

Not so Little School on the Prairie

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Four years ago, Prairie Elementary School did not identify or officially serve any gifted and talented students. Today, a program exists through a volunteer GATE committee that identifies, advocates, and provides services to both Prairie Elementary's gifted and talented students and its teachers. In order to decide which services the school could provide, GATE committee members planned vigorously, finally deciding on targeting students for identification in the areas of reading and math. According to teacher and program coordinator Kelly Troe, "the components of the service plan for students have been inspired by the Levels of Service Model, which promotes integrated service within a school system, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, which supports service in the areas of student interest, and the Schoolwide Cluster Model, which supports carefully structured classroom compositions in order to serve gifted and talented students." These models have indeed provided a foundation and plan for programming.

To identify students in grades 1-3 for services, students are referred using a screening/nomination form. After referral, a range of data is then collected on nominated students and they are administered the CogAT test. Students who score in the top 10% in any of the three areas tested: verbal, quantitative, and non-verbal, are "tagged" as a cluster student. Tagged students are placed in a cluster classroom for the next year and beyond. Cluster classrooms, which offer students a chance to engage intellectually with peers throughout the day, make use of accelerated curricula materials for every subject. Students are flexibly grouped within this self-contained setting or may be placed in groups by ability in the areas of reading and/or math. Students are also given problem-solving training and activities along with small-group instruction in

reading and math. Teachers at Prairie Elementary School work to identify and serve the whole child every day.

The GATE Committee at Prairie Elementary is planning to create a cluster group of students who speak English as a second language. Their goal is to use data from classroom performance and characteristics of gifted learners to create a top 10% ELL group. This will enable the GATE Committee the opportunity to advocate for those student's needs.

In addition to the cluster classrooms, Prairie Elementary provides a host of services for all students, including after-school clubs such as Book Club, Chess, Scrap-booking Club, Science Fair, Math Club, Cartoon Club, Spanish Club, and Coin Collecting/Economics Club. There is a school orchestra for interested students. The school also has an essay contest where the winners are provided registration and transportation to a Conference for Young Writers, something also done for student science fair winners. The diverse nature of extra-curricular activities offer opportunities for teachers to observe students who then may be referred for GATE services.

The opportunities for learning in an interest area are not limited to students. Teachers at Prairie Elementary who wish to deepen their knowledge participate in many professional development opportunities focusing on the characteristics and needs of gifted and talented learners. Prairie Elementary also offers teachers the chance to read current work concerning gifted and talented students and draft curriculum as a product. Teachers can also join educational book clubs and produce a reflective piece of work to show growth. In both cases, teachers are paid for their time and work.

To evaluate the program, GATE Committee members use NAGC's Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards as

benchmarks for measuring program effectiveness. The standards are also used as guidelines for further development of the program.

Prairie Elementary is an excellent example of how teachers, supportive administrators, and parents work together to provide needed academic challenge and enrichment to gifted students who might otherwise have gone unnoticed and unserved. ■

PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL • Worthington, MN

<http://www.isd518.net/pe/specials/gifted/gifted/index.htm>

Overview: Prairie Elementary, a public school in the Worthington School District, has a diverse school population of about 1000 students in grades K-4, 70% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The top 10% of students in grades 2-4 who are identified in the areas of reading and math are placed in cluster grouped classrooms and can receive a continuum of advanced services offered by the school.

Mission Statement: To recognize and serve the needs of gifted and talented students and enhance achievement opportunities for all learners. Gifted and Talented Education will become part of Prairie Elementary School culture and achievement gains will occur from focused and effective teaching strategies. This service will involve a combination of identification of high-ability learners, cluster classrooms, and opportunities for students to work in areas of interest.