

# **GIFTED AND TALENTED ACADEMY YEAR ONE EVALUATION (2007-2008)**

## **Executive Summary**

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Evaluation

This year one evaluation provides the School Board and superintendent with information about the implementation of the Gifted and Talented Academy at Quail Valley Middle School during the 2007-2008 school year. In February, 2007, the School Board approved the proposal of a middle school gifted and talented academy to be implemented in the 2007-2008 school year. The G/T Academy, located at Quail Valley Middle School, reflected the schools-within-a-school (SWAS) concept. Its goals were to promote student achievement by implementing a smaller learning community at Quail Valley Middle School and to provide specialized and rigorous academic opportunities for gifted and talented middle school students from around the district. During the 2007-2008 school year, the academy enrolled 87 sixth grade students.

## **Findings**

### ***Student Application and Selection***

- The student recruitment process was as follows: a letter was initially sent to parents/guardians of gifted fifth grade students in the district. A second letter, along with the G/T program brochure, was sent to follow up on the initial letter. Two district-wide parent information meetings were also held in late April of 2007 to provide related information about the application process, the screening process, curriculum offerings and program descriptions.
- The student application process required students to submit a parent inventory, a teacher inventory, an application form and a work sample to the G/T Academy coordinator. In all, 145 applications (31.7%) out of 457 total sixth grade G/T students in the district applied.
- Following the student application, a team of approximately 10 administrators and teachers with G/T certifications and G/T training served as the selection committee. The selection committee screened students based on a standardized, norm-referenced test, a performance task, and a writing test on the screening dates. There were 107 students (73.8%) recommended and 94 students (87.9%) enrolled in the G/T Academy as of August 21, 2007. In January 2008, 87 students were still enrolled for the remainder of the 2007-2008 school year.

- Of the remaining 87 students, 45 students (52%) were male and 42 students (48%) were female. The students' ethnic breakdown was: 22 Asian (25%), 25 African-American (29%), 10 Hispanic (12%) and 30 white (34%) students.
- Every middle school attendance zone was represented in the G/T Academy student enrollment. The greatest percentage of students came from the Quail Valley Middle School (25.3%) attendance zone. Two nearby middle schools, Dulles Middle School and Lake Olympia Middle School, accounted for the second highest percentage of students (both were 12.6 %). Palmer Elementary School (12.6%) supplied the greatest percentage of elementary students to the G/T Academy. Quail Valley Elementary School and Glover Elementary School supplied the second highest percentage (both were 8%) of elementary students to the total G/T Academy student population.
- When students were asked to explain their reasons for applying, 30.9 percent said that they wanted to get a good education with a high standard curriculum, good teachers and more academic opportunities; 25.5 percent said that their parents wanted them to or made them apply; 21.8 percent said that they wanted to be challenged; 10.9 percent said that they wanted to be in an environment specialized for G/T students; 9.1 percent said that the program would enhance their resumes and benefit their college applications. The remaining 3.6 percent answered that they wanted to “see friends and make friends” or “no answer”.
- Seventy-one percent of students and 84 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy application process was clear to them. Sixty-five percent of students and 81 percent of parents agreed that the application form was easy to complete. Thirty-one percent of students had neutral opinions about the application form.
- Sixty-five percent of students and 81 percent of parents agreed that they received enough information prior to submitting the application. However, 20 percent of students (vs. 8% of parents) replied that they did not receive enough information prior to applying. This may indicate that most of the information was geared to parents (i.e. letters to parents and parent information meetings) and some students did not receive enough information as a result. In addition, 68 percent of students and 77 percent of parents agreed that the orientation session in the beginning of the school year was helpful for them to understand the G/T Academy program better. Twenty-four percent of students held neutral opinions about the orientation session.
- For the student selection process, 83 percent of students and 81 percent of parents agreed that the student selection and recommendation process was fair. Eighty percent of teachers and both administrators (Quail Valley principal and the G/T Academy coordinator) agreed that the student selection process had identified promising students. However, some teachers also commented that some students were at lower levels than originally expected because the G/T identification processes seemed to differ at the elementary schools across the district. However, teachers felt that attending the G/T Academy was an opportunity for some of those students to excel and learn more than they would have at their home campuses.

