

Memo

To: Dr. Jeff Turner
From: Todd Kettler
CC:
Date: August 15, 2007
Re: Revisions to EHBB (LOCAL) (Gifted and Talented Students)

Proposed Changes to EHBB (LOCAL)

Attached find some proposed changes to EHBB (LOCAL). These proposed changes reflect updates, clarifications, and changes in CISD procedures for screening and assessing students for the gifted and talented program.

Rationale for the Policy Review

Through the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students*, every school district is provided a set of standards for creating and implementing programs for gifted learners. The standards outline three levels of GT program: acceptable, recognized, and exemplary. Currently, the CISD program falls mostly within the acceptable standards though we operate at the recognized and exemplary in a few areas. As part of the District Improvement Plan (2007-08 Proposed Goal 2, Performance Objective 10) we want to improve the GT program so that CISD meets standards for recognized or exemplary in each category.

Section 1 of the *State Plan* outlines the standards for "Student Assessment." The second standard in that section (1.2) requires that a district have written policies for the identification and assessment of gifted students. The exemplary standard requires that policies are "reviewed at least once every three years and modified as needed."

The written policies for assessment of gifted students in CISD were last reviewed and revised in 1997. In March a committee was assembled to review and possibly revise the CISD policies for assessment of gifted students. These proposed changes reflect the work of the committee. Below find an explanation for all proposed changes as well as a description of the committee work process.

GT Screening Committee

The GT Screening Committee was assembled during the spring semester of 2007. The committee was made up of the following representative positions:

- Elementary Principal (1)
- Elementary Assistant Principal (1)
- Elementary Counselor (1)
- Middle School Counselor (1)

- High School Counselor (1)
- Elementary GT Teachers (2)
- Middle School GT Teacher (1)
- High School GT Teacher (1)
- Elementary Parent (1)
- Director of Advanced Academics (Committee Chair Person)

The committee met four times between April and June. Additionally, committee members shared via email comments on the drafts of the policies and procedures during June and July.

As part of the work of the committee, we reviewed GT screening policies and procedures from other districts including: Irving ISD, Allen ISD, Clear Creek ISD, Garland ISD, and Carroll ISD.

Need for a Policies and Procedures Document in CISD

Coppell ISD has a one page diagram (attached) describing the screening process. Most districts have a detailed document describing procedures and guidelines for implementing a consistent and fair screening process. Feedback from teachers, counselors, and parents suggested that CISD needed to implement a more consistent and fair process outlined in a comprehensive document such as the one developed by this committee.

Explanation of Proposed Changes in EHBB (LOCAL)

First of all, the general qualifying characteristic of students in the GT program is not changing. Primary (k-2) students still have to score at the 98th percentile and other students (3-12) still have to score at the 95th percentile to qualify.

When you examine the proposed policy, notice that the language being eliminated is noted with a strikethrough, and the language that is being added is noted with underlining. Explanation of each change is noted below:

1. **NOMINATION:** The proposed policy allows teachers, counselors, and administrators to nominate students at any time for potential participation in the gifted and talented program. These educators know students well and have been successful at nominating potentially gifted students. The proposed policy also limits the number of times that parents may nominate a student for participation in the gifted and talented program. The rationale for recommending this limitation is based on a responsible use of resources. It costs approximately \$25 dollars each time a student is tested for the GT program. Additionally, testing takes students out of class and removes teachers who are administering the tests from the classroom. It makes sense for the district to exercise discretion when testing in order to wisely use fiscal and human resources.

At the elementary level, we test all kindergarten students and all third graders. Thus, if a parent nominates his/her student, the kid would be tested during three of the six years in elementary school. We believe our test procedures are sound and efficient, and the risk of not identifying a gifted student in three rounds of testing is minimal. Furthermore, district educators can and will nominate the student if he/she exhibits characteristics of gifted performance.

2. **IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA:** The term “program” seems to represent the instructional opportunities rather than the identification criteria. This proposal is asking the board to approve a document (attached) that will specify the procedures for screening and assessing. Thus, we propose inserting the name of the document in place of the work “program.”

3. **SELECTION:** The proposed elimination of this phrase is for clarity. It is unclear what the phrase modifies, and the new procedures will call for campus-based committees making placement decisions. Thus, we propose eliminating the phrase at the end of this paragraph.
4. **REASSESSMENTS:** The committee reviewing the screening process was strongly in support of having a dual qualification program. The dual qualification program simply requires that a student qualify to participate at both the elementary and secondary levels of the GT program. Under the current system a student who qualifies for the GT program qualifies at all levels.

