



Bexley City School District

To provide educational experiences that engage, equip and empower each student.

QUARTER 3 NEWSLETTER for FAMILIES of GIFTED LEARNERS

January 26, 2022

It's a New Year!

I am still trying to wrap my head around the idea that it is 2022. And that it is the end of January already. Like many of you may have experienced, my holiday season was a little different than I hoped thanks to the domino effects of the pandemic. While the break was nice, I also am glad to get back into the routine of the school week. A new year tends to bring about reflection and goals. In this newsletter, I will share the reflections and goals of the Gifted Work Group that met this fall and preview some new opportunities that we as a district will seize along with opportunities you and your gifted learner may want to explore. We also know scheduling for next school year will begin soon, so I will do a brief overview of the services offered by grade band, talk about other opportunities students might pursue for enrichment, and discuss considerations when selecting services to include in high school schedules for gifted learners at our next gifted family meeting to be held on February 1 (see link below). Hope to “see” you there!

Stay warm this winter!

Sincerely,

Dr. Colleen Boyle, Director of Curriculum and Gifted

Gifted Program Review

As shared in previous newsletters, a team of district educators and parents conducted a review of Bexley's gifted programming this fall. The work of this team can be found [on the district website](#).

After reviewing a variety of data, including the surveys completed by students, staff, and families this fall, the team identified nine priorities for their work:

- Underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic/Latino/x, and Multiracial students
- Supporting social and emotional concerns
- Better communication with stakeholders
- Disparity between parents and students about pace and challenge

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- Early identification of visual and performing arts
 - Support of twice exceptional students
 - Math service at the elementary level
 - Rethinking elementary services
 - Reviewing instructional approaches and materials

The team then examined research and state rules to formulate recommendations to address those priorities. The full scope of recommendations can be found on the website noted above. But, in summary, the group suggested some modifications to instruction within existing services to include increased focus on social-emotional development and incorporation of a depth and complexity learning framework. The group also proposed having the gifted and arts departments work to strengthen the visual and performing arts identification process and work with partners to craft opportunities for students identified as gifted in these areas. In response to the family survey, the recommended increased communication with families at the time of identification and after with suggested family learning sessions on topics such as the identification process and service options, the needs of historically underrepresented populations and twice exceptional students, and forming realistic expectations for growth and achievement. Similarly, the group recommended topics for staff professional development related to the identification and service of gifted learners from all student groups, including social emotional support of gifted learners. Over the next few months, many of these recommendations will begin to be implemented in various ways. Stay tuned for more details!

The team's recommendations also included 6 different options for expanding elementary gifted services. One of those options was put forth by Dr. Fine and approved by the Board of Education at their January meeting. The choice was made after considering continuity of services for students and the district's financial forecast. Below are the three key components of the approved plan:

- *Continuation of CogELA for Grades 4 and 5* - This replacement English Language Arts course for students in grades 4 and 5 who are identified as gifted in superior cognitive ability will continue as it currently is. The course is designed to meet both the cognitive needs of the students as well as provide specific lessons related to the social-emotional characteristics of cognitively gifted learners.
- *Flexible Math Groups for Grades 4 and 5* - Building Gifted Intervention Specialists will work with small groups of 4th and 5th grade students teaching enrichment lessons in math 1 to 3 times per week. Groups will be formed based on student skills as shown on in-class assessments during each math unit. While groups will often include students who are gifted in math or superior cognitive ability, any student who shows exceptional strength in a particular skill for a unit may participate. Students who participate in one group session may or may not participate in other sessions, depending on their strengths and needs during each unit of instruction. This opportunity is not considered a formal gifted service by the state, so students will not have a Written Education Plan for this instruction. But, we believe it will help address observed needs for support in math.

