

Leander ISD's
G/T Program Review
July 2016

Reviewer: Judy O'Neal
Advanced Academic Director
Cosenza & Associates, LLC.



Leander ISD
Gifted and Talented Program Review
July 2016

Opening remarks from reviewer

I feel very fortunate to have been asked to review Leander ISD's gifted services. Kathy Wood, Director of K-12 Gifted and K-8 Advanced Programs has played an integral part in the development and growth of this program. Every facet of the program was based on best practices of gifted education. I want to thank Kathy for providing me with a great deal of information and the scheduling of walkthroughs to over half of the Leander ISD campuses.

I was very hesitant to conduct walkthroughs of campuses during the hectic month of May, but I was pleasantly surprised. Every person I met in Leander ISD was extremely helpful and kind as I roamed the halls talking to teachers, students and, in some cases, parents. Principals took the time to talk to me on almost every campus. I was impressed by the QUEST teachers, who were all highly qualified and really understood the social and emotional needs of the gifted child. The parents and students that I spoke with shared many positive comments and benefits as a result of their child receiving QUEST services.

The following review is an outsider's view or perception of a program that was built on sound best practices. Leander ISD should be proud of the impact they have had on many gifted students in the past. Populations and standards do change over time and Leander ISD could benefit by making a few changes to compensate for current trends to improve their services for the next decade.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the district for providing me with the information and access to campuses to write this report. A BIG thank you to all the Leander ISD staff for their kindness.

**Leander ISD
Gifted and Talented Program Review
July 2016**

Review compiled by Judy O'Neal
Advanced Academic Director
Cosenza & Associates, LLC
Leander ISD Contact Person-Kathy Wood

The following review of the Leander Independent School District's Gifted and Talented (G/T) Program is based on the collection and analysis of the following sources of information:

- District visits conducted May 12 through May 19, 2016
 - Brief walkthroughs in over 50% of Leander ISD campuses including elementary, middle and high school facilities
 - Interviews with administrators, teachers, parents of G/T students, and G/T identified students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels
 - Observation at a G/T assessment and identification meeting
- Leander ISD 2015-16 Student Enrollment Data
- Leander ISD 2015 STAAR Data
- Leander ISD 2014-15 AP/IB Test Score Data
- Leander ISD EHBB Local Special Programs Board Policy
- Leander ISD District/Campus Webpages
- Leander ISD locally written policies, and procedure documents to describe the QUEST Program
- Leander ISD QUEST screening and identification documents
- Leander ISD QUEST curriculum documents
- Leander ISD 2015 HB5 G/T Evaluation Measures

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Introduction:

The purpose of this review, as identified by the district, is to compile observations and data to provide suggestions for improvement of the Leander ISD Gifted and Talented Services. The services that are provided in Leander ISD are often referred to as The QUEST Program. The following review is reported in the same format as the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students which is divided into five sections:

- Student Assessment
- Service Design
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Professional Development
- Family-Community Involvement

The reviewer analyzed the Leander ISD G/T services using the state plan as a guideline.

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Student Assessment

Section 1 of the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires districts to provide assessment instruments and gifted/talented identification procedures in order to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their diverse talents and abilities.

Observations/Research:

District 2015-16 student enrollment data and 2015-16 G/T identified student PEIMS data were reviewed. The information was given to reviewer and compiled in the graph on the following pages. The data collected is from all individual campuses. Please note that district preschool and early education enrollment numbers were less than 2% of the district total student population. Even though those students are not eligible for a G/T program or services, they are included in the district and campus total numbers and the disaggregation of the data. Those numbers will not make a big impact on the results. The Alternate Campuses are not listed as individual campus reports; there are no G/T identified students on those campuses.

The following chart reviews the total school population, the number of identified G/T students, and how many G/T students are identified in each reported ethnic group. The number of total students identified as free and reduced lunch on PEIMS, Low Social Economic Status (LSES), is noted on each campus. Areas of concern are highlighted.

20% or above identified-high numbers of gifted on a campus

30% or above identified-extremely high number of gifted on a campus

A 10 point or greater difference in ethnic group G/T identification-Identification beginning to not mirror campus demographics.

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Whitestone El.	733 LSES-269	76 10%	381/49 52%-64%	283/17 39%-22.3%	14/0 2%-0%	11/3 1.5%-3.9%	32/7 4.3%-9.2%	2/0 0.27%-0%
Faubion El.	524 LSES-163	80 15%	335/58 64%-73%	129/20 25%-25%	22/1 4.19%-1.2%	12/0 2.2%-0%	24/1 4.5%-1.2%	2/1 0.38%-0%
Blockhouse El.	642 LSES-125	88 14%	424/58 66%-66%	166/23 26%-26.1%	20/3 3.1%-3.4%	5/0 .77%-0%	27/4 4.2%-4.5%	0/0 0%-0%
Cypress El.	754 LSES-92	124 16%	511/86 67.7%-69.3%	120/13 15.9%-10.4%	21/1 2.7%-.80%	53/14 7%-11.2%	46/9 6.1%-7.2%	3/1 0.39%-0.80
C.C. Mason El.	618 LSES-183	132 21.4%	403/90 65%-68%	155/26 25%-20%	23/4 3.7%-3%	11/6 1.7%-4.5%	24/6 3.8%-4.5%	2/0 0.32%-0%
Giddens El.	556 LSES-208	89 16%	293/59 53%-66%	184/24 33%-27%	32/1 5.7%-1.1%	16/2 2.8%-2.2%	29/3 5.2%-3.3%	2/0 0.35%-0%
Steiner Ranch El.	632 LSES-47	120 19%	409/83 65%-69%	109/12 17.2%-10%	17/2 2.6%-1.6%	57/14 9%-11.6%	37/8 5.8%-5.5%	3/1 0.47%-0.83%
Pauline Naumann El.	469 LSES-94	120 26%	306/89 65%-74%	110/14 23%-11.6%	8/0 1.7%-0%	18/10 3.8%-8.3%	25/7 5.3%-5.8%	2/0 0.42%-0%
Bagdad El.	570 LSES-318	72 12.3%	210-35 37%-47%	300-30 53%-42%	24/3 4.2%-4.1%	6/2 1%-2.7%	28/2 4.9%-2.7%	2/0 0.17%-0%
Charlotte Cox El.	684 LSES-111	129 19%	416/79 61%-61%	138/18 20%-14%	23/2 3.3%-1.5%	68/26 10%-20%	37/3 5.4%-4.1%	2/1 0.29%-0.77%
Laura Welch Bush El.	835 LSES-5	269 32%	571/185 68%-68%	100/14 12%-5.2%	8/2 .95%-.74%	117/54 14%-20%	36/14 4.3%-5.2%	3/0 0.35%-0%
Patricia Knowles El.	710 LSES-393	54 7.6%	289/21 41%-39%	347/28 49%-52%	32/0 4.5%-0%	15/2 2.1%-3.7%	21/2 2.9%-3.7%	6/1 0.84%-1.8%

