districts, gifted and talented program staff analyze combinations of achievement test scores, ability tests results, behavioral scales, portfolios, and referrals to identify students as gifted. Contacts report that assessing a broad body of evidence increases identification of students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds, as well as students who may have a learning disability.

**Consider identifying students through local norms rather than national norms to better meet the educational needs of students within the district.** **District C** and **District E** assess students against local norms rather than against a national standard to identify students who may need more advanced educational services compared to their classroom peers. In some school districts gifted and talented staff consider a very small percentage of students gifted based on national norms (i.e., score in the 95 percentile or above on nationally normed tests). However, local norms allows program administrators to identify students as gifted who fall in the 95 percentile compared to their district peers. These students possess additional instructional needs compared to their peers that districts could serve through gifted and talented education.

**To provide gifted students with meaningful and achievable academic and social-emotional goals, collaborate with them to design their Personal Education Plans (PEPs).** Contacts report that PEPs advance learning when gifted specialists set goals together with students and ask students to participate in achieving these goals. Contacts at **District B** and **District D** state that initial collaboration and regular conversations with a student about their goals turns personal education plans from a compliance document into actionable agendas for the student's education.

**Tailor social-emotional lessons to gifted students' current needs to offer relevant social-emotional learning.** Gifted specialists and classroom teachers in **District C**, **District D**, and **District F** draw from a bank of lessons to help address pressing issues for students (e.g., perfectionism, bullying). Contacts suggest incorporating these lessons into classrooms based on the social-emotional needs of gifted students, rather than establishing a set curriculum to deliver social-emotional lessons on a predetermined schedule.

## 2) Identification

---

### Approaches to Gifted Education

### Approaches to Gifted Education Influence How Districts Identify and Serve Students

There is no universally accepted definition of what “giftedness” means in the context of gifted and talented education. Contacts at most profiled districts reference different definitions of giftedness provided by their states to explain how they approach gifted education, and literature on gifted education suggests multiple definitions of “giftedness.”<sup>1</sup>

Though definitions of giftedness differ, two distinct approaches to giftedness education emerge; one approach posits giftedness as an innate quality and the other posits giftedness as a situational instructional need. These approaches impact:

1. How districts identify gifted students.
2. Which students districts identify.
3. How districts serve students identified as gifted.

Gifted educator Janice Szabos’s “Bright vs. Gifted” checklist exemplifies the more “traditional” approach to giftedness.<sup>2</sup> This checklist defines giftedness as an innate quality possessed by a child. This definition supposes a child identified as gifted and talented should receive gifted and talented instruction regardless of their location or peer group. This definition also considers giftedness distinct from bright or high-achieving children. Under this definition, children with the same experience and instructional needs should be treated differently if one is identified as ‘truly’ gifted and the other as ‘just’ bright. This definition also prioritizes traits associated with the culturally dominant group (e.g. white, middle class, English speakers), which reifies existing disparities in access to gifted education.

#### Example Comparisons from the “Bright vs. Gifted” Checklist<sup>3</sup>

Bright Child		Gifted Learner
Knows the answers	VS	Asks the questions
Learns with ease		Already knows
Enjoys peers		Prefers adults
Has good ideas		Has wild, silly ideas

A more recent definition of giftedness suggests administrators identify children whose instructional needs qualify them to receive gifted and talented services. This definition is situational and indicates that gifted coordinators should place students who are more advanced academically than their peers in a gifted and talented program. Students may receive different services depending on their current needs, or move into and out of the program (particularly if they change school districts). Districts that approach giftedness as a situational instructional need may be more likely to recognize individual differences across students; to identify students from traditionally underserved populations; and to offer services to students who may not

<sup>1</sup>Scott Peters, “Bright vs. Gifted: An Unnecessary Distinction | National Association for Gifted Children,” National Association of Gifted Children, September 5, 2017, <https://www.nagc.org/blog/bright-vs-gifted-unnecessary-distinction>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Janice Szabos, “Bright vs. Gifted,” Challenge Magazine, 1989, <https://www.slideshare.net/PurdueGERI/bright-vs-gifted-handout>.

meet the stated criteria of giftedness but still benefit from extra instructional attention.

## Preliminary Identification

### Create a Pool of Students to Further Evaluate for Admission to Gifted and Talented Programs

Gifted and talented programs at profiled school districts initially use referrals, universal screenings, portfolio assessments, or a combination of these methods to identify potentially gifted students. Gifted and talented staff administer additional assessments to students in these pools to determine whether to admit them into the program.

#### Example Preliminary Identification Method

*In order of initial investment from the Gifted and Talented Program*

##### 1) Referral Only

The gifted and talented program at **District B** requires teachers, peers, administrators, and parents to refer students (students may also self-refer). After gifted coordinators receive a referral, they build a body of evidence (e.g., test scores, portfolio assessments, interviews) to decide whether the student qualifies for admittance to the gifted and talented program.



**District E** uses online Google Forms to refer students. Contacts report that parents and teachers find these digital forms more convenient than paper forms. Contacts add that the Google Forms also allow program administrators to track information better.

