

**Houston
Annenberg
Challenge
Research &
Evaluation
Study**

Woodsedge
Middle
School
Case
Study

Jacqueline Hawkins

Woodsedge Middle School
Houston Annenberg Challenge
Year 3 Evaluation
2002

By

Jacqueline Hawkins

University of Houston

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1

INTRODUCTION

Woodsedge Middle School has continued to make great strides this year to address issues in the last 2 years' reports and to identify issues that teachers, staff, and administrators have recognized as areas that could be changed to help improve the school culture and climate and to improve student outcomes. Some of these efforts have involved the notion of fine-tuning what has been happening over the past several years. Some of these efforts have involved new initiatives that have occurred this academic year. Clearly, these efforts have been successful in improving the *bottom line*. Specifically, Woodsedge Middle School has:

1. moved from Acceptable (1999–2000 TAAS results) to Recognized (2000–2001 TAAS results) to Exemplary (2001–2002 TAAS results),
2. demonstrated a 0% dropout rate, and
3. maintained an attendance level of approximately 96.4%.

These are the data that the general public see and generally use to assess the quality of a school. Woodsedge has demonstrated that it is a quality school. The school has set its sights on improving the outcomes for its students over the years and by 2002 it has earned exemplary status. Bravo!

The purpose of Annenberg funds is to support improvement in inner city students who have not traditionally been successful in educational contexts. Consequently, this year's report again will focus on the Regular Education cluster (Cluster A) at Woodsedge Middle School. While some attention will be paid to Clusters B and C (Vanguard Clusters), this will generally be for comparison purposes rather than the focus of this work.

REPORT FORMAT

This year's report is classified into five sections:

1. Overview of the Woodsedge Initiative,
2. Assessment,
3. Interventions,
4. Gifted and Talented, and
5. Clearly It Works.

The rationale for this is to help with the classification of information from a variety of sources and from a variety of goals and objectives.

1. Overview of the Woodsedge Initiative

This year Woodsedge had increased the number of goals and objectives on the Continuing Proposal for Annenberg. This has provided more specificity for the activities and for the budget that was aligned with the activities. The focus that was obtained when the number of goals was reduced has been maintained. Rather, the detail that is involved with multiple activities leading to the same overarching goal has been improved. Again,

many activities seem to be occurring, but the dispersion of a variety of previous activities into funded objectives seems to have helped them with the justification of funding for the various components.

2. Assessment

The Assessment component looks at the TAAS data. These are presented in:

1. Snapshot Form (current results 2002),
2. Academic Excellence Indicator System Report,
3. Trend Data by Grade Level (Figures 1–3), and
4. Trend Data by Program Subgroups (Figures 4–15).

3. Intervention

The Intervention component looks at some of the types of techniques that are being used and the outcomes that the teachers themselves have identified. These include:

1. Language Arts Study Group,
2. IBMYP,
3. Guidance Support Groups,
4. Central District Fine Arts Director,
5. Media Literacy,
6. Critical Friends Group and Critical Friends Group with a Twist,
7. Latino Boys and Latina Girls Writing Groups, and
8. Saturday TAAS Coordinator.

In addition, the intervention component presents the results of the overall impact of the various programs on the Annenberg Imperatives of *size*, *isolation*, and *professional development*. Teachers at Woodsedge participated in an end-of-grant survey to help identify the overall impact of various initiatives on themselves and on their students.

These include:

1. Critical Friends Groups,
2. Guidance Support Groups,
3. International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, and
4. Personal Learning Time.

4. Gifted and Talented

The Gifted and Talented component was designed to help address the repeated theme that has been heard by the evaluators over the years that students in all of the programs—Regular, Vanguard, Special Education, and LEP/Bilingual—have significant gifts and talents. We have reviewed the literature on how gifts and talents are identified and have found that teacher perceptions of the students' gifts and talents are not generally included in the literature base. Consequently, we encouraged the teachers to write descriptions of students in their classes whom they believe have gifts and talents. Teachers were guided to share student background information, the characteristics and behaviors that they considered gifted and talented, what they realized were gifts and talents as a result of interacting with the specific student, and what they did to encourage the student. Personal portraits have been provided, using the teachers' own words, to help describe the multiple facets that teachers consider gifted and talented. The students

described come from various cultures, speak various languages, are various ages, and have a variety of gifts and talents that the teachers identify—although many of these might not be considered typical.

5. Clearly it Works

Clearly it Works is a summary of what has happened over the past few years. It is provided to help the reader to realize the magnitude of the change, the daily nature of change in schools, and the impact that professional development and opportunities can have on teacher learning and student outcomes. The executive summary and the Woodsedge School Accountability Report was provided so that one of the Woodsedge Annenberg Coordinators could have her voice heard in a wider arena. We believe that the report exemplifies what has been happening at Woodsedge and provides the broader view of the initiatives. The outcome TAAS data included in this document provide information that was not available at the time of the writing of the School Accountability Report (SAR). Consequently, the TAAS data from the SAR are not included and the newer data are included.

2

OVERVIEW

Woodsedge Middle School has been designated an Annenberg Beacon School since the beginning of the Houston Annenberg Challenge grant. The school has learned systematically from what it has done over the past years and has figured out how to adjust and change procedures to attempt to improve outcomes. Clearly, this has been successful as defined by the State of Texas. Woodsedge is now rated an Exemplary school. For this to occur, Woodsedge students in the Regular Clusters (Cluster A) had to improve their scores. Specifically, because almost two thirds (61%) of the students at Woodsedge are in the Vanguard Program (an advanced program for students who qualify because of their gifts and talents) and score 100% passing, the only way that Woodsedge could be exemplary is for:

1. the quality of Regular Cluster teachers,
2. the quality of the custom-tailored instruction provided by the Regular Cluster teachers,
3. the professional development provided to the teachers and their application of that development to their classrooms, and

4. the secondary effect of the success of the students in the Regular Clusters.

These gains have not gone unnoticed throughout the city and the state. To move from Acceptable in 2000 to Recognized in 2001 to Exemplary in 2002 demonstrates the impact of systemic and sustained change.

It is evident that many initiatives have been undertaken and that most of these are long-standing work that has been fine-tuned over a period of years. The outcomes of these 21 initiatives primarily impact:

1. Professional Development (15 of the 21),
2. Isolation (18 of the 21), and
3. Size (10 of the 21).

Clearly, breaking down isolation by having teachers in the school work with each other and with professionals from other schools and institutions is a major component of Woodsedge. The quality and the content of the support that they receive are directly related to the needs of students in the school and in schools around them. These goals are clearly on target and will be discussed in future sections, as this document unfolds.

Again, this year the majority of teachers intend to remain at Woodsedge for the next academic year. Teacher retention literature would identify this as remarkable retention for such a large school. All of these data provide a picture of a school that has come far in professional development, getting to know each other, trusting the faculty and the administration, and impacting student performance in a highly positive manner.

3

ASSESSMENT

In last year's document we described the many assessment procedures used to collect evidence at the school. The evidence ranged from the macro level to the granular analysis level. This was done to demonstrate how the needs of the unique students could be addressed. Many of the techniques that were demonstrated can be seen in the activities this year. A great example is the way that Saturday morning and after-school tutorials are handled. Getting to a specific set of learning objectives for students based on each student's past performance is a tremendous task that has clearly paid off in the very high passing rates on the TAAS test that was administered in the Spring of 2002.

Table 1. TAAS data.