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Deer Creek El.	692 LSES-19	122 18%	476/85 69%-70%	107/13 15%-10%	11/0 1.5%-0%	59/16 8.5%-13%	36/8 5.2%-6.5%	3/0 0.43%-0%
Pleasant Hill El.	844 LSES-207	99 12%	524/74 62%-75%	215/16 25%-16%	33/1 3.9%-1%	24/3 2.8%-3%	44/5 5.2%-5%	4/0 0.47%-0%
Rutledge El.	796 LSES-58	109 14%	406/56 51%-51%	156/10 20%-9%	25/2 3.1%-1.8%	161/33 20%-30%	45/8 5%-7.3%	3/0 0.37%-0%
Jim Plain El.	649 LSES-166	65 10%	372/46 57%-70%	190/12 29%-18%	39/3 6%-4.6%	11/0 1.6%-0%	35/4 5.3%-6.1%	2/0 0.30%-0%
Winkley El.	682 LSES-72	114 17%	438/79 64%-69%	152/23 22%-20%	21/1 3%-.87%	28/2 4.1%-1.7%	38/9 5.5%-7.8%	5/0 0.73%-0%
River Place El.	768 LSES-77	178 23%	465/116 60%-65%	136/22 18%-12%	41/6 5.3%-3.3%	85/20 11%-11%	40/15 5.2%-8.4%	1/0 0.13%-0%
Grandview Hills El.	464 LSES-86	75 16%	259/46 59%-61%	109/14 23%-19%	24/3 5.1%-4%	50/9 11%-12%	20/3 4.3%-4%	2/0 0.43%-0%
Parkside El.	937 LSES-30	180 19%	643/133 69%-73%	140/14 14%-7.7%	12/2 1.2%-1.1%	97/23 10%-13%	44/8 4.6%-4.4%	1/0 0.10%-0%
Westside El.	569 LSES-35	98 17%	392/73 69%-74%	101/8 18%-8.1%	5/0 .87%-0%	45/9 7.9%-9.1%	23/8 4%-8.1%	3/0 0.52%-0%
Ronald Reagan El.	882 LSES-85	176 20%	497/109 56%-62%	202/34 23%-19%	16/0 1.8%-0%	113/20 13%-11%	50/12 5.6%-6.8%	4/1 0.45%-0.56%
River Ridge El.	784 LSES-13	241 31%	562/148 72%-61%	84/24 11%-9.9%	4/1 .51%-.41%	99/52 13%-21.5%	34/16 4.3%-6.6%	1/0 0.12%-0%
Leonard A. Reed El.	723 LSES-346	101 14%	213/37 29%-36%	372/37 51%-36%	59/6 8.1%-5.9%	48/15 6.6%-14.8%	29/4 4%-3.9%	2/2 0.27%-1.9%

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Camacho El.	602 LSES-233	68 11%	344/41 57%-60%	207/22 34%-32%	19/1 3.1%-1.4%	10/2 1.6%-2.9%	21/2 3.4%-2.9%	1/0 0.16%-0%
Stiles MS	1047 LSES-78	296 28%	662/201 63%-68%	202/31 19%-10%	28/2 2.6%-67%	105/46 10%-15%	49/16 4.6%-5.4%	1/0 0.09%-0%
Four Points MS	741 LSES-95	259 35%	495/188 67%-72%	128/33 17%-13%	30/4 4%-1.5%	43/20 5.8%-7.7%	39/13 5.2%-5%	6/1 2.3%-0.38%
Knox Wiley MS	951 LSES-235	159 17%	565/111 59%-70%	277/33 29%-21%	46/0 4.8%-0%	17/8 1.7%-5%	40/6 4.2%-3.7%	6/1 0.63%-0.62%
Canyon Ridge MS	1284 LSES-32	521 41%	906/341 70%-65%	156/54 12%-10%	17/3 1.3%-57%	158/106 12%-20%	45/17 3.5%-3.2%	2/0 0.15%-0%
Artie L. Henry MS	1306 LSES-278	319 24%	740/197 57%-62%	311/43 24%-13%	70/9 5.3%-2.8%	128/57 9.8%-18%	50/12 3.8%-3.7%	7/1 0.53%-0.31%
Running Brushy MS	1271 LSES-397	284 22%	721/204 58%-71%	382/50 30%-18%	69/5 5.4%-1.7%	32/13 2.5%-4.5%	58/11 4.5%-3.8%	8/1 0.62%-0.35%
Leander MS	919 LSES-362	146 16%	481/108 52%-74%	353/28 38%-19%	42/3 4.5%-2%	12/2 1.3%-1.3%	24/3 2.6%-2%	7/2 0.76%-1.3%
Cedar Park MS	1418 LSES-135	436 31%	969/330 68%-75%	259/45 18%-10%	30/2 2.1%-45%	98/44 6.9%-10%	55/14 3.8%-3.2%	7/1 0.49%-0.22%

