

Woodland Park Public Schools



S.T.R.I.V.E.

Strengthening Talents, Reasoning, and Intellect through Varied Experiences

PARENT/GUARDIAN GUIDE

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S.T.R.I.V.E.**

This handbook is intended to provide parents with an overview of the district's program for gifted and talented students.

This document is designed to answer many of your questions and help you understand the procedures our district employs to meet the needs of our gifted and talented students.



The New Jersey Administrative Code Regulations

(N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3.1)

DEFINE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS AS:

THOSE STUDENTS WHO POSSESS OR DEMONSTRATE HIGH LEVELS OF ABILITY, IN ONE OR MORE CONTENT AREAS, WHEN COMPARED TO THEIR CHRONOLOGICAL PEERS IN THE LOCAL DISTRICT AND WHO REQUIRE MODIFICATION OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IS THEY ARE TO ACHIEVE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR CAPABILITIES.

The purpose of the Gifted and Talented Program developed in the Woodland Park School District is to provide opportunities for every child to achieve at his or her highest potential. The program has been named "Strengthening Talents, Reasoning, and Intellect through Varied Experiences" or **S.T.R.I.V.E.**, to motivate students to strive for success. S.T.R.I.V.E. services those students who demonstrate high levels of ability in one or more content areas when compared to their chronological peers in the Woodland Park School District. The program is designed to provide differentiation and enrichment so that all students can broaden and extend the learning process.

Philosophy

Many students have the potential for performing at high levels in one or more areas of interest. These areas can change from student to student, year to year, which makes it necessary to remain flexible in the programs used to develop and support the academic and personal growth of each student. Based on the belief that there is no single learning prescription that fits all children, the S.T.R.I.V.E. program has a responsibility to foster critical-thinking, leadership, academic, and social skills in all students.

By providing for students' inherent and developed talents, the district is responsive to differing needs, interests, abilities, and aspirations of the entire student body, including students identified by the Gifted and Talented program. The district recognizes that modifications to instruction and the curriculum are needed for those who display characteristics of gifted and talented students. Therefore, opportunities for students to develop their higher-order thinking skills will occur in each student's regular classroom, as well as through the services provided through S.T.R.I.V.E. Learning will be enhanced by materials, tasks, and experiences differentiated in content, process, and products to serve the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of all students, specifically those identified through the district's Gifted and Talented Program.

S.T.R.I.V.E. creates a learning community where participating students can develop their potential through meaningful enrichment and services designed to nurture each student's individual strengths. After being admitted to the program, students identified as possessing above average ability, creativity, and task commitment will benefit from a unique approach to learning (Renzulli, 1986). Designed to address specific interests and needs, S.T.R.I.V.E. is a flexible program where students are engaged as independent-thinkers and problem solvers. It is the district's hope that these learning experiences, combined with the unique characteristics of students who display talents and high intellectual abilities, will enable our students to succeed individually and in our complex, global society.

S.T.R.I.V.E. Program

S.T.R.I.V.E. provides a variety of services to enrich and modify curriculum and instruction for identified students. Students in Kindergarten through Eighth Grade have multiple opportunities to engage in activities to advance their abilities to think and learn at higher levels. The district is committed to developmentally appropriate programming to provide stimulating learning environments and educational challenges consistent with students' abilities and interests. In addition to differentiation in the general education classroom, the special needs of gifted and talented students are addressed through a comprehensive, differentiated pull-out program. S.T.R.I.V.E. develops higher-order thinking skills, fosters creativity, and develops positive self-concept for each individual student.

In addition to the pull-out program, **all** students in grades K-8 will be given the opportunity to be enriched through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) related activities. Students will engage in higher order thinking activities that will stretch their thinking. Projects are designed to be hands-on and creative.

Screening & Identification

The district screening and identification procedures use multiple criteria as a means of determining eligibility for gifted and talented services. There is no single technique which teachers can use that will identify with certainty that all gifted and talented students are selected for special programming. That is why it is beneficial to use multiple measures of assessment when identifying students for the gifted and talented program. Careful teacher observations and objective assessments help build a detailed description of any student being nominated. **A student who was in S.T.R.I.V.E. during one academic year, may or may not be admitted the following year.** The selection process and evaluation process is in compliance with New Jersey Department of Education requirements for Gifted and Talented Programs. The selection of students for the S.T.R.I.V.E. are based on multiple measures:

- At or above proficiency on district level benchmarks,
- Ability test performance (i.e. SAGES-2),
- Teacher nomination/observation (Renzulli Scale)
- NJSLA- Proficiency Levels

S.T.R.I.V.E.

