

Mena School District



GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM

Handbook

Abigail Sims District GT Coordinator, ESL Coordinator
Lee Smith Superintendent of Mena School District

1000 Geyer Drive Mena, AR 71953 · 479-394-3151 · <https://www.menaschools.org/>

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Introduction

The GT program at Mena Public Schools is designed to meet the needs of students who demonstrate a talent for using higher level thinking skills, creativity, and problem solving. The goal of this program is for students to feel free to explore difficult areas and come to see mistakes, not as something to be ashamed of, but rather an indication that a challenge has been accepted. Students will be involved in broad themes, appropriate for integration within multiple disciplines. These topics will nurture growth in critical and creative thinking, independent and group investigation, use of technology in the acquisition of knowledge and creation of products, affective development, leadership skills, and encourage service learning.

What Makes Giftedness?

Gifted and talented students are those of high potential or ability whose learning characteristics and educational needs require qualitative differentiated educational experiences and or services. Possessions of these gifts or the potential for their development will be evidenced through an interaction of above average intellectual ability, task commitment, motivation, and creative ability.

Definitions of Giftedness

ADE Program Standard: 3.00 Definition

Gifted learners are children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. (U. S. Dept. of Education)

Gifted and Talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These children require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. (U. S. Dept. of Education)

Giftedness is that precious endowment of potentially outstanding ability, which allows a person to interact with the environment with a high level of achievement and creativity. (The Council for Exceptional Children)

Those who manifest giftedness obviously have some inherent or inborn factors plus the motivation and stamina to learn from and cope with the rigors of living. (AGATE)

Philosophy

The Mena School District has a commitment to help each child meet their potential. The GT program is designed to assist each gifted and talented student to gain a realistic and healthy self-concept of their strengths, weaknesses, potentials, and responsibility to self, school, community, and society. These goals will enable students to function in a constructive manner, not only in the world today, but also in the world of the future.

Characteristics of Gifted and Talented

General Characteristics:

- They typically learn to read earlier—even before they start school.
- They take less for granted, seeking the “hows” and “whys”.
- They work well independently and for longer periods of time.
- They relate well to adults and older children and may prefer their company.

Creative Characteristics:

- They are able to produce a large quantity of possibilities and ideas .
- They see the relationship among seemingly unrelated facts/ideas.
- They use different approaches to problem solving.
- They are good guessers.
- They are curious about ideas, situations, and events.

Learning Characteristics:

- They read a great deal on their own.
- They like structure, organization, and consistency in their environment.
- They have a well-developed common sense.

Behavioral Characteristics:

- They are often well organized and efficient with tasks.
- They have a longer attention span than their peers.
- They have a highly developed moral and ethical sense.
- They may seek to conceal their abilities so as not to stick out.

Twice exceptional students are those students who are gifted and have a learning disability. They exhibit some of the same characteristics that gifted students display. They have a wide range of knowledge about a variety of subjects as well as creative imaginations. They have superior vocabularies and sophisticated ideas.

(Galbraith and Delisle)

Program Goals

ADE 4.0-4.03 Community Involvement

ADE Program Standards: 8.0-8.05 Program Options

The identification process is comprehensive, fair, understandable, and in accordance with state standards.

- The state compliance standards concerning identification are being followed.
- The identification process identifies students matching the program definition.
- The identification process is free of any method that might discriminate based on culture, handicapping condition, socioeconomic status, or any other condition.
- The identification process is understood by stakeholders.
- The administration and management of the program is according to state guidelines and effectively provides services which are well documented and available to stakeholders.
- The program serves all students in Kindergarten through 12th grade via whole group enrichment, pullout classes, or within Pre-AP and AP courses.
- All state compliance standards are met.
- All aspects of program administration/management are documented and available for review by all stakeholders.
- The program Handbook addresses all areas of the Arkansas Department of Education's Gifted and Talented Rules and Regulations.
- The program actively seeks to involve parents and the community in the program in meaningful ways that value both input and participation.
- Program awareness is achieved through the Facebook Mena Gifted and

Talented Page, newsletters, and through sharing of program activities at Parent-Teacher and Open House nights.

- Parents and community members are included on the Advisory Committee.
- The public is made aware annually of their opportunity to refer students for the program via newspaper articles and at the yearly district meeting.
- Parents are encouraged to participate in the program.
- Professional development seeks both to educate the faculty as to the nature and needs of gifted students and other areas related to the program, and to extend the knowledge of the gifted and talented teacher/coordinator.
- All staff members have a clear understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted students as well as the identification process.
- Staff development concerning creative thinking and critical thinking is provided.
- The gifted and talented coordinator/teacher is involved in ongoing efforts to extend his/her expertise in the field by attending workshops, coordinator's meetings, and taking advantage of other opportunities.