### ***Staff Selection and Training***

- There were five teachers for the sixth grade students of the G/T Academy. They taught ELA, math, science, social studies and Spanish respectively. Spanish was taught as a regular course rather than as an elective. Three teachers for the G/T Academy had more than eight years of teaching experience. The other two teachers had two to three years of teaching experience. All teachers had G/T certifications and the original 30-hour G/T training. The G/T Academy coordinator had 15 years of teaching experience, a G/T certification and the original 30-hour G/T training. All teachers, except one, and the coordinator had the required six-hour G/T update training for the 2007-2008 school year.
- All the teachers in the G/T Academy completed staff development activities in technology based on their individual status in the Fort Bend ISD technology three-year training initiative and in concept-based curriculum and instruction conducted by the G/T Academy coordinator. Teachers were also given two conference periods each day to plan and work on creating interdisciplinary curricula. Teachers considered the extra conference period each day very beneficial.
- Both students (89%) and parents (82%) agreed that the G/T Academy teachers were knowledgeable in their content areas. Seventy-six percent of students and 89 percent of parents agreed that the teachers at the G/T Academy were well-prepared to work with G/T kids. Eighty-two percent of students and 88 percent of parents agreed that the teachers at the G/T Academy did a good job helping students learn the subjects.
- When asked about their staff development needs, 80 percent of teachers agreed that they needed more training to implement interdisciplinary curricula. Forty percent of teachers felt that they needed more training to work with G/T kids. Only 20 percent of teachers felt that they needed more training in technology. Creating an interdisciplinary curriculum seemed to pose the greatest challenge for teachers.
- All the teachers agreed that they had enough time for curriculum integration. However, only one teacher felt that teachers had enough time for technology integration. The majority (60%) of teachers had neutral opinions about whether they had time for technology integration.

### ***Implementation***

- During the implementation, time was considered a great constraint by both teachers and administrators. Because the administrators did not take their new positions until April 2007 or later, many priorities such as student recruitment, curriculum planning, technology purchases and staff development were delayed. Administrators and teachers alike recognized that there was not enough time to plan for the opening of the Academy and the whole process was rushed.
- The G/T Academy teachers and administrators also identified the lack of sufficient support from the district central office as an issue. Despite the initial district

support, there was very little follow-up support in the two areas of publicity and curriculum once the academy was opened. The G/T Academy was not well-known within the district, which made administrators' communication and coordination with all parts of the district difficult. Teachers also indicated that they needed more support from the curriculum department to help plan and create an interdisciplinary curriculum for the G/T Academy.

- Teachers, parents and students identified the need for better communication during the implementation process. Teachers recognized the need to communicate expectations to parents and students clearly early in the school year. Parents and students indicated the need to have a monthly newsletter (to inform parents and students of happenings at the school and the G/T Academy) and to have a syllabus/calendar (to show homework and project due dates). Parents also expressed the desire to have more social events that involve parents in order to meet the social challenges of families dispersed all over the district.
- Parents and students also identified bus transportation as a problem for some G/T Academy students. The bus schedule was not always followed, which caused long wait times for students. Some bus pick-up locations were not very convenient for students and parents. Activity buses to pick up students after their extracurricular activities were not consistent. In the student survey, 23 percent of students indicated that the school bus transportation did not allow them to participate fully in the Academy program.
- The majority of students (59%) and parents (65%) agreed that the G/T Academy offered enough opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular/athletic activities. However, 20 percent of students and 16 percent of parents thought that the G/T Academy did not offer enough extracurricular/athletic activities. With six extracurricular activities (Future Problem Solvers, Mars Rover, Math Counts, Band, Orchestra, Theater and Speech) offered this year, there could be more extracurricular selections for the G/T Academy students in the future.