While all gifted and talented students receive differentiated lessons in the general education classroom, the S.T.R.I.V.E. pull-out program provides a homogenous grouping experience for identified gifted and talented students. The district screening and identification process of gifted and talented students will begin as early as Kindergarten. At the start of the school year, data will be collected for identification and all decisions will be made for programming. Once the program begins, students that are admitted will receive instruction and enrichment through a pull-out program with the gifted and talented teacher.

During S.T.R.I.V.E., students will develop their higher-ordering thinking skills through in-depth and complex exploration of various topics. The topics challenge students to develop and apply their talents through differentiated activities and projects. The topics for exploration integrate Language

Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics, Technology, and engineering and are determined by the needs of each group, as well as student input. S.T.R.I.V.E. is designed to support student learning and expand understanding of the real world issues and challenges in our complex, global society. The curriculum remains flexible in order to differentiate for each student's individual needs.

Classwork & Homework

Students participating in the S.T.R.I.V.E. pull-out program will spend some time outside of their regular classroom. The work completed by students in the S.T.R.I.V.E. classroom should supplement and enrich the regular class work. Sometimes S.T.R.I.V.E. will require students to work on minor projects or assignments outside the classroom however, homework in the program is rare.

ALL students in S.T.R.I.V.E. are expected to be self-directed in keeping up with their regular classroom assignments and S.T.R.I.V.E. classwork. Therefore, the student will be responsible for learning the new material that was presented to the class during his/her absence. The student will be responsible for completing long-term assignments such as research projects and written reports that may be due on the day a student participates in S.T.R.I.V.E. The student will be required to make up all tests which are given in his/her absence unless excused by the classroom teacher.

Students are to communicate with their classroom teacher to find out what make-up work and homework is required. It is their responsibility to do so. Making up some classwork is necessary so that students have the proper foundation for future learning. The need for make-up work is decided upon an individual basis according to the student's needs and is at the discretion of the teacher. Reasonable time will be given for work to be completed. Make-up work should not inappropriately penalize the student or detract from the student's experience in the S.T.R.I.V.E. Program.

Attendance

Students are expected to be in class and to make attendance a top priority. Since the S.T.R.I.V.E. classes meet for only one or two periods a week, and often focus on in-depth projects, inconsistent attendance makes success in the program difficult. Frequent absences make participation in the program counterproductive. Students must be present in class as often as possible in order to take advantage of the unique learning opportunities that S.T.R.I.V.E. provides.

Student Evaluation

The S.T.R.I.V.E. Program is intended for extension and enrichment of learning. Therefore, students admitted into the pull-out program do not receive formal grades for the projects that they complete. Students will receive feedback about achievement, performance, strengths, work habits, and attitudes. This feedback is designed to help them assess their learning. Students frequently engage in self-evaluation and reflection of their projects which helps to guide further instruction. Parents may set up a conference with the S.T.R.I.V.E. teacher, at any time, to discuss any concerns about their child's progress.

Exit Procedures

All students will be encouraged to stay in S.T.R.I.V.E. whenever possible. However, in some cases, it is understood that exiting the program is in the best cognitive and/or behavioral interest of the student. These cases often occur consistently and over an extended period of time. Some indicators that program discontinuation may be desirable for an individual child include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Inability to meet the requirements of their general education program
2. Inability or reluctance to meet the requirements of S.T.R.I.V.E.
3. Student displays inappropriate behavior that consistently distracts or endangers other students
4. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) request that their child be allowed to leave the program
5. Expressed desire on the part of the student to discontinue his or her involvement in S.T.R.I.V.E.
6. Frequent absences hindering the child to keep up academically.

In those cases where the student's needs require removal from the program, the following exit procedure will be followed:

- The gifted and talented teacher, the classroom teacher, parent(s)/guardian(s), or student initiates request for student removal from the gifted and talented program. If the parent(s)/guardian(s) choose to withdraw their child from the program, a written letter to that effect, must be sent to the school.
- The gifted and talented teacher, the classroom teacher, and the principal will confer to consider the recommendation, and if necessary, to seek and review additional information from other staff members and/or the student's parent(s)/guardian(s).
- Parents will be informed that their child's placement in the program is being reconsidered and will have the opportunity to discuss the student's circumstances and status.
- If the conference participants conclude that continued participation in S.T.R.I.V.E. is not in the best interest of the student, the participants will decide whether or not to withdraw the student from the program for the remainder of the year.

