eagle talk

EAGLE
Gifted & Talented
Program

A Visible Thinking Program©

LANCASTER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Gifted and Talented Program **Parent Handbook 2026**





Our philosophy

Challenge & stimulate our students

Our district is committed to an educational philosophy that recognizes the unique value, needs and talents of individual students.

The EAGLE-GT Program is designed to challenge and stimulate the academically gifted through a multi-dimensional approach involving special curricula, enrichment and the inclusion of accelerated concepts and content.

How we define a gifted student

Students identified as gifted and talented are those who possess demonstrated or potential abilities for high performance in academic or artistic areas, and, therefore, require services or programs not ordinarily provided by the regular school program.

EAGLE/G-T Program Directory 2026-2027

- **Avery Faile** / Buford Elementary
- **Tammy Medlin**/ Brooklyn Springs Elementary, Clinton Elementary, and Erwin Elementary
- **Cathryn Torres**/ Program Coordinator
- **Christy Mullis**/ Discovery School and McDonald Green Elementary
- **Susan Cronley**/ Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper Eagle Program & Discovery School
- **Danielle Saglimbeni**/ Administrative Assistant EAGLE/GT program
- **Andrea Kebert, Josh Hobson & Bridget Francis**/ Harrisburg Elementary
- **Robbi Nusz, Clara Reed & Courtney Pickard**/ Indian Land Elementary
- **Michelle Burton**/ Kershaw & Heath Springs Elementary
- **Brad McGee**/ North Elementary
- **Leslie Brandt & Clara Reed**/ Van Wyck Elementary

How to contact us

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Dear Parents:

Welcome to the 2026/2027 school year! My name is Cathryn Torres and I will be serving as the Lancaster County Gifted and Talented Coordinator again this year!

Lancaster County will be celebrating its 50th year of service to gifted and high-ability learners throughout the county, from elementary through high school. We will continue with the Let's Think talent development program with our 1st and 2nd graders and our Eagles program will continue to serve our 3rd-5th graders. The students in grades 6-10 will continue to utilize the available pre honors, pre-AP, and honors level math and ELA classes. Our Discovery SmArts Program will be an option, once again, for our artistically gifted students in grades 6-8. This will include workshops in the spring as well as our SmArts camp next June. Additionally, our district will continue to offer a variety of AP and dual credit college-level courses for our upperclassmen in High School.

Our program uses research based strategies, practices and materials that are designed to promote thinking and reasoning. Our affiliation with Harvard University's Education Department will continue, allowing us to implement various thinking routines within our program that are designed to strengthen and enhance student thinking. We will stick with the program Making Thinking Visible (MTV) which is an important part of Havard's Project Zero. Please visit the website for more information about visible thinking at: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/projects/visible-thinking.

For more information about our district's EAGLE/Gifted and Talented Program, please visit our website at: https://sites.google.com/lcsd.k12.sc.us/gt-eagles/home

The Gifted and Talented department strives to provide essential information with all of our stakeholders. The following options are some additional ways for you to be actively involved in your child's education:

- Logging on to our website and teacher pages when you can
- Communicating with us via phone or email if you have questions
- Asking your child about their assignments and what they're learning about in their GT classes
- Attending parent meetings and conferences
- Encouraging and modeling critical and creative thinking
- Researching and understanding the nature and needs of your gifted child
- Visiting our program and attending your school's Eagles showcase



On behalf of the Gifted and Talented teachers and staff, we look forward to working with you and your child this year!

Sincerely,

Cathryn Torres

GT Program Coordinator



Our curriculum: What we teach

Students participating in our district's GT Program are offered a variety of educational experiences outside the bounds of the regular classroom.

Our focus is on a differentiated, concept-based curriculum (aligned to SC State Standards and the SC Gifted & Talented Goals), that emphasizes the following:

- Inquiry – observing, experimenting, critiquing and evaluating;
- Creative and productive thinking – producing many and varied responses, new or original responses, elaborating on a response and generating innovative ideas;
- Problem-solving – defining the problem, obtaining evidence, analyzing, synthesizing, hypothesizing, validating and evaluating.

