

Developing Minds

District 51 Gifted and Talented News



February 2017

Heather Baskin, Coordinator of Gifted and Talented Programming

Important Dates

CogAT Testing for Challenge Applicants

February 1, 2017 2-4:30pm

Must register in advance

<https://schools.mesa.k12.co.us/eastregCogAt/>

CogAT Testing for Challenge Applicants

February 20, 2017 9-11:30am

Must register in advance

<https://schools.mesa.k12.co.us/eastregCogAt/>

Parent Information Night - IB Diploma Programme

February 13, 2017 6:00pm

@ Palisade High School

IB Diploma Programme Applications Due

February 18, 2017

@ Palisade High School

East Middle School Challenge Applications Due

February 24, 2017

No later than 2:45pm

@ East Middle School

Early Access Applications Due

February 28, 2017

Mail to or drop off at GT Office

Early Access Testing

March – April, 2017 TBD

How are we doing?

Sometimes you are asked how you are, but the asker really isn't ready to hear anything beyond "OK" or "Fine." Well, we are asking and want your honest opinion. How are you doing in relation to D51 gifted? Are we meeting your/your students' needs? Where can we improve? Are issues district-wide or only in a certain level? Where are we doing really well?

This issue has the answers of three gifted students in our district. Each student has their own perspective, strengths, and struggles. It helps us see how we are doing – our strengths and our struggles. Enjoy reading about the students in our district.

We also want to gather opinions from a larger audience, and will be publishing the results and our resulting actions in an upcoming newsletter. Want your voice to be heard? Complete the survey for your group below (takes 5 minutes or less)... As always, if you would like to connect with someone directly (not just through a survey) do not hesitate to contact the GT Teacher or GT Liaison at your school (find their names here <https://connect.d51schools.org/sites/shared/gt/Pages/default.aspx>) or you can also call or email the D51 Gifted Department at 970-254-6903 or bev.jebe@51schools.org and heather.baskin@d51schools.org

Parent Survey <http://tinyurl.com/ParentD51GT>

High School Student Survey <http://tinyurl.com/HSGTstudent>

Middle School Student Survey <http://tinyurl.com/MSGTstudent>

Elementary Student Survey <http://tinyurl.com/ElemGTstudent>

Surveys will be open until
February 8th

Every participant will
have the chance to be
entered in a drawing for
books and games!

Did you Know

Gifted Education, for the first time, is included in a K-12 federal education initiative. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed including several provisions supporting gifted education. States and districts will be required to include advanced level performance on student achievement data (previously they could be combined as proficient and advanced). ESSA also requires the use of professional development funds to improve the skills of staff in identifying and serving gifted students. There is also an expanded ability of using Title 1 funds for identifying and serving gifted students in typically unrepresented populations (this is not a requirement, but allowed). Want more information or ways to support the development of gifted education?

Federal level information can be found on the National Association for Gifted Children website

<http://www.nagc.org/get-involved/advocate-high-ability-learners/nagc-advocacy/federal-legislative-update/every-student>

Suggestions on how parents can play and active role in making ESSA more effective

<http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/spring-2016-talent-newsletter#main-article>

Information on Colorado's plan for ESSA implementation <https://www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/essa>

Provide feedback to the Colorado Department of Education ESSA Hub Committee

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/essahubmeeting_publiccomment

Challenge Program at East Middle School

The Challenge Program is a MCVSD 51 program for academically gifted middle school students and is housed at East Middle School. Students must apply to be in this program; typically 5th graders apply for their 6th grade year and stay for three years. Students only need to apply in 6th grade, but may re-apply in 7th or 8th grade if they are not accepted in 6th grade. There is only one core of students in the Challenge Program at each grade level, so space is limited. Once accepted, students attend all core classes together (Literacy, Math, Social Studies, and Science). However, they attend their elective classes with the EMS population. The mission of The Challenge Program at East Middle School is to meet the needs of gifted middle school students by pursuing high academic and ethical standards in a rigorous, creative environment. Our focus is to provide challenging, higher level curriculum, as well as support for social and emotional needs. For more information visit their website <http://emschallengeprogram.wikispaces.com/Home> or contact Tina Sleigh at tina.sleigh@d51schools.org or 970-254-5020.

International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) at Palisade High School

Although this is not a program for gifted students, it can support the characteristics of some gifted students. This program is philosophically aligned to developing the attributes of the IB learner profile. This profile aims to develop learners who are inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. Students report their involvement in IB gives them experience in managing time, developing research skills, and developing a sense of the world around them and their involvement in it. For more information visit their website <http://www.palisadeib.org/about-us/> or contact the coordinator (Laura Meinzen) or counselors (Lisa Borgmann and Danielle Bagwell) at 970-254-4800.

The Many Faces of Gifted

This month we have featured three students. An elementary, middle school, and high school student. Thank you to all three for taking the time to share their perspectives and give honest answers.