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Leander HS	2195 LSES-697	433 20%	1,231/287 56%-66%	713/103 32%-24%	120/15 5.4%-3.4%	46/14 2%-3.2%	76/13 3.4%-3%	9/1 0.41%-0.23%
Cedar Park HS	1951 LSES-176	524 27%	1,343/388 69%-74%	359/58 18%-11%	58/10 2.9%-1.9%	112/46 5.7%-8.7%	68/19 3.4%-3.6%	11/3 0.56%-0.57%
Vista Ridge HS	2,252 LSES-380	413 18%	1,325/270 59%-65%	525/61 23%-15%	123/10 5.4%-2.4%	189/52 8.3%-12.5%	81/19 3.5%-4.6%	9/1 0.39%-0.24%
Rouse HS	2,393 LSES-564	406 17%	1,382/294 58%-72%	706/73 29.5%-18%	158/13 6.6%-3.2%	56/13 2.3%-3.2%	74/10 3%-2.4%	17/3 0.71%-0.73%
Vandegrift HS	2,257 LSES-137	628 28%	1,561/443 69%-70.5%	343/74 15%-12%	59/4 2.6%-0.63%	204/79 9%-12.5%	87/27 3.8%-4.2%	3/1 0.13%-0.15%
Alternate schools	55	0	30/0	21/0	2/0	2/0	0/0	0/0
District Totals	37,159 LSES-7,016	7,809 21%	22,550/5,303 61%-68%	9,058/1,174 24%-15%	1,405/125 3.7%-1.6%	2,421/837 6.5%-11%	1,571/347 4.2%-4.4%	154/23 0.41%-0.29%

Leander ISD has the highest percentages of G/T identified students of all the districts in Region 13. A comparison to several school districts in Region 4, the largest region in the state, is shown below. Also included are two additional districts from Region 16 & 10.

Region 13

Leander ISD-21%
 Eanes ISD-13%
 Comal ISD-12%
 Lake Travis ISD-12%
 Round Rock ISD-9%
 Pflugerville ISD-8%
 Hays ISD-8%

Region 4

Houston ISD-15%
 Clear Creek ISD-10%
 Pearland ISD-9%
 Katy ISD-7%
 Fort Bend ISD-7%
 Humble ISD-7%
 Cy-Fair ISD-5%

Region 16

Frisco-11%

Region 10

Plano-18%

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Review of EHBB Local Board Policy

Written assessment policies were updated 2012. The written policies are still aligned with program and services.

District Criteria Used to Assess/Identify G/T Students

The district is in compliance in all areas of assessment and identification. District uses multiple criteria for identification in areas of creativity, achievement and general intellectual ability. Nonverbal instruments are used for students where English is not the primary language.

The process is well defined, timelines for assessment are publicized. All students in Kindergarten are screened in January. New students to Leander ISD are automatically screened and results are determined within 30 school days. Screening for grades 1-5 takes place in May. Secondary school students are screened during the summer months. The QUEST teachers and staff that screen students and sit on the identification committee have received extensive training on the process and are highly qualified with 30 plus hours of gifted education training.

Definition of program aligns with identification:

“QUEST is an acronym for Quality Utilization and Enrichment of Student Talents. QUEST is a gifted program designed to meet the needs of students who excel or show potential to excel in a combination of two of the areas of giftedness as defined by the state of Texas: high general intellectual ability and creative and productive thinking.”

The information regarding the QUEST screening and identification process is defined on the District Website and is available for the general public.

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Findings:

QUEST has made it a focus to cast the widest net possible to screen and identify G/T students. In doing so, they have done a good job of capturing and identifying G/T students in all ethnic groups. On the preceding chart, there are a few areas highlighted that have too many White students identified and lower number of Hispanic students identified. Most of those occurrences happen on campuses with higher numbers of lower socio-economic students. QUEST teachers seem to be aware of this discrepancy and have made steps to search and screen those students that fit in this category.

There are many interesting trends that can be noted by looking at this breakdown of G/T identification. On most campuses the identification goes over the total student percentage in the White and Asian populations. While in Hispanic and African American the percentages are usually under the total student percentage.

The biggest concern I see in this chart is the **over identification of gifted students**. Educators and specialists in the field of gifted have held true to the claim that the percentage of gifted students has usually been found to be 5 to 8% of a student population. The state recognizes that research and only funds up to 5% of identified students. Gifted students are identified because they are at risk of not meeting their potential and because the regular curriculum does not meet their needs. To have 21% percent identified as gifted is saying that the regular curriculum is not meeting the needs of 21% of the students. There are some campuses that have 30 % of their total population identified. It has been noted that Leander ISD is a destination district, where parents are moving into the district because of the gifted program. Even on that note, the numbers of gifted students identified should still be lower than 21%. The district is indeed capturing gifted students, but it is also capturing many high achievers. Below the table on page 8 there is a sampling of other districts and their percentages of identified gifted. In Leander ISD, beginning with the 2012-13 school year, the G/T identification has risen from 17% to 21%. Percentages will continue to rise if changes are not made in the identification process.

Criteria for identification is the first place to look for over identification. The first step in the process must include three pieces of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data should be a norm referenced test. In the section labeled b there is a Non-verbal Test, Achievement test, and STAAR tested listed. All other items listed are subjective. The instructions do not specify if one of those tests must be used in the first screening step. The second step or category includes more ability and achievement testing and grade average again. The process is confusing to understand when there is so much written on the profile. Which items are actually being used on every student?

The tests that have been used and that are listed have been used for many years. Many are individually administered. My question would be, are you using current intelligence testing?

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Recommendations:

- Make changes to your identification instruments to reduce G/T identified population to at least 15% over time. Listed are possible changes that could be made:
 - Review the criteria that you are using to identify students. Use up to date testing booklets and instructions. If testing is over 5 years old, it needs to be revisited, if instrument is over 10 years old, it should be replaced.
 - Review the possibility to streamline your identification process into one category. Only list the criteria that you predominantly use on the identification profile. List your qualitative and quantitative data separately. Keep the “Other” category for those alternative assessments that you might be using.
 - Add extra measures or points for your identified low SES or LEP students.
 - Raise your criteria to 96% or above. One or two points will make an impact.
 - Use data to identify students gifted in just mathematics or other specific content areas.
- Changes in identification should be done gradually. Begin K-2 this year, 3-5 next year. Secondary the following year. Grandfather all other identifications done with past identification tools.
- G/T update training designed specifically to address Equity in Gifted Education. This can be done through campus book studies, using the resource, *Removing the Mask: Giftedness and Poverty* by Dr. Paul Slocomb and Ruby Payne.
- Review the resources available on the state website, www.gtequity.org for understanding and identifying bilingual, twice exceptional and low socio economic students.
- Continue all other best practices for screening of all kindergarten students, all new students, and the 30 day time frame for new students.
- Continue timeline for identification.
- Update Board policy if you make changes in identification.
- Update information on website if you make changes in identification process.