Community Involvement

ADE 4.0-4.03 Community Involvement

The Mena Gifted and Talented Program will have a working partnership between school personnel and other members of the community. The district's program will have an Advisory Committee made up of school personnel, parents, as well as community members. The gifted program will be part of the yearly district community meeting in order to make the community aware of program options. The Mena district will provide ongoing opportunities for community awareness and involvement of and within our program through our local newspaper, Facebook Page: Mena Gifted and Talented Program, handbooks, parent newsletters, and other various community sources.

Staff Development Plan

ADE 5.0-5.02 Staff Development

The Mena Gifted and Talented will provide ongoing staff development for all administrators and teachers in the area of gifted education. Staff will be trained in various areas of gifted education including the following:

- characteristics and needs of the gifted
- identification procedures--identification of low SES/minorities
- teaching strategies
- creativity
- affective needs of the gifted

The district will provide time to allow for staff development within the school district or by attending off campus in-service opportunities. The gifted and talented coordinator will be responsible for providing less formal means of staff development as well including:

- adding books and journals to the school's professional library
- sharing articles and other professional information
- providing information on gifted and talented workshops
- providing short in-building staff meetings
- sharing identified students' products with staff

Qualified Personnel

ADE Program Standard: 3.00 Definition

ADE 6.00-6.03 Personnel

The Mena School District employs persons licensed in Gifted and Talented Education to teach and to supervise the teaching of gifted students as outlined by the Department of Education Gifted and Talented Standards.

Required Certifications:

Gifted Certification, Master's Degree preferred
 Classroom Teachers with Pre-AP Certification
 Classroom Teachers with AP Certification
 Classroom Teachers with Content Differentiation Training

All educators who work as Teachers of the Gifted hold licenses in gifted education or have ALPs on file (Additional Licensure Plan) with the Department of Education.

Regular communication with gifted teachers, Pre-AP teachers and AP teachers is completed at least monthly. This is through email announcements, discussions, meetings, and social media.

Job Descriptions

Title: K-12 Gifted Programs Coordinator

Qualifications:

- Valid teaching certificate
- Prior experience as a successful classroom teacher
- Certification in Gifted, Talent, & Creative; Master's Degree in Gifted Education Preferred

Reports to: Superintendent

Supervises: Mena Schools K-12 Gifted and Talented Programs:

- K-3 Enrichment
- 3-6 Pull-out Classroom
- 6-8 Differentiation (Documentation for GT)
- 9-12 Pre-AP & Advanced Placement (Documentation for GT)
- Concurrent Courses (Documentation for GT)

Performance Responsibilities:

1. Supervises and coordinates all district programs for gifted students.
2. Helps establish and maintain special classes and services for gifted and talented students. Determines need for new programs and services by presenting new concepts and ideas based upon best practices to the Superintendent.
3. Selects instructional materials, supplies, and equipment necessary for instructional purposes in gifted and talented education programs.
4. With the assistance of the Superintendent, develops policies and procedures for the gifted program.
5. Uses a variety of teaching strategies that effectively incorporate higher conceptual levels in the areas of content, process development, product development, and affective skills.
6. Assists the Superintendent and the building principals in selection and placement of gifted and talented, Pre-AP, and AP personnel.
7. Plans and supervises the budget for gifted programs with the District Treasurer and a system of record keeping and supplies data as requested on financial and program reports required by the Arkansas Department of Education.
8. Coordinates and evaluates students for gifted identification.
9. Maintains records on all students identified and evaluated.
10. Prepares required yearly documentation required by the Arkansas Department of Education.
11. Provides consultant assistance, professional development, and resources for gifted and talented education to principals, gifted teachers/facilitators, Pre-AP, AP, and classroom teachers to ensure the implementation of a differentiated curriculum and to parents and the community to ensure an understanding of the MSD Gifted Program.
12. Provides periodic evaluation of existing programs and services and specifies necessary changes in the program based on those evaluations.
13. Assists in writing and dissemination of information regarding the gifted program in such venues as brochures, district newsletters, and the district website.
14. Performs other duties as requested.

Identification Procedures

ADE 7.0-7.09 Identification

There is no single criterion or cut off score. These identification procedures are non-discriminatory with respect to race, cultural or economic background, religion, national origin, sex, or handicap condition.

The Identification process:

1. 1. Referral
2. Permission to test
3. Testing
4. Committee meeting compiled with the GT coordinator, principal, counselor, and at least two mainstream classroom teachers
5. Placement decision
6. Notification of decision to the teachers and parents. Referrals may be made by students, parents, administrators, community members, and teachers.