The dual qualification program makes sense given the way our secondary GT program differs from our elementary GT program. At the elementary level, GT is mostly enrichment activities offered through an inter-disciplinary pull-out program. In the secondary GT program, students take subject-specific GT courses which are advanced and accelerated. Thus, the proposed screening process will require students to specifically qualify for the GT mathematics/science program and/or the GT English/social studies program. The instructional effect for this distinction should be a better match between student readiness and instructional content.

The proposed program does allow for elementary GT students to qualify for the secondary GT program without further assessment by demonstrating commended levels of performance on state assessments (TAKS) in 5th grade. Note that approximately 95% of our GT students score commended in one or both areas (math/reading), so the immediate practical effect would not remove a large number of students from the GT program. It would however channel students who are only strong in one area into the secondary GT program for that area; whereas the current system does not use available data to make those placements.

5. **TRANSFER STUDENTS:** The proposed policy calls for an immediate but provisional GT placement of a student transferring to CISD from the GT program in another district. Under this proposal the placement becomes official at the end of a complete semester if the student demonstrates satisfactory performance in the GT program classes. Current policy calls for review by the selection committee and possible reassessment of transferring GT students.

The negative effect of the current policy of review/reassessment is seen when placing transferring GT students into appropriate classes. For instance, a kid moves into a CISD middle school with appropriate GT records from a previous school district. We would only be able to place him into a pre-AP class until the GT committee could meet to review his file. Then in the best possible case, they approve his placement, but if it takes a week or two before the next committee meeting, the student would attend as many as four classes a day at the pre-AP level and then have a schedule change to be placed into the GT section of those four courses. Our committee felt this was a real disadvantage to the transferring student, and favored a policy of provisional placement where they student is immediately placed into the GT program and assumed to be qualified until evidence proved otherwise.

Practically, it is estimated that about 90% of the transferring students qualified upon review anyway, so this proposed policy would have a very positive effect on almost all GT transfer students. Similar programs like special education and ESL place transfer students directly into those programs without reassessment, and the committee felt that a GT policy that does the same is beneficial to students.

6. **FURLOUGH:** The proposal to strike this sentence is based on a clarification of the intended purpose of a furlough from the GT program. By definition a furlough is a temporary leave. The intent of the furlough according to Texas Education Agency is to allow a temporary leave due to an extenuating circumstance such as an illness or emotional event that may disrupt the student's performance or participation in the GT program. A furlough requires us to de-activate the student from the GT program in PEIMS because we are not allowed to receive GT funding for him/her when he/she is not participating. Furloughs allow automatic re-entry when the

circumstances change. The statement that is being removed from current policy actually reflects the purpose of a probationary period prior to removal from the GT program. Such a probationary period is described in the proposed Policies and Procedure document.

7. APPEALS: The proposed appeals process is being expanded to include a second level of appeal prior to filing a formal grievance. Current policy does not call for an appeal to the campus GT committee. Other districts that make placement decisions with a campus committee call for a first level of appeal to be made with the committee itself before taking it to the central administration. The committee felt this was more fair and appropriate for students and parents wishing to appeal a placement decision.
8. PROGRAM EVALUATION: "Periodically" is changed to "annually." Section 5.3A of the *Texas State Plan for the Education of the Gifted/Talented* requires that "The district evaluates the effectiveness of the program *annually* and uses the data to modify and update district and campus improvement plans. Parents are included in the evaluation process (TEC §11.251-11.253)." To comply with this requirement of the state plan, we propose the annual rather than the periodic program evaluation. It has been several years since a periodic evaluation has been conducted. Annual evaluations will be conducted through the curriculum department and will include assessment data as well as parental feedback.

Relationship of the Policies and Procedures Document to CISD Board Policy

EHBB (LEGAL) requires that school districts establish written policy for several aspects of the screening process. Those are all reflected in EHBB (LOCAL). However, neither EHBB Local nor Legal provides the specific guidelines necessary to insure fair and consistent implementation of a GT screening process. That is why most school districts develop written procedural guidelines. Our committee reviewed the procedural guidelines of other districts and developed this proposed document to help all parties involved in GT screening perform their jobs in a way that is fair and consistent for all students.

The proposed changes to EHBB (LOCAL) will provide policy and administrative guidelines which are consistent. Nothing in the Policies and Procedures document contradicts the proposed policy. It does, however, provide the specifics necessary for district educators to fairly and accurately perform the screening functions of the GT program.

Upon approval, the Policies and Procedures document will become public via the CISD website. It will also be readily available on all campuses for parents and educators. Additionally, I recommend reviewing EHBB (LOCAL) and the Policies and Procedures document every three years as called for in the exemplary standards of the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students*.