Parents/Guardians

Parents or guardians play essential roles in their children's education. Therefore, parents who are interested in being a part of their child's experience in S.T.R.I.V.E. are always welcome. Positive parent involvement is essential to students' achievement. According to research, when families are involved in a child's education, test scores are higher, attendance is better, and students have a more positive attitude towards school.

What Parents Can Do for their Gifted Child



- **Love, laugh, learn, and listen.** Encourage the support of extended family and friends. Raising and nurturing a gifted child can be exciting, yet daunting and challenging!
- **Learn to be positive.** Giftedness can be an exciting challenge or a chore, depending on how you see a child's characteristics. For example, persistence and stubbornness are the same trait.
- **Understand the way that your child's giftedness affects his or her needs: intellectual, social, emotional, and physical.** For example, ideas forged by eight-year-old minds may be difficult to produce with five-year-old hands.
- **Read aloud to your child.** It is important that parents read to their gifted child often, even if the child is already capable of reading.
- **Help your child discover personal interests.** Stimulation and support of interests are vital to the development of talents. Parents should expose their children to their own interests and encourage each child to learn about a wide variety of subjects, such as art, nature, music, and sports, in addition to traditional academic subjects.
- **Speak and listen to your child with consideration and respect.** From the time he or she can talk, a gifted child is constantly asking questions and will often challenge authority. "Do it because I said so" often doesn't work well. Generally, a gifted child will cooperate more with parents who take the time to explain requests.
- **Teach your child how to find information and resources in a variety of ways.** Gifted children need to know, to learn, to solve, and to ponder. There will be times when your child's expertise on a topic will be greater than yours, and you will not be able to provide answers or solutions. Prepare them for the future!
- **Become involved in a local, state, or regional parent group, or join an e-mail listserv.** Parents of gifted children need opportunities to share, and many of them are great teachers!
- **Be a knowledgeable advocate.** The brighter the child, the greater his or her emotional complexity and potential vulnerability. Approach schools in a positive, cooperative manner.
- **Be a vocal advocate!** Federal, state and local government agencies need to hear your voice... OFTEN... about the need for continued support for and expansion of gifted education opportunities in our schools.
- **The key to raising gifted children is to respect their uniqueness, their opinions and ideas, and their dreams.** It can be painful for parents when their children feel out of sync with others, but it is unwise to put too much emphasis on the importance of fitting in. Children get enough of that message in the outside world. At home they need acceptance and appreciation for being themselves.

Adapted from S. Berger's Keys to Raising a Gifted Child. Learning Network, <http://familyeducation.com>



CHECK LIST: ARE YOU A GIFTED PARENT?

1. Do you answer your child's questions with patience and good humor?
2. Do you take advantage of his questions and expressions of interest to guide him into further learning and exploration?
3. Do you help your child develop physical and social skills as carefully as you encourage mental growth?
4. Do you help her learn how to get along with children of all levels of intelligence?
5. Do you avoid criticizing him by comparing him with his brothers and sisters or companions?
6. Do you set reasonable standards of behavior for your child and then see that she meets them?
7. Do you impose firm and fair discipline that is consistent and neither too harsh nor too permissive?
8. Do you show your child that he is loved for his own sake and not for his intellectual achievements?
9. Do you try to find something specific to praise when she shows you her work? (A generalized compliment means little to gifted children.)
10. Do you help him to select worth-while reading materials and television programs?
11. Do you provide your child with hobby materials and books of her own?
12. Do you provide places where your child can study, work at her hobbies, and display her work?
13. Do you participate in some of your child's activities?
14. Do you let him learn about and share in some of your hobbies and interests?
15. Do you enable your child to take advantage of lessons and activities offered by private groups or community organizations?
16. Do you teach your child how to budget her time, organize, her work, and improve her study habits?
17. Do you help your child to make his own plans and decisions?
18. Do you give your child increasing independence as her ability to handle responsibility increases?
19. Do you give her household responsibilities and other tasks suitable for his age?
20. Do you avoid overstressing intellectual achievement?
21. Do you avoid "pushing" your child too hard by not being too demanding about afterschool lessons or activities?
22. Do you resist the impulse to show your child off before relatives and friends?
23. Do you resist any temptation to exploit his gifts commercially?
24. Do you teach him to use his gifts for the benefit of society rather than only for his own selfish purpose?
25. Do you encourage her to set high educational and vocational goals?
26. Do you refrain from trying to pick her vocation for her but try to help her learn about as many occupations as possible?
27. Do your expressions of attitude and your behavior set the example you want your child to follow?
28. Do you avoid talking down to him and speak to him as you do to adults?
29. Do you try to speak as correctly as you want her to do?