Data collection:

Parental permission to test and gather other data will be obtained. The following data are collected and placed on a student profile sheet:

1. Current Norms referenced test scores
2. Williams Creative Test
3. Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test
4. HOPE Teacher and Parent Rating Scales
5. Grades

Letters of notification are sent to all parents regardless of placement decision. A permission to place form is sent to the parents/guardians of those identified by the committee for the program. This form is signed by the parents/guardians and returned to be placed in the student's file.

Appeals Process

Any disagreement with the placement decision may be appealed.

The following procedures shall be followed:

- A written request shall be filed with the GT Coordinator for a placement appeals evaluation with 10 days of decision. This request should state the decision reached by the initial placement committee and the reason for the disagreement of placement. Any additional pertinent information regarding the student may also be submitted at this time with the appeals request.
- The GT Coordinator will convene a placement evaluation committee. This committee will review the appeals request and the chair of this committee will schedule an appeals evaluation conference within ten working days of receipt of the appeals request. The committee will be composed of a minimum of five (5) of the following:
 - (1) Principal or designee (chairman)
 - (2) Certified G/T personnel
 - (3) Teacher(s)
 - (4) Counselor
- The appeals evaluation decision will be submitted to the building principal to implement. All parties directly involved with the student shall have access to the appeals decision. This decision is final.

Remaining in the Program

The exit policy for the Mena School GT program is as follows: The student will remain in the program as long as the program meets the student's needs. He or she may be exited from the program if parents request removal from the program, lack of motivation, quality of work and product based on GT qualifications, and or rescheduling into other classes to meet required academic needs.

Probation Period

If a student needs to be placed on a probation period due to grades, behavior, parent request, etc., they may do so for up to one year without the need for re-testing for the GT program again.

Transfer Student Referrals

Transfer students, after confirmation of participation from their previous school, will be evaluated and considered for participation. This may or may not require testing. However, no student is automatically placed in the program without an evaluation of their ability and need to participate.

Referral Process

Although referrals are formally requested once a year, student referrals are accepted at any time during the school year, fostering an open door policy which thereby provides for the placement of new students throughout the year.

Acceleration Policy

The Board believes that acceleration is an effective and research-based intervention for the academic growth of students who are ready for an advanced or faster-paced curriculum. It can allow a student to move through the traditional educational setting more rapidly, based on assessed readiness, capability, and motivation. At the same time, the Board understands that acceleration is not a replacement for gifted education or programs.

Generally, acceleration can occur through one of two broad categories: content-based and grade-based. Grade based acceleration shortens the number of years a student would otherwise spend in K-12 education, while content based acceleration occurs within the normal K-12-time span. Either form of acceleration can be triggered by either a parent/guardian, student, or community member's request or by the referral of school personnel. In either case, the process of determining the appropriateness of the request shall be under the direction of the district/school Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator who shall convene the individuals necessary to make an informed decision which shall include the student's parents or guardians.

While the needs of the student should dictate when acceleration decisions are considered, the Board believes the optimal time for referrals is in the spring which gives adequate time for working through the determination process and for

preparing those concerned for a smooth transition to the acceleration beginning in the following school-year.

The District's Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator will create a written format to govern the referral and determination process which shall be made available to any parent or staff member upon request.

The parents/guardians of any student whose request for acceleration has been denied may appeal the decision, in writing, to the District's GT Coordinator and the placement committee will again thoroughly review the case study that was completed on the student. Upon completion of the review, the Committee will either request additional new testing be conducted to help the committee make its determination or it will uphold the initial decision. The Committee's decision may not be further appealed.

Acceleration Request Procedures

1. A referral shall be made to the GT Coordinator of the school. Either the parents or the school may initiate a referral.

A. Parent-Initiated Referral

A written request shall be made to the GT Coordinator of the school.

Included in that request shall be:

- a. Reasons for seeking the change
- b. Parents' authorization for data collection.

c. The GT Coordinator shall notify the appropriate school personnel (i.e., principal, counselor, past and present teachers, etc.).

d. Parents shall be presented with a copy of a parent packet which is to be completed and returned to the GT Coordinator.

B. School Initiated Referral

A written request shall be made to the GT Coordinator. Included in that request shall be:

a. Reasons for seeking the change

b. Teacher's commitment to support the change.

c. The GT Coordinator shall notify the appropriate school personnel (i.e., principal, counselor, past and present teacher, etc.).

d. The parents shall be presented with a copy of why the school seeks such a change.

e. Parents shall complete a parent packet, including authorization to collect data, and return it to the GT Coordinator.