TAAS Rating: Snapshot Form (current results 2002)

2000–2001 State Acceptable
 2001–2002 State Recognized
 2002–2003 State Exemplary

Grade	Reading	% Passing	
		Math	Writing
6	99%	98%	—
7	98%	99%	—
8	98%	99%	98%

These data would identify that Woodsedge is an exemplary school. All grade levels scored above 90% in all areas evaluated by the state for the rating. The data have increased in most areas over the year and the subgroup comparison identified that subgroup percentages passing are in the 90% range. These data clearly show that the techniques that have been used by the teachers over the past few years have reaped benefits.

Two years ago, in Spring 2000, the school initially responded to its Acceptable rating with a document that suggested procedures that could help move the school to the Recognized rating. Last year, a document was prepared that identified what had to occur to be exemplary and in which areas the change in rating could be impacted. Last year we demonstrated the use of the lowest granular approach to the analysis of student assessment data. We demonstrated this for two members of the administration and a small group of faculty. Some of the same techniques have been used in the tutorials and in the teacher training that has occurred this past year. Using the lowest granular approach to student assessment, using multiple types of assessment, using frequent assessment, and tailoring curriculum and instruction to match the unique needs of the students has paid off for the faculty who work with the A Clusters. The gains on TAAS scores and the gains on Stanford 9 data are presented next.

TAAS BREAKDOWN

School Demographics of Woodsedge Middle School

1. Large inner city school located in the heart of Houston, Texas
2. 1,425 students enrolled in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades
3. One third of the student population is zoned to Woodsedge.
4. Almost two thirds (61%) of the student population attends the Vanguard Magnet Program.
5. Daily attendance rate is 96.8%.
6. Ethnically, socioeconomically, and academically diverse: African American 15%, Asian 8%, White 45%, and Hispanic 32%.
7. Of all students, 25% qualify for free or reduced-price school meals and are classified as economically disadvantaged on the TAAS school report.
8. Of all students, 5% qualify as Limited English Proficient and are serviced in English or English as a Second Language.
9. Exceptional Education services are provided to 6% of students.

Trend Data by Grade Level

Trend data by grade level are presented in Figures 1–3. These help identify the trends over time that occurred at Woodsedge. While these data do not compare the same students over time, they do compare the criteria used by the state to assess school and teacher performance over time. This year’s sixth grade scored higher in reading and in math. There is a general trend upward for the sixth grade when all tests taken are considered. In addition, the reading, math, and all test outcomes are at the highest level

ever for the sixth grade at Woodsedge. Again, this year's seventh-grade class outperformed the previous year's students in reading, math, and all tests. Again, this year's seventh grade outperformed all previous seventh grades at Woodsedge. This year's eighth grade performed at a higher level than the previous year's eighth grade in math, writing, science, and social studies. The percentage passing reading dropped from 99.4% to 98%. The scores for this year's eighth grade in writing, math, science, and social studies are at the highest levels ever recorded at Woodsedge. These trend data clearly show that the instruction at Woodsedge has improved over time and that the teachers are responding to the unique needs of the students. This is the second year in a row that the scores have been the highest ever. Clearly it works.

Trend Data by Program Groups

Trend Data by Program Groups will be presented in Figures 4–15. These data expand upon the previous information by providing trend outcomes that are grouped by program. The figures present the data for each content area assessed and show trends over time by program. The specific programs are: Vanguard, the Regular Program, Special Education Support, and students who receive English as a Second Language Support.

Sixth-Grade Data

When the data for sixth-grade reading are compared by program there is a substantial increase in the performance of this year's sixth-grade subgroups that are in the Regular program, the Special Education program, and the ESL program. The students in the

Vanguard program perform at the same level as in previous sixth-grade years—100% passing.

Sixth-grade data for math demonstrate a substantial increase in math for the Regular program, the Special Education Program, and the ESL program groups. Indeed, all of these groups are at some of the highest levels of performance when they are compared with previous years' sixth grades. The students in the Vanguard program perform at the same level as in previous sixth grade years—100% passing.

When all tests are considered, there is a substantial increase in all the sixth grade program areas—Regular Program, ESL, and Special Education. Again, the Vanguard program participants maxed out on all tests with a 100% passing level. Clearly, again, something has been happening in the sixth grade in the past few years that results in substantial increases in the student scores. Very few students in the sixth grade did not pass the TAAS test.

Seventh-Grade Data

When the data for seventh-grade reading are compared by program there is an increase in the performance of this year's seventh-grade subgroups that are in the Regular program, the ESL program, and the Special Education program. The students in the Vanguard program perform at the same level as previous years' seventh graders—100% passing.

Seventh-grade data for math demonstrate an increase in math for the Regular program, the ESL program and Special Education program groups. Indeed, the Regular and ESL groups are at the highest levels of performance ever when they are compared with previous years' seventh grades. While the data for 2001 were the best that the school had seen since the inception of statewide testing in Texas, the data for 2002 far surpass

those levels. Last year's sixth graders have continued to outperform their older peers when moved up to seventh grade. Again, Vanguard students performed at the same level, with 100% passing. When all tests are considered, there is an increase in the Regular program, the ESL program, and the Special Education program groups. Again, this year's seventh graders who receive ESL or participate in the Regular program are scoring at higher levels than previous years' students. While last year's seventh-grade class outperformed all previous seventh-grade classes, this year's group surpassed all previous years. Something has been happening in the seventh grade in the past few years that results in substantial increases in the student scores.

Eighth-Grade Data

When the data for eighth-grade reading are compared by program there is a slight decrease in the performance of this year's eighth-grade subgroups in the Regular and Special Education programs. However, 98% of the Regular students passed and 89% of the students in Special Education passed. However, the decrease in Special Education is negligible and is likely related to the low number of students in the group. (Percentages are more likely to vary when there are low denominators.) No students in the ESL program took the test in eighth grade since there were no students eligible. The students in the Vanguard program performed at the same level as in previous eighth-grade years, with 100% passing.

Eighth-grade data for math demonstrate an increase in math for the Regular program and the Special Education program groups. Indeed, all program groups are at the highest levels of performance ever when they are compared with previous years' eighth grades. The students in the Vanguard program perform at the same level as in previous

eighth-grade years, with 100% passing. In writing, the students in the Regular and Special Education programs outperformed the previous year's eighth graders. The students in the Vanguard program performed at the same level as in previous eighth-grade years, with 100% passing. In science, the Regular program and the Special Education program students demonstrated increases over previous years. There were no TAAS data for the ESL group in the eighth grade in reading, math, writing, and science. The students in the Vanguard program perform at the same level as in previous eighth-grade years, with 100% passing. Social studies results for this year are better for this group of eighth graders in the Regular program and the Special Education program than for previous years' groups. Social studies results for the students in ESL program declined. The students in the Vanguard program performed at the same level as in previous eighth-grade years, with 100% passing. When all tests are considered, there is a dramatic increase in the student passing rate in the Regular program and the Special Education program group. Meanwhile the ESL program group demonstrated a decrease in performance in social studies. The students in the Vanguard program performed at the same level as in previous eighth-grade years, with 100% passing (although this is a 1% point increase over last year, when 99% of the students in the Vanguard program passed all tests). Clearly, there is improved performance for this year's eighth graders in many areas. The analyses that were done to help the students in these programs have helped identify what should be done and how student performance could be relayed to the students and the teachers.