##### 2) Universal Screenings

In addition to accepting referrals to the program, **District E's** gifted and talented program screens all students in the district. Specifically, in first and sixth grades (District E's elementary schools span first through sixth grade), all students in the district take the CogAT, and gifted coordinators test students by referral only in second through fifth grade.



##### 3) Universal Primary Talent Development

At **District A**, all students in the district enrolled in kindergarten through second grade participate in a series of primary talent development lessons. Based on these lessons, gifted specialists develop a portfolio for each student. The specialists use a rubric developed by the state to evaluate and score. Then, in second grade, all students take the CogAT. Contingent on a combination of high scores from the portfolio and the CogAT, the gifted coordinator refers potentially gifted students to a performance test series. The combination of these assessments determines whether program staff identify a student as gifted.



## Consider Waiting to Identify Giftedness in Subject Areas to Reduce Both Over- and Under-Identification

**District A, District D, and District F** identify elementary school students as gifted by subject area. In previous school years, gifted and talented staff at District F tested students and placed them in subject areas in kindergarten. Now, gifted and talented staff administer only aptitude tests (e.g., CogAT, NNAT) to kindergarteners to identify students for placement into a Talent Development program. Then in second grade, staff administer an achievement test to identify students by subject areas. Contacts report that this delayed assessment prevents over-identification of students who attended strong pre-schools. A strong pre-school may cause a student to display a level of achievement that proves unsustainable over time.

Delayed assessment of subject areas also allows students who may possess high aptitude but score lower on achievement tests to continue to receive gifted and talented instruction in kindergarten through second grade. Classroom teachers and gifted specialists dedicate additional instructional time to help these students develop their skills in specific subject areas before they take the achievement test in second grade. If students' achievement scores align with their high CogAT scores, they move to subject-specific programming in third grade.

## Assessments

### Evaluate Achievement, Aptitude, Behavior, and Talent to Comprehensively Assess Students for Giftedness

Gifted and talented coordinators across profiled school districts use two or more assessments in their identification process to increase the probability of correct student placement (i.e., little over- or under-identification of students who meet the districts' definition of giftedness). Contacts at **District A** recommend program administrators consider multiple data points to ensure that not any one data point prevents student placement in the gifted and talented program. For example, traditionally underserved populations typically score lower than their white, upper-middle class, English-as-a-first-language peers on standardized exams. To avoid bias based on these traits, contacts emphasize the importance of aptitude tests, behavioral scales, and expert evaluation to supplement assessments of students' giftedness through achievement tests.

## Types of Assessments Profiled Districts Use to Evaluate Giftedness

Achievement Tests	Aptitude Tests	Behavioral Scales	Expert Evaluation of Talent
<p><b>Examples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Iowa Achievement Test</li><li>• Logramos</li><li>• STAR</li><li>• i-Ready</li><li>• NWEA</li><li>• State tests</li></ul>	<p><b>Examples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CogAT</li><li>• NNAT</li></ul>	<p><b>Examples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SIGS</li><li>• GES</li><li>• Kingore Observation Inventory</li></ul>	<p><b>Examples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluation of a portfolio of artwork</li><li>• Juried dance or musical performance</li></ul>
<p><b>Uses</b></p> <p>Measures academic ability. May not fairly evaluate students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.</p>	<p><b>Uses</b></p> <p>Measures aptitude, intellectual ability. Discrepancies between scores on Achievement and Aptitude tests can signal potential learning disabilities or unmet needs.</p>	<p><b>Uses</b></p> <p>Looks for behaviors in students indicating gifted ability outside of a testing setting.</p>	<p><b>Uses</b></p> <p>Assess talents outside of the classroom setting.</p>

## Establish Local Norms to Improve Identification of Students with Unmet Instructional Needs

Most profiled school districts evaluate nationally normed assessment scores as part of their identification process for gifted students. At these school districts, gifted and talented leaders identify students who score at or above the 95 percentile as gifted. However, gifted and talented program leaders at **District C** and **District F** use locally normed scores to identify students. At District C, all students complete nationally normed tests (i.e., Iowa Achievement Test, CogAT, i-Ready). The gifted coordinator then finds the average score for their district and evaluates students based on their standard deviation from that mean value, rather than students' nationally normed percentile rank. Program staff identify students whose z-scores place them significantly above their peers as gifted and offer them admittance into the gifted and talented program. District C serves 1,100 students, and in some years may not identify any students who fall in the 95 percentile of students nationally. To ensure that District C operates a gifted and talented program, the gifted and talented coordinator uses local norms to identify and serve those students who demonstrate an instructional need compared to their peers.

Local norms can also help districts identify underserved populations. District F serves 48,000 socio-economically diverse students. The gifted and talented coordinator at District F developed a system of local norms for the CogAT and NNAT. The coordinator divided the district into three bands based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at each school:

- Band 1: Schools with less than 10 percent of economically disadvantaged students.
- Band 2: Schools with between 10 and 50 percent economically disadvantaged students.
- Band 3: Schools with more than 50 percent economically disadvantaged students.



The coordinator uses the top five percent of scores within each band to establish different scores that identify students as candidates for the gifted and talented program. These local norms ensure that a consistent identification process exists within each school and alleviate potential under-identification at schools with lower socio-economic status (SES). Consequently, the coordinator increased the number of students identified at schools with lower SES and established a process that better reflects how students compare to their local peers.