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Service Design

Section 2 of the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires districts to provide a flexible system of viable service options which provides a research-based learning continuum that is developed and consistently implemented throughout the district to meet the needs and reinforce the strengths and interests of gifted/talented students.

Note- The state plan changed the title of this section in 2009 to reflect new terminology. The state has been referring to this section of the law as service design not program options. Most of the printed documents refer to the QUEST Program. This review will use the current terminology of services.

Observations/Research:

The information on the Leander ISD website defines the services provided for Elementary, Middle, and High School G/T identified students. The reviewer visited elementary, middle and high school campuses to observe how those services were implemented as a whole district. The services were found to be consistently implemented on the elementary campuses that were visited. The reviewer spoke to many QUEST teachers, regular classroom teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

The stated QUEST Purpose and QUEST Goals are aligned with the services that are presently being provided.

Elementary G/T Services

In the elementary grades, the identified gifted students are served in a pull-out classroom and spend at least two hours of instructional time each week in a gifted curriculum with their campus' QUEST (G/T) teacher. There is flexibility on each campus as to how the campus schedules the two hours. In kindergarten, and occasionally in other grade levels, some of the services are provided with a push-in model, where the QUEST teacher enters the regular classroom and provides enrichment. The QUEST teachers are highly qualified with 30 plus hours of gifted education. The QUEST curriculum is interdisciplinary and addresses all four content areas. QUEST teachers facilitate identification and screening on each campus.

Highly advanced mathematics students, that may or may not be identified G/T, are also receiving additional services in a program called PACE (Programs for Advancement, Challenge and Enrichment). This is not listed as a QUEST component but it appears to be serving gifted students in mathematics, and the curriculum includes acceleration beyond grade level expectations. There is a PACE language arts program but it appears to be the regular language arts program with little acceleration of grade level expectations.

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The QUEST services have allowed identified students to be with other students who are at their grade level. Sometimes there was an audible sigh of relief when these students entered through the doors of the QUEST classroom. The atmosphere was risk free and students could be themselves in this classroom. The gifted child's social and emotional needs are well satisfied with this type of service option. One 3rd grade student said, "Being in QUEST gives me a break. I need a break, because I am really stressed in the regular classroom and I feel more relaxed in QUEST." The QUEST teachers played a tremendous role in the success of this service. Every QUEST teacher that I observed truly understood and appreciated the gifted child.

The few general education classroom teachers that I spoke with were expressing more of a push-in model to benefit all students, not just the gifted students. Many elementary principals made the comment that what was going on in the gifted program should be going on in the regular classroom. They wanted to see more project-based learning done with all students and to see more push-in and blending with the regular curriculum. One elementary principal said, "more should be done to support general education."

The array of services that are open to all elementary LISD students, include Spanish classes, Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, Science Share, Business Fair, Math Pentathlon, Computer Programming, Robotics, Legos, and Destination Imagination. Many QUEST students also participate in these enrichment activities.

Students also have the options to take an examination for acceleration to progress to an advanced grade level.

Middle School G/T Services

At Leander ISD, middle school includes students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Middle school QUEST students are served through a daily QUEST Studies Class. The class meets about 50 minutes every day. The QUEST curriculum is designed to provide challenging learning opportunities for identified QUEST students. These students receive advanced instruction in an interdisciplinary gifted curriculum, utilizing Pre-AP[®] teaching strategies. The teachers are highly qualified with 30 plus hours of gifted education.

I was fortunate to be able to visit several of these QUEST Studies classes. Students loved the class! There were so many wonderful, positive comments from these middle school students." I am so glad I came here to Leander ISD. QUEST has helped me so much—I only had 2 friends before, and one was my dad. Now I have friends!" "We can embrace our nerdiness in QUEST!" "We learn new things in QUEST. In regular classes, I have learned the same things over and over. I have been taught the water cycle every year since kindergarten." This service was meeting the needs of identified gifted students.

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QUEST middle school students are usually automatically enrolled in the QUEST Studies class but are also given the opportunity to opt out of the QUEST Studies class and select another elective, such as, Spanish, AVID, or the Gateway/Science STEM class. Provisions are made for a student that opts out of the QUEST studies class for support in a QUEST Lab with the QUEST teacher.

On most campuses the QUEST Studies class has a large number of students in the class. One QUEST teacher made the comment that she felt the district has over-identified students as gifted. Administrators appeared to be satisfied with the services and felt that the needs of gifted kids were being met at their schools.

The PACE/Pre-AP[®] mathematics experience in grades 6 and 7 prepares students for Pre-AP[®] Algebra I in grade 8. Native Spanish speakers are taking AP[®] Spanish in 8th grade, and are scoring 3, 4, & 5s on the AP[®] examination! Leander ISD middle schools also participates in the Duke TIP (Talent Identification Program). These programs are available for all advanced students, but many QUEST students participate.

Identified gifted middle school students are provided the G/T services through the QUEST class. These students and other advanced students also have an array of additional challenging experiences through electives, leadership opportunities, Gateway into Technology, and special interest activities, such as Robotics, Math Counts, student clubs and Destination Imagination.

Students also have the options to take an examination for acceleration to progress to an advanced grade level.

High School G/T Services

LISD's high school QUEST students may participate in a QUEST class in which they select an independent study project in an area of their choice. They may also participate in a QUEST Lab designed to meet individual student's needs and interests. QUEST students may also take a Pre AP[®] English QUEST class during ninth and tenth grades.

As part of the array of services, high school G/T students have the option of selecting from a multitude of Pre AP[®] and AP[®] classes. On many high school campuses, freshman are even taking AP[®] Human Geography. These are College Board open enrollment classes for any student who wants to participate. LISD students are taking the AP[®] exams and are scoring well. For example on one campus, there were 1,521 exams taken with 860 students. Many of the students participating in Pre AP[®] and AP[®] classes are identified gifted. Teachers teaching Pre AP[®] and AP[®] classes have the 30 state required hours of G/T professional development.

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Another option in the array of services for high school students is participation in the International Baccalaureate® (IB) Programme on select campuses. The number of tests taken and the number of student's scoring 4-7 have increased from the preceding year. Many of the students participating in these classes are identified G/T students. IB teachers also have the 30 state required hours of G/T professional development.

