

# West Linn – Wilsonville School District

## The Education of Gifted Children

“The aim is clear. Each child – each of the young – should be able to advance to full capacity in accordance with general and special ability and aptitude.”

*Paul Brandwein*

*Memorandum: On Renewing Schools and Education*

The education of gifted children in the West Linn-Wilsonville School District is a vibrant, constantly improving educational initiative that works to provide a quality education for all our identified gifted students. The district recognizes the importance of differentiated learning experiences for gifted learners and acknowledges the value of integration within the regular program. The heart of Gifted Education is seen in challenging classroom-based instruction characterized by differentiated instruction, flexible skill-based groupings, complex integrated problem solving challenges, and individually designed inquiry-based research projects designed to fit the academic rate and level of each student. The classroom program for gifted children is enhanced with additional activities and enrichment opportunities.

### **Gifted Education and State Law**

Gifted Education policies and procedures throughout Oregon are governed by the Department of Education through Administrative Rules. The Administrative Rules direct school districts to provide systematic, appropriate identification of gifted learners and to provide instruction appropriate to the learners' level and rate of learning. The rules governing the Talented and Gifted may be found in the Oregon Administrative Rules 581-022-1310 through 581-022-1940.

### **West Linn-Wilsonville: Guiding Principles for Educating Gifted Children**

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District works to identify gifted learners and meet the academic needs of each learner. In addition, education for gifted children is designed to encourage self-direction, to promote social-emotional growth, to facilitate development of leadership behaviors, and to mobilize effective effort to support the development of the individual child's potential.

### **Belief Statements**

- We believe that a gifted learner's needs are best met through experiences that are differentiated in pace and depth. We will design instruction with a challenging level and pace for each gifted learner.
- We believe that collaboration is essential to the success of a learner. We will work as a team to facilitate the learning of each gifted learner.
- We acknowledge the importance of participation and inclusion in the regular classroom program to assure regular scholarly interaction with others. We will educate individual children in a community of mutually respectful learners.
- We believe that students, parents and teachers are integral partners in designing educational programs for gifted learners. We will invite a productive partnership for planning and learning.

## **Identification as a Gifted Learner**

All children have talents and gifts in various areas. For formal identification as a gifted learner, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District recognizes the two state defined areas of giftedness:

1. Intellectually Gifted
2. Academic Talented in Reading and/or Math

A teacher, parent or specialist may refer a child for identification at any time. With the referral, a case study begins. In the West Linn-Wilsonville School District, students can be and are identified at *any and all grade levels*. Students are identified after consideration of data reflecting a variety of factors. Such data may include but is not limited to test scores, teacher referrals, parent referrals and examples of student work. *No single test, measure or score shall be the sole criteria for an identification.* (OAR 581-022-1310) The identification process may take as few as six weeks or up to several years to complete.

Though gifted identification may occur at any time and the process may be tailored to meet the needs and situation of a specific child; the West Linn-Wilsonville School District has a system in place that allows for a periodic evaluation of students for identification.

## **Kindergarten through Grade 2**

At the kindergarten, first and second grade levels, all students are assessed in a general screening process. The district uses one of several tools to screen all children.

1. *Kingore Observation Inventory or KOI*, a series of planned activities along with a set of specific characteristics for teachers to observe.
2. Raven's Progressive Matrices, an assessment of non-verbal abilities
3. Otis Lennon School Abilities Test (OLSAT)
4. Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt)

Following the screening, teachers meet with the school's Gifted Education Coordinator to discuss their findings. At this point, case studies and referrals are often begun. If further evaluation is required or if a referral is made prior to the designated screening time, additional information may be gathered from a nationally standardized individual test.

1. Otis-Lennon School Abilities Test (OLSAT)
2. Weschler Intelligence Scale of Children - Revised (WISC-R)
3. Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)
4. Weschler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI)
5. Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery

A student must score in the 97th percentile or above on the total battery of a standardized test for further evaluation. Other evaluative tools include teacher referrals, parent referrals or further testing.

While students in the West Linn-Wilsonville School District can be and are identified at all grade levels, caution is exercised when making early identification with individual standardized tests. Research shows that it is very difficult to get an accurate assessment of ability from very young children. Giftedness is often identified through patterns over

time and may not yet be assessable in students just beginning their academic careers. In order to avoid an ineffective assessment, early identifications are approached with great care.

### **Grade 3, 5, 8 and 10**

Once students reach third grade, standardized testing becomes a part of their general academic evaluation. The *Oregon Statewide Assessment Test* is considered valid indicator of academic giftedness and may be used as an evaluation tool. Students must score in the 97th percentile or above on the total battery of tests in reading and/or mathematics to be considered for further evaluation.

### **Grade 4, 6, 7 and 9**

In grades where students do not participate in statewide standardized testing, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District uses off-grade-level testing to provide further information for assessment. These tests are appropriately normed to provide valid indications of academic giftedness in reading and math. As is the case with all other standardized testing, the building Gifted Education Coordinator reviews all test results and further considers those which show potential for gifted identification.