2. The teacher(s) shall complete behavioral rating scales. These scales shall be completed by the student's present teacher(s), as well as the previous teacher(s) within the school that the student is presently attending. Upon completion, these scales are to be returned to the GT Coordinator of the school, which may include any or all of the following:

A. Characteristics of superior students

B. Intellectual functioning

C. Physical development

D. Social development

E. Emotional development

3. The GT Coordinator and/or other school personnel (where appropriate) will determine specific tests to assess:

- A. Learning aptitude.
- B. Educational achievements.
- C. Emotional maturity.
- D. Social behavior.

4. All data collected shall be compiled by the GT Coordinator on an individual student data sheet and

5. The GT Coordinator shall convene a committee consisting of the principal, counselor, and other appropriate personnel to make a recommendation regarding the change

6. An evaluation conference shall be held to present the results of the data to the parents and to make recommendations. In addition to the parents, persons in attendance may include:

- A. Principal or designee (chairman)
- B. G/T Coordinator
- D. Receiving principal/teacher if a change is recommended
- E. Counselor
- F. Student (if appropriate)

7. The decision of the evaluation conference shall be documented and signed by all parties involved.

Acceleration Appeals Procedures K-12

Any disagreement with the placement decision as a result of the acceleration request conference may be appealed. The following procedures shall be followed:

- A written request shall be filed with the GT Coordinator for an acceleration appeals evaluation with 10 days of decision. This request should state the decision reached by the initial acceleration committee and the reason for the disagreement of placement. Any additional pertinent information regarding the student may also be submitted at this time with the appeals request.
- The GT Coordinator will convene an acceleration evaluation committee. This committee will review the appeals request and the chair of this committee will schedule an appeals evaluation conference within ten working days of receipt of the appeals request. The committee will be composed of a minimum of five (5) of the following:
 - (1) Principal or designee (chairman)
 - (2) Certified G/T personnel
 - (3) Teacher(s)
 - (4) Counselor
- The appeals evaluation decision will be submitted to the building principal to implement. All parties directly involved with the student shall have access to the appeals decision. This decision is final.

2022-2025 Program Goals

ADE Program Standards: 8.0-8.05 Program Options

Goal 1: Enhance the Evaluation

Enhance the evaluation of the program by including more evaluation instruments including, but not limited to: questionnaires, surveys, interviews, graphs, statistical analysis, anecdotal data, focus groups, etc.

Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Secondary Students

Our goal is to provide quarterly opportunities to all GT students at the secondary level in addition to advanced coursework. The GT Program at the secondary level needs improvement through the addition of opportunities. Students receive test preparation for ACT, competitions, concurrent credit, and AP Exams, but there are no GT classes nor pull-out opportunities for secondary students in grades 9-12. Junior High students participate in periodic affective meetings. There will be an effort to meet with the gifted students more frequently and offer speakers, mentors, and special opportunities. Recommendation for a secondary facilitator will be made in an effort to provide more options for secondary students.

Goal 3: Staff Development

Beginning with the 2023-24 school year, the GT Department will produce a *Monthly GT Minute* which will serve as an informal staff professional development opportunity. These monthly distributions will include up-to-date and relevant information about giftedness including affective needs, appropriate curriculum, identification, and more. The *Monthly GT Minute* will be distributed via email and published on our website. In addition, staff members will receive periodic (monthly and/or quarterly) GT Bite-Sized PD briefs via email.

Goal 4: Social Media

Beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, the Mena GT Department will create a Facebook account to publish information about the GT services our school provides in addition to promotional information about our program and ways the community can be involved and support student giftedness.

Program Options

ADE 8.0- 8.05 Program Options

Louise Durham Elementary

Students in the primary grades participate in a weekly thirty minute whole-group enrichment class planned and taught by the gifted and talented facilitator *and* the classroom teacher. The emphasis is on creative and critical thinking, providing meaningful insight into each child's potential. Activities follow the program scope and sequence for K-2 and build upon previously learned skills.

Each learning experience focuses on:

- ☐ Fluent thinking – the ability to think of a large number of ideas. The intent is to build a large store of information for children to draw upon later on.
- ☐ Flexible thinking – teaches children to shift their thoughts to different categories. Students find themselves being more original because they have taken a detour in their thinking. The results are ideas that are more clever, uncommon, and inventive.
- ☐ Elaborative thinking – the ability to enrich an idea or product by adding details. This is somewhat like taking an ordinary tree and adding ornaments. This helps children be more descriptive leaving very little to the imagination.