The Regular Cluster students also showed increases in their average growth in reading, language arts, science, and social studies. There is a slight drop in their

performance in mathematics from sixth to seventh grade. This has already been addressed in the focus on mathematics for next year. The Regular Cluster students increased their average performance in reading, mathematics, language, science, and social studies—all subject areas. These data support the TAAS data and demonstrate that the students have gained skills that are tested on TAAS and have gained skills that are tested on nationally normed tests.

4

INTERVENTION

Many interventions occur at Woodsedge. Most of them stem from the procedures that are used throughout the various professional development activities. We have focused on the bulk of these activities in previous reports. Consequently, we have focused on the four main initiatives that seem to define the bulk of what occurs for all teachers at Woodsedge. These initiatives are:

1. Critical Friends Groups (or equivalent),
2. Guidance and Support Groups,
3. International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, and
4. Personal Learning Time.

We created a survey to assess the impact of these interventions over the period of the grant. Survey results are presented below.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics

Eighty-five surveys were distributed. Of these, 49 were returned (57.6%). Of the 49 returned surveys, there were 13 respondents from sixth grade (26.5%), 9 respondents from seventh grade (18.4%), 13 respondents from the eighth grade, and 14 respondents from a multi-grade position (28.6%). There were 13 respondents from Cluster A (the Regular Cluster, 26.5%), 11 respondents from Cluster B (26.5%), and 7 respondents from Cluster C (the Vanguard Cluster, 14.3%). Eighteen respondents did not record a cluster association (36.7%). Table 2 shows the breakdown of the respondents across subject areas.

Table 2. Respondents by Subject Area

Subject	Frequency	Percent
Algebra	1	2.0
Art	1	2.0
Band	1	2.0
Choir	1	2.0
English	8	16.3
ESL	1	2.0
Latin	1	2.0
Math	6	12.2
Media 2000	1	2.0
Physical Education	6	12.2
Pup House/Detention Center	1	2.0
Reading	5	10.2
Science	4	8.2
Social Studies	4	8.2
Sp. Ed. Life Skills	1	2.0
Spanish	1	2.0
Technology	1	2.0
Texas History	3	6.1
Theater Arts	1	2.0
US History	1	2.0
Total	49	100.0

Experience Levels of the Respondents

Table 3 provides the breakdown of number of years teaching of the respondents.

Table 3. Years Teaching

Years	Frequency	Percent
1.0	2	4.1
2.0	1	2.0
3.0	3	6.1
3.5	2	4.1
4.0	2	4.1
5.0	4	8.2
6.0	1	2.0
8.0	1	2.0
9.0	1	2.0
10.0	2	4.1
11.0	2	4.1
12.0	1	2.0
12.5	1	2.0
13.0	1	2.0
14.0	3	6.1
16.0	2	4.1
17.0	1	2.0
18.0	3	6.1
19.0	2	4.1
20.0	5	10.2
21.0	1	2.0
24.0	2	4.1
25.0	1	2.0
26.0	1	2.0
28.0	1	2.0
29.0	1	2.0
32.0	1	2.0
34.0	1	2.0

Teachers at Woodsedge have taught an average of 13.86 years. This is an extensive period of time for educators to remain in the profession.

Table 4 demonstrates the breakdown of years teaching at Woodsedge. The average number of years teaching at Woodsedge is 7.3 years. Again, this is a long time for teachers to remain in the same school.

Table 4. Years teaching at Woodsedge

Years	Frequency	Percent
1.0	6	12.2
2.0	6	12.2
3.0	2	4.1
3.5	1	2.0
4.0	5	10.2
5.0	2	4.1
6.0	6	12.2
8.0	2	4.1
9.0	1	2.0
11.0	4	8.2
12.0	5	10.2
12.5	1	2.0
13.0	1	2.0
14.0	4	8.2
15.0	1	2.0
20.0	1	2.0
23.0	1	2.0

Endorsements

Of the 49 respondents, 23 were “Not Endorsed” for gifted students (46.9%), 25 were “Endorsed” for gifted students (51.0%) and 1 did not respond to this question (2.0%).

Thirty-seven were “Not Endorsed” for LEP (75.5%), 6 were “Endorsed” (12.2%), and 6 did not respond to this question (12.2%).

Forty were “Not Endorsed” for Special Education (81.6%), 4 were “Endorsed” (8.2%) and 5 did not respond to this question (10.2%).

Forty-one were “Not Endorsed” for Bilingual Education (83.7%), 2 were “Endorsed” (4.1%), and 6 did not respond to this question (12.2%).

Experience With Teaching Student Specialty Areas

Table 5 demonstrates the breakdown of the number of years teachers have taught students identified as gifted. On average, teachers at Woodsedge have spent 5.21 years teaching students with gifts and talents.

Table 5. Years Teaching Gifted Students

Years	Frequency	Percent
.0	4	8.2
1.0	5	10.2
2.0	9	18.4
3.0	2	4.1
4.0	3	6.1
5.0	3	6.1
6.0	5	10.2
7.0	1	2.0
8.0	1	2.0
10.0	1	2.0
11.0	2	4.1
12.0	2	4.1
12.5	1	2.0
13.0	2	4.1
14.0	1	2.0
15.0	1	2.0

Table 6 demonstrates the breakdown of the number of years teachers have taught students identified as LEP/Bilingual. On average, teachers at Woodsedge have taught students whose language was not English for 5.99 years.

Table 6. Years Teaching LEP/Bilingual Students

Years	Frequency	Percent
.0	10	20.4
.5	1	2.0
1.0	2	4.1
2.0	1	2.0
4.0	3	6.1
5.0	4	8.2
6.0	2	4.1
7.0	1	2.0
8.0	2	4.1
10.0	3	6.1
11.0	1	2.0
13.0	1	2.0
14.0	2	4.1
20.0	1	2.0
24.0	2	4.1

Table 7 shows the breakdown of the number of years teachers have taught students identified as having disabilities. On average, teachers at Woodsedge have taught students with disabilities for 8.79 years.

Table 7. Years Teaching Students With Disabilities

Years	Frequency	Percent
.0	6	12.2
2.0	1	2.0
3.0	2	4.1
3.5	1	2.0
4.0	3	6.1
5.0	4	8.2
6.0	2	4.1
8.0	2	4.1
9.0	1	2.0
11.0	1	2.0
13.0	1	2.0
14.0	3	6.1
18.0	1	2.0
20.0	2	4.1
24.0	2	4.1
27.0	1	2.0
28.0	1	2.0

Adequacy of Training

Of the 49 respondents, 7 felt that the district does not provide adequate training for Gifted and Talented (14.3%), 29 felt that the district does provide adequate training (59.2%), and 13 did not answer this question (26.5%). Three respondents felt that the district does not provide adequate training for LEP/Bilingual (6.1%), 23 felt that the district does provide adequate training (46.9%), and 23 did not answer this question (46.9%).

Three respondents felt that the district does not provide adequate training for Special Education (6.1%), 24 felt that the district does provide adequate training (49.0%), and 22 did not answer this question (44.9%). On the whole, teachers at Woodsedge reported that they have received sufficient training to work with the students at the

school. However, it would be beneficial to review these variables and identify the limited number of teachers who did not feel adequately trained. As a result of the identification, specific training in these areas could be provided to help them to work with the students.

