

ALHAMBRA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
GATE Advisory Committee Minutes
May 18, 2015, 6:05pm-7:50 pm
Marengo West Conference Room

Administrative Staff:

Grace Love, Director, Accountability and Assessment
Tracy Burt, Secretary, Executive Secretary I

Presenter:

Donna Bennett, Cal State University Fullerton

Attendees:

Benson Lin, Marguerita Elementary School
Julie Lau, Ramona Elementary School
Douglas Chin, Brightwood Elementary School
Juan Jimenez, Emery Park Elementary School
Tiffany Ung, Repetto Elementary School
Luis Huapaya, Fremont Elementary School
Yeeling Chiu, San Gabriel High School
May Lee, Mark Keppel High School

1. Welcome and Introductions:

The GATE committee meeting was opened at 6:05 pm by Grace Love. Ms. Love introduced herself as the Director of Accountability and Assessment. She also introduced Tracy Burt as the Executive Secretary for Secondary Education, and the acting Secretary for the GATE Advisory Committee. Ms. Love added that those in attendance at tonight's meeting will be privileged to hear from a guest presenter, Donna Bennett, of Cal State University, Fullerton.

2. Approval of Minutes, February 2, 2015:

Ms. Love asked the Committee to review the proposed Minutes of the last meeting of February 2, 2015.

A motion to approve the Minutes as submitted was made by Douglas Chin, a parent from Brightwood School. Luis Huapaya, of Fremont School, seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

3. Presentation – Donna Bennett, M.A., Cal State University, Fullerton

Ms. Love introduced Donna Bennett as our guest presenter at tonight's meeting. She stated that Ms. Bennett has been teaching this series of courses to the teachers in our District for a very long time. Our District offers a multitude of trainings throughout the school year; and this is the one training series that is especially well loved by all of our teachers.

Ms. Bennett began her presentation by discussing how parents can identify some of the characteristics of gifted children. Although they are identified by School Districts through a testing process, she wanted parents to be aware of how they can identify them in terms of their disposition and characteristics. She distributed

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some materials to the parents in attendance and explained that this information is available through our State Legislative group called "California Association for Gifted", also known as "CAG". She went on to explain that when these characteristics are observed early, it can help parents with a couple of ideas to be helpful and supportive of their gifted children. She also wanted to discuss what teachers are doing in their classrooms to meet the needs of the gifted students in this District. She feels that the teachers in AUSD are an amazing group of teachers. They take Staff Development to learn new ways to meet the needs of your students. She invited parents to integrate their questions into her discussion this evening and she will answer throughout the presentation.

She cited a quote about Sir Isaac Newton that said, "Millions saw the apple fall, but only Newton asked, "Why?". She explained this is a typical characteristic of a gifted student. They ask the questions that others may not think to ask.

She referred to a book about Albert Einstein which stated that, at a very early age, he had a curious mind. At the age of five his father gave him a compass, and his parents were surprised at his excitement with the gift. This was the beginning of his lifelong love of science.

Ms. Bennett introduced several characteristics of gifted children:

Curious - Gifted kids are very curious. Therefore, parents should strive to create an atmosphere at home that supports their curiosity. The internet is a great resource for parents. CAG recommends that as parents, you don't need to know all the answers. Instead, model for your student how to find resources and obtain the answers they are searching for.

Twice Exceptional - Many students identified as "gifted", also have an additional exceptionality. For example, many gifted students have ADD or other learning disabilities, either auditory or visual. She cautioned that if your child is experiencing challenges in school, you might explore other reasons that are hindering them. This is called dual exceptionality.

Perfectionism - Gifted students often equate grades with self-esteem and self-worth. They often set impossible goals; avoid taking risks; afraid of failure; highly competitive; afraid of making mistakes. She referenced a book by Free Spirit Publishing, "Perfectionism, What's Bad About Being Too Good". She stated that this is a source of great information, if you feel your child is a perfectionist.