#### **Local Norms Over-Identify in Higher SES Schools and Under-Identify in Lower SES Schools**

Contacts at **District F** note that the Coordinator for Gifted Services chose not to set the benchmark for identification any higher than a score of 130 on the CogAT in high SES school zones, even though the top 5% of scores typically fell around 135-136. The Coordinator implemented this ceiling to alleviate potential dissatisfaction from parents (because setting the ceiling any higher meant children could get into MENSA, but not into the district's gifted and talented program). However, the practice increased the number of student identified in higher SES schools. Contacts express that over-identification in higher SES schools is an acceptable tradeoff for decreased under-identification in lower SES schools.

## Holistic Identification Processes

### **Create a Distinct, Specialized Instructional Tier to Identify and Cultivate Traditionally Underserved Students**

To help resolve issues of under-identification, **District E** added another level to their gifted and talented program to specifically address the under-identification of culturally, linguistically, economically diverse (CLED) students. The Director of Advanced Academic Studies noticed that the percentage of white, English as a first language, high-SES, students in the gifted and talented program was much higher than the percentage of students with those same characteristics (i.e., white, etc.) in the district overall. To identify additional CLED students as gifted, the director added an extra tier (Tier 1) to their identification process and gifted services. The gifted coordinator now places any student in the district who does not qualify for the gifted and talented program but shows the potential to do so into this extra tier. The coordinator also places students in Tier 1 for whom more information is required before the coordinator determines their placement (e.g., a transfer student from another district).

Tier 1 provides students gifted and talented instruction and services, but in the more supportive environment of one-on-one lessons, as opposed to cluster groups. These students may receive the same content as students identified as gifted. However, the instructional staff may deliver the content more slowly than in gifted cluster groupings or the content may focus more on vocabulary or skill development. These more supportive services transition to less supportive services as students acquire the foundational skills they need to succeed in a more traditional classroom setting. Contacts at District E strongly recommend this practice to districts with diverse populations and/or large numbers of students who do not speak English as a first language. Tier 1 increased the number of CLED students identified as gifted and reduced the number of CLED students lost through attrition.

## Encourage Placement Committees to Consider Non-Academic Performance Factors to Recognize Different Types of Giftedness

After gifted and talented staff at profiled school districts collect a body of evidence on potentially gifted students, a person or team assesses the evidence to determine whether students qualify for the gifted and talented program. At **District C**, the coordinator of the gifted and talented program determines placement based on the body of evidence. **District A**, a larger profiled district, operates an instructional data division at the district level that assesses the body of evidence and determines students' placement.

The Texas State Board of Education requires districts to establish a standing placement committee with three to five members who completed the state mandated gifted and talented training. This impacts both **District F** and **District E**. At District F, the gifted and talented coordinator establishes guidelines for placement, which they then distribute to the placement committees for each campus. Contacts at District F prefer this approach because the centralized guidelines ensure consistency and equip local placement committees to find and address exceptions to the rules.

Contacts at District A also express a need for flexibility in placement decisions. They note that some children receive scores that do not indicate they belong in a gifted and talented program, but administrators and teachers know they would benefit from gifted and talented services. Contacts stress that this type of flexibility is particularly important because students who qualify for gifted services but do not receive them drop out of school more often than their peers.

## Program Withdrawals

### Establish a Policy to Remove Students from the Gifted and Talented Program to Address Concerns and Reflect Changing Needs

Contacts at **District F** recommend creating a policy to remove or withdraw students from the gifted and talented program if their needs change. Contacts emphasize that the policy creates a process to withdraw students from the program, rather than a grade or performance-based threshold that students must meet. If a student struggles to meet the demands of the gifted and talented program, program administrators first create a growth plan (i.e., actions to address academic, social, or emotional problems). The placement committee also holds meetings with teachers, parents, and the student to discuss their rationale for why the student may not be best served by their placement within the program at the time.

At District F, students in elementary school rarely withdraw from the program, though students exit the program at greater rates at the secondary level. Contacts attribute the increase in withdrawals at the secondary level to scheduling conflicts with gifted and talented programs and the availability of Advancement Placement courses at District F.

## Example Reasons Why Students Exit a Gifted and Talented Program at *District F*



# 3) Delivery of Services

## Instructional Models

### Use a Combination of Instructional Models to Deliver Services Effectively to All Gifted and Talented Students

At all profiled districts, contacts use a combination of models (e.g., cluster grouping, pull-out classes, push-in classes, differentiated lessons, case managers) to deliver services to students in gifted and talented programs. Gifted and talented staff tailor services based on the number of students identified as gifted in a school or class, the needs of specific students, and the subject area of academic support. **District A**, **District E**, and **District F** also include tiered services to address the needs of students who may not fully qualify for the gifted and talented program but still benefit from additional supports and lessons.