At Cedar Park High School, AP Capstone™, a College Board program, was in its first year of implementation. The first year is referred to as the AP Seminar year. Students are exploring in-depth themes as they use their analytical skills to delve deeper into topics. The second year is referred to as the AP Research year. Students research a topic of interest and prepare a product/presentation and a 5,000 word thesis. Other high school campuses will begin AP Capstone™ in the next few years. This is available for all advanced students. Many G/T students are participating in this class. AP Capstone teachers have their 30 hours of G/T training.

More options in the array of services that are provided for all high school students include Dual Credit, Destination Imagination, Science Fair, Computer Science/Technology, Career Tech, Special Interest Activities, and Leadership Opportunities. Gifted students may choose to participate in these options. High schools were proud of all the students who participated in these programs. For example, Vista Ridge High School was especially proud of their success in the student participation in the Science Fair; they have won Regional 10 times!

Also included in the array of services for high school students is the option for early graduation or examination for acceleration.

Findings:

Elementary Program

The pull-out program at the elementary level provides challenging, creative experiences for the G/T identified student. The QUEST teachers are well trained to meet the needs of gifted students. One of the biggest assets to this program is that the students are in a risk free environment. This class also gives students an opportunity to learn something new and have time to work on more projects that the regular classroom teacher might find challenging to implement. The students and parents of these students are satisfied with this model. On many elementary campuses the QUEST teachers were referred to as Instructional Leaders on their campus.

Criticism from a pull out model comes from other constituents, mostly regular classroom teachers and principals. The complaint is that there should be more push-in to benefit ALL students. This was a consistent complaint on elementary campuses. In the reviewer's opinion this is more of an over-identification and curriculum issue than service issue. On the Dual Language campus, it was found to be more of a challenge to pull-out students. An

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alternate plan was put in place, and will be monitored in the 2016-17 school year. Additional G/T training will be provided for Dual Language teachers.

The PACE Math Program, which is not designated a gifted program, causes some confusion. My question is if a student shows only strengths and talents in math will they also be a part of the QUEST services for gifted?

These QUEST teachers, who are the heart and soul of this service option, are given time during the year to gather together to discuss issues on their campuses, curriculum and assessment. This keeps the consistency strong in the district.

Middle School Program

In many districts across Texas, G/T services fall apart in the middle school. This was NOT true for Leander ISD gifted students. The QUEST Studies class was one of the better models I have observed to serve gifted middle school students. Middle school is an emotionally challenging time for these students and gifted students emotions are even more intensified. Leander has developed a service where gifted middle school students can be together every day. The overwhelming positive reaction from the students was so refreshing. It was also an easier arrangement for administrators. Students are selecting this class. When observing students in these classes, they are watching the time constantly, not because they are bored and want the class to be over, but because they don't want to leave this class.

If students opt out of the interdisciplinary QUEST Studies class to take another elective, such as Spanish, AVID, or Gateway/ STEM class, then they are no longer receiving services in the four core areas with a G/T trained teacher. AVID, a College Readiness class, is a class that could benefit many students. It would be helpful if G/T students didn't have to remove themselves from the QUEST Studies class to participate in the other programs.

High School Program

G/T students have a scheduled opportunity to remain together during their 9th and 10th grade years in a Pre AP[®] QUEST English class. The QUEST Lab is also a safe haven for students. This continues the risk free atmosphere that Leander ISD has provided to meet the social and emotional needs of G/T students while receiving services in English.

Leander ISD has a strong Pre AP[®] and AP[®] and IB[®] program with many choices for students to excel in their area of interest and strength. Those classes are taught by G/T trained teachers. G/T students are able to receive advanced instruction in the other four core areas through their Pre AP[®] or

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AP[®], IB[®] classes. The AP Capstone™ is a wonderful addition that really prepares students academically for college. Even though this is a program available for all students, the goals of the AP[®] Capstone are aligned with the State goal for gifted students. I hope that all the high schools that are not participating in IB[®] will eventually have this option.

Recommendations:

- **Elementary**

- Continue the QUEST pull-put program with the highly qualified teachers.
- Encourage QUEST teachers to spend time supporting regular education teachers as they extend learning in the regular classroom. Give the regular education classroom teacher an opportunity to ask questions of the QUEST teacher, such as: “how can this lesson be extended in my class for the gifted child?” This communication could be done on a simple form or as an email.
- Encourage QUEST teachers to be instructional leaders on their campuses that teach and model higher level of thinking strategies for the regular education teacher through push-in lessons.
- Provide campus training on the social and emotional needs of the gifted for the campus so everyone can understand why gifted students benefit from being with other G/T students.
- Add academic acceleration to the curriculum so that it is intensely different than the regular curriculum (see Curriculum and Instruction section on report).
- Continue scheduling meeting times for all elementary QUEST teachers so they can discuss similar issues and concerns.
- Continue monitoring the services provided to the Dual Language Gifted child.
- If PACE is serving gifted math students, designate it as part of the services, but keep it open to other qualified students.
- Since PACE teachers have many gifted students, they should work on obtaining their 30 hours of G/T training.
- If changes are made in the curriculum, consider updating QUEST Purpose, Goals and Big Ideas.

- **Middle School**

- Continue the QUEST Studies Class with highly qualified teachers.
- Integrate AVID skills in the QUEST Studies class so that students have those skills but don't have to choose that class over QUEST studies.
- Share resources with Gateway STEM class, specifically the technology
- Encourage the Gateway STEM teacher to obtain their 30 hours of G/T training.
- Require that all Pre AP teachers have their 30 hours in gifted education.

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- **High school gifted programs**

- Continue the strong AP[®] and IB[®] program.
- Continue the Pre-AP[®] QUEST English class in 9th and 10th grade.
- Expand the AP Capstone[™] program for the 11th and 12th graders on other campuses that are not participating in IB[®].
- List Pre AP[®], AP[®], and IB[®] as part of your continuum of services for high school gifted students. This would include the AP Capstone[™] class. They are still open enrollment classes, but all those teachers have been trained with the required 30 G/T hours.
- Organize a community Student Fair for students to share their research from AP Capstone[™] products. Include professionals from the real world to evaluate these products.
- Expand the numbers in the G/T Mentorship Program on campuses that do not have AP Capstone[™] or IB[®].
 - Have a district fair with all G/T Mentorship Projects from all high schools. Include professionals from the real world to evaluate these products.

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Curriculum and Instruction

Section 3 of the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires districts to provide curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of gifted students by modifying the depth, complexity, and pacing of the general school program.