Benson Lee, parent of a Marguerita student, stated that his daughter seems too often under estimate herself, but always seems to do well.

Ms. Bennett replied that she may not be a perfectionist, but is using under estimating as a defense mechanism. She may not want to set herself up for failure, even though she wants to do well.

Over sensitivity - Gifted children can have a tendency to overreact to situations that others would hardly react to. They can also relate to physical sensitivities, such as a tag in the back of their shirt that scratches them, or they can't stand the restrictiveness of certain clothing, etc. She encouraged parents and teachers to speak with their students honestly and openly, and teach coping mechanisms and how to separate themselves from the emotion. Recommended, website: SENGIFTED.org, "Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted". This website has great parent resources, webinars, support groups, etc.

Emotional Immaturity – She stated that sometimes gifted children cognitively look ahead; meanwhile, social skills, that others are learning, get missed. They need to feel competent, have a purpose, and to belong. It's always a great idea to get our gifted students connected with one another. She suggested parents look for outside classes and groups that mix students of different ages with different interests, (i.e., sports, drama, music).

Underachiever – Ms. Bennett had a son that was identified as “gifted” when he was young, and they were shocked, because he was a classic, underachiever. His 4th grade teacher had to struggle with him to get his work done. They often have a negative attitude toward school, with few goals or ambitions. Their work can be incomplete or poorly done. They tend to daydream, they blame their teacher, or others, for problems, and they can be verbally aggressive or rebellious. She suggested that parents should work closely with them in setting goals; encouraging and modeling a positive attitude toward school; discussing the value of persistence, resilience, and self-discipline. This can simply be because of developmental immaturity. She recommended another website “Hoagies Gifted Education Page”, website: hoagiesgifted.org. This site has a lot of information about “Twice Exceptional Kids”. It's a great page because there are many blogs, some that are written by teachers, but many are written by parents, like those that are here tonight.

Visual Spatial Learners – These students tend to “think in pictures”. They are good at puzzles, mazes, reading charts and maps. They picture objects from different angles. Whenever possible, use pictures, videos, graphics when working with them.

High Cognitive Abilities – This is a characteristic that is true for all gifted students. The average child has a IQ score of about 100. Far fewer students have scores that are in the 130 range, and some may be in the 145 range. They tend to be great problem solvers. These students will typically understand a lesson the first time it is given, when the majority of teachers have to review the lesson several times with their class before it's really understood.

Ms. Bennett explained that there are eight different intelligences. They are: verbal linguistic; logical/mathematical; inter or intra personal intelligence; body kinesthetic; musical; naturalist; and visual/spatial. She recommended the website “surfaquarium.com” for parents with gifted children that are third grade, and above. She added that there is an inventory that students can take to help identify their intelligences.

She went on to discuss what teachers are doing in the classroom to meet the needs of their gifted learners. She discussed the GATE program that existed several years ago, where gifted children were pulled out of their classrooms and sent to special training every other week. Those programs have gone away. The model that is popular now, is that teachers in all classrooms are now being trained in how to meet the needs of the gifted learners in their individual classrooms. She recommended that parents ask their teachers what they are doing to meet the needs of their gifted learners.

Julie Li, a parent from Ramona School, stated that each year at the Parent Teacher Conference, her child's teacher reviews their GATE contract and discusses how they intend to implement it in the classroom, and give additional, more challenging work; such as online research; book research; and power point presentations. Each year the teachers identify what they expect from him.