Program goals

- To help each student recognize and utilize his/her ability(ies) to the fullest;
- To strive for excellence in his/her contribution to self and others;
- To help each student gain a realistic and healthy concept of self and others;
- To provide each student with opportunities for intellectual stimulation.

Program objectives

- To develop and refine critical thinking skills;
- To develop and refine problem-solving abilities and research skills;
- To develop and stimulate creative behaviors;
- To develop independence and responsibility.

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Some characteristics of gifted learners

- Learns easily and rapidly;
- Thinks clearly, recognizes implied relationships;
- Reads above grade level;
- Retains what he/she has heard or read without appearing to need much rote or drill;
- Exhibits independence, individualism, self-sufficiency;
- Demonstrates a curious and investigative nature;
- Asks penetrating, searching questions;
- Focuses intently on areas of interest;
- Readily recognizes spatial relationships;
- Produces original products or ideas;
- Prefers complex ideas;
- Excels in mathematics concepts and problem-solving;
- Demonstrates an advanced sense of humor;
- May start several projects at one time, but never finish any;
- May demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to issues and concerns.

How does a student qualify for academic GT Programs in SC?

Identification is a multi-step process, which consists of referral, screening, and assessment by a district evaluation and placement team.

The state of South Carolina has established three dimensions of giftedness as criteria for placement in state-funded academic gifted programs.

To qualify for placement, a student must meet the eligibility criteria in two out of the following three dimensions:

(A) Reasoning Abilities

Students must score 93rd national age percentile on a nationally-normed aptitude test. Students may be eligible for placement based on aptitude scores alone if they score 96th percentile or higher on the composite score of a nationally-normed aptitude test.

B) Achievement

Students must score 94th national percentile on approved subtests (reading or math) on a nationally-normed achievement test or score appropriately in ELA or math on the SC statewide assessment instrument (PASS).

(C) Performance

For placement in grades 3-6, a student must score appropriately on either verbal or non-verbal sections of the SC Performance Tasks. For placement in grades 6-12, a 3.75 grade point average in the academic areas may be used.

Placement based on local criteria

Our district has adopted guidelines for placement of students (based on space availability) who meet one of the two required dimensions and are very close in a second dimension.

Students identified based on local criteria are eligible for services only in our district and will be served only if appropriate academic performance is maintained.

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Terms associated with highly capable students

Ability Grouping

Students put in groups by need, ability or interest. Groups can be formed and reformed to meet varied instructional purposes. All students need to participate in both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping patterns.

Acceleration

Refers to the educational practice of examining or covering curriculum at an advanced pace (i.e. early entry into school, grade skipping, use of standards from a higher grade level, focus on abstract concepts, early graduation, etc.)

Advanced Placement

An academically rigorous program in which secondary students can gain college credit and/or advanced college placement. Students in Advanced Placement classes must meet a level of criteria established by higher education institutions on a nationally given and scored Advanced Placement examination.

Authentic Assessment

Process of evaluating student learning using student products or performances instead of traditional standardized tests. Students are evaluated with regard to effort, individuality and creativity.

Cluster Grouping

A method for organizing a heterogeneous classroom by assigning students with similar needs, interests, and/or abilities within the same classroom.

Collaborative Learning

A teaching strategy whereby students are expected to share their expertise [their area of strength] in order to reach a consensus or create a common project.

Content/Process/Product

The elements of curriculum. Content is the subject matter. Process is the skill included in the curriculum [how we learn the content]. Product is the outcome of the learning.