Intervention Initiatives

In addition to information about the students taught and the adequacy of training, specific items were posed to help identify the impact of the overall Annenberg Challenge on the specific areas on which the school focused its efforts. The information presented in Tables 8–23 is provided to help identify who participated in which initiative in which years:

Table 8. Frequency of Participation, Critical Friends Groups, 1998–1999

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Did not participate	15	30.6	30.6	32.7
	Participated	33	67.3	67.3	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. Frequency of Participation, Critical Friends Groups, 1999–2000

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not participate	14	28.6	28.6	28.6
	Participated	35	71.4	71.4	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Frequency of Participation, Critical Friends Groups, 2000–2001

Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Did not participate	7	14.3	14.3	14.3
Valid Participated	42	85.7	85.7	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. Frequency of Participation, Critical Friends Groups, 2001–2002

Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Did not participate	4	8.2	8.2	8.2
Valid Participated	45	91.8	91.8	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. Frequency of Participation, Guidance and Support Groups, 1998–1999

Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Did not participate	38	77.6	92.7	92.7
Valid Participated	3	6.1	7.3	100.0
Total	41	83.7	100.0	
Missing Did not respond	8	16.3		
Total	49	100.0		

Table 13. Frequency of Participation, Guidance and Support Groups, 1999–2000

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	8	16.3	16.3	16.3
	Did not participate	35	71.4	71.4	87.8
	Participated	6	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 14. Frequency of Participation, Guidance and Support Groups, 2000–2001

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	8	16.3	16.3	16.3
	Did not participate	12	24.5	24.5	40.8
	Participated	29	59.2	59.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 15. Frequency of Participation, Guidance and Support Groups, 2001–2002

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	8	16.3	16.3	16.3
	Did not participate	7	14.3	14.3	30.6
	Participated	34	69.4	69.4	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 16. Frequency of Participation, International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, 1998–1999

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	5	10.2	10.2	10.2
	Did not participate	28	57.1	57.1	67.3
	Participated	16	32.7	32.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 17. Frequency of Participation, International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, 1999–2000

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	3	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Did not participate	20	40.8	40.8	46.9
	Participated	26	53.1	53.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 18. Frequency of Participation, International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, 2000–2001

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	3	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Did not participate	14	28.6	28.6	34.7
	Participated	32	65.3	65.3	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 19. Frequency of Participation, International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, 2001–2002

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	3	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Did not participate	5	10.2	10.2	16.3
	Participated	41	83.7	83.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 20. Frequency of Participation, Personal Learning Time, 1998–1999

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	2	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Did not participate	38	77.6	77.6	81.6
	Participated	9	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 21. Frequency of Participation, Personal Learning Time, 1999–2000

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not respond	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Did not participate	30	61.2	61.2	63.3
	Participated	18	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 22. Frequency of Participation, Personal Learning Time, 2000–2001

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not participate	11	22.4	22.4	22.4
	Participated	38	77.6	77.6	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 23. Frequency of Participation, Personal Learning Time, 2001–2002

	Participation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Did not participate	4	8.2	8.2	8.2
	Participated	45	91.8	91.8	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

It is clear from the data in Tables 8–23 that an ever-increasing number of these teachers have participated in the Critical Friends group format over the years. By 2002, 92% of respondents were participating. The same trend can be seen with the number of teachers who have participated in the Guidance Support Groups in the last 2 years. By 2002, 70% of the respondents were participants. However, there is an anomaly in the data since some of the teachers stated that they participated in this initiative 3 and 4 years ago.

They may have confused these questions with the Continuum 10 initiative that was part of the school's initiatives in previous years. Again, this trend is seen in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program since it began. By 2002, 84% of the respondents were participating. Personal learning time was initiated a couple of years ago. By 2002, 92% of respondents were participating in this initiative.

Isolation, Size, and Teacher Learning

The impact of each of these interventions on the three main Annenberg Imperatives of Isolation, Size, and Teacher Learning was assessed.

Isolation

The Critical Friends and IBMYP had the greatest impact in breaking down the isolation at the school, perhaps because each of these initiatives requires teachers and students from the various programs to integrate. In a school that has students who are multi-national and multi-ethnic, and are from diverse socioeconomic levels, this type of intervention will help. Teachers reported that Personalized Learning Time was somewhat helpful in breaking down isolation and that the IBMYP was the least successful in that endeavor.

Size

Teachers reported that the Guidance and Support Groups and the Personalized Learning Time had the greatest impact on the size imperative. The Critical Friends and IBMYP had some impact but did not seem to present a systematic solution to the need to personalize the learning environment. These techniques clearly meant that teachers felt

that they could get to know the students better (they maintain the same GSG for a period of years) and could prepare materials and instruction that were customized for the students.

Teacher Learning

The Personal Learning Time initiative clearly surpasses all other initiatives when teacher learning is concerned. This has been a very recent addition to the repertoire at Woodsedge. It has given a great deal of control to the teachers and has required a great deal of trust on the part of the administration. However, teacher reports about its impact and the scores obtained by the students may confirm that the faith that the administration has placed in the teachers has been worthwhile.

5

GIFTED AND TALENTED

Throughout our years at Woodsedge we have continually heard about the students who have gifts and talents that are not identified appropriately, who do not fit the mold, and who could excel if they were provided the opportunity. We decided to review the literature on the identification of students with gifts and talents and to provide information from the various sources that have been used—parents, teachers, and researchers.

WHAT THE FIELD OF RESEARCH IN GIFTED EDUCATION SAYS ABOUT IDENTIFICATION

In the last decade the field of gifted education has continuously changed in ideology, theory, and practice. Throughout the literature, the definitions of giftedness, gifted and talented, and talented alone have shifted and changed over the past 80 years. Ackerman (1997) stated, “One of the most critical problems in gifted identification stems from confusion in the field about what giftedness is and how it should be defined.” Assessment practices and tools have been evaluated, restructured, and evaluated again in attempts to ensure adequate identification of the children who represent the changing face of the

gifted child. This increased effort to find under-identified populations of gifted students has spurred study of these children's environments, parents, teachers, peer evaluations, assessments, and achievements. All of these attempts have resulted in changing definitions of giftedness, more extensive assessment practices and tools, multicultural sensitivity training for parents and teachers, and ultimately, enhanced programs for students who are gifted.

Do We Know What Teachers Think?

While these efforts are admirable and have no doubt led to an increased representation of otherwise under-represented populations, the literature reflects the absence of a simple, yet key, piece of information. There does not appear to be sufficient research delving into the different implicit perceptions that teachers hold concerning the characteristics of gifted children and how those perceptions are incorporated in their individual classrooms. Additionally, the literature has not addressed the classroom teachers' attitudes or perceptions when deciding if students should receive further evaluation for gifted programs. It is the classroom teacher who initiates the first element of the prereferral component in 80–85% of the cases (McEachern & Bornot, 2001). If the classroom teacher does not see a child as fitting the socially accepted definition of gifted, then that child's chance for referral is diminished (Scott, Perou, Urbano, Hogan, & Gold, 1992). In rare instances, the child may be identified through standardized intelligence screening practices; however, these standardized methods have been said to miss the very populations that are most in need of identification (Clark, 2002; Richert, 1986; Slocumb & Payne, 2000; Sternberg, 1986).

Throughout the research, buzzwords accompany such theories as Gardner's Multiple Intelligences or Sternberg's Triarchal Theory. The question arises about how teachers may interpret these words in the identification of students in their own classroom. Teachers in the trenches, the ones who work with these children who may not fit the stereotypical profile of giftedness, may hold diverse views of what is gifted in their classrooms (McGonagill, 1997; Pardeck, Pardeck & Callahan, 1990). Additionally, these views may or may not mesh with the official definitions of giftedness in various districts. In many districts, teachers take the first step for referral to special programs (McEachern & Bornot, 2001) and these regular education teachers are the primary referral source for gifted students (Hishinuma & Tadaki, 1996). Without adequate identification procedures, gifted children are lost in classrooms, remain unidentified and may not be served appropriately. For this reason, teacher perceptions deserve attention.