Observations/Research:

Visiting Leander ISD in May turned out to be a great time to visit QUEST classes. I was able to see many end-of- year projects. At the elementary level there were many showcases where I was able to view the products and talk to students and teachers about the learning that occurred in the QUEST classroom.

There are G/T curriculum documents, Leander ISD QUEST Scope and Sequence, which are provided for the teachers grades K-8. The curriculum is broken down into five areas: Affective, Creative Thinking, Critical Thinking, Research/Independent Study, and Evaluation. The elementary documents are listed on the district website and can be downloaded. I was given a curriculum document that reflected some new lessons and revisions for 2015-16 school year in the K-5 Scope and Sequence. All lessons were focused on creative, productive and critical thinking. These documents were all well aligned with district goals for services.

As I visited elementary and middle school campuses I recognized facets of the curriculum being implemented. Even though there were slight differences in how curriculum was presented, there was consistency among the campuses.

On elementary campuses, principals consistently requested more push-in services because they believed that what QUEST teachers were doing should be done with all students.

Middle School QUEST Studies also has a scope and sequence for units of instruction. Their units also included Pre AP[®] strategies. Although there was positive feedback concerning the 7th grade children's book project, there was concern that this part of the curriculum needed more substance.

High School curriculum in the Pre AP[®] English QUEST class includes advanced content and Pre AP[®] strategies for English. This is the only class where gifted students are together in 9th and 10th grade. Students are able to select Pre AP[®], AP[®] or IB[®] classes for the remaining core areas of study, Math, Science and Social Studies. There are AP[®] and IB[®] curriculum objectives that teachers are required to teach. Teachers of these classes are G/T trained to differentiate for the gifted child in those classes.

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Findings:

Elementary Curriculum

The curriculum scope and sequence developed for Leander ISD was based on sound G/T practices. The documents reminded me of the Principles of a Differentiated Curriculum, see appendix, which was written by some of the greatest minds in gifted education (Sandra Kaplan, Irv Sato, Joseph Renzulli, Dorothy Sisk). This program included the Affective Domain which is often overlooked in gifted education. It is so important for students to understand how they are different and similar than other students around them. It is also important to appreciate those differences and similarities.

Leander's QUEST scope and sequence included areas on creative productive thinking and critical thinking. Over the years, the regular curriculum has been expanding to include these areas as well. The days when only the gifted students analyze, synthesize and evaluate are long gone. All students should be doing more of this in the regular classroom. All students should be learning research skills and communicating to others what they have researched. This is probably why so many elementary campus principals wanted more push-in than pull-out lessons. They want and expect all their teachers to teach students at the higher levels of Blooms taxonomy. They want all children exposed to those ideas. Your outstanding regular curriculum teachers also recognize that all students need this type of instruction.

The large number of identified students also has a significant impact on the perspective of the G/T curriculum. If 30 % of a campus is identified G/T and is receiving services, then why can't more students be included. Gifted education services are provided for students because the regular curriculum does not meet their needs. The curriculum should be so advanced that it is not something all students would benefit from.

There were a few parents that expressed a need for more in-depth content. Even though they felt that the research and the communication skills were very important, they wanted their young students to learning something new.

Leander ISD has a scope and sequence with lessons and has been effective for teachers to implement. Many districts have a scope but it does not give teachers lessons. Leander ISD does and this is a positive thing! Leander ISD could tweak their scope and sequence by adding more advanced high-interest topics of study to their scope and sequence. (Oceanography, Architecture, Enigmas) Keep the affective, and research/independent study, evaluation domains as well as lessons on creative and productive thinking and critical thinking with more high-interest advanced content. Organizing your grade levels with big ideas or themes would automatically increase the level of complexity. For example, in Kindergarten the theme or big idea could be Adaptation. Instead of learning about spiders, bugs and snakes, you could look at how these different animals adapt in different biomes. The G/T curriculum should be so advanced that when Kindergarten students go home and tell their parents they are learning about the different biomes in

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the world and how animals adapt to their environment, the parents will be impressed! The Texas Performance Standard Project, at www.texaspsp.org, has a few high interest projects that are worth looking at to incorporate into your studies.

As I went into the QUEST classrooms, I did not see any visible signs that teachers were purposefully teaching the elements of depth and complexity. This is often what distinguishes the difference between the regular education and gifted curriculum. There are lots of resources now available to help teach these elements to teachers and students. This would be another easy addition to the G/T Scope and Sequence.

The curriculum is not always understood by the regular classroom or the administrators. There seems to be a disconnect between perception of a QUEST classroom and what actually goes on in the QUEST classroom.

The STAAR is not a measurement of the success for this curriculum but it does reflect that these students can be successful on the STAAR test and learn some new advanced content. The STAAR test has a low passing standard, so a passing rate is not a good indicator of growth. The advanced measures have room for improvement.

Middle School Curriculum

Students that are in the QUEST Studies have a curriculum overview. The topics on the sixth grade and eighth grade overview have high interest content. Teachers and students were so engaged in those topics. I can just imagine what the discussions and products will be like this year with all the political unrest. I really enjoyed watching the Trial of Planet Earth. The eighth grade students were so engaged; they had researched and prepared for that event like a real professional. They did not want that class to end.

The seventh grade project was also good, and seeing the students read their original story to younger students was rewarding for both parties involved. Several teachers said there wasn't enough in this unit to keep students engaged. I think that comment should be investigated further and perhaps seventh grade teachers can add a little more to the seventh grade study.

It warms my heart to see G/T middle students working together on these relevant real life projects. Middle school is such a hard time developmentally, and twice as hard for emotional intensified gifted students.

If students are not participating in the interdisciplinary QUEST Studies class, then there is a concern that they are not receiving gifted services in the four core areas by a trained GT teacher.

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PACE Math is not a program just for gifted. It includes advanced math content. Many gifted students do participate in this program. A concern is that these PACE teachers should also be G/T trained to differentiate the math for the gifted student.

High School Curriculum

At the high school level, the continuum of gifted services listed are the QUEST Lab, QUEST Independent Study/Mentorship Class, and the Pre-AP English QUEST class. The QUEST lab is just a support time built in for gifted students and there is no set curriculum. The G/T Independent Study/Mentorship program has curriculum guidelines that are similar to the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP). The Pre-AP English QUEST Class curriculum uses Pre AP strategies with advanced content.

