



QUEST

Parent

Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Montgomery Public School's QUEST (Questioning, Understanding, Enriching, Seeking, and Thinking) Program for gifted students. The QUEST Program strives to provide opportunities and enriched experiences beyond traditional classroom academics. In the QUEST Program, students are provided opportunities for learning the skills underlying the thinking process, for experiencing an understanding for the world's people and their relationships to each other, for exploring personal futures, and for the independent quest of knowledge in areas of interest. The differentiated curriculum is designed to mesh with and extend the regular school curriculum. QUEST emphasizes student-initiated learning and offers academic challenges through enriched content, long-term projects, and interaction with intellectual peers. QEC curriculum includes humanities/literature, science/math, visual arts, thinking skills, computers/technology, and research.

ADMINISTRATION

Mrs. Yolanda Gracie	Director of Special Education 269-3808
Mrs. Susan Morrow	Gifted Coordinator 269-3808

MONTGOMERY PUBLIC SCHOOLS MISSION STATEMENT

All schools will be safe and caring communities where teachers teach and all students learn at higher levels.

PHILOSOPHY

The Montgomery Public School System is committed to an education program that recognizes individual differences for students in grades K-12. Embodied in this commitment is a responsibility to intellectually and creatively gifted students to assist them in maximizing their potentials.

Intellectually gifted children and youth are those who perform at high levels in academic or creative fields when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth require services not ordinarily provided by the regular school program. Children and youth possessing these abilities can be found in all populations, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. Gifted students may be found within any race, ethnicity, gender, economic class, or nationality. In addition, some students with disabilities may be gifted. The Montgomery Public School System shall prohibit discrimination against any student on the above basis with respect to his/her participation in the gifted program.

QUEST GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

A. To provide curriculum for gifted learners that is concept and problem based.

- Support gifted teachers in attending professional development in the areas of concept and problem-based learning.
- Support gifted teachers in meeting with other gifted specialists to work on units of study.
- Provide curriculum content that is related to broad-based issues, themes, or problems and integrates multiple disciplines into the area of study.
- Provide learning opportunities that are varied and incorporate student interests.
- Provide a program of instruction that consists of content and instructional strategies that are differentiated to reflect the accelerative learning pace and advanced intellectual processes of gifted learners.
- Provide curriculum and instruction that addresses the needs of diverse abilities (e.g., the spatially gifted, the creatively gifted, etc.).

B. To provide continuous evaluation of the gifted program

- Provide for a system of self-evaluation that solicits input from various stakeholders such as parents, students, and general educators.
- To provide opportunities for interested and involved persons to submit feedback
- Establish a gifted advisory committee that reflects the cultural and socio-economic diversity of the school district's total student population and includes parents, community members, students, and staff members.

C. To provide regular communication with parents and with the community.

- Encourage participation of all parents in GEP meetings.
- Provide opportunities for parents to participate in activities, field trips, etc.
- Publish a gifted newsletter 3-4 times during the school year to be distributed to parents.
- Provide opportunities for parents to visit gifted classrooms,
- Provide programs for parents on parenting gifted (i.e. parenting for achievement, underachievement, resources available for gifted, etc.).
- Provide collaboration with community resources through opportunities such as mentorships, partners in education, field trips, service learning projects, etc.

BUS BEHAVIOR



Behavior on the bus for students transported for gifted services is governed by the Montgomery Public Schools Code of Student Behavior. Students will ride the bus back to their home school on their QUEST day unless the center is furnished with a note of permission from the parent.

CURRICULUM

The Montgomery Public Schools Gifted Program has studied the research on learning and the brain, and has chosen a curriculum and instruction path that teaches standards-based facts and skills in relationship to the concepts and principles/generalizations of the disciplines. There is an inherent relationship among *topics/facts, concepts, principles/generalizations (essential, enduring understandings), and theories*. Traditional curriculum focuses on teaching topics and facts, and makes the assumption that students will understand the key concepts and principles of the discipline.

The gifted specialists have identified *concepts* or the organizing ideas for their units, and written deep conceptual understandings (enduring, transferable, conceptual ideas) in addition to identifying the factual knowledge and skills necessary for developing conceptual understanding. They have developed guiding or open ended questions that frame the activities and lessons that lead students toward essential understandings along with instructional activities which focus on thinking and producing rather than memorizing facts.