### **Students Who Show Potential**

Although the state of Oregon requires that a test score in the 97th percentile or above be one of the measures by which a child is identified, situations may occur where gifted students fail to qualify with this measure. To address this issue, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District strictly follows state policy which states that “no single test, measure or score shall be the sole criteria” and that “a team shall make the final decisions on the identification (based on data) collected and used by the team”. If, after extensive and thoughtful evaluation, a student who has not scored at or above the 97th percentile, still shows “potential to perform” at that level, identification may be made.

### **How does the West Linn-Wilsonville School District educate gifted children?**

#### ***The Heart is in the Classroom.***

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District educates gifted children as individual learners in a classroom-inclusive program. This model has evolved over the last 30 years and constitutes best educational practices. Gifted children are gifted all the time - not just once a week for gifted class. Students who are identified as gifted or talented need instruction designed for depth and complexity. An appropriate instructional program is best designed and accomplished by classroom teachers in partnership with the child, the family, and with the support of colleagues. For those identified as gifted, appropriate classroom assessment helps teachers adjust the program to the student’s level and rates of learning. Continuous classroom assessment is an integral part of an appropriate educational program.

Teachers use many strategies to assess and meet the needs of gifted learners in the classroom. Some gifted children already have a bank of knowledge from which to build new understandings and some gifted children need less practice to master skills. Many gifted students approach learning with the confidence that grows from success. For these children, it is important that the learning draws them into complex, integrated problem-solving challenges and challenging inquiry-based research projects.

Classroom teachers choose teaching strategies that help differentiate instruction, responding to the needs of all learners. Differentiation for gifted students is achieved with open-ended lessons, flexible skill-based grouping, curriculum compacting, critical thinking challenges and many other instructional strategies. Differentiated instruction describes a range of strategies teachers use to respond to the needs of all learners.

### **Class Selection /Middle School /High School**

In middle school and high school, identified gifted students again have the benefit of differentiated instruction to address their individual rate and level of learning. In addition, at the high school level, academically advanced students may be placed in accelerated or higher level classes. In each area or discipline the high schools offer honors level and Advanced Placement (AP) classes that students may select as part of their program of rigor.

### **Opportunities beyond the Classroom for Primary and Middle School**

The classroom program is enhanced with district-wide enrichment opportunities known as Saturday Activities and before and after-school enrichment classes sponsored by Gifted Education. These classes offer additional opportunities for gifted children to engage in advanced critical reasoning and research into areas of interest.

### **Saturday Activities – Primary and Middle School**

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District provides a series of “Saturday Activities” specifically targeted to our identified gifted students. Saturday classes and field trips provide students with a chance to meet and learn with other gifted students from throughout the district. These popular activities encompass the arts, sciences and everything in between. These opportunities are by invitation only to identified gifted students who register for opportunities that interest them. This ensures that those in attendance are more apt to be eager and enthusiastic learners for the subject at hand. Saturday Activities are usually scheduled once a month at the primary level with registration information sent home by mail approximately three weeks prior to each activity. Due to the active schedules of our middle school students, activities at the middle school level are less frequent but carefully chosen and have been extremely well received.

### **Before and After School Enrichment Classes – Primary and Middle School**

Enrichment classes take place before and after the regular day at each school and are designed to provide creative, thoughtful “hands-on” learning opportunities that are beneficial to all eager and able learners. These classes are sponsored by Gifted Education and are developed within the framework of sound educational principles for the education of gifted children. These principles lead to open-ended instruction with an emphasis on developing thinking and critical reflection. Because these classes provide exciting educational opportunities; they are open to all students. Classes in each school vary based on availability of instructors and popularity with students. They usually run in eight-week terms for one hour per week. A small registration fee is charged for participation.

Again, at the middle school level, our students participate in such a myriad of activities that each school chooses a few classes that meet students’ interest. Often our middle school classes and clubs include chess, art, second language and computer science.

### **What about High School?**

Students in grades 9-12 select a program of studies that meets their individual level, interests and abilities. Advanced sections are provided in most subjects to accommodate different ability levels. The West Linn-Wilsonville School District provides multiple options for high school students. Options include the following:

- 1 Honors classes
- 2 Advanced placement classes and examinations
- 3 Planned independent study opportunities
- 4 Off-campus experiences such as concurrent enrollment in colleges, junior colleges or accredited training institutions
- 5 Work experience and internship programs
- 6 A full participation activities and athletics program

### **Parent Rights and Responsibilities**

Parents in the West Linn - Wilsonville School District engage in productive partnerships for learning. Parents in this community are extremely active and devoted to their children's education. Parents of identified gifted students are encouraged to become collaborative partners with the school and as such, as all parents, have rights and responsibilities. The West Linn - Wilsonville School District acknowledges the following rights in accordance with the Oregon Department of Education:

- The West Linn-Wilsonville School District agrees to inform parents at the time of the student's identification and of programs and services available.

*We hope you have been in contact with your child's teacher or building Gifted Education Coordinator regarding his or her identification. Your collaboration with them, along with some of the information in this handbook should give you a good understanding of our identification process and program.*

- The West Linn - Wilsonville School District will provide an opportunity for parents to give input and discuss an appropriate educational program for their children.

