



Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of Oak Park's GATE program is to ensure that all students are able to grow and flourish and to set in place the cornerstones for a lifetime of learning and global citizenship. The program provides gifted learners with differentiated curriculum experiences including critical thinking, inquiry, problem solving, and creativity. Classroom instruction differs in pace, depth, and complexity of study in order to better meet the needs of gifted learners. The characteristics of gifted learners include intensity, complexity, and precocity. Individual learning styles and the social-emotional needs of students are also considered, as well as exceptional abilities and special talents.

Oak Park USD earned the prestigious FIVE STAR GATE AWARD from the California Association for the Gifted in 2012. This is the highest recognition for GATE programs in the State of California. The purpose of the award is to highlight exemplary programs in gifted education to serve as models for other school systems to emulate.

Oak Park students enthusiastically take advantage of the diverse learning opportunities afforded them. They express their thoughts below:

In Their Own Words...

“Challenges raise the bar of the quality of my projects and my determination to complete them.”

-Emily, 5th Grade

“Challenges cause me to think and think and think, and I get smarter.

Challenges create the smartest of people.”

-Avery, 5th Grade

“Without a challenge here and there, life would be boring.”

-Karen, 5th grade

“Challenges are the main component in the progress of humanity.”

-Thea, 5th Grade

“Challenges make me work full throttle.”

-Hayden, 5th Grade

“A challenge makes me think harder. Classes at my school attempt to challenge me, not to throw me off my feet, but to give me a push like the lighting of a candle.”

-Zoe, 5th Grade

“I like thinking critically because I’m not only learning the answer but why it is the answer.”

-Arielle, 7th Grade

“The challenge of critical thinking has inspired me to go beyond the facts of the textbook pages by investigating deeper concepts.”

-Monique, 7th Grade



Curriculum and Instruction

Access to a high quality learning environment is the gold standard for any school GATE program. This is the core of the OPUSD GATE program. The GATE program is embedded in the regular classroom experience. Teachers are well trained in differentiated instruction. Enrichment opportunities abound at all levels and schools.

The District utilizes differentiated curricula and instructional models and strategies that are aligned with and extend the common core academic content standards and curriculum frameworks. The differentiated curriculum is related to theories, models, and practices from recognized research in the field. Elements and components of the differentiated program include:

- Grouping strategies that are designed to provide effective differentiation and interaction with intellectual peers.
- Cluster grouping of gifted learners is used at the elementary and middle school levels to inspire authentic learning experiences. The cluster design facilitates dynamic interaction between intellectual peers as well as meeting the social and emotional needs of GATE children.
- Fluid grouping is also provided to individualize and level instruction.
- At the elementary level, 5th grade students investigate the environment on a yearly trip to Santa Cruz Island. In addition, GATE students are offered the opportunity to meet with their intellectual peers to work on inquiry-based projects. All elementary school students attend field trips that enhance the curriculum.
- At the middle school level, GATE teaching strategies are used in daily lessons and projects, enabling students to expand critical thinking and independent learning skills.
- Special interest programs beyond the classroom are available for our middle school students. These include a History Day challenge, the Idea to Impact Energy and Environmental challenge, the Ventura County Science Competition, and a number of curricular field trip opportunities.
- Oak Park High School offers a variety of honors, AP courses, and extensive enrichment through a wide range of elective classes. Students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular clubs and sports. Highly capable students may attend local colleges to continue their studies in specific subject areas. Independent Study projects are available for those students who want to immerse themselves in a particular subject matter.



Moving into the 21st Century

In Oak Park, our 21st Century classrooms are equipped with Smart Boards, laptop computers, tablets, and other technological devices. These tools are used to help students research topics related to the core curriculum. Students become engaged as they learn to integrate information from a variety of sources while refining their technology skills. In addition, our 21st Century tools offer opportunities for students to pursue authentic inquiry-based learning.

Social and Emotional Development

Mindful teachers of the gifted require a special understanding of their students' social and emotional needs. Oak Park has implemented plans to support these needs in order to increase student engagement and self-awareness.

- Counselors and psychologists at all grade levels are available to support our gifted students.
- If necessary, students are referred to appropriate community resource.
- Intervention programs are available for our at-risk gifted students.
- Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted (SENG) parent discussion groups offer an opportunity to share ideas, strategies, and support, guided by trained facilitators.

Identification and Monitoring

Oak Park's identification procedures are equitable, comprehensive, and on-going. They reflect the research-based consensus of the definition of giftedness and its relationship to the program designed to serve them in the public school setting. Our portfolio process allows the nomination of any student in grades ranging from elementary through high school. We understand that testing alone may not reflect the abilities of GATE students in general, as well as GATE students of diverse populations. Any student in grades K-5 may be considered for identification, however, precautions are taken in terms of identifying too early. Often early skill acquisition is confused with giftedness, which can be associated with giftedness, but in itself is not a characteristic.

- Teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators may submit referrals. In addition, students at the middle and high school levels may refer themselves. GATE identification teams (GIT's) are comprised of the site GATE coordinator, referring teacher, and school administrator. The GIT may also include teachers from previous years and/or counselors. Following the process, parents will be notified of their child's eligibility or the appeal process.
- Our portfolio process includes traditional and non-traditional evidence to provide equal access to the program (e.g. student work samples from school and home, classroom observation, and teacher narratives).
- The portfolios of students referred but not admitted to the GATE program are maintained and may be considered for future re-evaluations.
- Transfer students previously identified as gifted are immediately placed within the Oak Park GATE program. Documentation is required.
- Once students are identified as gifted and parents are made aware of their options, they sign a "Permission to Participate" form. Once identified, students remains in the GATE program as long as they attend a school in Oak Park.
- Once a student leaves our district, the GATE portfolio is sent to the receiving school. The portfolio remains part of a student's cumulative file.
- The identification process is specific in areas of giftedness and student needs.
- Our program recognizes the needs of both gifted and multi-exceptional students and correlates service options.
- Annual parent-teacher-student conferences at the elementary schools encourage analysis of student progress. Individual needs and abilities are discussed and specific goals are determined. Possibilities of extensions, independent study, and cluster grouping may be discussed at the conference.

Professional Staff Development

Our district provides many staff development opportunities to enhance teacher effectiveness when working with gifted students. Many of our staff development opportunities have stemmed from recommendations and collaborations with GATE researchers and experts throughout the nation. Teachers are highly encouraged to focus their instructional growth plans on differentiated instruction. Oak Park has developed a 45-hour GATE certification program for teachers. Requirements for certification focus on the following areas:

- Differentiation
- Social-Emotional Needs
- Identification
- Curriculum and Instruction

Tri-County GATE Council
www.Tri-CountyGATE.org

California Association for the Gifted (CAG)
www.cagifted.org

California Department of Education
www.cde.ca.gov/sp/gt

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
www.nagc.org

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page
www.hoagiesgifted.org

Parent Involvement in GATE

Well-informed parents are more effective partners in their children's education. Information is provided in a variety of ways:

- GATE brochure
- Parent E-mail
- School Discussion Groups
- District Website
- District Advisory Council (DAC)
—The DAC assists in planning and evaluation of our GATE Program.

Resources

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)
www.sengifted.org

Davidson Institute
www.davidsongifted.org

Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children
www.hollingworth.org

2e Twice Exceptional Newsletter
www.2enewsletter.com



Suggested Reading

Parenting

A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children by James T. Webb, Janet L. Gore, Edward R. Amend and Arlene R. DeVries (Mar 1, 2007)

The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids: How to Understand, Live With, and Stick Up for Your Gifted Child... by Sally Yahnke Walker Ph.D. (May 15, 2002)

When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers: How to Meet Their Social and Emotional Needs by Ph.D. Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith M.A. (May 15, 2002)

For Kids and Teens

The Survival Guide for Gifted Kids: For Ages 10 and Under by Judy Galbraith M.A. (Aug 6, 2013)

The Gifted Teen Survival Guide: Smart, Sharp, and Ready for (Almost) Anything by Judy Galbraith M.A. and Ph.D. Jim Delisle (Sep 7, 2011)

Smart Teens' Guide to Living with Intensity: How to Get More Out of Life and Learning by Lisa Rivero (Apr 15, 2010)

Education

Growing Up Gifted: Developing the Potential of Children at School and at Home (8th Edition) by Barbara Clark (Apr 28, 2012)

The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners, 2nd Edition by Carol Ann Tomlinson (May 20, 2014)

The Parallel Curriculum: A Design to Develop Learner Potential and Challenge Advanced Learners by Carol Ann Tomlinson, Sandra N. Kaplan, Joseph S. Renzulli and Jeanne H. Purcell (Oct 22, 2008)

Teaching Gifted Kids in Today's Classroom: Strategies and Techniques Every Teacher Can Use (Revised & Updated)... by Susan Winebrenner M.S. and Dina Brulles Ph.D. (Aug 15, 2012)

Differentiating the Common Core Standards for Gifted Students by California Association for the Gifted (2013)

Collaboration and Advocacy

Helping Gifted Children Soar: A Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers by Carol Strip Whitney, Gretchen Hirsh and Jennifer Ault (Nov 1, 2011)

Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide by Barbara Jackson Gilman (Nov 1, 2008)

Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home by Joan Franklin Smutny, M.A. (Oct 2000)

Intensity

Living With Intensity: Understanding the Sensitivity, Excitability, and the Emotional Development of Gifted Children... by Susan Daniels and Michael M. Piechowski (Nov 1, 2008)

Mellow Out: They Say, If I Only Could - Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright, 2nd Edition, Revised... by Michael M. Piechowski (2013)

Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students: Helping Kids Cope with Explosive Feelings by Christine Fonseca (Oct 1, 2010)

Twice Exceptional

Serving Twice Exceptional Gifted Learners: Gifted Education Communicator by GEC Contributors, Karen Daniels and Margaret Gosfield (May 17, 2013)

To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled: Strategies for Helping Bright Students with LD, ADHD and More by Susan Baum and Steven Owen (Jan 1, 2004)

Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, Ocd, Asperger's, Depression, and... by James T. Webb, Edward R. Amend, Nadia E. Webb and Jean Goerss (Jan 1, 2005)