It is important to help students develop the processes and skills of disciplinary ways of knowing and doing. Mathematicians, scientists, historians, and writers employ different tools, techniques, and perspectives to solve problems and understand the world. That is their strength. Many times students will work within disciplines to model the behaviors of the professionals in their respective fields.

We invite feedback and suggestions on the units we have developed. It is essential that our children become thinkers and problem solvers, not just memorizers of facts. They need big ideas that they can take with them through their lives so that they will be able to understand complex interactions and become true innovators

FIELD TRIPS

Teachers may plan field trips in connection with study units at various times during the year. Trips will be by bus. A student must have a parent-signed Trip Permission Form on file at the QUEST Enrichment Center prior to leaving the school. **This permission cannot be taken over the telephone.** Parents must complete the Field Trip Medical Release Form for students on trips out of town. **Field trip monies cannot be refunded.**



GIFTED EDUCATION PLAN (GEP'S)

All QUEST students must have a current Gifted Evaluation Plan (GEP) on file before they can attend classes. GEP's last for the time a student is in elementary school in the Montgomery Public School system, or until the child transfers to middle school/junior high or a magnet school.

EVALUATION OF GIFTED STUDENTS: ELEMENTARY RESOURCE ROOM PULLOUT

1. General education teachers are to ensure that students are not penalized because of time out of the regular program to participate in the gifted program.

2. A gifted student should not be expected to do the class activities missed while participating in the program and the number of grades should be adjusted accordingly. However, gifted students are expected to complete all homework assignments.
3. If a test is missed because of participation in the program, provision is to be made for a make-up test without penalty to the student. Since a student will miss the same day of regular class each week, provision may need to be made for the student to make up scheduled tests on a regular basis (e.g., Friday spelling tests could be administered on Thursday).
4. The student will receive an evaluation from the gifted teacher at the end of each unit of study. Units of credit are not to be awarded for participation in the gifted program as in the regular program.
5. If a gifted student does not perform satisfactorily in the majority of his/her regular program classes, the provision will be made for a parent conference. A Gifted Specialist should participate in the conference. A gifted student may not be denied gifted services because of classroom performance without written consent from the parent.

ACCELERATION

Accommodations for acceleration are available to students who perform above grade level in grades K-12. All requests for acceleration must be made to the principal. Requests for acceleration follow the process in the Montgomery Public Schools Acceleration Procedure guidelines. A copy of these guidelines may be obtained from the school principal, the gifted specialist, or the gifted coordinator (269-3808).

REPORT CARDS

Students receive a QUEST evaluation at the end of each unit of study. Teachers use rubrics, checklists, and/or narratives to evaluate student products, performances and class participation.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Any questions or concerns which cannot be answered by a QUEST teacher should be directed to Susan Morrow, Gifted Coordinator at 269-3808.

MPS GIFTED GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

- A. Grievance procedures have been established to settle, equitably, at the lowest possible administrative level, differences and issues relating to the gifted program. The grievance procedure is as follows:
 - **Level I (Informal Procedures).**
 1. The aggrieved person (student, parent, guardian or employee) must first discuss his or her grievance with the gifted coordinator with the objective of resolving the matter informally.