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- *Talent Development Program for Grades 1 through 3* - The district is bringing on a new Talent Development Specialist trained in gifted education who will travel between the three elementary buildings specifically to lead this program. The specialist will visit every classroom in grades 1 through 3 each week for a 30-45 minute lesson designed to provide direct instruction in discrete critical and creative thinking skills. The classroom teacher will remain in the class as a support and observer, gathering observational data to help identify students who would benefit from extensions in these skills. It cannot be reported to the state as a formal service, nor will gifted students receive a written education plan. However, this aspect of programming brings great value to the district. Programs such as these have been found to help increase the rate of gifted identification over time among groups who have been historically underrepresented in gifted programs. Additionally, it can be a support for primary grade students already identified as gifted, particularly in superior cognitive ability, and expose all students to critical and creative thinking. Finally, the program serves as a type of job-embedded professional development for our teachers to help them learn strategies they can incorporate into their daily instruction to raise the level of critical and creative thinking for all students.

Thank you to all who contributed to the work of this group, including the 19 team members who gave their evenings as part of the committee, to the students, staff, and families who shared their perspective by compelling the surveys this fall, and to district leadership and the Board of Education to acting upon the group's recommendations.

Gifted Gets Existential

Most people, at some time or another, experience some sort of existential crisis or temporary existential depression when engaged in such deep thinking. A new year or, more commonly, times of significant change in life or trauma can lead someone to ponder the meaning of life and their purpose in it, the difference between their ideal view of the world around them and reality, or any number of related abstract concepts. In previous communications, I've talked about the various overexcitabilities, or intensities, some gifted individuals experience, including emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities. Those intensities along with some other traits of gifted individuals may push them into an existential awakening spontaneously, for a short or long period of time, and even at a very young age. The questioning and sensitive nature of the gifted person causes them to ask questions about life that have no easy answers, and the inability to control the world around them or find solutions to the problems they perceive may lead to feelings of helplessness or sadness. In the times in which we are living, it would not be surprising for our perceptive bright learners to experience this existential depression in some form or another as they process issues of justice, equity, health and well being in a pandemic, human connection, and so much more.

Often, these experiences are stages that come and go over time as the individual reassesses their place in the world, develops a new understanding of their role and abilities, and comes to terms with that

knowledge for that moment in a way that makes them more mature and capable of life than they were before. Well, until the next period of questioning begins. There are instances when the experience becomes chronic, resulting in an ongoing negative state, and extra support is needed. There are some things families can do to provide support to the gifted individuals in their lives who may be experiencing existential tumult.

- Don't shy away from discussing with gifted learners, even young gifted children, that their giftedness may mean they see or experience the world a little differently than some others. Others may think they are too intense, too deep, too nerdy, too picky, too sensitive, too anything because it is different than what most people are observed to be. Help the individual accept that is the reality, and it is neither good nor bad. That different lived experience doesn't make them better or worse than others. It just is.
- Acknowledge the weight of the existential questions on the gifted individual. Don't try to minimize or dismiss the fears or worries, but rather repeat back the concern the person is sharing and acknowledge it is a big thing weighing on their mind.
- Help the individual identify ways they can contribute to betterment of whatever is weighing on their mind. It may mean finding a place to volunteer, writing a letter to a decision-maker to share their perspective, or engaging in a new hobby or learning activity to build a skill to use down the road, among other options. The goal is to find an active and constructive way the gifted person can respond to their concerns and questions, even if they can't be in total control or create an ideal world around them.
- Talk through and practice compartmentalizing the concerns and worries from other aspects of their life in order to find moments of joy outside of the existential discontent.
- Share stories or read books about individuals who have experienced existential depression and took action as a result, either in order to survive themselves or to create a larger positive change in the world. If possible, look to family members' experiences, past or present, to help foster a sense of connection and sense of legacy.
- Look for the bright side. Help the person identify instances of good within the chaos they perceive, small answers within the big questions. It may be that the gifted youth is frustrated by the discord within communities baked on politics, race, or religion. So, after acknowledging that reality, look for examples that counter the negativity and show reconciliation or cooperation among different individuals.
- Monitor actions and behaviors to ensure health and safety. Set boundaries or seek professional help if the individual begins to engage in reckless or dangerous behaviors.