Listed as an additional array of learning opportunities for all advanced high school students are Pre AP[®], AP[®] or IB[®] classes. The IB[®] senior year curriculum includes independent study and a research component. AP Capstone™ has also a senior year independent research component. High school gifted students receive their gifted curriculum in the remaining four core areas Science, Math and Social Studies through Pre AP[®], AP[®], or IB[®] Classes. That curriculum is dictated by the AP[®] or IB[®] learning objectives. In the reviewer's opinion, this is really a continuum of gifted services. Although these classes are open to all students interested in pursuing them, these teachers have been trained with the 30 hours of G/T education and differentiate the curriculum based on the needs of the gifted students in the classroom.

Reviewing AP[®] and IB[®] test results are a good measure to determine if the classes had the rigorous curriculum that was required. The AP[®] test results in 2014-15 showed that out of 1,445 G/T students, 80% scored a 3 or above. IB test results for 2014-15 showed that 93 students out of 206 tests taken scored 4-7, an improvement from last year.

- **Recommendations for Elementary Curriculum:**

- Tweak the existing scope and sequence to add more advanced high-interest content.
- Integrate the elements of depth and complexity into existing curriculum.
 - Provide training on the elements of depth and complexity to K-8 QUEST Teachers.
 - Provide depth and complexity icon materials from www.jtayloreducation.com.
- Include a grade level big idea or theme to add more depth to existing lessons.
- Provide opportunities to explain the curriculum that has been designed for the gifted to administrators.
- Share some of the Blooms taxonomy lessons and the creative and productivity lessons with a push in model.
- Meet with grade level teachers once a month in order to support the regular education curriculum and to help teachers differentiate content for gifted students.

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- Add more scholarly language and vocabulary to units.
 - Continue to teach lessons to gifted students to help them understand their giftedness.
 - Include more professionals from the outside world to visit classrooms to share their expertise.
 - Continue to monitor the STAAR advanced percentages for gifted students and the performance growth from preceding year
-
- **Recommendations for Middle School Curriculum**
 - Ask several 7th grade teachers to examine the 7th grade QUEST Studies overview and make recommendations for additional content or a different unit of instruction.
 - Continue the QUEST studies curriculum for grades 6 – 8.
 - Encourage PACE Math teacher to obtain 30 hours of G/T training to help understand G/T students and differentiate the curriculum for those students.
 - Encourage all Pre AP[®] teachers at the middle school level to obtain their 30 hours of G/T training to help understand G/T students and differentiate the curriculum for those students.
 - Continue to monitor the STAAR advanced percentages for gifted students and the performance growth from preceding year.
 - Integrate the elements of depth and complexity into the existing curriculum.
 - Provide training on the elements of depth and complexity to 6-8 QUEST Teachers
 - Provide depth and complexity icon materials from www.jtayloreducation.com
-
- **Recommendations for High School Curriculum**
 - Continue the Pre AP[®] English QUEST class emphasizing the Pre AP[®] strategies.
 - Continue offering the G/T Independent Mentorship class, especially on campuses not participating in AP Capstone[®] or IB[®].
 - Continue growing the Pre AP[®], AP[®], IB[®] programs with G/T trained teachers.
 - Integrate the elements of depth and complexity to support AP[®] and IB[®] testing.
 - Expand AP Capstone[™] to high schools not participating in IB.
 - Continue to monitor the AP[®] and IB[®] test scores

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Professional Development

Section 4 of the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires districts to provide all personnel involved in the planning, creation, and delivery of services to gifted/talented students possess the knowledge required to develop and provide appropriate options and differentiated curricula.

Observations/Research:

Leander ISD's G/T professional development is facilitated by Kathy Wood. She insures that every administrator and counselor receives their 6 hours of G/T professional development in nature and needs and service options. The QUEST teachers are required to have 30 hours of G/T training. LISD organizes an annual district professional development conference with qualified speakers and consultants, including GT speakers and sessions. Kathy also provides some of the G/T required 30 hours. Reviewer examined the district developed Nature and Needs course training booklet, which also included topics on assessment, identification, differentiation, creativity and social and emotional needs. QUEST teachers are also given the opportunity to attend the Texas Association of Gifted and Talented Students (TAGT) annual conference. On the elementary campuses the regular education classroom teachers, that have gifted students in their classroom, are asked to take 6 hours of G/T training.

Pre AP[®], AP[®] and IB[®] teachers are required to complete 30 hours in gifted education. Some College Board, NMSI or IB trainings can be substituted for some of the curriculum required hours.

All teachers that provide services to gifted students are required to obtain a 6 hour update each year.

Findings:

The district is in compliance by having all QUEST teachers and high school Pre AP[®], AP[®] and IB[®] teachers complete the required G/T professional development hours. One of the disadvantages of an elementary pull-out program is that all the responsibility of delivering G/T services is placed on the pull-out teacher. The regular education teacher has the gifted student most of the school day. All elementary teachers should be encouraged to complete the G/T hours over time so that they can differentiate content on a daily basis. The middle school QUEST Studies teachers have the students in an interdisciplinary class every day so they are trained with the 30 hours. It would be an added benefit if all the Pre AP teachers at the middle school also obtained their G/T hours.

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Recommendations for professional development topics:

- AP[®] and Pre AP[®] training for secondary teachers-College Board Summer Institutes
- Pre-AP[®] Interdisciplinary Strategies – Springboard College Board
- Essentials for G/T Differentiation in All Classes
- Texas Performance Standards Project-What is it all About?
- Independent Investigation Method –Research Model
- Elements of Depth and Complexity to Differentiate for the Gifted
- Local district training to help teachers and administrators understand district’s G/T program, goals, and curriculum
- Continue offering 30 hours of G/T training to all QUEST teachers and other interested teachers
- Continue offering opportunities to attend TAGT conference
- Continue QUEST teachers meeting together to plan, create or just discuss their professional development needs.
- Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted
- The Twice Exceptional Child-Using resources from www.gtequity.org
- Creating a Productive G/T Parent Advocacy Group
- Nature and Needs Course booklet had a lot of information for a 6 hour training on Nature and Needs. Consider re-titling book to Gifted and Talented Overview.
- Encourage Pre AP[®] middle school teachers to obtain 30 hours of G/T education.

