

Program
for
Gifted Pupils
in the
**St. Louis Public
Elementary Schools**



ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

1960

I. ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ST. LOUIS PROGRAM

Providing learning programs for pupils who are particularly facile and adept at learning from books has long been a concern of educators. Children with unusual mental ability tend to go unrecognized unless special measures are adopted to identify them. The St. Louis Public Schools began a program for superior pupils in September, 1955. All pupils in the second half of the fourth grade had been given a screening test of mental ability during the 1953-54 school year. During the 1954-55 school year, individual mental ability tests were given to those who had qualified on the group test for further examination. Some 260 pupils met the requirements and were organized into sixth grade classes at nine geographically distributed centers. In the 1956-57 school year these pupils moved to the seventh grade, and 280 new sixth graders entered the program. In September of 1957, the third group of 290 sixth graders came in, and, in January, 1958, the first group entered the high school. In 1958-59 the program was extended to include fifth grade pupils in eleven centers. At present approximately 1200 pupils are in these classes in nine centers.

II. SELECTION STANDARDS

All fourth grade pupils in the public schools are given a group intelligence test. Those scoring 115 or above on this test are scheduled automatically for an individual mental performance test by a psychological examiner from the Test Service Section of the St. Louis Public Schools.* To be considered for these classes a student must, first, score an I.Q. of 130 or better on this individual test.

Secondly, the pupil must score at least up to his grade placement in reading, language, and arithmetic on standardized tests.

Thirdly, the principal of the sending school must recommend the pupil and certify that the pupil will, in the principal's and the teacher's judgment, be able to adjust satisfactorily to the program.

Finally, the parent must signify his consent to have the pupil enter the program.

*Others may be tested on the recommendation of the principal.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN SELECTED FOR THE ST. LOUIS PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS GIFTED CLASSES

Experience and observation indicate that there are certain behavior characteristics that must be understood in gifted children. The desirable traits must be recognized and accepted, the undesirable understood and evaluated fairly in order to eliminate them when possible. All children are alike in many ways. They acquire bad habits as well as good. That a child is designated as gifted or superior in no way excuses him from the standards of behavior expected of any children. Contrary to popular opinion, gifted children are above the average physically. They tend to be larger than other children of the same age and their health is generally excellent. They are interested in everything which appeals to the average child.

These pupils learn rapidly, so they must be supplied with enough stimulation to keep them profitably occupied. In the regular classrooms the range of differences in learning ability among pupils is so great that it is often easy for the gifted child to waste time and to become careless and slovenly in his work. Such undesirable study habits acquired over a period of years cannot be overcome immediately.

These pupils tend to be annoyed by details which they consider unimportant and which slow them down. They do not like to be interrupted. They want to continue to work at a task until they reach their own stopping place. This makes it difficult for them to adhere to rigid time schedules.

These children like to think independently and sometimes appear to be argumentative when they really are trying to grasp adult meaning. They must learn to be diplomatic and to listen to other points of view. They are nonconformists in the sense that they will respond to direction which seems reasonable to them and will balk when they see no purpose or value to the direction. They are unwilling to follow directions merely to please. They like to assume responsibility and will frequently take complete charge of a situation without being so directed. This may be misunderstood as officiousness, when it frequently is a desire to be efficiently helpful.

Gifted children are especially in need of sympathetic understanding because of conflicts peculiar to their personalities. On the one hand they seem to be careless; on the other, they are perfectionists within the

scope of their abilities. At times they think and generalize at an adult level. At other times they revert emotionally to conduct below their own developmental level. This type of behavior may be most apparent in the lowest level of the gifted classes when, for the first time, they must exert themselves to make good with the group.

IV. TEACHERS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Teachers for these classes are selected on the basis of experience, teaching record, and adaptability to teaching this type of pupil. As some high school subjects are taught in the eighth grade, teachers of these subjects must meet the certification requirements of secondary as well as elementary teachers. Special teachers who are fluent in speaking the language are provided for French instruction. Art specialists offer instruction in this field.

Pupils in these classes generally use the regular elementary, and, in the eighth grade, the high school texts. An additional supply of reference works, supplementary books, and equipment are furnished these centers to help the pupils meet heavier academic requirements.

V. CURRICULUM

In the elementary school classes the pupils are given conversational French for three years (30 minutes daily), textbook French for one year.* Special instruction in rapid reading is given at the fifth and sixth grade levels. One period weekly is given to Art by special instructors. Industrial Arts for boys and Homemaking for girls are given in the seventh grade only. The usual amount of time is given to Physical Education.

Most of the instructional content of Grades Five, Six, Seven, and Eight is completed by the end of the seventh grade. In Grade Eight pupils take the ninth grade English, Algebra, French, Social Studies, and basic science courses. They are carefully tested in these areas before they enter the high school. They may earn a year's credit, a half-year's credit, or none at all depending upon their performance on the tests. There is no chronological acceleration, i.e., pupils do not enter the high school sooner than other pupils. They may, however, enter the high school with one year of credit in French, Algebra, English, and Social Studies, and there take second year English, second year French, second year Social Studies, and Geometry. They take Biology as their first year science subject.

*A special four-year physics-mathematics course is provided.

If these pupils enter high school with eight credits in English, French, Algebra, and Social Studies, they will not take less work in the secondary school, but will take more advanced work.