*Fall conferences, "Personalized Instructional Plans", Gifted Education parent response letters, high school forecasting - these are all formal opportunities for parents to provide input into their children's educational plans. We hope you will be active participants in these options and we strongly encourage you to develop a relationship with your child's teacher(s).*

- Parents may, at any time, request the withdrawal of their child from programs and services provided.

*We hope to provide our gifted learners with challenges that meet their needs and goals, both in and outside of the classroom. If you are ever concerned about your child's academic program or general well being, please contact your child's teacher, school Gifted Education Coordinator or the Administration Building.*

- Differences of opinion occasionally arise among good, well-intended people. Should a difference of opinion arise regarding the appropriateness of programs for an identified gifted student, parents have the right to file a complaint under OAR 581-022-1940. Prior

to doing so the state of Oregon requires that resolution be attempted within the district complaint and problem solving process.

*The West Linn-Wilsonville School District is dedicated to providing a personalized education for all students. The district promises to work in a good-will partnership with students and parents to resolve any concerns that may arise. If you have questions or concerns regarding the education of your child please speak directly with your child's teacher. If you need further help please contact your school Gifted Education Coordinator or Principal. If your issues are not resolved at the school you may call the Assistant Superintendent for further assistance.*

Parents of identified gifted students have unique responsibilities. Parenting your child can be both challenging and exciting. You will want to encourage your child to participate in the classroom program with full attention and energy. With your support your student will grow in her ability to express her own needs and extend her own learning within an open-ended lesson. You will want to encourage your child to explore enrichment activities in areas of interest and in new and challenging areas where his gifts are not so evident. You will be invited to provide helpful input and feedback to teachers regarding the goals for your child.

Here are some suggestions that have been helpful to parents of gifted children:

- Remember that all children are more alike than they are different. Gifted children have needs for belonging; competence and contribution just like other children.
- *Be aware that most children are not gifted in all areas.* Help gifted children set realistic expectations and avoid putting undue pressure on them to excel in everything.
- Remember that gifted children are children first and gifted second.
- Provide structure and boundaries for behavior no different than those for brothers and sisters.
- Be ready with an understanding attitude to discuss feelings of difference with your child. Gifted children are often more sensitive than their peers, and problems we might normally associate with growing up may be more intense.
- Help your child relate to friends who may not be gifted in the same ways as your child. Help the child look for strengths in friends and find ways to share his or her abilities in a productive, respectful manner.
- Encourage gifted children to embrace challenge. Because of their advanced abilities, gifted students sometimes work at only partial capacity and may establish poor learning habits. Value knowledge, respect the quest for learning and praise all efforts in the pursuit of excellence including the unsuccessful trial and error that leads to quality performances.
- Leave time for daydreams, wonder and fun.

### **Parent Involvement**

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District has a deeply held belief in the importance of the family and the role of parents as the child's first and most important teachers. Parent presence and participation is an essential element of a gifted student's education. There

are many opportunities for parents to be involved with their child's learning but the most important is in the daily parent-child conversation and check-in. When parents let children know they care about what the child is doing at school, school success increases.

Most parents attend the conferences and special parent events at school but beyond that we invite your volunteer time. Please contact your child's teacher, building Gifted Education Coordinator or the Gifted Education office at the Administration Building if you are interested in volunteering your time and talents. There are opportunities to help with art activities, field trips, science classes, in-class presentations, mentoring....the list goes on and on. Your ideas and support add strength to the West Linn - Wilsonville School District.

### **In Conclusion**

We hope this handbook gives you a better understanding of how your gifted child will be educated in the West Linn-Wilsonville School District. The most important thing about identification as a gifted learner is that it provides an integral piece of information for your child's teachers, to help them better understand and respond to the needs of your child. With more complete information about the child as a learner, teachers and parents work together to educate the child.

If you should have questions regarding the information in this handbook or your child's educational program, please contact your building Gifted Education Coordinator or the Gifted Education office at the Administration Building.

### **Resources for Parents**

#### ***Books***

Clark, Barbara, *Growing up Gifted*, Charles Merrill Publishing Company, 1983.

Galbraith, Judy and Delisle, Jim, *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide*, Free Spirit Publishing, 1996.

Galbraith, Judy and Delisle, Jim, *The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids*, Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.

Pipher, Mary, *The Shelter of Each Other (Rebuilding our Families)*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996.

Armstrong, Thomas, *Awakening Genius in the Classroom*, ASCD Publishing, 1998.

Calkins, Lucy and Bellino, Lydia, *Raising Lifelong Learners (A Parent's Guide)*, Addison-Wesley, 1997

#### ***Publications***

*A Different Drummer*, available through membership in OATAG  
Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted  
P.O. Box 1703  
Beaverton, OR 97075  
[www.oatag.org](http://www.oatag.org)

*Parenting for High Potential*, available through membership in the  
National Association for Gifted Children  
1701 L Street NW  
Suite 550  
Washington D.C., 20036  
[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)