Brooklynn Winkler is a 5th grade student at Pear Park Elementary. Her GT Teacher, Janelle McGowan, said “I have thoroughly enjoyed watching her grow, and change in the last two and a half years. Brooklynn has grabbed ahold of the concept of growth mindset and the idea that everyone is learning something; ‘smart’ has nothing to do with it – it’s all about how hard you are willing to work. Brooklynn has developed an intense passion for her education and advocating for her needs, as well as helping others along their educational journeys. She is, in my opinion an excellent example of a budding autonomous learner.”

What do you know/remember about being identified gifted?

I remember going to a private school starting in kindergarten, but then moving to Pear Park in the middle of my kindergarten year. I started the GT program in first grade, then was identified in third grade. I remember being surprised when I was told I was being identified and getting an ALP. I thought I was just like everyone else, I didn’t know that I had all of these gifted abilities.

What have you struggled with in D51 gifted programs?

The label: I have been called a nerd and a geek just because I go to GT. People think that I think I am better or smarter than them even though I don’t think that.

How do you feel about the “gifted” label?

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with the label, it’s how other people view the label that makes it difficult.

I/my family found the best support _____

When my GT teacher started at Pear Park my second grade year.

The best thing about you is _____

I don’t care about labels, people and just people.

The one thing you wish you could change about yourself is _____

My hate of change.

If you had one wish for GT programs or GT students it would be _____



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The Many Faces of Gifted (Continued)

I want people to view the GT program and the label of GT differently.

Morgan O'Rourke is a 6th grade student at Grand Mesa Middle School. She is in Lori Chandler's (GT Teacher) Achievement class and GT Exploratory class. She has a caring personality, wants to help others, and is a leader. Morgan describes herself as a "Bookaholic" who has a goal of writing a fantasy type fiction novel. She is creating a timeline of different steps to keep herself on track towards her goal. She can plan out how much time and how often she will be spending on this goal. There are different areas that she needs support and training in to help her be successful.

What does "gifted" mean to you?

To me, gifted means needing to be challenged a little more in a course than others. The GT class helps with that and it goes through ELA, reading and math.

What do you see as highlights of gifted programs in D51?

Being able to be myself and not being scared to speak in class. In my regular classes, kids are jerks when it comes to me speaking in class. In GT, I can be myself.

What have you struggled with in D51 gifted programs?

Sometimes my teachers are the problem. I have only had two teachers that were great. Others were either really mean or just not good GT teachers. I still loved all of my teachers though.

How do you feel about the "gifted" label?

The "gifted" label has been a struggle over the years. When kids find out that I'm "gifted", they tend to think that I'm either snobby or too stuck up to talk to them. I have done a very good job of keeping it to myself. I do love being in the program but the label and the way teachers make me feel like I'm supposed to be stuck up.

I/my family found the best support _____

My family and I found the best support in each other and my fourth and fifth grade teachers. It's been a little hard but I have found the best support in my family and friends.

The best thing about you is _____

The best thing about me is my ability to be myself.

The one thing you wish you could change about yourself is _____

I have nothing that I want to change about myself. I like who I am and who I will be.

If you had one wish for GT programs or GT students it would be _____

My one wish for the GT program is to be ok about being "gifted". I felt unsure about it. I didn't know how to handle it. I wish somebody could be able to talk to newer GT kids.

Marygrace Prinster is a senior at Grand River Academy (GRA). In eighth grade, she was diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and OCD while being enrolled in the East Middle School Challenge Program (CP). She credits GRA, their amazing staff and their innovative education styles with getting her closer than she ever thought she would be to graduating high school. She didn't think she could answer some of the questions because she doesn't identify as a "gifted" student. She said, "I have never really understood what that meant, and the definitions that people give to me are images that I don't think fit me. That being said, since people have identified me as being gifted in the past and I am intrigued by some of the questions you have, I will try to answer them as best I can."

What does "gifted" mean to you?

To me, gifted is a word with a connotation that doesn't come close enough to what it is trying to express. Throughout my academic career "gifted" has been thrown around superfluously to refer to the fact that I learn differently and have academic aptitudes that verge from the mainstream. This is true and the fact that our education system has identified

kids like me and offered specialized tracks for us is something I will always be grateful for. But the reality that there is a concept of “regular” and “gifted” learning is far too generalized and gives “regular” learning a negative connotation (perhaps not for teachers, but certainly in my experience of student culture) that seems like a dangerous precedent. The reality of the education system today which I believe many educators are and have been catching onto is that there are so many other delineations besides “gifted” and “regular” in learning. Traditionally “gifted” students were identified early in the evolution of our modern education system because they excel at the system as it is, which is always a pleasure and a sight to see for everyone involved. But it is a surely a flawed version of education if the only other group besides “gifted” that we can cluster kids into is that of “regular learners”. There are so many other learners out there and because they don’t have their denoted group, educators keeping tabs on them, and specialized funding like GT kids do, perhaps too many fall by the wayside later and may even end up in the troubleshooting side of education. Gifted children tend to be identified in classes early for their ability to understand and perform for teachers at an accelerated level. So, we pull them out of classes and give them options, projects, augmented learning in all the subjects we can. It is amazing what teachers do for GT kids and just how much the kids benefit and continue their love of learning. But the facet of intelligence and aptitude that our modern GT system is able to pick up on in certain students is cruel in that it ignores the diverse and rich parts of intelligence that so many other students have (and that traditional GT students don’t have). Every educator knows that every student is gifted in something, so why do we only fund and specialize education for one version of what intelligence is?