This checklist is not all inclusive and there is no passing score. It is intended as a set of reminders as to what are the most important principles for promoting a child's giftedness. The parent who can answer "yes" to a large proportion of these questions can feel he or she is effectively promoting his/her child's

gifts.



CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

While it is rare for a gifted child to exhibit all characteristics listed below, it is common for a gifted child to manifest many of them:

- Shows superior abilities to reason, generalize or problem solve.
- Shows persistent intellectual curiosity.
- Has a wide range of interests; develops one or more interests to considerable depth.
- Produces superior written work or has a large vocabulary.
- Reads avidly.
- Learns quickly and retains what is learned.
- Grasps mathematical or scientific concepts readily.
- Shows creative ability or imaginative expression in the arts.
- Sustains concentration for lengthy periods on topics or activities of interest.
- Sets high standards for self.
- Shows initiative, originality, or flexibility in thinking; considers problems from a number of viewpoints.
- Observes keenly and is responsive to new ideas.
- Shows social poise or an ability to communicate with adults in a mature way.
- Enjoys intellectual challenge; shows an alert and subtle sense of humor.

These characteristics can lead to conflicts in the regular classroom, as the gifted child may:

- Get bored with routine tasks.
- Resist changing away from interesting topics or activities.
- Be overly critical of self and others, impatient with failure, perfectionist.
- Disagree vocally with others, argue with teachers.
- Make jokes or puns at times adults consider inappropriate.
- Be so emotionally sensitive and empathetic that adults consider it over-reaction, may get angry, or cry when things go wrong or seem unfair.
- Ignore details, turn in messy work.
- Reject authority; be non-conforming, stubborn.
- Dominate or withdraw in cooperative learning situations.
- Be highly sensitive to environmental stimuli such as lights or noises.

Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted and Talented Services in New Jersey



How does New Jersey Administrative Code define a gifted and talented student?

The regulations (*N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3.1*) define gifted and talented students as: *Those students who possess or demonstrate high levels of ability, in one or more content areas, when compared to their chronological peers in the local district and who require modification of their educational program if they are to achieve in accordance with their capabilities.*

What services are required?

All public school districts must have a board-approved gifted and talented identification process and provide services for identified students enrolled in the grades of that school district. The regulations require that identification and services be made available to students in grades K-12.

When should districts identify students for giftedness?

N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3.1(a)5 ii requires district boards of education **to provide appropriate K-12 educational services for gifted and talented students**. Therefore, the identification process and appropriate educational challenges must begin in kindergarten or upon entrance to the school or district. There is a misconception that schools are not required to identify students prior to grade three or that students who are new to a district must complete a state-mandated waiting period before they can be evaluated. That information is inaccurate. Additionally, local school districts are not obligated to identify students prior to their enrollment in the public school (e.g., three-year olds, students enrolled in community early childhood programs or private kindergartens). Local school districts are not obligated to identify students attending nonpublic schools.

What types of instructional accommodations must be made for students identified as gifted and talented?

The regulations require that district boards of education provide appropriate K-12 services for gifted and talented students. This includes appropriate curricular and instructional modifications for gifted and talented students indicating content, process, products, and learning environment. District boards of education must also take into consideration the *PreK-Grade 12 National Gifted Program Standards* of the National Association for Gifted Children in developing programs for gifted and talented students. A copy of those standards was sent to every chief school administrator and is available at www.nagc.org. In addition, each curriculum framework developed by the NJDOE provides general, as well as content-specific information on gifted education (e.g., terminology, examples of appropriate practices). The frameworks can be accessed at: <http://www.nj.gov/njded/frameworks/> or at www.nj.gov/njded/aps/cccs.

GIFTED RESOURCES: INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

New Jersey

Resources and Contacts at the New Jersey Parents Interactive Network for Gifted Education

<http://www.njping.org>

New Jersey DOE Resources

http://www.state.nj.us/education/njpep/classroom/classroom_resources/gt_educators.html

New Jersey Association for Gifted Children

<http://www.njacg.org>

New Jersey Gifted Child Society

www.gifted.org

Academically Gifted/Talented Youth Programs at Montclair State University including Parents of Gifted Offspring (POGO) giftedmsu@mail.montclair.edu

Other Gifted ...

National Association for Gifted Children

<http://www.nagc.org>

The About.com Guide to parenting of K-6 children. Good, solid information and links, including fostering academic creativity in gifted students.

<http://giftedkids.about.com>

An on-line support community for parents of gifted and talented children

<http://www.GTWORLD.org>

The all-things-gifted site for parents and educators of gifted children, including articles and research, books, organizations, on-line support groups

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org>