

The mission of the *Gifted Education* program is to promote and support the intellectual curiosity of our identified exemplar *Gifted & Talented* students at Beach Haven Elementary School.

The *Gifted & Talented* Program, through a variety of methods and modalities, strives to enhance and develop higher-level thinking skills of identified students by offering a customized and challenging enrichment program. Our teachers are dedicated to gifted education and carefully screen those students demonstrating superior academic abilities. Enrichment activities at all levels are developed to assist students in expanding and enhancing their unique proclivities and talents through the vehicles of science, technology, reading, engineering, art, and math.

The identification process is a multi-step process, beginning with teacher recommendations from your child's grade level teacher and your child's teacher from the previous school year. Next, the procedure includes the collection of data to create a portrait of the student's abilities. The data collection includes the following guidelines: 1) state test scores and your child's individual running record 2) teacher evaluation of the student's thinking skills 3) teacher assessment of the student's classroom performance 4) scores from the *G & T* test administered by an outside proctor. Students who attain a targeted score or higher are invited to enter the *G & T* program for the current school year. Children new to the district will be observed in the same manner, and recommendations for the *G & T* program will originate with an endorsement from their classroom teacher.

It is important to note that as individuals we are all endowed with unique gifts and abilities. And, children are in the process of developing their interests and strengths. Through our program, we strive to encourage our students to maximize their full potential. The purpose of the program is to improve, expand, and inspire academic performance by engaging the students in meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable learning activities thereby aiding in the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Our Beach Haven School program will encourage and stimulate students to use critical thinking, decision-making, and creative problem-solving skills. They will be exposed to ideas, concepts, and topics not traditionally introduced in their grade level curriculum. All students will be encouraged to develop academic, social and emotional competence, develop inquiry and discovery techniques, and ultimately become independent and collaborative investigators. Finally, all learners will be oriented toward being producers of knowledge rather than consumers of knowledge.

Our goals, emanating from this aim, directly evolve from the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. The Gifted and Talented program reflects the six gifted education programming standards put forth by the National Association for Gifted Children. These standards include; learning and development, assessment, curriculum and instruction, learning environments, programming, and professional learning. From these goals, our program determines to maintain the following objectives, thereby supporting the standards underscoring the 21st Century skills related to *Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving*: 1. Critical thinkers must first identify a problem then develop a plan to address it in order to effectively solve a problem. 2. The ability to solve problems effectively begins with gathering data, seeking resources, and applying critical thinking skills. 3. Students will maintain that multiple solutions exist to solve a problem & an essential aspect of problem solving is being able to self-reflect on why possible solutions for solving problems were or were not successful. 4. Collaboration with individuals with diverse experiences can aid in the problem-solving process, particularly for global issues where diverse solutions are needed.

The model is an after-school enrichment lab that will provide a variety of activities for students who meet all of the evaluated criteria. Kindergarten through sixth grade are assessed each year in late September. We endeavor to facilitate in assisting students in building greater self-esteem and stimulate those students to think more critically and creatively. It is our expectation that this successful program be achieved by stressing independent processing over teacher led presentations. The G&T teacher acts as a facilitator for the group during their exploration, leading to increased metacognitive ability and eliciting creative and critical thinking individually and in small groups.

Our program is deliberately undergirded with a conceptual emphasis on progressive theorists of education including; Marie Montessori, Margaret Naumburg,

Reggio Emilia, and Howard Gardner. With a fundamental shift from direct teaching to a collaboration model, the students will begin each session with a mini-lesson that quickly evolves into a student-centered and constructivist approach. This self-directed, experiential learning will be conducted once a week. The program will begin in early October and conclude in late May. Each new school year students have an opportunity to be reconsidered for our G & T program.

It is our firm belief that the ingenuity of children, when properly aligned and motivated through individual rigorous interests will lead to the next generation of inventors, innovators, builders, designers, engineers, artists, writers, and theorists who are critical to our society and an asset to mankind.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any thoughts, concerns, or suggestions.

Very truly yours,
Dr. Stephanie Cechhini

"Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence."

Abigail Adams