### Models of Gifted and Talented Instruction at Profiled Districts

District A	District B	District C
<p><b>Pre-K-2</b></p> <p>All students participate in primary talent development lessons.</p>	<p><b>K-8</b></p> <p>Pull-out service for identified students, supplemented with occasional push-in lessons if teachers request them.</p>	<p><b>K-5</b></p> <p>Cluster grouping and pull-out programs for identified students.</p>
<p><b>3-8</b></p> <p>Identified students clustered or in cohorts for their identified subjects (math or reading).</p>	<p><b>9-12</b></p> <p>Counselor/case manager model to advise identified students on college and career readiness.</p>	<p><b>6-12</b></p> <p>Cluster grouping and pull-out programs for identified students, opportunity to take online acceleration courses.</p>
District D	District E	District F
<p><b>K-5</b></p> <p>Case manager model for identified students, pull out classes for independent study, push-in lessons in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>K-6</b></p> <p>Pull-out lessons for identified students.</p>	<p><b>K-2</b></p> <p>Talent development model based on aptitude with cluster grouping, pull-out for independent study.</p>
<p><b>6-8</b></p> <p>Case manager model for identified students, differentiated lessons, elective classes for independent study.</p>	<p><b>7-8</b></p> <p>Cohorts or cluster grouping in identified subjects, accelerated track for math.</p>	<p><b>2-12</b></p> <p>Cluster grouping by identified subject and pull-out programs for identified students conducting independent study and in accelerated tracks.</p>
<p><b>9-12</b></p> <p>Case manager model for identified students, resume building and goal-setting.</p>		

## Independent Projects and Extracurriculars

### Use Pull-out Instruction to Guide Independent Projects that Encourage Creativity and Exploration

While districts like **District B** use pull-out programs to deliver their primary academic instruction for gifted students, other profiled school districts use cluster grouping or a push-in model to support students in their identified subject areas. These districts may complement their in-class services with pull-out sessions which provide opportunities for students identified as gifted to explore topics of interest, hone research skills, and work on large scale projects. These pull-out sessions do not focus on specific subject areas (e.g., math, reading).

For more information on Texas requirements for gifted and talented teachers, see the Texas Education Agency's [website](#).

**District F** uses pull-out independent study programs to complement their cluster grouping in the classroom. The gifted and talented program extends these independent study projects to all students identified as gifted in kindergarten through fifth grade, in compliance with their state requirements. In the fall, students identified as gifted complete a group research project. In the spring, they undertake an individual research project. While each project includes writing and research components, gifted specialists also encourage students to demonstrate technical or artistic skills by incorporating display boards, artifacts, or videos into their project. For younger students, gifted specialists provide more guidance on projects. As students proceed through the program, they take on additional responsibility for shaping the direction of their projects. Gifted specialists look to outside sources like the Texas Performance Standards Projects for ideas of more directed projects, but gifted specialists encourage students to come up with their own ideas and projects.

At **District D**, administrators wrote a pull-out program curriculum for third through fifth grade, which continues with elective classes at the middle school level. This program focuses on self-exploration and independent learning.

### Guiding Questions and Activities for Independent Learning

*Curriculum for 3-8 Grade Pull-out Programs at **District D***

**3 Self-Advocacy and Awareness**

- Who am I?
- What are my strengths?
- How do I advocate for myself in the classroom?

**4 Research Skills**

- Research on culture, creativity, and leadership
- Move from whole group to individual research

**5 Passion Project**

- Independent research project which spans one quarter to one year, depending on the school

**6 Who am I?**

- Changes in adolescences
- Neurological research
- How their brains impact them in the classroom

**7 Use Your Strengths to Help Others**

- Community Service Project
- Examples include tutoring, creating maps, raising money for cancer research

**8 Career and College Pathways**

- What do I want to do?
- How do I get there?

Each spring, the gifted and talented program at **District F** holds a showcase for all the independent projects completed by K-5 students. The students display their work for family, friends, teachers, and administrators. The events serve as both a reward for the student's hard work and an opportunity to engage parents in their child's work within the program.

## Example Independent Projects

From *District F*



### College/Career Exploration

Grade 8 Students Find out:

- Classes to take
- Degree needed
- College to attend
- Applying to that college



### Pet Parade

K-2 Students Find out:

- What your pet eats
- What habitat they need
- How to care for them
- How much they cost

## Offer Extracurricular Opportunities to Engage Gifted Students Academically and Socially

Many school districts provide additional extracurricular opportunities for students identified as gifted. These opportunities allow students to explore their interests further and engage in creative activities. These extracurricular opportunities may be exclusive to students identified as gifted, or open to other interested students as well.

### Extracurricular Opportunities for Students Identified as Gifted



Hiking or Jeep tours in local parks



TEDx Kids



Museum Trips



Live Action Role Play (LARP)



Math Olympiad



National History Day

## Personal Education Plans

The Colorado Department of Education requires gifted and talented programs to create ALPs. For more information, see the Department's [website](#).

## Develop PLPs through Collaborative Effort among Gifted Specialists, Teachers, and Students

**District B, District C, District D, and District E** use Personal Education Plans (PEPs, also called Advanced Learning Plans [ALPs]) to varying extents.

District B and District D improved their PEPs to increase their practical application. Contacts at both districts report that prior to the last few years, gifted specialists created numbers-based and straightforward goals (e.g., achieve a 95 percent in English) for students' PEPs. Further, specialists often wrote PEPs at the beginning of the year and did not reference them until the end of the year when students saw whether they had met their goals or not.