2. The aggrieved person and the gifted coordinator shall discuss the grievance with a view toward arriving at a mutually satisfactory resolution.
- **Level II Step One (Formal Procedures)**
 1. If as a result of the discussion between the aggrieved person and the gifted coordinator, the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the aggrieved person, the aggrieved person may, within five school days of the date of the meeting with the gifted coordinator, set forth his or her grievance in writing, directed to the gifted coordinator and shall specify the following:
 - a. The nature of the grievance;
 - b. The nature or extent of the injury, loss, or inconvenience;
 - c. The remedy desired;
 - d. The results of previous discussions; and
 - e. Areas of dissatisfaction with decisions previously rendered.
 2. The gifted coordinator will consult with the Director of Special Education and shall communicate in writing his or her decision to the aggrieved person within five school days of receipt of the written grievance.
 - **Level II, Step Two (Formal Procedures).**
 1. If the aggrieved person is not satisfied with the disposition of his or her grievance at Level II, Step One, he or she may, within five school days of receipt of the gifted coordinator's written decision, present his or her grievance to the Superintendent or the Chief Academic Officer as appropriate.
 2. The Superintendent or the Chief Academic Officer will review the written record and convene a hearing, no later than ten working days after the filing of the grievance, at which both the aggrieved person and the Gifted Coordinator and the Director of Special Education may present testimony and documents relevant to the grievance.
 3. Witnesses may be presented and cross-examined. Detailed minutes of the hearing will be made and kept; a copy of the minutes will be available to each party.
 4. Within ten working days of the hearing, the Superintendent or the Chief Academic Officer will provide a written copy of his or her determination to both parties.
 - **Level III, Step One (Forman Procedures)**
 1. In the event the aggrieved person is not satisfied with the disposition of his or her grievance at Level II, Step Two, he or she may request a hearing before the Board of Education.
 2. The request shall be in writing and include copies of the original complaint, the minutes of the hearing before the Superintendent or the Chief Academic Officer, and the written determination of the Superintendent or the Chief Academic Officer.
 3. The request for a hearing before the Board must be made within ten working days of the receipt of the decision by the Chief Academic Officer.
 4. The request for a hearing before the Board shall be submitted to the Superintendent.
 5. The Board shall convene a hearing within thirty calendar days of receipt of the request at which the parties may present additional testimony and argument.
 6. The aggrieved person may be accompanied by an attorney at this hearing.
 7. The aggrieved person shall be given a written decision by the Board within five working days of the Board's hearing.

- **Level III, Step Two** (Formal Procedures).
 1. In the event the aggrieved person is not satisfied with the disposition of the grievance by the Board, he or she should follow the procedures listed in the *STATE COMPLAINT AND MEDIATION PROCESSES FOR MATTERS PERTAINING TO GIFTED STUDENTS*
 2. This information is available for download from the Alabama State Department of Education and may be obtained by calling (334) 242-8144 or is available at www.alsde.edu. (Click on Sections, then Special Education Services, then Gifted).

Supporting Your Gifted Child's Needs

Recommendations as compiled by: www.hoagiesgifted.org, website for the advocacy of gifted individuals and learners.

Build Personal Awareness

- ◆ Learn about the unique cognitive, social and emotional issues of the gifted
- ◆ Attend public forums/panels that focus on the needs of gifted/talented students
- ◆ Get involved in school and/or district decision-making committee
- ◆ Attend conferences sponsored by local, state and national organizations
- ◆ Plan informal gatherings to meet with other parents of gifted children
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with books, newsletters, websites, etc. *See Appendix*

At Home

- ◆ Set an example; model life-long learning
- ◆ Collect examples of your child's work and creativity in a portfolio
- ◆ Encourage and model good communication with your children
- ◆ Create an accepting environment and encourage your child to share his/her feelings, questions, comments
- ◆ Be a good listener
- ◆ Be a facilitator and a guide - share in the adventure of learning new things
- ◆ Allow childhood to be a part of your gifted one's life; do not expect him/her to feel and act like a miniature adult
- ◆ Avoid comparing your child with others or you may lose sight of his/her individuality
- ◆ Make free time a regular pastime - don't over schedule your child
- ◆ Set clear and consistent expectations and consequences; involve your child in the process
- ◆ Help your child believe in himself/herself
- ◆ Emphasize your child's strengths; be positive
- ◆ Supplement your child's learning at home; nurture your child's passions, interests and creativity
- ◆ Model general respect for educators and their important service to society
- ◆ Value risk taking, hard work and the satisfaction of achievement
- ◆ Discuss effective problem solving techniques and strategies to cope with failure
- ◆ Encourage independence by giving your child responsibility
- ◆ Provide opportunities for your child to interact with other gifted children, older children and stimulating adults
- ◆ Encourage self awareness
- ◆ Remember the value of humor
- ◆ Above all, enjoy them

In School

- ◆ Ask your child's teacher for suggestions to encourage and nurture his/her talent or interest or particular ability.
- ◆ Be a volunteer in the school.
- ◆ Keep written documentation of meetings with school staff (e.g. teachers, specialists, principals)
- ◆ Agree on a timeline for setting student, parent and teacher goals

Internet Resources for Parents

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

1707 L Street NW, Suite 550, Washington, D.C. 20036; Phone: 202/785-4268. Parent members receive the quarterly newsletter, *Parenting for High Potential*.