Ms. Bennett stated that teachers have different strategies now with Common Core State Standards being introduced. They are teaching at a higher level, adding more rigor and depth. Your students, because they

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learn things quickly, are ready to move forward and perform tasks at a different level than most. Instead of asking a child to discuss a story that was just read; your child may be asked to perhaps compare this story with another story, and evaluate it. It's a higher level of thinking. In terms of 21st Century skills, synthesis is about being creative. When students are asked to synthesize, it's asking them to be very creative. For example, instead of discussing and analyzing the story of "Little Red Riding Hood"; synthesizing would be asking the child to write a different ending. Ms. Bennett addressed the Depth and Complexity Chart which is being used in their classrooms. This makes the students think about patterns, and rules. This model is being used in the majority of schools in the District today. It was created about 15 years ago by Dr. Sandra Kaplan. She received a grant to try and determine what teachers can do with their gifted students, since they aren't being taken out of their classrooms every other week and going to specialized learning. The goal is to keep them appropriately challenged, based on their cognitive abilities. She stated that teachers in this District have done some incredible things using these tools. She recommended that parents meet with their children's teachers and ask what they are doing to address the needs of their gifted child. Our teachers want to make sure they are challenging your children, as well. This model is happening in classrooms with small groups of gifted students. Your children are being better served by being integrated in a heterogeneous classroom with different types of learners and exceptionalities, because this is what the real world is all about.

Ms. Bennett encouraged the parents to ask their children hard, open ended questions. It's what they are good at doing. That's their talent. Parents and teachers need to work together to ensure that all the needs of these special children are being addressed.

Ms. Bennett offered her email address, to parents that may have any questions regarding the material she has covered tonight. Her email address is: DBennett@fullerton.edu.

Ms. Love explained that every teacher in the District that has a student that's been identified as a GATE child is required to submit a plan at the beginning of the year, with a goal of how they intend to work with their gifted students. Additionally, at the end of the year, they are required to submit a history showing how they implemented those goals in the classroom. Ms. Love explained that there is another level of accountability, in that all the Directors, and Assistant Superintendents, as well as other Cabinet Members, visit every school site every year to see how the teachers are using the training they've received in their classrooms.

Benson Lee, a parent from Marguerita School, stated he does not believe that the gifted students are getting adequate attention in the classroom. He stated he has spoken with the teacher and is still not satisfied.

Juan Jimenez, parent from Emery Park, said that he was more comfortable with the traditional GATE plan, when the students were called out of their classrooms and given special instruction and assignments. He doesn't believe that his child's teacher is doing a good job at implementing this new approach. He's also concerned that the teachers are out of the classroom quite often, due to training. He does not believe that a substitute teacher will take the extra time to make sure the gifted children are being challenged at another level. He stated that he's already met with the teacher and expressed his concerns.

Benson Lee concurred with Mr. Jimenez's comments.

Ms. Love suggested that he should then take his concerns to the school's Principal.

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Ms. Huapaya, a parent from Fremont School, also stated his frustration with how his child is being taught. His daughter told him she wants to move to another school because the teacher isn't teaching her and addressing her needs.

Ms. Bennett suggested the parent visit the classroom during the school day. She also stated that the parents are doing exactly the right thing by advocating for their children. She added that it also boils down to the teacher. Some teachers will receive training and will vigorously run with it. Others are slower at how they implement what they've learned. On the whole, it's her experience that this District does a wonderful job providing accountability between the teachers and the students.

May Lee, parent from Mark Keppel High School, said her son participated in the previous GATE pull out program, and she felt as though she never knew what was going on during those days. She stated at Open House, one of the other parents noted what wonderful projects the teacher has been working on with their classroom; however when Ms. Lee looked around, she was surprised to see that these were all the projects that had been sent home for the student to work on at home. She stated that there will always be pros and cons to how things are being taught. She stressed that you have to be an advocate for your child to ensure they receive the attention they require. Being a teacher herself, she stated that she had taught in an inclusion classroom for ten years, with learning handicap, main stream kids, and GATE kids. It was a true heterogeneous population, and it was an ideal teaching situation, both for learning and engaging, as well as enhancing social skills. Every child should have an opportunity to rise above their potential.

Julie Lou stated that her son is in a blended classroom and it has really benefitted him socially, and helped overcome his shyness.

This concluded the presentation, and Ms. Love thanked Ms. Bennett for joining us this evening.

Adjournment:

With no further comments, Ms. Love adjourned the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Tracy Burt, Executive Secretary, Secondary Education