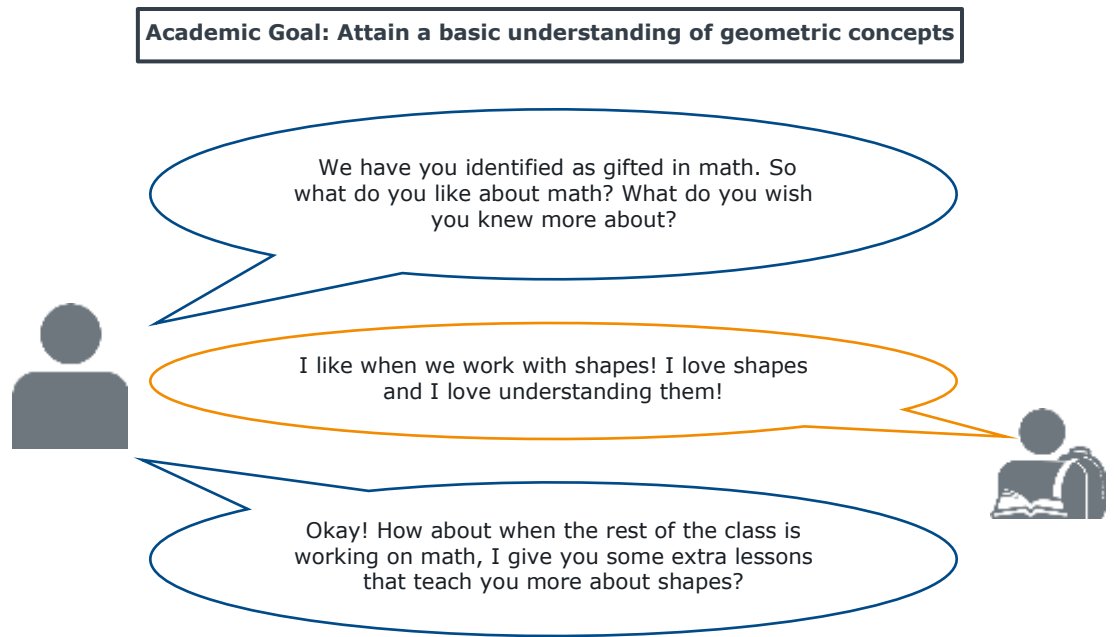
Recently, both districts changed their PEPs to require more nuanced and complex goals, and to ensure classroom teachers and gifted specialists regularly check-in with students to discuss their progression toward those goals. District B's classroom teachers set academic goals for students, which must relate to state standards, and gifted specialists set the affective goals that guide a student's social-emotional learning. These goals often involve activities and projects (e.g., running for student

government to improve leadership skills). At District D, gifted specialists attempt to create academic goals that further develop a student's strengths and establish affective goals that may be related to strengths or weaknesses.

At District C, the gifted coordinator chose to stop creating PEPs for each student within the program. Because of the small size of the district, the gifted coordinator works with all gifted students. To save time and paperwork, only struggling or otherwise at-risk students (e.g., students who are twice exceptional, students who accelerate in a grade or subject) receive a PEP. Gifted specialists then discuss these PEPs with classroom teachers to provide support to the student.

Gifted specialists at District D and District B, as well as classroom teachers at District D, work with students to develop the goals outlined in their PEP. Contacts at District B report that goal setting should be a student-guided process, and both districts require specialists to converse with students about their strengths and interests to develop their goals. Contacts at District D report that gifted specialists can conduct substantive goal-setting conversations even with very young students.

### Example Goal Setting Conversations with a Young Student at *District D*



### Examples of Affective Goals



Building social groups



Dealing with organization



Taking on a leadership role



Combating unhealthy perfectionism

Because program teachers and/or program specialists collaborate with students to create PEPs, contacts at both District D and District B report that they contribute significantly to the success of their gifted and talented programs. Contacts add that the collaborative development process helps provide students with meaningful and achievable academic and socio-emotional goals.

Contacts also suggest that teachers should encourage students to assume responsibility for aspects of their goals, which facilitates consistent student engagement and progress. While students may accomplish much of the work to achieve their goals through differentiated lessons or work with the gifted specialist in a pull-out program, gifted specialists at District D ask students and their parents to think of what actions they can perform to help teachers and specialists support these goals. The gifted specialist then adds those actions to the PEP, as well.

## Social-Emotional Supports

### Use Lessons to Give Students the Language to Discuss their Social-Emotional Needs

All profiled schools provide social-emotional support for their students. At **District E**, teachers incorporate Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick’s research on Habits of Mind into their regular lessons. These two researchers identify 16 “dispositions” or thought patterns to use when confronted with problems to achieve a positive result.<sup>4</sup>

Examples include:

- Persisting
- Managing impulsivity
- Applying past knowledge to new situations
- Taking responsible risks
- Finding humor
- Remaining open to continuous learning

Contacts at District E note that all 16 concepts can be easily conveyed to students through lessons or stories and integrated into the curriculum. Contacts report that these concepts allow classroom teachers and gifted specialists to teach students how to maintain a growth mindset while keeping concepts at a level that younger students can understand. Teachers and gifted specialists embed these concepts into normal classroom lessons and teach them as they apply.