### ***Resources***

- Administrators concurred that the lack of a budget was a major issue for the G/T Academy. Administrators needed to contact various departments in the district for funding and equipment. Access to funding in a timely fashion to pay for supplies and fieldtrips was a constant problem for administrators during the school year. Administrators recommended that all future Academy programs should have an operating budget in year one.
- The G/T Academy was adequately staffed for the 2007-2008 school year. However, the teacher and administrator surveys indicated that as the Academy grows, there will be a need for additional staff such as enough teachers to constitute a full team of teachers and to keep class size small, a counselor for the G/T Academy students and an administrative assistant to help with data-keeping.

- Quail Valley Middle School has a capacity of 1436 students according to Dr. Dennis Harner’s demographic analysis report. In the 2007-2008 school year, Quail Valley Middle School had an enrollment of 994 students (as of November 30, 2007). It was more than 30 percent under capacity. Thus, the G/T Academy enrollment did not appear to adversely impact Quail Valley Middle School’s capacity.
- All classrooms except the science lab at the G/T Academy were adjacent to each other and faced the same hallway. The close proximity of the classrooms and classes allowed students to develop a close relationship with each other and a sense of community within the G/T Academy.
- When asked to rate the media facilities (the library and computer lab) for the G/T Academy, 49 percent of G/T Academy students and 58 percent of parents responded that the media center served the G/T students well. Twenty percent of students and nine percent of parents disagreed while 31 percent of students and 33 percent of parents had neutral opinions about the media center. The majority of students and parents seemed to consider the media center adequate.

### ***Program Curricular and Pedagogical Goals***

- The G/T Academy mission/vision statement states that “the G/T Academy will provide challenging learning opportunities and special curricula to enhance students’ self-awareness, self-efficacy, problem-solving, and their learning of critical/creative thinking skills”. Thus, the G/T Academy students were compared with a comparison group, which consisted of sixth grade G/T students randomly selected from all the other middle schools around the district, for some of the program goals. Due to the limited number of parental consents given, only 64 students from the G/T Academy and the comparison group respectively were compared.
- No significant difference was found between the two groups in their problem-solving skills, as determined by the Students Thinking about Problem Solving Scale (STAPSS). There were no significant statistical differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the two groups of G/T students in their planning, organizing, accommodating, evaluating, strategizing and recapitulating skills.
- No significant difference was found between the two groups in their self-efficacy, as determined by the Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (ASE). The two groups demonstrated no significant statistical differences ( $p < .05$ ) in their class concentration, memorization, understanding, explaining concepts, discriminating concepts and note-taking confidence.
- These results were not surprising as students’ problem-solving skills and self-efficacy usually take years to develop. It was not surprising that both groups of G/T students had equivalent problem-solving skills and self-efficacy. It is possible that it may take the G/T Academy students an extended period of time to develop

better problem-solving skills and self-efficacy in comparison with other G/T students.

- The G/T Academy group had higher average TAKS math (2655.86 vs. 2627.28) and reading (2596.59 vs. 2576.73) scale scores than the comparison group in the 2007-2008 school year.
- The G/T Academy group had 92.5 percent of students with commended status (scores greater than 2400) in their math TAKS score versus the comparison group's 86.6 percent. The G/T Academy had 95.5 percent of students commended in their reading TAKS score versus the comparison group's 89.6 percent. Overall, the G/T Academy group had higher commended rates in both the TAKS math and reading tests.
- Based on qualitative comments from administrators and teachers, the G/T Academy was able to help some G/T students, who were at lower levels coming in, to excel. Even though the highest scores of both groups were the same, the lowest math score of the G/T Academy group was 2224 versus the comparison group's 2100. The lowest reading scale score of the G/T Academy group was 2340 in comparison with the comparison group's 1758 score. This general trend seemed to reflect that the lower level students of the G/T Academy were able to make more progress than those in the comparison group.