In the high school the minimum requirements for these pupils will be:

English, 4 years	8 credits
Social Studies, 3 years	6 credits
Mathematics, 2 years	4 credits
Laboratory Science, 2 years	4 credits
Foreign Language, 2 years	4 credits
Physical Education	2 credits
Electives	<u>14 credits</u>
	42 credits

The City of St. Louis requires 34 credits (17 units) for graduation; these pupils will be expected to earn 42 credits. It appears likely that the colleges and universities will agree to give these students advanced standing at the college level. Thus, whatever chronological acceleration is done will be done in the college. It will probably be possible to finish college in less than four years.

VI. ACHIEVEMENT

A comparison of test scores of pupils in the first gifted children's classes with those of other sixth grade pupils in 1955 showed that the experimental group scores ranged from 2.59 grades above their grade norms in silent reading to .91 grades above in arithmetic. Subsequent tests given to the same experimental group showed two facts. First, test scores of children who had qualified for sixth grade classes for the gifted compared favorably with standardized test scores for ninth grade pupils. Second, the same group when retested in 1958 upon entrance to high school compared favorably with twelfth grade norms. For example, in 1955, the sixth grade pupils who entered the program already performed better in Social Studies, Science, and Literature than approximately 60 per cent of regular pupils who had finished the ninth grade. By the time they had finished the eighth grade, two and a half years later, they performed better, in these fields, than 95 per cent of all pupils finishing ninth grade in the United States. The average child in the gifted program, when he entered the ninth grade of the high schools, already performed better than 60 per cent of the students being graduated from the high schools.

In the area of social adjustment, as measured by the available tests, the gifted group, when they entered these classes, appeared to be less well-adjusted than did the regular group; however, they made a much greater gain in the special classes than did other pupils in regular classes. They seemed to adjust better to each other in the segregated grouping than they had to regular classroom situations.

Results of Algebra and French tests administered before graduation in January, 1958, showed that eighth grade gifted pupils compared favorably with ninth grade students on the same tests. In French the pupils who left the elementary school performed better than 80% of all finishing 9-1 high school students. After one-half year of Algebra in the elementary school they scored better than 60% of the pupils who had finished one full year of Algebra in the high school. All pupils were placed in 10th grade English courses.

These children appear to be making gains in both achievement and social adjustment beyond what could have been expected of them in the regular classroom. A review of this program from September, 1955, to September, 1960, shows nothing to indicate that separating rapid learning children for instructional purposes is harmful in any way.

VII. LOCATION OF THE CENTERS

The centers for the elementary gifted classes are housed in nine elementary school buildings which are geographically located to make traveling to school as comfortable as possible for the majority of children. As there is a constant shifting of city school population, and as there are changes in the number of rooms available in different schools, the centers are not necessarily permanent. In some cases, pupils may have to attend one center for grades five and six, another for grades seven and eight. These changes are not desirable but are sometimes necessary. The centers are now in the following schools: Ashland, Buder, Dewey, Fanning, Mallinckrodt, Nottingham, Scruggs, Wade, and Walnut Park.

Upon graduation these children are assigned to one of three high schools. The high schools were chosen geographically to serve all sections of the city. By concentrating the students in three school centers, teachers will be available for advanced courses in Mathe-

matics, Science, English, and Foreign Languages as the program progresses. These high schools are now Beaumont, Cleveland, and Southwest.

VIII. FOR PARENTS

As this program differs in intensity from the regular classroom program, parents should expect, at first, some differences in performance.

(a) Grades and report cards

For the first time, many of these children are working with their intellectual equals and superiors and are being challenged to their full capacity. It follows that they will no longer receive all E and G report cards. M's may indicate good, average work. P's and U's point up areas where more application is needed.

Children and parents alike must realize that a grade is not the ultimate goal of any course. The real issue is not whether the child receives an "E," but whether his performance is at the level of his ability.

(b) Homework

Pupils in these classes will usually do more homework than they have been accustomed to doing. By providing a quiet place for efficient study, and some help, at first, in scheduling study and playtime, parents can help the beginners adjust to the new program.

A child who has been poorly motivated or bored because of lack of challenge may enter the program with poorly developed work habits. Such a child will be unable to work efficiently. Until the poor work habits are corrected, he may find the program particularly difficult.

(c) Outside activities

Because of the child's own work pace it is hard to say how many, or if any, outside activities such as music lessons and club activities should be encouraged. Children who have established good work habits should be able to participate in their usual activities.

(d) Work quality

Gifted children inadequately challenged quickly learn that they can accomplish their work with much less effort than average pupils. This

leaves them with time to practice habits of idleness and carelessness. The habits of laziness thus established may make them unwilling to do the kind of work necessary for significant achievement in this program. One of the goals, therefore, of the program is to replace the habit of laziness with a drive toward maximum achievement.

High standards in neatness, correct spelling, and good writing are set for these pupils. The necessity of careful proofreading of all work is emphasized. Careless and slovenly work is not accepted.

(e) *Separated classes*

There is locally no evidence to show that separating these pupils from regular classes tends to create undesirable feelings of superiority. On the contrary, competition with their equals and superiors apparently points up their limitations.

Experience has shown that gifted children, when wisely and carefully informed of their abilities, will not consider themselves better than others. They will come to understand that along with their special abilities goes a responsibility both to themselves and to society.

This program makes heavy demands upon pupils rather suddenly. If parents feel that the program is too difficult, the pupils may be withdrawn, preferably at the end of a semester. If the pupil does not adjust to the program or does not perform at a level commensurate with his abilities, he will be requested to withdraw from the program, preferably at the end of a semester.

The term "gifted" for these pupils merely means that they have, to a certain arbitrary degree, unusual capacity to learn from books and to think abstractly and independently. There are many other pupils who have these abilities, and who far surpass these pupils in particular fields. Parents can do considerable harm to children by assuming that meritorious distinction has been conferred by enrollment in these classes.