At District E, older students (i.e., fourth through sixth grade) in the gifted and talented program also attend elective periods where they may work on activities such as journaling, crafts, or meditating. These low stress periods throughout the day give students an opportunity to learn coping mechanisms to deal with stress in the rest of their lives.

### Work with School Counselors to Challenge Perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome in Gifted Students

At **District A** and **District B**, gifted specialists work with school counselors to provide social-emotional supports to gifted students. As part of a district-wide emotional learning platform at District B, the district trains School Health Professionals to work with students and deploys these professionals into schools. The Gifted Coordinator brings the health professionals into the gifted pullout classes to work on problems

<sup>4</sup>“What Are The Habits Of Mind?,” TeachThought (blog), August 4, 2017, <https://www.teachthought.com/pep/what-are-the-habits-of-mind/>.



more common with gifted-identified students (e.g., perfectionism, imposter syndrome).

At District A, gifted specialists work with school counselors to educate parents and students on the needs of gifted students and dispel common myths about gifted education. Contacts report that some parents hesitate at the idea of “labeling” their child as gifted, as they feel that the label may cause social-emotional issues such as perfectionism. Alternatively, parents may expect a “gifted” child to never struggle in school. Gifted specialists work with counselors to reiterate to parents and students that being identified as gifted does not mean that teachers expect students to never make a mistake or ask for help. Instead, gifted and talented staff emphasize that parents should expect a degree of struggle as it indicates learning. They tell parents that students identified as gifted may need more support and instruction precisely because they possess the capacity to tackle more difficult concepts than their peers.



#### **Provide a Consistent Presence in Students’ Lives to Offer them Increased Social-Emotional Support**

At both **District C** and **District E**, contacts discuss the positive impact of a long relationship with gifted specialist on students’ social-emotional health. At District C, all students work with the one gifted coordinator from the time they are identified until they leave the district. At District E, students see the same gifted specialists from fourth to sixth grade. As students spend time with the same specialist over a period of several years, they develop a much stronger relationship built on trust. Students feel more comfortable confiding in the specialist and the specialist gains more insight into the student, so they can spot potential problems faster.

### **Create a Bank of Lessons that Teachers and Gifted Specialists Can Tailor to Meet Current Student Needs**

Contacts at profiled school districts note that due to the individualized nature of social-emotional problems, gifted and talented teachers often deliver lessons delivered on an irregular basis to address specific concerns. At **District C**, **District D**, and **District F**, gifted coordinators maintain a bank of lessons and resources that classroom teachers or gifted specialists can use to create specific lesson plans or to address the needs of individual students. Contacts report that this bank gives teachers the ability to address concerns or problems as they arise, which better fits the flexible nature of students’ social-emotional needs.

## Example Resources for Social-Emotional Lessons

*Banks of lessons provided by gifted coordinators to teachers at profiled districts*

For more information on Social Stories, see their creator Carol Gray's [website](#).



### "I'm Not Just Gifted"

A book of ready-made lesson plans on:

- resiliency
- exploring giftedness
- facing tough situations
- managing intensities



### Social Stories

Meant for children with autism on topics like "I can make good choices," these stories can also provide lessons to gifted students who struggle with social cues.

## Training and Professional Development

### Tailor Professional Development to Address Specific Needs

**District E** and **District F** in Texas both conduct state-mandated trainings for teachers and administrators working with students in the gifted and talented program. To provide differentiated instruction or teach in a cluster classroom with gifted students, the state requires teachers to complete an initial 30 hours of training and take an additional six hours of training every year thereafter. Administrators must complete six hours of training each year. Completion of the training is noted on teaching certificates. Lessons during the initial 30-hour training include identification of gifted students, the nature and needs of gifted students, differentiation in the classroom, and social-emotional needs.

District-level gifted and talented staff at District E work with their regional educational service center to develop these trainings, which offers them insight into what teachers learn and gives them the ability to address new or more complex problems. Primarily, the central gifted and talented staff within the district offer the six hours of required training to teachers every year. Contacts report that they use this opportunity to provide tailored training for specific needs within their current classroom (e.g., distinct trainings for a gifted and talented social studies teacher and a gifted and talented science teacher based on their individual needs).

### Work with Professional Learning Communities to Support Gifted and Talented Instruction in the General Classroom

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide opportunities for educators of similar grade levels or with similar responsibilities to convene and discuss concerns, strategies, and problems they experience. Contacts at **District C** and **District E** both use PLCs to improve their gifted and talented instruction.

At District C, contacts note that PLC meetings provide time to complete professional development because they convene teachers from across the district together at regular intervals. During the roll out of their new curriculum last year, teachers at District C used their PLCs to plan differentiated instruction for new curriculum. Currently, they work together in their PLC meetings to crowdsource ideas and ensure consistency across classrooms. At these PLC meetings, the district gifted coordinator serves in a consultant role and makes themselves available to assist teachers and answer questions. At District E, the central gifted and talented staff writes curricula

and curriculum extensions to assist PLCs with achieving their overall goals for professional development.