For more information about this topic, take a look at the following articles:

- [Existential Depression in Gifted Individuals](#)
- [Dabrowski's Theory and Existential Depression in Gifted Children and Adults](#)
- [Why Gifted Children Suffer from Existential Depression](#)
- [Existential Depression in Gifted Teens](#)

Looking for More Information About Gifted Education?

Do you have questions about gifted education in Bexley? Wondering about processes or timelines? Planning ahead and wondering what to expect as your child gets older? Looking for resources related to raising a gifted learner? You can find answers to these questions and more by [visiting our website](#). Not only is much of the information available on the various pages linked to our site, we also have a [comprehensive gifted handbook](#) available to download from the main page. Check it out!

Upcoming Family Engagement Opportunities

We continue to hold quarterly sessions for parents and guardians to come together and learn a little about how to further support their gifted learners. Mark your calendars and join us for the events listed below. Slides and recordings of previous sessions, including September's session about supporting the whole child and November's session about grit, are posted on the district's [gifted website](#).

- *February 1* - Gifted Services Overview - 6:00-7:00pm, Virtual, [Link to Join Zoom Session](#)
- *March 29* - Gifted Family Support and Collaboration - 6:00-7:00pm, Location TBD

Summer Opportunities

It may be the middle of winter, but now is the time to think about summer opportunities. We've assembled [a list of various programs](#) that may be of interest to students. The last currently reflects last year's program types/mode, but we will update with current information as we receive it. So, be sure to check back. Two programs that may be of particular interest to gifted learners currently in grades 6 through 11 are OWjL Camp and Martin Essex School.

- **OWjL Camp:** OWjL is a week-long residential summer camp for gifted and talented students currently in the *6th, 7th, and 8th grades*. It is held in June on the campus of Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. The program offers a range of courses across all disciplines to tap into many student interests. Students may submit their applications online (owjl.owu.edu) from now. Parents/guardians will start the application process with a request for access to the OWjL Application Portal on the "Be A Camper" page. More details can be found on the camp website.
- **Martin Essex School:** The Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted and Talented at Ashland University is a weeklong virtual learning experience for *rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors*. It will be held in June and includes a series of seminars and interactive experiences tied to the theme of "Reinvent and Reinvest." Students may also earn 1 credit from Ashland University in

some circumstances. Applications are open now. More details, including the application, can be found on the program website: <https://www.ashland.edu/coe/essex-school>.

Scholarship Opportunities (School Age and College)

The Ohio Association for Gifted Children has different scholarship programs to support the pursuits of gifted learners in Ohio. These programs are for both school-ages and rising college freshmen. [Visit their website for applications for the programs described below:](#)

- *2022 OAGC Student Scholarship* - Each year OAGC offers scholarships to K-12 Ohio students for special activities that extend their special talent/interest areas. Note: The deadline is **February 15, 2022** for applications.
- *2022 OAGC College Scholarship Award* - For any student who is about to enroll in his/her first year of college and/or a student currently enrolled full time in an undergraduate program of an Ohio college. The extended deadline is **April 15, 2022**.

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation also offers programs to support students, including a program for current 7th grade students.

- The *Cooke Young Scholars Program* is a selective five-year, pre-college scholarship for high-performing 7th grade students with financial need. It provides comprehensive academic and college advising, as well as financial support for school, Cooke-sponsored summer programs, internships, and other learning enrichment opportunities. [Applications will open February 7, 2022](#). For more details, [visit the website](#).

Finally, *Support for Talented Students* (STS) is a local organization that provides scholarships for gifted students in grades 3 through 12 to access summer programs aligned to their talents and interests. Awards are based on financial need. The application window typically opens in December or January. For more details and the application, [visit their website](#).