Clark (1979, as cited by Weber, 1999) stressed that the attitudes of those who work directly with gifted children are of great concern to the field. Teacher perceptions are important at both the inservice and preservice levels. Arming both novice and veteran teachers with knowledge about students with gifts and talents and student identification is essential to improving the likelihood that children will receive the educational services they truly need. This can best be done when there is a clear understanding of what classroom teachers perceive as gifted characteristics or behaviors when working with and referring the children in their classrooms. As a result of this review outcome we decided to first focus on a few of the definitions of gifted and talented. They are reviewed below.

What Does the Federal Government Say?

The definition of giftedness is unclear in the literature as well as in practice, and many interpretations of the term exist (McGonagill, 1997; Stephens & Karnes, 2000). The imprecision of definitions leaves the door open for more questions rather than answers for teachers. There are over 100 definitions of the various constructs that intertwine intelligence, creativity, talent, ability, attitude, leadership, and entrepreneurship (Johnsen, 1997). The constitutive definition depends on the study, the book, the expert or the state in which one lives. One of the commonly used definitions was developed by a team of researchers under the leadership of former U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland, Jr., in the August 1971 report to Congress:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. (Marland, 1972)

The same report also indicated that children may excel in one or more of the six areas identified, including

1. general intellectual ability,
2. specific academic aptitude,
3. creative or productive thinking,
4. leadership ability,
5. visual and performing arts, and
6. psychomotor ability (Richert, 1986; Stephens & Karnes, 2000).

In 1978, modifications included the addition of the terms “preschool” and “youth” and the exclusion of the psychomotor ability category. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and

Talented Students Education Act of 1988 (U.S. Congress, 1988) eliminated performing arts and also excluded the specific preschool, elementary, and secondary levels previously mentioned. In 1994, the U.S. Department of Education released a new definition in its National Excellence report:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools.

Outstanding talents are present in the children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (Stephens & Karnes, 2000, p. 220)

This definition completely eliminated the term “gifted,” indicating that the construct is a developing trait and recognizes that talent is present across all areas of society.

Why Use the Federal Definition?

There are advantages to using federal guidelines. The legitimacy of the national law and its comprehensive nature make it an enticing option for states and districts (Richert, 1986). Individual states tend to reflect the broad domains that are similar to the federal definitions and a majority of states follow federal guidelines for identifying students as gifted or talented (Johnsen, 1997; Shriner & Ysseldyke, 1993; Stephens & Karnes, 2000).

Although there are national guidelines regarding the definition of gifted and talented children, each state can interpret and define the term as they choose. In turn, school districts may interpret the state definitions and determine the criteria for the term as they choose to use it. Texas is one of four states that most closely align their definition of talent with that of the federal government. It is interesting to note that five states

reported to have no working definition of gifted or talented (Stephens & Karnes, 2000). The Texas definitions are seen to closely parallel the original federal definition offered by Marland in 1972 and change to reflect the current federal guidelines.

1990: Gifted and talented students are those who excel consistently or who show that potential to excel on any one or combination of the following areas: general intellectual ability, specific subject matter aptitude, creative or productive thinking ability, leadership ability, ability in the visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability. These students require educational experiences beyond those normally provided by the regular school program.

1998: “Gifted and talented student” means a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:

- exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative or artistic area;
- possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
- excels in a specific academic field (Stephens & Karnes, 2000, p. 231).

By recognizing the developmental needs of the child, the federal government and State of Texas definitions focuses on the innate, outstanding abilities the child possesses or exemplifies. Conversely, other definitions in the field give more weight to environmental influences and its interaction with any innate abilities that may be present.

What Do Parents Think?

When a group of neighborhood parents attempted to define giftedness, their interpretation stated, “giftedness is that precious endowment of potentially outstanding abilities which allows a person to interact with the environment with remarkably high levels of achievement and creativity” (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1990). Here giftedness is seen not only as a collection of innate traits, but identifies that the environment is the arena of development. The exogenous influences that the environment may or may not provide directly influence the creativity and achievement levels of individuals. The resulting achievement is found only in the interaction between the inherent and acquired variables. The federal government and neighborhood parents are not in agreement when defining giftedness.

What Do Researchers Think?

In the realm of gifted education, definitions and views commonly used by practitioners and teachers are those developed by the various experts in the field (Fernandez, Gay, Lucky, & Gavilan, 1998; Guskin, Peng, & Majd-Jabbari, 1988). These experts have worked with the construct of intelligence and have used their own models to explain the phenomenon. Although there are many experts in the field of gifted education, at present the three main theorists in the field are Howard Gardner, Robert Sternberg, and Joseph Renzulli.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1983) presented the field of gifted education with his theory of Multiple Intelligences. This theory suggested that individuals interpret the world in varying ways and, rather than promoting a specific pattern of intelligence, Gardner implied that an individual may be gifted in a variety of ways and the options fall into the domains of Multiple Intelligences. Gardner experienced his own struggles with definitions as he selected very specific words and definitions that, just as other definitions of giftedness, changed over time (Gardner, 1999). Gardner eventually defined intelligence as “biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (Gardner, 1999, p. 33–34). He explained that one might not see or count intelligence. They (he was the first to refer to “intelligence” in the plural) are neutral potentials that may, or may not, be activated by experience, opportunities, choices, and values of a culture.

Development of the domains began with the identification of eight scientific criteria that must be met. From this, he introduced the original seven intelligences. The first two offered, linguistic and logical mathematical, deal with school ideals. The next three intelligences, musical, bodily kinesthetic, and spatial, deal more with the arts. The last two, interpersonal and intrapersonal, are the personal domains (Gardner, 1983, 1999).

Gardner explained that many people may have the same number IQ, but no two people have the same intelligences, with the same combination, or same depth. He has recently brought three more possible intelligences to the field: naturalist, spiritual, and existential, the one that touches the “furthest reaches of the cosmos” (Gardner, 1999, p. 60). One or more of these serve to determine how an individual thinks and operates.

Testing is not seen as consistent with the theory of Multiple Intelligences and Gardner wanted to examine the intelligence directly. This necessity brought the introduction of the “spectrum classroom” (Gardner, 1999). This was a comfortable environment planned to activate the different intelligences. Rather than bringing the children to the assessment, “you bring the assessment to the children” (p.137). Having dedicated his total research and writing efforts to the study of intelligence and gifted education, his work is supported by vast amounts of knowledge and experience.

Renzulli

Renzulli (1986) clustered three traits that are necessary for gifted behavior in his model:

1. above-average or specific abilities,
2. high motivation (task commitment), and
3. high creativity.

“Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance” (Renzulli, 1978, p. 53).

Renzulli’s model has been the target of attacks by those believing that his requirement of high motivation excludes underachievers. His studies, however, have refuted this and have demonstrated high learning from underachieving youth (Renzulli, 1999).