A Creative Thinker…

- Sees exceptions.
- Wonders.
- Daydreams; may seem off task.
- Overflows with ideas, many of which will never be developed.
- Plays with ideas and concepts.
- Injects new possibilities.
- Is in his/her own group.
- Questions: What if…
- Prefers the company of creative peers but often works alone.
- Relishes wild, off-the-wall humor.
- Is independent and unconventional.
- Enjoys creating.
- Improvises.
- Is an inventor and an idea generator.
- Is intuitive.
- Is never finished with possibilities.
- May not be motivated by grades.

Kingore, B. (2004). Differentiation: Simplified, Realistic, and Effective. Austin: Professional Associates Publishing.

Creativity

It is the process of combining what exists into something new. This process could be a procedure, an idea or a product. Creativity can be taught. The elements of creativity play an important part in introducing new ideas and solutions to problems.

Critical Thinking

The development of analytical thinking for purposes of problem-solving and decision making. Critical thinking uses specific attitudes and skills such as seeing others' points of view and reaching sound conclusions.

Curriculum Compacting

A process used to compact what students already know. It allows students who demonstrate mastery to omit portions of assigned curriculum, or to move more quickly through curriculum than is typical. Students are thus able to "buy time" which can be used to accelerate content or to pursue enrichment activities while the unit is being taught to the other students.

Dual Credit Courses

University/college-level courses offered to high school students which carry both high-school unit credit as well as undergraduate college credits. Allows high school students to graduate with a college transcript, by-passing some elective or required college credits.

Enrichment

Activities that supplement the core curriculum. Such activities are generally not specified in the curriculum and are selected by the teacher and/or students in a given classroom.

Flow Room

"Flow" is defined as a state of being in which individuals are totally immersed in their experiences. A Flow Room is a dedicated space where students have choice in what they learn and where they are free to explore their multiple intelligences through a wide range of logic games, interactive activities, hands-on projects, puzzles and other experiences. Student choices, growth and levels of involvement are closely monitored by a teacher trained in multiple intelligences assessments.

International Baccalaureate [IB]

A rigorous international pre-university course of study, leading to examinations, that meets the needs of highly motivated and academically advanced secondary school students. IB has a comprehensive classics curriculum [languages, sciences, mathematics, and humanities] that allows its graduates to fulfill education requirements of various nations. Only schools approved by the IB organization may offer the program. Also, school fees are charged by the IB organization.

Junior Great Books

A strong, inquiry-based language arts program that refines and extends students' skills in reading, thinking, and communicating. The program is a model of student-centered learning in which students work with complex ideas and rigorous texts. The program uses well-crafted, multicultural reading selections that are rich in ideas and invite a number of interpretations. Through consistent use of the program students develop their reading and thinking skills by asking questions, formulating and sharing their opinions, and supporting their ideas with evidence from the selections they read.

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Kaplan's Dimensions of Depth & Complexity

Developed by Dr. Sandra Kaplan, these are strategies and skills for approaching and analyzing new information. They can be used individually or in combination and include: Language of the Discipline - Specialized vocabulary, names of skills/tasks particular to people, working within the disciplines, tools used by the disciplinarians; Details – Parts, facts, describing words, attributes; Patterns – Predictability, repetition; Rules - Order, structure hierarchy, laws; Trends – Direction, a course that seems to follow; Unanswered Questions – Ambiguities, unclear ideas, incomplete ideas; Ethics - Points of view, different opinions, judging; Big Ideas - Generalization, principle, theory; Change Over Time – How time influences things; Different Perspectives – Interpretations, compare and contrast topic with perspectives; and, Across Disciplines - Relationships between areas of study.

Magnet School or Magnet Program

Many school districts, especially those with large student enrollments, select individual schools to emphasize particular programs or services. Some magnet programs focus on specific learning areas such as math, science, or performing arts. Others are designed to serve a specific student population such as highly gifted or gifted and high-ability students. Since space is usually limited, special entrance requirements may apply.

Mentor

An adult member of the community who can provide expertise and/or advice in a field of study or other community endeavor when matched with a student on a one-to-one basis.

