

The P.A.C.E. Program

Program for Academic and Creative Endeavors

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Philosophy

St Johns county school district is committed to develop to the greatest extent possible the potential of each student. The school district recognizes that students who are gifted have special needs which must be met in order for them to reach their potential.

The philosophy of the gifted program is to encourage and facilitate higher levels of critical and creative thinking, communication, independent study skills, leadership abilities, productivity, self-awareness and community involvement. The program supports students to maximize intellectual growth and to become aware of personal and community responsibilities. Students are encouraged to realize the impact of their academic, social, emotional, creative and leadership capabilities on both the present and future through enrichment, awareness activities and academics.

Goals

The school district believes that a program for gifted students should provide a flexible classroom structure which meets the needs of the gifted learner through a variety of learning situations and styles. The program focuses on problem solving, higher level thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation), creative thinking (fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration), convergent and divergent thinking, critical thinking and metacognitive thinking.

Learning Environment

- A faculty and staff who acknowledge and respect student's uniqueness.
- A flexible classroom structure which meets the needs of the gifted learner through a variety of learning situations including small group instruction, cooperative learning, and independent research.
- A school day which provides opportunities to:
 - (a) interact with intellectual peers,
 - (b) interact with other gifted students who share the same learning need,
 - (c) learn and practice being a leader as well as a follower,
 - (d) engage in divergent, creative, critical, and higher level thinking,
 - (e) develop social as well as academic skills.
- A risk free environment in which freedom of thought is encouraged, expected and valued.
- Teachers who have the desire, skill and commitment necessary to provide students intellectual, social and emotional development.

Curriculum Content

St Johns County school district believes that the gifted program should challenge the students through a multi-dimensional teaching approach. Instruction must consist of curricula and instruction adapted to meet the unique needs of the gifted learner. Differentiation, enrichment and flexible instructional pace allow appropriate learning opportunities for gifted students.

Program Design

St Johns County offers a continuum of gifted services for students K-12. The services (full time, resource and consultative) are available for eligible students at either their home zoned school or a designated regional school. Full time services are currently available at Cunningham Creek, Julington Creek, Webster, Ponte Vedra-Palm Valley and Rawlings Elementary schools. Regional middle schools with full time programs are Fruit Cove, Landrum, Murray and Switzerland Point Middle.

Characteristics of Gifted Children

Gifted children vary in their interests, abilities, values and background experiences, as do all children. There are traits, however, which can be linked to the majority of gifted children when compared with other pupils.

Gifted students may:

- Be highly motivated
- Be very curious
- Have a good memory
- Use advanced vocabulary
- Be a good problem-solver
- Be creative and imaginative
- Have many hobbies and interests
- Have a clear learning goal
- Have a highly developed sense of humor.

(Frasier, 1997)

Referral for Evaluation Process

A referral is a request for an individual evaluation of a student who is suspected of needing gifted education services. An individual evaluation is a way of collecting information about a child's learning needs, strengths, problems, and interests. It is used to make decisions about whether a child is gifted and is eligible for ESE services. No decisions about ESE services can be made until after the individual evaluation is finished and reviewed.

To determine if a child needs gifted services the following may occur:

- Student will be given an intelligence screening
- Classroom interventions/strategies will be tried
- Parental information about the child's development and history
- Intelligence test administered by a licensed school psychologist
- Behavioral characteristics checklist of superior students

After the evaluation is done, an eligibility staffing will be held. The team of people at this meeting will determine whether the evaluation data indicate that the child is eligible for ESE gifted services. A child is only eligible when he or she meets the criteria listed in the **State Board Of Education Rules**. Students must meet the eligibility criteria in order to receive ESE services.

If the team at the eligibility staffing determines that a student is eligible for ESE gifted services, the next step is to write an educational plan (EP). An EP is a plan that tells the parents, the teachers, and other school staff which ESE services will be provided to the child. These services are designed to meet the child's learning needs. After the first EP has been written parents are asked to give written consent for the child to receive gifted services.

The referral process may take several weeks. For more information contact Lynn O'Connor, Program Coordinator, at (904) 819-7148.