www.nagc.org

Alabama Association for Gifted and Talented (AAGT) is an advocate for the diverse population of gifted children in the state of Alabama. <http://www.alabamagifted.org/>

Hoagies' Gifted Education page is a resource guide for the education of gifted children with links to resources on nearly every aspect of gifted education available on the Internet, plus annotations and first hand information provided by parents.

www.hoagiesgifted.org

The Association for the Gifted (TAG) was organized as a division of The Council for Exceptional Children in 1958 to help both professionals and parents deal more effectively with the gifted child. www.cectag.org

The Gifted Development Center serves parents, schools, and advocacy groups with information about identification, assessment, counseling, learning styles, programs, presentations, and resources for gifted children and adults.

www.gifteddevelopment.com

State Department of Education for the Gifted is a resource guide for parents with the gifted and talented children in the State of Alabama

http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/section_detail.asp?section=65&footer=sections

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted. www.cec.sped.org/index.html

Davidson Institute has a large resource of articles about gifted and parenting in addition to a free monthly newsletter <http://www.ditd.org/>

Duke Gifted Newsletter excellent free newsletter with information about gifted.

<http://www.dukegiftedletter.com/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted SENG excellent newsletter with information about gifted.

<http://www.sengifted.org/>

PARENTING HIGHLY CAPABLE CHILDREN

By Susan Winebrenner Education Consulting Services

Parenting is a difficult job! Regardless of the ability levels of your children, each one brings special problems and rewards to the family. The following suggestions are offered as a means to ease everyone concerned through the trials and tribulations of parenting children of high ability.

1. It's very important to remember that your gifted child is first a child. Gifted children need love and controls, attention and discipline. Since they seem to require a reason for EVERYTHING, accept this need as part of their exceptional ability rather than as an impertinent challenge to your authority. The key is to give them CHOICES whenever possible, while retaining the authority you need to be an effective parent. AVOID POWER STRUGGLES! If you share parenting with a spouse, grandparent, or child care worker, be as sure as you can that all persons are consistent in their expectations and behavior of the children. Inconsistency in parenting is the primary cause of discipline problems in children.
2. LISTEN to your child. Although maddening at times, the endless questions reflect the gifted child's unusual curiosity. Sometimes setting aside a special time each day with each child to spend with them alone is very beneficial. Don't be afraid to tell your child you don't know the answer to some questions; your job is more to help guide them to find the information themselves than it is to behave like a walking encyclopedia!
3. DON'T COMPARE your gifted child to other children, siblings, or peers. Try not to discuss his/her ability with other people in a way that makes it sound like you are proud primarily of how smart he/she is. It places in the gifted child the responsibility to be gifted all the time, and it certainly is not fair to whoever comes off second best. Birth siblings are rarely more than 10-15 points apart in "innate IQ"! Every person has some special gift and would like to be appreciated for it. The label "gifted" is fraught with all kinds of pressures by itself. It is probably better to discuss your child's abilities without the label. Gifted children need to understand that their advanced learning ability makes them different, not better, than many of their age peers, and that their ability is perfectly natural and acceptable for them and you. They are perfectly "normal" in their own right.
4. Gifted children are usually good creative thinkers, and they need time to do things that may look like time wasters. They NEED TIME to daydream, to be silly, and to lie on the bed contemplating the ceiling. Be patient when your child seems unable to stay with a topic for very long or finds one and never wants to go on to another. Gifted children have a vital need to acquire information and store it away for future references.
5. ENCOURAGE your children because all people need encouragement to stay goal-oriented. Use PRAISE carefully, however. Whenever possible, avoid saying things that will make the child think he/she has to continue to please you or be exceptionally precocious to continue to receive your love and support. Appropriate encouragement will not result in giving gifted children a "swelled head"; rather, it can help build a strong, realistic self-concept. Praise the EFFORT as well as the outcome. Praise the ABILITY TO TAKE A RISK when something does not work out well. Let these children do for themselves what they say they can do, without always trying to show them the correct way. If the child's judgment is faulty, use the opportunity to praise him or her for trying, and discuss that the value of mistakes is what we can learn from them.