- ☐ Curiosity – a strong desire to know something. Students are FULL of this already; however we often tire of their “whys?” Students will learn to test out and to confirm guesses about the unfamiliar or unknown.
- ☐ Willingness to take a calculated risk – this encourages students to predict. This also encourages students to set goals in anticipation of success and to consider the chance of failure. It helps them develop a tolerance for insecurity so common in everyday living.
- ☐ Preference for complexity – a willingness to accept a challenge. We want students to dig into knotty problems. Challenges in school and in life may be in the form of complicated ideas, difficult problems, or complex tasks. Students need an “I can” attitude.

Holly Harshman Elementary

Students in grades 3-5 are in a pull-out class that meets for 150 minutes per week with the GT coordinator. The purpose of this program option is to provide opportunities to think critically, problem solve, make hard decisions and justify it, and reason logically. Students in fourth and fifth grade GT are encouraged to compete in academic competitions such as the chess and quiz bowl tournaments.

Mena Middle School

Students in grades 6-8 are no longer pulled out of the mainstream classroom, but their instruction is differentiated. They receive instruction from their mainstream classroom teachers who are not only trained in their specific areas but also have

received special training to differentiate the curriculum for GT students.

Sixth-eighth grade GT students are encouraged to compete in academic competitions such as the chess and quiz bowl tournaments. The GT coordinator also meets with these students monthly to develop positive character traits, team building skills, and engage in a variety of STEM activities.

Mena High School

Students in grades 9-12 GT students are still in GT but are not pulled out of class as a group. They receive instruction from their mainstream classroom teachers who are not only trained in their specific areas but also have received special training to deliver Pre-AP content and AP content. The eleventh and twelfth grade GT students also have the option of taking classes at RMCC and receive dual concurrent credit. High school students are encouraged to compete in academic competitions such as the chess and quiz bowl tournaments.

Curriculum

ADE 9.0-9.03 Curriculum

The Gifted and Talented Program will provide curriculum for the identified gifted and talented students that are differentiated in depth, in pace, and in type both in the gifted classroom option and in the regular classroom.

Curriculum for the gifted has an emphasis on creativity and higher order thinking skills as well strategies to improve communication, research, and their affective development.

The curriculum for the gifted extends or replaces the regular curriculum.

The Mena GT Curriculum provides a scope and sequence for the process skills.

Documentation of Curriculum

The differentiated curriculum for the identified Gifted and Talented students will be documented through submitted student work samples and documentation in the lesson plans, submitted Gifted Programs Lesson Plans and documented in the lesson plans; through submitted secondary lesson plans, and student work samples. Observation of teachers and teacher meetings, workshops and conferences will document curriculum planning.

Curriculum References

The Gifted and Talented Program will provide curriculum for the identified gifted and talented students that may include commercially produced curriculum for high ability learners such as PETS Curriculum from Pieces of Learning, CAP ACE curriculum, and/or The Gifted Guide Curriculum.

Advanced study in core areas and in the fine arts, Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement are also offered as curriculum options for the gifted student. Quiz Bowl, Stock Market Game, Chess, and Robotics are offered as supplemental enrichment curriculum opportunities for the gifted students of Mena Schools.

Annual Evaluation

ADE 10.0-10.07 Evaluation

The Gifted and Talented Program will conduct an annual evaluation. Surveys will be offered to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members in order to get an appraisal of the understanding of and the needs for the Mena School District Gifted Program. In addition to surveys, questionnaires, focus group meetings, and interviews may assist in determining the best plans for the program. The Gifted Program Administrator, in a summary report will compile the results of the surveys, and share with stakeholders. Information about the MSD gifted program is shared with all stakeholders in a variety of ways.

- The MSD Gifted Handbook is presented to teachers of the gifted, the MSD administration, the school principals, and is posted on the district website. Information to parents and guardians is distributed to parents in the referral letters.
- To inform parents and the community about the MSD gifted program the district office offers information for parents concerning GT, Honors, concurrent credit, and AP. This is available at Open Houses, during parent teacher conferences, in schools, at the district's office, on the website, and as requested. The teachers of the gifted as well as the district program distributes information during the school year; these are also posted on the website. Information is presented to stakeholders during the Annual Report to the Public.
- In each of these outlets, the opportunity for discussion sharing options, suggesting needs and concerns are gathered and added to the evaluation information to help determine the best Plan of Action for the Gifted Program.

Referral Forms from the Office for Gifted & Talented Programs

Please go to the Mena Gifted and Talented Website or contact Abi Sims, GT

Coordinator, at 479-394-3151 or email Abigail.sims@menaschools.org