What do you know/remember about being gifted?

Many children are identified as gifted in elementary school. I never experienced that pathway because my grade school years were spent at a local private school. However, even there I was fortunate enough to experience being taught in small groups with accelerated learning styles and special attention from teachers. The support and appreciation I got because of my “gifted” label pushed me to apply for CP in middle school. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience there (EMS) and felt that the program gave me opportunities to learn Math and Science, my two favorite subjects, at an accelerated pace that would benefit me to no end in my high school years.

What do you see as highlights of gifted programs in D51?

The three gifted programs I have come into contact with in D51 are those at Chipeta Elementary (through volunteer work), CP, and the GT program at GRA. I have been thoroughly pleased with all of these programs and thankful to those who create and make them all possible. Their highlights come from dedicated staff, the positive effect they have in providing kids with unique learning experiences, and the self-esteem they instill in making kids feel that they have a special asset - their ability to learn. I especially appreciate the GT Program at GRA which, though small, has provided me with support and opportunities that focus on instilling a love of learning and excitement for future careers. Most of all GRA’s GT staff has never forced me to identify as a GT kid, which I struggle with and often prefer not to. It has only provided me with possibilities.

What have you struggled with in D51 GT programs?

The biggest struggle I have faced is the competitive environment created by CP. At the time I was also struggling with symptoms of mental illness, many of which were tied up in my academic performance. In this way, my experience and struggles were incredibly subjective and I cannot say that they are or have been the same for everyone else. But the culture I experienced between students in CP was not always easy because many of us were pushing ourselves not for our parents or for our grades, but to instill in ourselves a sense of self-worth dependent upon our intelligence and performance. On top of this, our senses of identity were compromised by the break-out of puberty and the influx of sexual identity. In other words, sometimes it was a perfect storm and I cannot say that this tense culture was healthy. That being said, when kids who think in similar ways get together they tend to be able to have wonderful times feeding off of each others’s mental aptitudes socially and culturally. While I think mentally and emotionally the way GT kids push themselves and compete can be more harmful than healthy, friendships between GT kids are inexplicably rich and satisfying. Being in a group of about 30 of them made me feel at home and gave me an experience I wouldn’t trade for

The Many Faces of Gifted (Continued)

the world.

How do you feel about the “gifted” label?

I feel that the “gifted” label doesn’t truly apply to me. To put it better, the definition that I grew up developing and often holding dear to my identity should never be for anybody else what I myself made it into. The “gifted” label should be changed to describe kids who learn like me - we excel in a traditional learning model of textbooks and worksheets and essays. And then more labels should be created to identify those who don’t learn like me - they are diverse and complex in nature and educators shouldn’t shy away from expanding their definitions of learning styles. All this should be done because the “gifted” label should not imply that I am smarter or more intelligent than anyone else, which it sadly came to mean to me for a time. Excelling at our modern model of school cannot be conflated with intelligence.

I/My family found the best support...

My family’s history caused us to search in middle school for support for my emotional needs at a local private practice specializing in behavioral health. After our needs were met above and beyond our expectations there, we searched around a few D51 schools to find the right fit for me. GRA and their online program proved to be a place I could begin trying to succeed, and largely because of the support and patience they showed me. Their smaller size and dedicated staff worked with my issues and my family and still does to this day. I was worried after a whole year of skipping school that they would give up on me, perhaps sending me somewhere else due to my poor performance, but their acceptance changed my high school career for the better.

If you had one wish for GT students or GT programs it would be...

That they no longer have to be the only kids on the block providing resources for special learning styles/aptitudes. I hope for identification of and funding/special services for all different types of student learners.

Stay tuned in upcoming newsletters as we continue to work on the strengths and struggles of our current system. Identification for different types of student learners has changed a lot in the last few years.

Do you know a student that should be featured in this section? Please send your nomination to bev.jebe@d51schools.org or visit <http://tinyurl.com/D51nominate>

Have an idea for a story, a student poem/story/art piece to include, or question you would like answered in our newsletter?

Let us know bev.jebe@d51schools.org or visit <http://tinyurl.com/D51GTIdeas>

Want more information?

D51 GT Website <https://connect.d51schools.org/sites/shared/gt/Pages/default.aspx>

CDE’s Gifted Parent’s Corner <https://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/parents>



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