6. Many PRESSURES accompany exceptional learning ability. When gifted youngsters continually hear about the CONTRIBUTION they will someday make to the world, it may cause them to worry about what will happen if they don't make such a contribution. The purpose of recognizing and nurturing one's exceptional learning ability is to be willing to face real challenges in leaning in order to build a strong self-concept and high self esteem so that adjustment in life is healthy. Choosing the "right career" as really not as important as being ready for the challenge that college brings by learning how to learn and study.

7. Many gifted persons have difficulty dealing with the issue of perfectionism. PERFECTIONISTS are people who believe they will only be valued when they do exceptionally great things, such as earning all A's for their grades. They need consistent experience learning that they are valued just as much when they do not do the best possible job! Be careful of bumper stickers and refrigerator displays that only focus on perfection. Be sure to recognize and validate all the good aspects of a child's report card or other grading results before discussing the areas that need improvement.

8. The issue of GRADES must be handled with care. If your child is in an advanced class, it is natural to expect he/she will have to struggle more with the work than he/she may have in the past. TRUE LEARNING IS STRUGGLE! We must be very careful not to measure a student's worth by his/her grades. An "A" is a long-term goal; "B's" or "C's" may indicate the student is struggling to learn new material. The longer a student's experience with struggle is postponed, the more difficult it may be for him/her to develop the necessary "study skills" he/she needs to master difficult material. Remember, colleges are very interested in the "well-roundedness" of a candidate; a few "B's" will probably not prevent the youngster from being accepted to a good college. INTELLIGENCE IS NOT THE SAME AS EFFORTLESSNESS!

9. Do whatever you can to help your child find a suitable FRIEND, one who is just as capable as your son or daughter and who shares the same interests. Many gifted students are content, as are adults, with one or two close friends. It is not productive to insist they socialize with their age peers if they'd rather not. To get your child together with intellectual peers may involve lots of time in the car, but parents of gifted Olympic athletes do it all the time! Summer programs at universities provide stimulating courses and are excellent resources for new friends. Information is available at colleges and universities and through state educational agencies.

10. Be aware that GIFTED GIRLS have special problems as they are conditioned by society to be more feminine and less intellectual. Subtle pressures to be popular or "normal" may send a message that too much intelligent behavior is not good. The best jobs require as much training in math and science as possible. Girls must be encouraged to take those courses and to do their best to excel in them. Gifted adolescent girls and their parents should read *Smart Girls, Gifted Women* by Barbara Kerr. GIFTED BOYS who are especially sensitive or interested in the arts rather than athletics may experience significant problems regarding their parents' expectations and the stereotypes of society.

11. Some profoundly gifted youngsters do not need 13 years of schooling or four years of high school. Moving more rapidly through the grades should occur in the primary grades and in high school ONLY for the PROFOUNDLY GIFTED (IQ 145+). If they can graduate early, they may choose to spend time at a nearby community college, or they may be eligible for early entrance to college. COLLEGE adjustment may be difficult for gifted students, particularly if it represents a

significant difference in the difficulty they experience in learning and achieving success. Parents should contact the counseling office to help their children discover and take advantage of any support programs that are available. Remember that the long-term benefits of acceleration for profoundly gifted persons far outweigh any serious disadvantages.

12. Gifted people usually have many careers they might follow. This “embarrassment of riches” may create stress regarding the “right” choice. Sometimes gifted adolescents make a premature choice that reflects their respect for a certain teacher or other mentor. Gifted students should be encouraged to keep as many career options open as long as possible and should know that it is OK to plan for multiple careers.

13. Sometimes gifted adolescents become depressed because they realize that the world and its people may never live up to their expectations of perfection. If these issues seem to become serious for your child, seek the help of a professional counselor sooner rather than later.

14. Stress management techniques can be very helpful in dealing with the stressful issues related to being gifted, such as attitudes of peers, perfectionism, test anxiety, etc. There are many audio tapes available to rent or buy that can be helpful.

15. Be a welcome person at your child’s school. SUPPORT the school’s EFFORTS to meet your child’s special learning needs, while gently advocating for your child’s special educational needs. Give your help in whatever way seems appropriate. Demonstrate your genuine interest in quality education for all children. If you have a concern, such as with cooperative learning events, first see the teacher to state your concerns and to suggest alternatives. Be willing to do your part at home to meet the complete educational needs of your gifted child.