In the early years of his career, certain state directors of gifted programs prohibited Renzulli (1999) from speaking in states because he challenged traditional thoughts. As additional theorists began to emerge and support the idea that IQ does not

equal giftedness, his work gained more acceptance. He identified two types of intelligences:

1. “School house giftedness” is easier to measure, highly valued by schools, and warrants attention.
2. “Creative product giftedness,” is based on “original ideas, products, artistic expression, and areas of knowledge that are purposefully designs to have an impact on one or more target audiences” (Renzulli, 1999).

Renzulli has expressed that he would rather deal with theory development; however, he has recognized the need for practical identification and program procedures and has dedicated much of his work to developing these areas. Procedure evolution has seen the development of the

1. Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness,
2. Enrichment Triad Model,
3. Revolving Door Identification, School Wide enrichment Model, and
4. Total Talent Portfolio.

Renzulli (1999) stated,

The best theories are of little value in an applied field of knowledge if they do not make sense by providing specific strategies and guidance to practitioners, the persons we hope will use them in the best interest of young people.

Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory

Sternberg (1986, 1999, 2000) explained intelligence as a Triarchic Theory linking

1. the individual’s internal world,
2. the individual’s experiences, and

3. the external world of the individual.

It is the interaction of these elements and the intelligent use of these elements that create giftedness as defined by different cultures. Consequently, the degree of an individual's success depends on the pattern, level, and balance that form the interaction of a particular person and their respective environment (Sternberg, 2000).

Sternberg expressed, "It is fundamentally important in recognizing the multiple nature of intelligence and that theories of a single ability just do not take into account the complexity of the human mind" (Sternberg, 1996, p. 120). He expressed criticism of IQ testing and theorists that do not back up their theories with empirical research. Sternberg suggested that one must think in three ways: analytically, creatively, and practically (Sternberg, 1996, p.127). What schools value as important (analytical), will not make one successful in isolation. It is the balance of the three aspects that create successful intelligence. Knowing how and when to flexibly adapt to roles is a necessity in exhibiting intelligence (Sternberg, 1996).

How Do Lay People Define Intelligence?

Sternberg conducted a rather large study (Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bernstein, 1980) that evaluated experts' and laypersons' conceptions of intelligence. He explained that explicit theory had been studied, but implicit theory, what resides inside the mind, had not had much attention. Since these theories already exist, they need to be discovered, not invented. These theories are the ones that are in practice in every day life and need to be understood (Sternberg et al., 1980). The study, in summary, concluded that individuals have well-developed implicit theories concerning intelligence and they use these theories

when evaluating themselves and others. Common attributes emerged such as problem solving, verbal ability, and social competence among the different groups. Sternberg used this as a starting point and his studies have led to his theory of Successful Intelligence. He stressed that is it simple: Know your strengths and capitalize them; know your weakness and compensate or correct them (Sternberg, 1996).

Historical Alterations in the Terms

When defining giftedness, the task is compounded by the addition of the term “talented.” As cited by Callahan (1997), the early literature did not distinguish between the terms, but in the mid-1950s the distinction emerged as Cutts and Mosely (1957) created a separate category for talented individuals. The 1970s saw the terms interchanged (Marland, 1972), and in the early 1990s, the term “gifted” disappeared entirely from some of the research (Callahan). Callahan described that although some researchers such as Feldhusen and Gagne maintained distinctions, others such as Gardner and Sternberg have given equal weight to the terms. When the combination is used, the term “talent” is often seen as the nonacademic element of the two components and often has been viewed as the less important of the two terms (Callahan). The numerous and overlapping definitions of gifted and/or talented available from experts in the field exhibit the difficulty that exists in providing a clear and concise understanding of the terms.

Referral Practices

The views and definitions of gifted and talented are numerous and also continually changing. The same broad and confusing situation is found when reviewing the literature

concerning how children are referred for special programs. Sternberg (1986) stressed that education could do better in identifying gifted students. Current referral practices result in certain populations being screened out of the process and not assessed for gifted and talented services; consequently, they are not included in valuable programs that they deserve (Olenchak & Reis, 2002; Richert, 1986; Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Various subpopulations are impacted by assessment problems. These include students who underachieve, who are poor, who are in minority groups, who are creative-divergent thinkers, who are culturally different, who have talents that are not addressed by programs, and who have some type of disability. Some of these students, such as those with learning disabilities, are also difficult to identify because their contradicting characteristics tend to mask one another (La France, 1994; McEachern & Bornot, 2001; Norton, Hartwell-Hunnicut, & Norton, 1996; Olenchak & Reis; Sattler, 1992). Thus, the gifted/learning-disabled child often performs below his or her true potential, but likely maintains general educational standards (Clark & Dixon, 1997), which makes identification more difficult. Although there are numerous ideas as to why there is an underrepresentation of subpopulations, many attribute this to the misuse of standardized tests or to biased views of teachers (Bracey 1992; Richert; Slocumb & Payne).

CURRENT FACTORS THOUGHT TO INFLUENCE EDUCATOR VIEWS OF GIFTEDNESS

Numerous studies in the field of gifted education have focused on specific adults who work with possibly gifted children. Classroom teachers, gifted specialists, and parents of gifted children have all participated in different studies related to the identification of

gifted children and their varied roles in this process. Many factors may be related to how teachers form perceptions and interact with gifted students.

Teacher and Student Ethnicity and Culture

The lack of minority representation in gifted children, as well as minority teachers of the gifted, has raised concern about differing cultural values and beliefs that are being used for identification (Ford & Trotman, 2001; Peterson, 1999; Sternberg, 1999). Ford and Trotman recognized that due to the lack of minority teachers teaching in gifted programs, there is an increased need for teachers to be culturally competent. Consequently, this increase means that teachers of the gifted should be culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse to meet the needs of the ethnically diverse children. Peterson (1999) studied themes that emerged in different minority cultures by evaluating the nomination process to hypothetical gifted programs. It was clearly evident that different cultures valued different characteristics and behaviors as representative of giftedness. Dominate-culture teachers often miss the students that do not show their valued individualistic, assertive, and competitive behaviors. Peterson asserted this lack of shared values could go the other way as well if there is a minority teacher nominating dominant culture children.

Sternberg (1999) also supported that intelligence is a culturally defined construct and the views that are held have concrete effects on how a child performs in school. A teacher searching for different behaviors and abilities may not recognize what may be valued as intelligent to a student and its family. The three studies have indicated a lack of

knowledge concerning different cultures. Additionally, training is needed to help teachers achieve the skills of valuing and understanding diversity.

Teacher Experience

A handful of studies have focused on the correlation between a teacher's experiences with students in the classroom and their assessment of that child's academic abilities. (Bennett, Gottesman, Rock, & Cerullo, 1993). It is not unusual for bright children to act uncooperatively in the classroom (Bennett et al.; Olenchak & Reis, 2002; Pardeck et al., 1990; Tolan, 1996). Findings have suggested that student behavior affects referral to special programs and those students exhibiting poor behavior are judged to be poorer academically than those students who conform and are cooperative (Bennett et al.; Tolan). Copenhaver and McIntyre (1992) found that less-experienced teachers failed to recognize that poor behavior might be a manifestation of frustration felt by gifted individuals. Consequently, many characteristics demonstrated by gifted children easily result in negative experiences for the child and teacher. Misunderstanding, many teachers are not able to relate these negative behaviors seen in their students as possible indications of giftedness.