## Parental Support

### **Encourage Parents to Support Gifted and Talented Students Emotionally, Financially, and Through Advocacy**

In addition to providing in-person supports to students and teachers, profiled districts also provide digital resources to parents to help them support their children. Gifted coordinators at **District A**, **District B**, and **District E** also reach out to parents and parent groups proactively to educate them. The gifted coordinator at District B operates two groups for parents to learn about how to assist their students. One group is SENG (supporting the emotional needs of the gifted), and the other is a winter book club. During this book club, parents of gifted students gather to learn about how to support the needs of a student identified as gifted at home and at school.

Gifted coordinators at District B, District E, and **District F** also work with parent committees to secure additional funding for the programs. At District B, the parent committee (along with other community members) participate in a breakfast fundraiser where the gifted and talented program partners with a local restaurant. Students help prepare and serve a meal at the restaurant in exchange for proceeds from the sales. This money supplements the low level of funding received from the state and allows the program to send students on field trips and organize other activities outside of the school day. Parent groups at District B and District E also serve as important advocates for gifted and talented education. This type of parent support can maintain levels of state funding, increase awareness of the benefits of the program, and pressure states and districts to make necessary improvement and changes.

At District E, the local parent group, District E Gifted Parents, is not directly affiliated with the school. Parents designed the group to create a space where they could convene and learn about how to best support both their children and the gifted and talented program. However, the gifted and talented program staff routinely work with District E Gifted Parents. This collaboration provides a chance for gifted and talented staff to educate parents on how to properly support their students. It also ensures the Gifted Coordinator keeps open channels of communication to address problems, concerns, or misperceptions about the program and giftedness more generally.

## Gifted Parents Group's Events and Activities at *District E*

In collaboration with the *District E* Gifted and Talented Program

To ensure the accessibility of the Family Extravaganza, gifted and talented staff also provided activities for students operated by teachers. Also, they alternate between lunches and dinners for brown bag discussion to ensure that parents with different schedules could attend.



### Family Extravaganza

- Parents provide topics of interest.
- Gifted and talented staff find speakers to present on these topics at roundtables during the extravaganza.



### Brown Bag Discussions

- Parents request topics.
- Gifted coordinator hosts discussions.



### Fundraising

- Holds T-shirt sales.
- Raised \$4,000 to send secondary teachers to a state gifted and talented conference.

## 4) Program Evaluation

---

### Assessment Methods

#### Administer Surveys and Meet with Parents to Obtain Qualitative Data on Program Performance

To collect qualitative feedback on their gifted and talented programs, **District A**, **District B**, **District C**, and **District F** administer surveys, and **District D** and **District E** hold meetings with parents and teachers.

#### Example Methods to Obtain Qualitative Feedback on Gifted and Talented Programs



##### Conduct Surveys of Parents and Students

At **District C**, the gifted coordinator administers anonymous surveys to parents and students each year to evaluate the program. The surveys request information on what respondents see as the program's successes and challenges. Contacts at District C report that these surveys provide the best longitudinal data to measure their program, because constant changes in state tests prevent coordinators from using scores on that assessment to measure the program's influence over time. **District B** found a higher response rate when the Coordinator surveyed stakeholders every three years. Contacts suggest limiting surveys to 10 questions or fewer to encourage completion.



##### Hold Annual Meetings with Parents

The Gifted Coordinator at **District D** holds annual meetings with parents of children in the program to understand their concerns. One year, gifted and talented staff received feedback that suggested parents did not know about services provided to students in the program at the high school level. In response to this feedback, gifted and talented staff developed an onboarding session to transition students from middle school to high school and orient them to the program's services in secondary school.



##### Meet Informally with Parents and Teachers

The Gifted Coordinator at **District E** meets with parents to discuss more informal concerns and questions about the program. The Coordinator meets frequently with a small group of parent leaders (members of two groups for parents of students identified as gifted) to discuss the program and the district. At **District C**, the Gifted Coordinator meets informally with teachers to obtain their feedback on the program.

#### To Calculate Impact of Program, Track Students' Growth Over Time Rather than Raw Scores

To evaluate the impact of gifted and talented programs on individual student development, gifted and talented program staff at **District B** and **District E** track student growth using performance on tests. Specifically, District B staff review STAR reading and math assessments and the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (i.e., Colorado's state test), and staff at District E uses data from the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (i.e., Texas's state standardized test). Contacts at both school districts emphasize the importance of selecting measures that show growth rather than track raw student scores or percentiles to provide an accurate assessment of the program. They add that a high score on a standardized test does not indicate whether a student benefited from the gifted and talented program.

At District E, the gifted coordinator references a metric built into the state testing system that assigns students a grade based on their performance compared from one year to the next. The state testing system flags students who did not improve from

the previous year, regardless of how well they scored on that year's test. The Gifted and Talented Coordinator analyzes the data to see which students did not grow and discuss the reasons for their lack of growth with these students. This system allows the coordinator to identify both individual problems the students may face, as well as potential systemic problems that inhibit student growth.

Among profiled districts, contacts at both **District A** and **District C** express plans to create similar systems to track growth in the future.

