



# HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS



## A POSITION PAPER

The California Association for the Gifted (CAG) periodically publishes position papers that deal with issues, policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. All position papers approved by the CAG Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's philosophy and mission, and the current research in the field.

The position papers support the organization's belief in the value and uniqueness of all individuals, its respect for diversity present in our society, and its commitment to honoring the similarities and differences among all students. CAG encourages the provision of educational opportunities that are appropriate to challenge and nurture the growth of each child's potential. The organization is especially mindful of the need for advocacy for individuals who have developed or show the promise of developing intellectual abilities and talents at high levels.



# HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

Many California high schools offer Honors or Advanced Placement classes to gifted, high-ability, or high-performing students. The Advanced Placement Program (AP) has courses that are designed and supervised by the College Board, which also conducts and grades a nationally standardized examination for each of the numerous AP courses currently recognized. Some high schools offer the International Baccalaureate Program. The program demands a high level of subject mastery and culminates with a diploma recognized by many international universities. Concurrent enrollment and early entrance programs are available in many districts that have nearby universities or community colleges.

While these programs are excellent choices for many gifted students, they should not be considered a complete gifted program. Many gifted students do not participate in these programs because of underachievement, lack of requisite skills, or lack of motivation. Therefore schools and districts need to offer a wide array of program options, appropriately paced with depth and complexity and opportunity for originality of expression. These courses must match the interest, learning style, and modality of each student. In this way, the needs of gifted students can be met in all classes, and the capacity of all students is developed.

The primary goal for gifted education is to provide a curriculum that recognizes and responds to the needs, interests, and abilities of gifted students, offers continuous progress, and translates potential into performance. Administrators and teachers must be trained to differentiate:

- processes used in learning
- content or subject matter
- resources used
- products or methods of assessing understanding

These practices lead to greater student engagement and motivation.

The high school experience for gifted students should extend far beyond the test-driven academic core curriculum.



- A strong belief in the total education of the student is essential. Opportunities that build expertise in areas such as Visual and Performing Arts, Career Technical Education, and philosophy must be available. These promote effective contextual approaches for learning and tie formal education to the broader world of career and community/global citizenship.
- Counselors who are knowledgeable about and empathetic toward the characteristics and needs of gifted learners must be available to students, families and teachers. They can make high school a positive learning experience, as well as guide students into appropriate classes and pathways for the future.
- High school can be a stressful time for students, especially for those experiencing academic rigor for the first time. Support systems must also be an integral part of the program. Family involvement and support must continue into high school and beyond.
- Alignment, coordination, and articulation among the disciplines, and between elementary, middle, and high school must be strengthened. Teachers must understand and implement strategies that teach the way the brain learns, including the integration of cognitive, physical sensing, emotional, and intuitive brain functions. Administrators must become the educational leaders that both model and expect academic rigor and richness at its highest level.
- Mentors should be available to students seeking independent study or depth that goes beyond the high school teacher's expertise. Students need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning experiences.
- For those gifted students who are lacking requisite skills to be academically successful, GATE programs must nurture necessary organizational and study skills. To achieve this, gifted programs and programs such as AVID should work together, focused on the needs of the individual student.

The California Association for the Gifted believes that high schools can develop both traditional and technological classrooms that ignite intellectual curiosity, develop academic integrity, and promote reflection and further exploration. In order to accomplish this, administrators, counselors, teachers, families, and students must work together to implement best practices in a way that is relevant, engaging, and meaningful.

#### References:

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- Gosfield, M. (Ed.). (2003). Visual and Performing Arts/Serving Gifted High School Students [Special double issue]. *Gifted Education Communicator*, 34(3 & 4).