### ***Stakeholders' Perceptions***

- The results from the student and parent survey showed that 92.9 percent of students and 86.1 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy offered opportunities for students to solve problems in creative ways. Sixty-nine point six percent of students and 88.4 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy program offered opportunities for students to understand the real world.
- The survey results also showed that 82.1 percent of students and 88.3 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy offered opportunities for students to think critically. Seventy-six point nine percent of students and 79 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy program offered opportunities for students to develop their interests and talents.
- Seventy-one point four percent of students and 81.4 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy program offered opportunities for students to feel confident about themselves, but 12.5 percent of students disagreed. This result may reflect students' varying expectations about the program, as expressed by teachers' written comments.
- Seventy-eight point six percent of students and 90.7 percent of parents agreed that the coursework at the G/T Academy was more advanced than what was required at regular middle school. However, only 50 percent of students and 72.1 percent of parents agreed that the G/T Academy program was challenging for students.

- Thirty-five point seven percent of students and 20.9 percent of parents held neutral opinions and 14.3 percent of students and seven percent of parents disagreed that the G/T Academy was challenging enough for the student. This result seems to indicate that the majority of students and parents believed that the G/T Academy offered more advanced programs than in regular middle school, but some students and parents considered the curriculum not challenging enough.
- When asked about their opinions towards their classmates at the G/T Academy, 73.2 percent of G/T Academy students and 95.3 percent of parents had positive opinions about their classmates at the G/T Academy. Only five point four percent of students and two point three percent of parents had negative views about the G/T Academy students.
- Forty-three point six percent of G/T Academy students and 32.6 percent of parents showed negative opinions about students outside of the G/T Academy. Only 25.5 percent of students and 32.6 percent of parents held positive opinions about the non-G/T Academy students. Thirty point nine percent of students and 34.9 percent of parents had neutral opinions.
- When asked if the students at the Quail Valley campus were friendly, only 20 percent of students and 44.2 percent of parents agreed. Thirty-four point five percent of students and 34.9 percent of parents had neutral opinions. Forty-four point six percent of students and 21 percent of parents disagreed that the students at the Quail Valley campus were friendly.
- When asked if they considered the Quail Valley campus safe, 50.9 percent of students and 39.6 percent of parents considered the campus to be unsafe. Only nine point one percent of students and 34.9 percent of parents thought the campus was safe. Forty percent of students and 25.6 percent of parents held neutral opinions. Students and parents' written comments showed that some campus safety issues such as bullying, stolen property and teasing from older non-academy students (seventh and eighth grade) were great concerns for some students and parents of the G/T Academy.
- Administrator interviews indicated that the school safety situation was improving under the new principal (disciplinary incidents decreased from 1954 incidents in the 2006-2007 school year to 1601 incidents in the 2007-2008 school year) but it will take time to improve the overall safety situation. Administrators estimated that with older students (seventh and eighth grade) moving on to high school each year, and with the new seventh and eighth grade level change for the Quail Valley campus for the 2008-2009 school year, the school climate will continue to improve for the G/T Academy students.
- When asked if the Quail Valley campus was safe for G/T students, three teachers agreed; one chose neutral and the other one disagreed. However, all the teachers thought the Academy students adjusted well at Quail Valley Middle School for the 2007-2008 school year.

## **Recommendations**

- Continue the implementation of the G/T Academy at Quail Valley Middle School.
- Assign the G/T Academy an operating budget to allow timely access to funding and materials by the G/T Academy administrators.
- Start the student recruitment process early in the school year and disseminate information to both parents and students.
- Recruit qualified teachers, plan curriculum, and implement quality staff development early in the school year.
- Hire additional staff for the G/T Academy as needed as the Academy expands.
- Investigate ways to accommodate and prepare for increasing enrollment of G/T Academy students and ways to meet the future needs of this student population.
- Increase the G/T Academy publicity and visibility by introducing the G/T Academy on the district website as well as other publications and events.
- Investigate ways to provide district support to assist teachers in developing and revising interdisciplinary curricula to ensure challenging opportunities for G/T students.
- Investigate ways to enhance communication and coordination between the school, students and parents of the G/T Academy.
- Investigate ways to improve school bus transportation for the G/T Academy students.
- Investigate ways to increase elective/extracurricular offerings at the G/T Academy.
- Continue to allow the G/T Academy a defined space at the Quail Valley Middle School campus.
- Continue to focus on fostering students' problem-solving skills and self-efficacy development as well as on promoting students' academic achievement.
- Investigate ways to address the safety concerns of students and parents.