Preconceptions and Labels

Labels that accompany a child can influence a teacher's decisions of how to interact with that child and, furthermore, these preconceptions affect referral to gifted programs (Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1998; Minner et al., as cited by Clark, 2002; Walther-Thomas & Brownell, 1999). Minner et al. reported the results of an inbox study in which

an identical written description of a gifted child was presented to participants in 68 schools. The descriptions were randomly identified as either physically impaired, learning disabled, or not specified. The descriptions identified as learning disabled were selected for referral to the gifted program less than the other two groups. Clearly the label of “learning disabled” influenced the teachers’ perceptions of the child’s potential strengths. Baum et al. (1998) expanded the labels to discuss the high number of bright children that are said to have ADHD, among other behavior problems. They found increasing reasons to believe that many of these children are misdiagnosed, and by treating their behavior problems or weakness, their negative label is addressed, rather than their giftedness. They stressed that by focusing on the label instead of the giftedness, far greater problems may incur in the future for these children. Mara Sapon-Shervi, in an interview with Walther-Thomas and Brown (1999), cautioned teachers not to pigeonhole learners. When labels affect decisions, the students miss the opportunity of creative teaching methods found in gifted programs. Whether Learning Disabled or ADHD, the labels children bring with them are shown to influence teachers’ interaction and referral decisions.

Studies of Teacher Perceptions

Studies in the field delving into teacher views are limited and weak. Galloway and Porath (1997) looked at teacher and parental views, but they limited the study to perceived social abilities and did not address gifted characteristics. They found that the two groups differ in their perception of social skills of the gifted, and what values they attached to the demonstrated skills. This study used a small sample size that included mainly upper- to

middle-class White individuals and the assessment instrument for the children's actual social skills was not normed with gifted children. The study had weak internal and external validity as well as low reliability.

Pardeck et al. (1990) studied the use of an assessment instrument for measuring beliefs and understanding of gifted children created by Barbara Clark. The sample consisted of directors of special services and the instrument assessed their perceptions of specific gifted characteristics. The study focused on a way to measure teacher perceptions, but not the perceptions of the teachers that would initiate the referral of children to gifted programs. Instead, Pardeck et al. found the instrument to be of "great promise" for measuring understanding of gifted characteristics, but it excluded the classroom teacher. The studies that exist concerning the specific beliefs teachers have about gifted children and their characteristics are minimal and have not only failed to find what regular classroom teachers perceive as giftedness, but also how teachers use their daily interaction with the children to create their definition of giftedness for referral.

Teacher Perceptions in Practice

Attempts to evaluate teacher perception and identification of gifted characteristics have indicated that there is a gap in what teachers believe to exemplify giftedness and what they will actually refer to a gifted program (Guskin et al., 1988, Hunsaker, 1994). Guskin et al. assessed the images teachers have of giftedness, and when comparing this definition to an official definition, found the two definitions to align closely. Undergraduate and graduate students both found the same five themes of:

1. analytical abilities,

2. social and personality skills,
3. verbal skills,
4. motor ability, and
5. creative skills.

There was no evidence that teachers use these conceptions when providing for their students educational needs. It was suggested that additional work be done to see how teachers use their personal views in their daily interactions in the classrooms.

How Teachers From Woodsedge Middle School Can Help

Since teachers at Woodsedge have consistently told us that some of the gifts and talents that their children evidence are not considered appropriate for the gifted/talented programs, it was very appropriate in this final evaluation to begin to ask them the questions about “what is gifted and talented?” The faculty at the school is uniquely positioned to help answer this question because two thirds of the students have been classified as gifted and talented and assigned to the Vanguard program, and many of the teachers hold the gifted and talented endorsement. The teachers told us a great deal about themselves and their qualifications and described a student that they felt had unique gifts and talents. We have presented the data from the teacher demographics in a previous section of this report. We have selected 11 student portraits that tell the story of the diverse students that the teachers feel present with gifts and talents in their classrooms. We have given the teachers their own voices in these portraits. We hope that you enjoy them as much as we do.

What is Gifted?

About Jesse

*Jesse was 11 years old and a recent immigrant from Mexico.
He had one younger brother and one younger sister.
They lived with their parents in an efficiency, a one-room apartment that had two beds and a sofa.
His father worked in construction and his mother didn't work.
Neither parent spoke English nor were they literate in Spanish.
Jesse was extremely curious.
He wanted to read about everything.
He asked many questions and displayed a remarkable maturity for his age.*

About Jesse at School

*Jesse wanted to learn English as quickly as possible.
He gained vocabulary from every conceivable place.
He memorized words on wrappers, signs, anything.
He read voraciously and had tremendous power of concentration.
He arrived in the U.S. either at the end of fifth grade or the beginning of sixth and was reading on the eighth-grade level within a year.
Jesse was extremely curious, but also extremely organized.
One time, when I had an in-service, I left a short documentary film with my substitute. While the other students were misbehaving badly, he not only watched the documentary, but also wrote a summary of what he had seen in English. (This was only his first year to study English.)
Jesse was placed in Vanguard classes in seventh grade. Unfortunately, his family moved and he relocated at the end of the year. He did fine in the Vanguard classes he took.*

This teacher saw past the poverty, immigration status, and language barriers and might align Jesse's giftedness with that of Renzulli. Jesse demonstrated not only a high intellect but also high motivation in his work.

About David

*David is a White boy in seventh grade.
He is Jewish and has two sisters and one brother.
He lives in this neighborhood only a few blocks from the school.*

About David at School

*David was in the theater rotation and in theater arts, seventh grade.
He will be in theater production next year.
He is a loner with only one or two people he is friendly with in class.
He selects very cutting-edge pieces to perform and brings much insight and natural intuition to the characters.
He displays much natural ability in expressing emotions and has a perceptive way with dialogue.
He displays a lack of focus (so I hear) in other classes and even in my class can at times be lazy about getting some work in on time.
I believe this child was previously in gifted programs. I have heard students speak of it.
He has failed to keep up academically to stay in the Vanguard classes.*

This teacher was able to look beyond the laziness demonstrated by David as well as his inability to work well with others. By recognizing his deep insight and theatrical ability, this teacher's perception of giftedness reflected that of Howard Gardner.

About Henry

*I first met this student when he was 11. He is now 13.
His ethnicity is Caucasian.
He is an only child with two parents.
He has a physical disability.*

About Henry at School

*This student has a natural ability to match pitch and to repeat any pitch sung or played to him.
He progressed from the beginning level to the advanced level in one year.
He demonstrates quickness in learning/mastering new material.
He shows an eagerness to pursue extra activities (activities not required as part of the daily curriculum)
Henry is a student already involved in the GT program.*

Henry's teacher was obviously not influenced by the physical disability, but rather impressed by his natural musical ability. This teacher might have seen Henry's musical talent as one of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences.

About Sharon

*Sharon is a White, 12-year-old female whose parents are divorced.
She recently moved from her mother's house, where she lived with her mother, stepfather and baby sister, into her father's house.*

About Sharon at School

*Sharon is in danger of failing every 9 weeks.
She does not turn any work in. The few assignments she turns in have been done in a matter of minutes. She isn't very careful when completing work.
She wants to read the entire class period.
She is also very unorganized.
She has anger issues and very few friends.
She is extremely bright.
She knows the answers to all of my questions.
She asks brilliant questions that let me know she is thinking on a higher level.
She has a very large vocabulary.
Her test scores are off the charts.
The cluster teachers met with this student's mother and stepfather once. The mother said that she had given up on her daughter and no longer cared if she stayed in the gifted program. We met with the father once. He seemed to be much more concerned.*

This teacher recognized that Sharon's giftedness extended beyond her underachieving attitude and angry outlook. Her higher-level thinking and practicality might align somewhat with Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Giftedness.

