

LARKSPUR SCHOOL DISTRICT GATE PLAN

Philosophy and GATE Program

The mission of the Larkspur School District Board of Trustees and staff is to develop literacy, critical thinking and an enthusiasm for learning within each student by offering a rich, rigorous and engaging curriculum and through a collaborative partnership with parents and community.

The GATE program is one vehicle for ensuring the success of students, by creating eligibility criteria for a broad range of students who demonstrate an advanced level in academics, extraordinary leadership, exceptional achievement, and the ability to creatively overcome obstacles and problem solve. The district is committed to providing all eligible students with enrichment opportunities and integrated curricular activities. Larkspur District's comprehensive GATE plan includes administrative groupings and structures, articulation with general education curriculum, and a high level of student and parent involvement encapsulated in the Individual Learning Plans created for each GATE student. In each of these areas, which are aligned with the California recommended standards programs for gifted and talented students, this district has implemented a continuous improvement model so that delivery of services is at all times improving as we seek excellence in education.

The GATE plan within the Larkspur School District focuses on differentiated instruction in the general education classroom. As a small district, the state-funding model restricts application of a special day class strictly for identified gifted students. In addition, the average STAR scores for students within the district are in the top quartile (75% or above). As a result, the district maintains that students need instruction based upon individual ability and talents everyday and for the subjects where a student excels. Staffs at both Neil Cummins Elementary School and Hall Middle School are committed to offering a challenging education for all. Students are clustered within classrooms, making the differentiated offerings more amenable to span subjects and grade levels. For example, at the lower grades (3-5), students are organized in smaller flexible groups of 4-5 students to receive small group reading and math instruction on a daily basis. Many of these lessons are also integrated with math and science concepts. At the upper grades, core units integrating social studies and language arts concepts provide opportunities for application of critical thinking skills and real-life experience. In the 8th grade students are placed in a one or two year algebra program based on ability. The staffs demonstrate their ongoing commitment by participating in ongoing differentiated staff development as well as being active participants in the nomination process of potential GATE students, and finally by working with the parents and students to create Individualized Learning Plans (ILP).

The Larkspur District, working in collaboration with the newly formed District Advisory Committee, comprised of district personnel, parents, classified and certificated staff, will focus on improving the ILP system. Students will be integral members of the ILP team,

which creates an annual learning plan for every GATE student. Parents are invited and encouraged to participate in their students ILP meeting. Parents are also invited to participate in the twice-annual GATE meetings through the District Advisory Council. The district is planning on creating a Student Services Coordinator position to further facilitate communication with parents as well as to support teachers in creating outstanding and challenging programs for GATE students in their classrooms. Collaboration between all stakeholders is crucial to the continuing success and growth of the GATE program in the district.

The options available to gifted students within the Larkspur District span various areas of giftedness. As stated before a major part of the program is high quality differentiated instruction in all academic and enrichment areas (music, art, technology, and library/media), Odyssey of the Mind (language arts, math, art, music, reasoning), Great Books (language arts, reasoning) Mathletes and Math Olympiad (math), Word Power (vocabulary development, problem solving) and Geography Bee (multicultural awareness, language arts). During the ILP process, the team will individualize the program to expand the focus in areas that support each individual students gifts.

The district is setting a goal of 100% participation of all identified gifted students in the district GATE program. Identification of gifted students is done through state CST testing, parent recommendation, teacher recommendation, and staff recommendation and through SAGE testing beginning in Grade 3. The district encourages nominations of all students who demonstrate giftedness in specific areas. The district is also setting a goal that all GATE students score in the “advanced” category for all subjects on the test. These high expectations are designed to create an overall GATE program that is always striving for excellence.

Overall, the GATE program in the Larkspur District seeks to offer and create and individualize outstanding programs for gifted students in the district. The district works collaboratively with all stakeholders and is dedicated to a continuous improvement model so that programs meet and exceed the goals of these gifted students.

Eligibility and Identification

Students in the Larkspur School District are identified using multiple assessment measures, including CST testing scores, scores on SAGES subtests of language arts/social studies, math/science, and reasoning, teacher recommendations and parent recommendations. All students in Grade 3 are tested using the SAGES assessment. The SAGES testing system was chosen because it is easily used with students from different cultural backgrounds. The District Advisory Council will review the current identification process, requesting input from all stakeholders, and then communicating to the district parents any clarifications of current identification procedures or any additions needed to support the system that is already in place. A special area of interest, in the self-review of current identification practices, is identification of minority student populations. The current identification procedures were developed collaboratively and will be reviewed by the GATE Committee.

Curriculum and Instruction

Students in the Larkspur School District receive differentiated instruction throughout the school day. In addition, Larkspur School District provides music, art, science, and movement development instruction through elementary specialists and single subject teachers at the middle school. Students are given the opportunity to participate in “after school” programs such as Odyssey of the Mind, Great Books, Mathletes, Math Olympiad, Word Power and Geography Bee. These different offerings as well as extracurricular activities offered by parents (i.e. music lesson, special interest lessons) all are part of the ILP. All GATE programs vary with the needs of the gifted student. During the school day, differentiated instructions is offered through literature circles, small group math and reading instruction, 8th grade algebra, and out-of-level assignments in language arts, science, math, and social studies. The gifted student can then further supplement their learning goals by participating in after school programs that interest them. Continuing communication between parents, teachers, and students ensure the success of the ongoing differentiated instruction as students work to meet their educational goals.

Social and Emotional Development

The Larkspur School District is proactive in the development of programs to support the affective needs of students. At the onset of each school year, students are surveyed with parent input, regarding affective needs and counselors develop small group counseling sessions based upon those desires. There is a full time counselor on each site who coordinates counseling needs and keeps records of students’ social and emotional developmental needs. Counseling groups are established with input from staff, parents, and depending on current events on campus. Critical to GATE students are the friendship groups and leadership groups available on campus throughout the year. Most of the groups have sessions with a time frame of 6-weeks. These can be extended depending on individual needs.

Students are required to take a leadership role and take responsibility for their education by reporting on their progress towards reaching their Individualized Learning Plan goals. Students are taught how to track their progress and trained how to report progress to their parents and teachers. This method of accountability allows students to gain self-awareness as well as be leaders who acknowledge their own responsibility in the learning process.

Parent and Community Involvement

The Larkspur School District encourages parent and community involvement as an integral part of educating the student. Parents in the district are a major part of why this district is so successful. Parents of gifted students are part of the recommendation process and after qualifying for GATE the parent is a very important member of the Individualized Learning Plan team. Parents are also invited to participate on the District Advisory Committee, that reviews GATE goals and objectives at the sites. Parents are encouraged to attend fall and spring parent GATE meetings. Parents are also asked to

give feedback through annual surveys regarding the success of the GATE student at meeting the goals of the ILP.

Parent and community members are heavily involved in the after school programs. Parents and community members collaborate with teachers regarding the Odyssey of the Mind, Junior Great Books, and Mathletes to help create outstanding programs that encourage learning, leadership, and self-awareness. Parents also support classrooms and after school programs by helping with refreshments, transportation needs, and study groups for competitive programs.