## Outcomes

### Gifted and Talented Programs Increase Students' Sense of Comfort at School

No profiled district collects data beyond standardized test scores to assess the overall short term benefits of gifted and talented programs. However, contacts across profiled districts note that gifted and talented programs provide a space for gifted-identified students to temporarily spend time with their peers and away from students not identified as gifted. Gifted coordinators at both **District B** and **District C** note that students often visibly relax upon entering a gifted pull-out class. The Gifted Coordinator at District B attributed students' relaxed demeanor to the pull-out class environment, which involves peers who think similarly to them and who will empathize with their failures or successes. Further, contacts at District C suggested that the looser structure and freedom of gifted pull-out classes as compared to general classrooms may also contribute to students' sense of comfort. Contacts at both District B and District C added that spending time with a smaller group of peers consistently contributed positively to a student's social-emotional health.

### Long-Term Benefits Include Higher Attainment of Advanced Degrees and Improved Social-Emotional Health

Previous research suggests that gifted instruction increases the likelihood that students pursue advanced degrees and correlates positively with students engaging in creative work post-school.<sup>5</sup> Some studies also suggests that keeping gifted students in the same environment as their intellectual peers improves their social-emotional wellbeing not only throughout their school career, but after graduation as well.<sup>6</sup>

More generally, students who do not feel engaged and challenged by school are more likely to underachieve or drop out. Research shows that 25 percent of gifted people underachieve compared to their potential. Researchers attribute this to a lack of engaging and meaningful work in their early years, which negatively reinforces student interest in achieving more than necessary to accomplish a particular task.<sup>7</sup> This also indicates that a challenging and engaging gifted and talented program benefits the student.

<sup>5</sup> Why Are Gifted Programs Needed? | National Association for Gifted Children, "accessed September 21, 2018, <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/why-are-gifted-programs-needed>.

<sup>6</sup> M. Gross, "Exceptionally Gifted Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Academic Acceleration and Nonacceleration," *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 29 (2006): 404-29.

<sup>7</sup> National Statistics - Why Our Nation Needs to Educate Our Gifted and Talented Youth, "accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10398>.

## 5) Research Methodology

---

### Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do contact districts deliver gifted and talented instruction?
  - What practices do contact districts implement to address gifted and talented students' learning needs in general education classrooms?
- What academic support services do contact districts offer students in gifted and talented programs?
- What social-emotional support services do contact districts offer students in gifted and talented programs?
- How do district contacts leverage "Personal Education Plans" to improve gifted and talented students' academic achievement?
- What methods do contact districts employ to identify gifted and talented students?
  - How do contact districts determine giftedness versus high-level learners?
  - How do contact districts percent over-or under-identification of gifted and talented students?
  - What percentage of contact districts' student populations do gifted and talented students compose?
- How do contact districts evaluate gifted and talented programs?
  - What findings and trends have recent assessments found?
- To which components of gifted and talented programs do district contacts attribute program success?
  - Specifically, how do Personal Education Plans contribute to program success?
- What feedback about gifted and talented programs have contact districts received?
- What short-term and long-term benefits do district contacts associate with gifted and talented programs?

### Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries ([eab.com](http://eab.com))
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Profiled School Districts' Websites
- Freeman, Joan. "Giftedness in the Long Term." *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 29, no. 4 (2006): 384–403.
- Gross, M. "Exceptionally Gifted Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Academic Acceleration and Nonacceleration." *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 29 (2006): 404–29.
- Mathews, Jay. "It's Time to Get Smart about Gifted Learning, and Who Gets Exposed to It." *The Washington Post*. August 10, 2018.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/its-time-to-get-smart-about->

[gifted-learning-and-who-gets-exposed-to-it/2018/08/09/50a715c8-9aa0-11e8-b60b-1c897f17e185\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.b3cccfbfbdab](https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10398).

- “National Statistics - Why Our Nation Needs to Educate Our Gifted and Talented Youth.” *Davidson Institute for Talent Development*. Accessed September 24, 2018. <https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10398>.
- Peters, Scott. “Bright vs. Gifted: An Unnecessary Distinction | National Association for Gifted Children.” *National Association of Gifted Children* (blog), September 5, 2017. <https://www.nagc.org/blog/bright-vs-gifted-unnecessary-distinction>.
- Szabos, Janice. “Bright vs. Gifted.” *Challenge Magazine*, 1989. <https://www.slideshare.net/PurdueGERI/bright-vs-gifted-handout>.
- “What Are The Habits Of Mind?” *TeachThought* (blog), August 4, 2017. <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/what-are-the-habits-of-mind/>.
- “What Is A Social Story?” *Carol Gray - Social Stories* (blog). Accessed September 27, 2018. <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/>.
- “Why Are Gifted Programs Needed?” *National Association for Gifted Children*. Accessed September 21, 2018. <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/why-are-gifted-programs-needed>.

## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed Gifted and Talented Program Coordinators at school districts with gifted and talented programs which had received awards or recognition for excellence.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

School District	Location	Approximate District Enrollment
District A	Mid Atlantic	81,500
District B	Mountain West	16,500
District C	Midwest	1,100
District D	Mountain West	61,500
District E	South	38,500
District F	South	48,000



# Appendix A

---

## Percent of Students Identified as Gifted at Profiled School Districts

District	Approximate Percent of Students Identified as Gifted
District A	4.5-5 percent
District B	9 percent
District C	7-10 percent
District D	3.4 percent
District E	10-12 percent
District F	8 percent