About Fatima

Fatima is a 12 to 13-year-old girl, probably Middle Eastern.

About Fatima at School

*I taught a lesson on Indian symbols. The assignment was to create an Indian symbolic narrative.
She designed a wonderful narrative and hand stitched each symbol on a large cloth that*

resembled an animal skin. It was one of, if not the most, impressive thing I have ever seen, whether by child or adult.

She will take an assignment to each project to a uniquely higher level.

She is humble and shy and does not perform to impress.

She simply self-actualizes in splendidly creative ways.

She is also a wonderful student in more traditional ways such as note taking, group projects, and quizzes.

I displayed her symbolic project in the hallway and it simply stopped traffic. She never basked in its glory.

Fatima's shy nature and minority status might have overshadowed her expressed gifts and talents. Her teacher, however, recognized her extensive creative ability, intense task commitment, and more traditional strengths in the classroom. These traits combined several of the definitions of giftedness discussed earlier.

About Michael

Michael is a 10-year-old from a single-parent household.

He lives with his father only.

He is European American and has no siblings.

About Michael at School

Michael could barely write legibly.

He made Fs.

His work was minimal. (If there were 10 problems, he did 2; if there were two pages to write, he wrote two short paragraphs.)

He displayed many of the established, researched characteristics of "gifted" students.

His head was buried in a book reading.

He thought "outside of the box."

He was a procrastinator.

He would avoid things because of fear of failure.

He held a higher standard for himself, so therefore wouldn't attempt work because of his perfectionism (wasn't going to be "good enough" anyway).

He related well to (conversed with) adults.

I referred him for "gifted" testing.

At first administration refused because of low grades and poor performance, but finally he was allowed the opportunity to be tested. Testing proved he was "gifted." He was put in a gifted program.

His attitude, quality of work, and performance improved—grades also.

This teacher pursued Michael's referral to a gifted program in light of the child's inability to write, his poor grades, his lack of effort, and administration's refusal to cooperate initially. The teacher referred to "researched characteristics of 'gifted'." This training might explain the deep understanding and persistence this teacher demonstrated for identifying gifted children.

About Dean

The student was 12, he was White, and I know very little about the family.

He had a sister that was an eighth grader and he lived with his mother and stepfather.

I do remember the sister telling me that they had not seen their father in 6 years and that he was a heroin addict. Dean never shared this information with me.

About Dean at School

*Dean was highly disorganized and his handwriting was dysgraphic.
 He rarely got his thoughts down onto paper.
 He rarely turned in his work—but he was brilliant.
 He could verbalize and articulate sophisticated arguments, ideas, and had a deep understanding of anything I ever engaged him in.
 Dean had incredible listening skills and an unusually high vocabulary.
 Dean was off the beaten path.
 He even sat in his chair differently than the other students.
 He was incredibly knowledgeable about computers but also a critical reader.
 Many of the students thought he was strange and I don't think he had many friends.
 Dean always saw more than the other students, but produced little work.
 He was truly gifted, but would never have survived in Woodsedge's GT program. He would have been exited because of his lack of production.
 The parents were difficult to get a hold of, and we never pushed Dean to apply to the GT program.
 He left Woodsedge for seventh grade. I do not know where he went.*

This teacher was able to recognize giftedness beyond the disorganization and dysgraphia shown by Dean. His linguistic skills, which demonstrated his giftedness, might be explained by Gardner.

About Reese

*Reese is 14 and African American.
 He has a college-educated mother. His father is unknown to me.*

About Reese at School

*Reese was in a Pre-IB eighth-grade math class.
 His skills were excellent, but he seemed to be angry and easily reacted to other students.
 I felt that racial issues impeded his potential.
 He grasped ideas quickly, but he was also quick to shut down.
 I felt he did not want to appear brighter than his peers.
 I needed more experience at the time.
 I gave him good challenge problems, but now I recognize that my approach at the time was to "reward" good work with more work.*

Although the teacher indicated she might have been inexperienced working with gifted children, she knew that Reese was not defined just by his ethnicity and angry personality. The teacher's recognition of the interaction occurring between Reese's internal and external world allude to early use of Sternberg's Triarchic Theory in her practice.

About Maria

*Maria was from Mexico. She had limited use of the English language.
 Her family earned very little money and could not provide her with school supplies.*

About Maria at School

*Maria was a truly eager learner.
 She worked hard to learn to speak English and became a part of the school community.
 She was a visual/spatial learner.
 She loved to do mazes, draw, and create interesting things.
 She entered G/T program in the eighth grade.
 All her teachers recommended her to the program.*

This teacher was not influenced negatively by Maria's poverty and ethnic background. Conversely, she identified her as one who fit Gardner's explanation of a spatially intelligent person.

About Richard

Richard is a 14-year-old Hispanic male.

This student comes from a Spanish-speaking home with few written resources.

He has a twin brother, and it was difficult for him to communicate with other students.

About Richard at School

What made his giftedness clear was the great wit and imagination his writing showed from day one. It was not well organized, or by any means easy to read, but his writing reflected sensitivity and images that could only come from a uniquely gifted imagination.

I came to respect the imaginative quality of his writing.

He never spoke in class; it was through his writing that I was able to gauge his giftedness.

He had an ability to form complex ideas into clear, articulate images.

He demonstrated sensitivity to life experiences of others.

He had an impressive acumen and was socially reclusive.

He was unable to conform to practical rules.

He had been identified as gifted prior to that point.

He had attendance problems earlier in the year, which were alleviated with a student-teacher meeting.

I often adapted lessons to suit his strengths and I made him participate in groups that I monitored carefully.

This teacher demonstrated a use of numerous theories explaining giftedness. She did not focus on Richard's family background or his difficulty with organization, reading, or following rules. The recognition of his linguistic strengths and intense sensitivities reflects a Gardner approach to defining giftedness.

About Chris

Chris is a White male from a broken home.

He lives with his mother and his Hispanic stepfather.

There is much tension between him and the stepfather.

The father has almost no contact with him or his mother.

He wished to live with his father when things weren't going well at home.

About Chris at School

When I questioned him about his lack of effort he made very weak excuses for himself.

When I noted that I wasn't satisfied, he threw a temper tantrum and ended up crying.

He brought to me, on several occasions, his personal writing.

I discovered his genius in this area, especially after reading excerpts from his novel.

We had a meeting, actually a couple of meetings, with the parents.

These were actually ARD meetings so the Special Education Case Manager was present as well as some teachers.

Looking beyond the underachievement and behavioral outbursts, this teacher referred to Gardner's Multiple Intelligence. As seen prior, the linguistic strengths of the child alerted the teacher to the student's giftedness.

6

CLEARLY IT WORKS!

Woodsedge Middle School has clearly used the funds that they were provided by the Houston Annenberg Challenge to:

1. improve student performance in all subject areas;
2. improve student performance for all subgroups of their student population;
3. increase professional development levels for the faculty and administrators who attend the school;
4. increase the level of trust between the faculty and the administration;
5. decrease isolation among faculty and among students;
6. increase the level of understanding and the equity among students;
7. personalize the learning environment for the students and the faculty;
8. continue to grow and respond differentially to the unique needs of their student body; and
9. use research, past experiences, past learning, and data to inform the decisions that are made in the classrooms and in the school.

Woodsedge has changed dramatically over the past 5 years. The students, the faculty, and the administration have clearly benefited from the efforts.

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