Multiple Intelligences

The theory that intelligence can be expressed in a variety of ways and is not limited to the rational linear mode. The theory commonly associated with Howard Gardner identifies at least eight intelligences: linguistic, musical, spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic.

Portfolio Assessment

A collection of student products is used to measure student progress and achievement. A collection of student products is often used to evaluate abilities to determine the appropriateness of placement in a program such as visual and performing arts. This practice allows students to demonstrate a wide variety of abilities and talents that traditionally are not measured well by standardized tests. Materials in a portfolio may be student selected. [See also Authentic Assessment.]

Project M3

[Mentoring Mathematical Minds]

Creative and engaging mathematics curricular units designed at the University of Connecticut in conjunction with the National Research Center for Gifted Education.

Rubric

It is a scoring guide to assess learning. Each interval along the scale represents a specific level of learning from the beginner to expert. The levels of learning are accompanied by specific descriptors of the type and quality of work.

SC Junior Scholars

Recognizes outstanding student performance by eighth-graders on the PSAT, a test normally given to high school students across the nation.

Shared inquiry

A method of teaching and learning that enables people of all ages to explore the ideas, meaning, and information found in everything they read. It centers on interpretive questions that have more than one plausible answer and can lead to engaging and insightful conversations about the text.

Smithsonian Science

Problem-Based Learning units that incorporate team-work, hands-on experimentation, and creative problem-solving.

STEAM

An educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The end results are students who take thoughtful risks, engage in experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and work through the creative process.

Thematic Curriculum

A curriculum focused on the study of a specific topic or concept, such as "animals" or global, such as "change." The theme serves as an organizing element to provide continuity and "connectedness" for learning.

Visible Thinking

A flexible and systematic research-based conceptual framework which aims to integrate the development of students' thinking with content learning across subject matters. This program was created by educators from Harvard University in collaboration with teachers worldwide as part of the Project Zero research program.

Our Gifted & Talented offerings

3-5 EAGLE Program

EAGLE units of study*

3rd Grade

- Junior Great Books (ELA)
- The Mystery of the Moli Stone (M3 math)
- Smithsonian Science
- Generation Genius & Kessler Science
- Changing Tomorrow (Part 1) Leadership
- STEM Biography Blueprints (Part 1)

4th Grade

- Junior Great Books (ELA)
- Algebra at the Mall (M3 math)
- Smithsonian Science
- Generation Genius & Kessler Science
- Changing Tomorrow (Part 2) Leadership
- STEM Biography Blueprints (Part 2)

5th Grade**

- Junior Great Books (ELA)
- What Are Your Chances? (M3 math)
- Smithsonian Science
- Generation Genius & Kessler Science
- Changing Tomorrow (Part 3) Leadership
- STEM Biography Blueprints (Part 3)

*For more information (including detailed curriculum maps) please visit our website.

**Indian Land Intermediate uses the special class model with 5th & 6th-grades in math & ELA.

6-8 Discovery Sm-ARTS Program

For over 30 years, the Lancaster County School District has sponsored a special program for students identified as artistically gifted and talented. Students are identified through referrals which may be made in the early fall by parents, teachers, administrators, community members and students themselves. An audition/portfolio process then takes place (usually in November) and students are identified for services.

Our arts-enrichment program is generally divided into four key components – visual art, music, drama, and dance and students receive services that are tailored to their specific strengths and interests over and above those that are offered to the general school population. These services may take place virtually, through a hybrid format, or in person depending on specific circumstances.

The district's arts-enrichment program is open to any student currently enrolled in the appropriate grade levels as part of the Lancaster County School District.

Referrals of 6th, 7th, or 8th grade LCSD students must be made before the end of September. Auditions are set for mid-November. For more information or a referral form, please see your school guidance counselor or call the G/T Program office at 803-416-8910. Forms may also be accessed at the G/T Program website – https://sites.google.com/lcsd.k12.sc.us/gt-eagles/home.