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Family Community Involvement

Section 5 of the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students requires a district to involve family and community members in services designed for gifted/talented students throughout the school year

Observations/Research:

The reviewer conducted walkthroughs and spoke to many constituents regarding the QUEST Services. I spoke with teachers, administrators, parents and students in order to get a feel for how they felt about the G/T services at Leander ISD. I also reviewed the district website and examined the Advanced Academic page and the QUEST pages, and I reviewed the March 2016 Secondary and Elementary QUEST Notes. I also read every comment written on the District Parent Surveys and examined the results from the Community and Student Engagement Report.

Findings

This part of the state plan emphasizes how the district communicates to parents and the community information regarding the QUEST or G/T services. Leander ISD does a good job of sharing information to the public through the district website and a district newsletter. Individual campuses differ in how they share information.

The school district webpage presents tons of information regarding QUEST services. There are so many good things going on in QUEST that it will be hard to decide what should and should not be included on the website. The page that most parents will go to, is QUEST Parents FAQ. There are many links that lead to information that is no longer up to date. For example, under Parent Resources, a parent would most likely click on the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students. This link takes parents to the 1996 version of the plan instead of the 2009 revision of the plan. The link to the state's advocacy group, TAGT, is also an outdated link. The special events link repeats the same information that is on the G/T identification page, and the Readings link should be updated to include newer releases.

The QUEST Quotes also has lots of good information on it. The pictures are wonderful, but is anyone really looking at this information online? Is it published and given to parents? The pages themselves are very cluttered and hard to read online and yet they contain a great deal of good information. If the perception of the document is just the publishing of positive quotes that concept would be boring, and a reader might not get to last page where the information about special honors and awards these children have received is located.

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Leander ISD has done an excellent job of conducting annual surveys to receive feedback from parents. They are a valuable tool in helping improve the QUEST services in the district. The 2015-2016 surveys on the most part have mirrored the positive responses the reviewer received out in the field. But there are also some unhappy parents that have expressed their concerns regarding QUEST services. Those concerns shouldn't be dismissed because they are not same as the majority of the comments. Individual campuses should be made of aware of complaints that are expressed for that campus. Even if it is just one parent that feels that way, that one parent can sabotage the perception of an entire program with negative feedback. In the 2015-2016 responses, there were a few repeated responses that will require attention: lack of communication from teacher to parent on what is going on in QUEST, when project deadlines are, and how students are doing in the QUEST classroom. Another concern from administrators is their perception that they are not aware of decisions that are being made at the district level regarding QUEST. This comment was mostly from elementary principals.

Another survey response that caught the reviewer's attention is the one parent comment that the QUEST curriculum is just a "Rinse and Repeat" curriculum. This parent expressed a concern that she has mentioned this complaint on numerous other surveys and nothing ever changes. This is one concern that would be worth looking into. When parents perceive they are being listened to and taken seriously, they can be your biggest advocates.

There were individual showcases for the student's independent study projects. Parents and the community were invited to these displays. Students were available to talk to visitors about their research. This is another way to share what is going on in the QUEST program. The showcases that were brought to the reviewer's attention were for elementary campuses. It was hard to talk to every student, and I felt that some students were overlooked. One of the parent evaluation comments confirmed that fear, when he said his son's biggest disappointment was when no one talked to him about his research.

Another Program evaluation is reported on the TEA's Community and Student Engagement report. Leander ISD has every campuses reported as Exemplary except Running Brushy Elementary and Ronald Reagan Elementary, and these two schools are rated Recognized. The evaluation performance measures are; Equity in Identification and Services, Gifted Program Services, G/T Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Development, Parent Involvement and Communication.

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Recommendations:

- Streamline the Advanced Academic QUEST information on the district website
- Correct links on Quick Links/Parent Resources page with current links
- Eliminate double postings and links
- Remove any postings that are not pdf documents. Some of the slide presentations can be downloaded and easily changed.
- Turn QUEST Quotes into a short video with pictures and a few student quotes and honors. Have a video for elementary, middle school and high school news. You may then need to change the name of the link.
- Follow up on negative criticisms of QUEST services
- Look into beginning a Leander ISD Parent G/T Advocacy Group
- Send a group of Leander ISD parents to TAGT
- Develop a system for showcases that will visually identify whether or not a student has had a visitor at the showcase
- At the high school level, have a district showcase with an authentic audience of community professionals providing feedback
- Compile a list of professionals that can be mentors on independent studies in elementary, middle or secondary campuses.
- Review the district created QUEST Evaluation Report form that teachers send home after every unit of study. Be sure that all campuses give that feedback to parents regarding a student's progress and performance in the QUEST class.
- Re-emphasize the importance of communication with parents regarding timelines and due dates for independent study with QUEST teachers.
- Request a short time period at principal meetings for district G/T coordinator to share information on district wide G/T services
- Develop a short bulleted list of upcoming events for principal's reference.
- Consider putting only the information needed in a QUEST Services Booklet. Pdf the booklet and load on website so that everything you need or want to share is one place.

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In Conclusion:

Leander ISD has had quality G/T services for over a decade. It has made a positive impact on many, many students. Grouping G/T students together in a secondary setting is not something you see very often and in the reviewer's opinion has prepared those students for higher education. As students move through their school career they will cherish their independent studies and presentations.

Over-identification and some minor changes in curriculum are the two major areas of concern. The shift in curriculum is because many of the creative and critical thinking skills emphasized in QUEST should be moved to the regular education curriculum. QUEST curriculum should then add some more depth and complexity into its curriculum.

As the reviewer's final note, I would like to share a quote from a former QUEST student who is now a University of Texas, San Antonio pre-med student. She said, "I am in college now and I still use my QUEST skills!" That is a tribute to this district.

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References:

The following references were mentioned in the review.

- Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students
- Depth and Complexity Icon Chart
- Principles for a Differentiated Curriculum for Gifted and Talented Students

Appendix

- The following Appendix is an accumulation of documents used in the writing of this document. It is by far not the only source of information that the reviewer used in this review. Information was collected in person through campus walkthroughs, acquired through TEA websites, and the district and campus websites.
 - The order is as follows:
 - Student demographic documents
 - Student reports
 - Assessment documents and procedures
 - Description of services documents
 - Curriculum and instruction documents
 - Program evaluation documents