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The Middle School CONNECTION

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WINGS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

The instructional day at WINGS is divided into three sections. These sections are Thinking Skills, Personal and Group Dynamics, and Major Unit.

In **Thinking Skills**, students have four objectives: to develop critical thinking skills, to develop creative thinking skills, to develop analytic skills, and to develop organizational skills. Research skills play a major role in our thinking skills curriculum. "The secret to effective research with new electronic information sources is the use of powerful questioning strategies. In fact, questions may be one of the most powerful technologies invented by humans. Even though they require no batteries and need not be plugged into the wall, they are the tools which help us make up our minds, solve problems and make decisions."

In **Personal and Group Dynamics**, students work to understand themselves and how they relate to others. The Personal and Group Dynamics class is a very important part of the WINGS day. This time, specifically allotted to affective education, is part of a comprehensive curriculum designed to meet the needs of gifted children. Linda Silverman, author of *Counseling the Gifted and Talented*, and Nicholas Colangelo, a contributing editor, define goals and objectives that provide the framework for the WINGS affective curriculum for gifted students.

Major Units, the third portion of the day, are of great interest to the students. Unlike the first two classes, Major units change over the course of the school year based on student interest. Each unit is written by the WINGS staff and includes the following components:

- the BIG IDEA, or issue, associated with the topic,
- the three or four skills/concepts the student is expected to master,
- the skills from the program goals and student expectations covered in the unit with special emphasis on critical thinking,
- a calendar of topics, activities, and events scheduled for the unit,
- a listing of student expectations or outcomes, and
- a letter to parents that communicates the components.

SHARE YOUR EXPERTISE . . .

One of the great challenges faced by WINGS students and their teachers is how they work together to ensure concepts covered on WINGS day are mastered. We would like you, the classroom teachers, to share with us ideas you have used, I.E. study buddies, homework file, etc. Tell us what works and we will share your ideas in our next newsletter.

BECAUSE YOU ASKED . . .

In recent visits to SPS middle schools, several teachers ask about the BRIDGES Program. They had heard the name and have students from the program, but didn't really know more than that. In response to your inquires, we wanted to share a brief over-view of the program.

BRIDGES is an inquiry-based service model for at-risk gifted students in grades 3 - 5. The Program provides direct service to gifted students identified using non-traditional methods of identification and evaluation. These gifted students are often from underrepresented populations and attend a Title One school. Students attend BRIDGES one day each week in a satellite location, Weller Elementary School. Curtis Cunningham and Darlene Taylor comprise the BRIDGES staff. Working with individual strengths, the BRIDGES curriculum uses an inquiry-based approach to learning.

Question: I have a student in my class who attends WINGS but is failing my class because he doesn't turn in assignments. Should he be permitted to attend WINGS and miss my class while he is failing?

Answer: The decision to participate in Gifted Programs should be based, in large part, on the needs of each individual student. WINGS is not a reward for achievement or good grades, rather an intervention to support student success using a variety of program options. Many Middle School teachers and counselors are working with the Middle School liaison, school counselor and teachers at Phelps, to provide comprehensive support and ensure success for their gifted students. Caring and persistent educators and counselors providing structures for change at both the home school and gifted center will make an important difference to those gifted students struggling academically.

Question: How can a student who is supposed to be so smart act so immaturely?

Answer: In the book, *Counseling the Gifted and Talented* by Linda Silverman, it is suggested that while normal developmental periods can put young people at risk, this is amplified for gifted children who often appear to be more mature than they really are. Many teachers wonder why a young person so smart can do such dumb things sometimes. But adolescence is marked with inconsistencies between thought and action. It is precarious to have an adult thinker in the body of an adolescent and be expected to act "gifted" in order to meet the requirements of others for high performance. The books recommended below have much more to say about this subject.

WINGS Major Units for Middle School

Utopia: Inventing the Ideal - Frustrated with the world today? Got a better idea? Then perhaps Utopia: Inventing the Ideal is the right unit for you! In this unit, we will look at man's search for Utopia throughout history and, ultimately, design our own "perfect world". We will analyze systems (government, education, economic, etc.) currently in place around the world as well as looking at alternative communities and systems. We will also explore the concept of Utopia as expressed in the Arts (including reading Lois Lowry's *The Giver*). After you have formed your own ideas about what constitutes an ideal world, you (individually or as part of a group) will design your own Utopian community right down to the very last detail. We all have our own idea of what the perfect world would look like, come show us yours!

The Spirit of Wonder: Japanese Culture as Viewed Through the Anime Paradigm - As Clark and van Tassel-Baska have noted, gifted students need to have access to special courses in areas of their strength and interest which accelerate the pace and increase the depth of the content as well as giving them (students) greater exposure to new areas of learning, within and outside of the school structure. In the affective domain, Barbara Clark also states that gifted students need to be able to explore issues related to the world community; become aware of personal talents contributing to world issues; and foster a commitment to humanity.

We believe that our Center will benefit from this stimulating unit, which will both support and broaden students' understanding of our global village; in particular, Asia, a portion of that village which is sometimes underrepresented in curricula.

Through this unit, students will acquire a better understanding of a region of the world that is very different from ours, but has a great impact on us - and it will help the students recognize and understand that impact, socially, artistically, economically and historically.

School of Rock - School of Rock Major Unit will allow bands of students to record their own music and design their own album cover art. In this unit, we will gain exposure and appreciation for the many different music genres and explore the process that guides music composition. Aided by the software *Garageband* and the application of musical theory, each band will compose four original compositions. Along with the music, we will study the graphics that are used to package and advertise the music we love. We will learn and apply different techniques of graphic design (both by hand and with the help of Photoshop) and elements of advertising as we create an album cover and tour poster.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GIFTED KIDS . . .

Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning

Author: Barbara A Kerr, Ph.D. and Sanford J. Cohn, Ph.D.

This book was written to help us understand the needs of gifted boys. It is designed to provide insight for the boys themselves, their parents, teachers, and counselors. Depression, underachievement, and relationship struggles are just some of the issues that this book addresses. Suggestions are presented to help gifted young men embrace optimism and motivation, thought-provoking insights, maximum achievement, and successful interactions. Interviews are also included with men who have experienced crises or failures.

Growing up too fast

Author: Sylvia Rimm, Ph.D.

Sylvia Rimm, a New York Times best-selling author wrote *Growing Up Too Fast* to help look closely at today's changing middle school students. After an extensive survey of 5400 middle school kids and hundreds of others in focus groups, Rimm reports her results in this book. As a child psychologist, she provides advice for dealing with middle school age children and practical advice of how to help students survive and thrive in today's world. Quotes from the book.

- "If you look at the news, you'll see things that are 10 times worse than PG-13 movies." -7th grade boy
- "Kids are either in or out, and fat kids can't be in." - 6th grade boy
- "I have a friend who brags that she can chug a Bloody Mary in less than 10 seconds." -7th grade girl