6-8 math & ELA

[Pre-AP / Pre-Honors / G-T / Honors]

No matter what it's called, our district's middle schools are committed to offering appropriate services for high-ability and gifted learners through special sections of math and English-language arts.

- Content-based to match student identification criteria;
- Teachers are specially trained and state-endorsed in gifted and talented;
- Aligned to SC Best Practices for GT;
- Uniform offerings district-wide;
- Meets SC Department of Education GT guidelines.

Units of study in English & Math incorporate the areas below

- Inquiry-based learning
- Authentic assessment
- Higher-order reasoning
- Conceptually-oriented curriculum
- Focus on constructing meaning
- Higher level questions
- Focus on analysis and interpretation
- Accelerated pacing
- Real-world applications

8-12 Junior Scholars

The SC Junior Scholars Program was developed by the SC Department of Education during the 1985-86 school year to identify eighth-grade students with exceptional academic talent and to determine strategies for their inclusion in special programs.

The program reflects the growing statewide effort to improve education in South Carolina and responds to the needs of students possessing unique abilities.

The program's purpose is to identify students with exceptionally high scholastic achievement and intellectual ability and to provide opportunities for these students to facilitate their intellectual growth, broaden their individual interests, and promote their scholastic achievement.

Eighth graders who are identified as SC Junior Scholars are recognized in a variety of ways by the SC Department of Education and our district.

Special field learning experiences are offered to 9th – 12th grade students identified as SC Junior Scholars through the Lancaster County School District and regional colleges and universities each year.

9-12 honors-level courses

At each of our district's high schools, gifted and high-ability students have the opportunity to engage in honors-level classes that provide a challenge in English-language arts and mathematics.

9-12 Advanced Placement courses

The AP program consists of academically-accelerated courses that offer college-level instruction in high schools and an exam administered by the College Board to determine a student's mastery of the material. Scores on the exam can range from one, the lowest, to five, the highest. A score of three or greater on a test may earn a student college credit for the course the exam material covers. A wide variety of AP courses are offered through our district's high schools and include AP English, AP Calculus, AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP US History, AP Human Geography and more.

10-12 dual-credit college courses

Students may earn dual credit through the district's partnership with USCL & York Tech. Courses are offered at all four high schools through distance learning and on-campus at USCL & York Tech. All courses are taught by USCL & York Tech professors.

For more information visit the GT Website

https://www.lancastercsd.com/page/gifted-talented

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Elementary school FAQ's

What grades must an EAGLE student maintain?

EAGLE students are expected to maintain grades commensurate with their abilities. If an EAGLE student makes a "D" or "F" on a report card, the student is usually placed on academic probation for a period of four and a half weeks. During this time, a student-parent-teacher conference should be scheduled and a plan created to enable the student to work on performance deficiencies.

Does participation really matter?

Yes! State regulations require districts provide services for a specified time period. Students need to be in EAGLE classes each scheduled day. Parents and students may not "pick and choose" days students attend without direct authorization by their school administrator. If a child has excessive unexcused absences, he/she will be placed on academic probation until a conference with parents can be held.

What is G-T IDEAS? Why should I join?

G-T IDEAS is our district's parent support group for GT students. Each year they sponsor a fund-raiser which helps to offset the cost of materials and supplies, field trips and scholarships for students. An annual membership is only $5 and it is well worth the money for you to join. G-T IDEAS also sponsors parent workshops, newsletters and other updates to keep parents informed about the unique needs of gifted learners.

Recommended Websites on Gifted and Talented

National Association for Gifted Children
https://www.nagc.org/

South Carolina Department of Education / Gifted and Talented
https://ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning/advanced-academic-programs/gifted-and-talented/

South Carolina Consortium for Gifted Education
http://www.scgifted.org/

Hoagies' Gifted Education page
http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/

LCSD / Gifted & Talented
https://sites.google.com/lcsd.k12.sc.us/gt-eagles/home

Great Books Foundation / Junior Great Books Curriculum
https://www.greatbooks.org/great-books-k-12-programs/

Changing Tomorrow / Leadership Curriculum
https://www.prufrock.com/Changing-Tomorrow-1-Leadership-Curriculum-for-High-Ability-Elementary-Students-P1661.aspx

M3 Mathematics Curriculum
https://k12.kendallhunt.com/program/project-m3-mentoring-mathematical-minds-grades-3-6

Making Thinking Visible/Project Zero
http://www.pz.harvard.edu/projects/visible-thinking

Smithsonian Science
ssec.si.edu/smithsonian-science-for-the-classroom

EAGLE Parents as Partners Contract

Our Pledge to Students and Parents: EAGLE Program faculty members will, to the best of their abilities, offer quality instruction for students identified as academically gifted and talented in accordance with state regulations and nationally accepted best practices related to gifted education. EAGLE Program faculty members will also maintain appropriate communication with parents, welcome parental involvement, and strive to meet both the cognitive (learning) and affective (social and emotional) needs of the students that we serve.

Attendance: Due to the special nature of the program, every effort should be made to attend each EAGLE class.

Academic Responsibilities: Students are expected to be prepared for each EAGLE class. They should have materials ready for classroom work sessions. They will also be expected to set personal goals for the effective use of class time.

1. Students are expected to complete all EAGLE assignments. Projects should be turned in on the assigned date and meet all requirements. Failure to accept these responsibilities may result in conferences and/or probation from the program.
2. Students should complete all work assigned by their regular classroom teachers.
3. Grades from the regular classroom will be requested at the end of each nine week grading period. Students must maintain at least a "C" average in all major academic subjects (ELA, math, science and social studies). Students not meeting these grade expectations will be encouraged to take part in a parent/teacher/student conference and may be subject to probation from the program.

Behavior: Students must cooperate with EAGLE teachers and fellow students and behave responsibly.

- Field trip participation and participation in special performances are directly related to behavior and academic progress. Students who have failed to complete assignments and/or who have chronic disruptive behavior may not be eligible to participate in field trips or special performances.
- Severe behavior problems may include (but are not limited to): disrespect to teachers, being physically or verbally abusive to other students, destruction of school property, and misbehavior on the school bus that creates a safety hazard. For these types of offences, students may be referred to the EAGLE Program coordinator and/or the child's principal for discipline consistent with district policies.
- Behavior on the bus to and from EAGLE sponsored events is very important. Students must cooperate with the bus driver at all times and follow the rules and instructions.

Let's Think!

Talent Development Program

Sequential lessons for the explicit teaching of thinking skills, developed by the Gifted and Talented Program of the Greenville County School District. Used with permission by the Lancaster County School District.

– Purpose: To provide students with non-threatening exposure to many kinds of thinking activities through short weekly lessons that are implemented by school-based instructors in grades one and two.

–Implementation: The program has been Implemented district-wide in Greenville County for over ten years. Let's Think has been used for the past four years at Discovery School.

–Audience: First graders and second graders.

– Expected Results: Overall increase in the number of students qualifying for gifted and talented services (especially through aptitude and Performance Task scores). Increase in use of critical thinking skills by students at an early age.

–Support: EAGLE Program teachers assigned to each elementary school will teach two lessons each week in each grade level (1 & 2) for 16 weeks while the regular education teacher observes and notes student performance.

– Lesson Components:

1. Out of the Box Fables
2. Working with Words
3. Logic (Inductive Reasoning, Logic Puzzles, Story Logic)
4. Analogies
5. Non-Verbal Math (Mental Math, Visual Memory, Number Patterns, Equivalent Expressions, Figurative Patterns)
6. Auditory Memory

– Sequence of Instruction: August through December (16 weeks / one 30-minute lesson per week) for second grade AND January through May (16 weeks / one 30-minute lesson per week) for first grade.