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| *Description of Program* |

General Function

* To implement and monitor a consistent and equitable gifted identification and assessment process.
* To ensure that information about the StarGATE Gifted and Talented Program is available to interested parents and community members.
* To communicate to staff StarGATE Gifted and Talented policies and procedures as well as timelines of implementation.
* To provide continuous and ongoing professional development district-wide in the nature and needs of gifted students and strategies for meeting these needs.
* To offer an advanced-level curriculum K-12 which supports and extends the learning of the general education classroom; students are provided services specific to their needs at each grade level.
* To annually evaluate the StarGATE Gifted and Talented program to ensure best practices in gifted education and quality services for gifted learners.

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| *Description of Program* |

Structure

Students may be nominated for the StarGATE Program at any time by teachers, administrators, counselors, peers, parents, or self. Students are screened by StarGATE personnel trained in the nature and needs of gifted students, assessed using quantitative and qualitative data, and are identified by a team of trained teachers and administrators throughout the school year.

* **Grades K-5 Elementary Program** (Combination Send-out group)- Identified GT students in grades K/1, 2/3, and 4/5 may attend send-out one day a week, located in a classroom at the new Sunset school. These students are offered a challenging academic program with curriculum differentiation spanning subject area content 1-3 grade levels above their own. Direct instruction is given specific to the nature and needs of gifted students to address their social/emotional development. Differentiation is also used to meet student needs in regular education classrooms through compacting, content acceleration, and enrichment/extension opportunities. This is facilitated through cluster grouping students.
* **Grades 6-8 Middle School Program-** (Enrichment Class)- Identified GT students in grades 6 and 7 attend a gifted studies class one period each day. These students are offered a challenging academic program with curriculum differentiation spanning subject area content 1-3 grade levels above their own. Direct instruction is given specific to the nature and needs of gifted students to address their social/emotional development. Differentiation is also used to meet student needs in regular education classrooms, through cluster grouping in core academic subjects and advanced math classes.
* **Grades 9-12 High School Program-** (Send-out groups and Honors/Advanced Placement)– Program is designed to encourage self-nomination and to enable students to earn college hours based on AP College Board guidelines. Students can attend two 40-minute send-out groups each week. One session is a split group that meets in the media center conference room with the GT specialist and High School counselor to discuss social/emotional issues specific to gifted students. The other session meets in a whole group in a teacher’s classroom with the GT specialist to provide challenging academic subjects/topics not offered at CHS. Students can also take AP/Honors courses offered at CHS.

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| *Description of Program* |

Staffing

* **GT Department:** 2 Gifted and Talented Specialists/Teachers
* **CHS GT Staff-** 1 Advanced Placement Teacher

Students Served

5.7% of the current PCSD #6 student population is served by the StarGATE Program. PCSD#6 serves 54 identified gifted students at the elementary level, 38 gifted students at the middle school, and 31 gifted students at the high school. Program increase from last year is approximately 38%. Additionally, through the increase in participation in advanced classes at the middle school, high-ability students who are not identified for StarGATE are also being provided with challenging coursework in mathematics and language arts.

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| *StarGATE Mission and Goals* |

**StarGATE Vision Statement**

Park County School District #6 is committed to developing responsible learners with skill and knowledge to succeed in an ever-changing world. The district recognizes that some students have the potential for performing at remarkably high levels when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These students have needs that require unique learning experiences. The district will provide tailored instructional services, known collectively as StarGATE, for intellectually gifted and talented students from kindergarten through grade twelve designed to meet their academic, social, emotional, and creative needs. StarGATE will provide these students with opportunities for exploring, experiencing, and expressing, as well as developing a sense of individual responsibility to the school community and to a changing society. The mission of the program is to chart a course that launches the student on a life-long journey of learning.

**StarGATE Goals**

The Park County School District #6 initiative for high-ability students has three fundamental purposes:

1. *To fairly and effectively identify students whose intellectual, academic, and creative abilities are far above average*
   1. by using multiple and varied assessment instruments to provide evidence of giftedness, including both qualitative and quantitative measures, and
   2. by training staff in the recognition of gifted characteristics and behaviors.
2. *To meet the educational needs of high-ability learners and address their psychological, social, creative, emotional, and career needs*
   1. by offering enrichment and acceleration opportunities through send-out programming, small group instruction, and other methods as appropriate,
   2. by providing direct affective instruction to encourage positive socio-emotional growth and development, and
   3. by assisting teachers and counselors in meeting the unique needs of this population.
3. *To guide the educational process of high-ability learners*
   1. by developing an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) for each student identified as gifted and talented.

In addition, the StarGATE program will strive to:

1. *Increase awareness of and support for the unique characteristics and special learning needs of gifted learners among the professional community of Park County School District #6*
   1. by providing professional development for Cody school district faculty and staff on the characteristics and needs of gifted learners and how best to meet these needs, and
   2. by encouraging and supporting educational opportunities in gifted and talented education for staff members.
2. *Involve the Cody community, especially parents, in the gifted and talented program*
   1. by developing communication strategies to increase the visibility and effectiveness of the gifted program,
   2. by raising funds to acquire additional resources for the gifted program through the StarGATE Foundation, and
   3. by facilitating parent meetings offering information on the characteristics and needs of gifted learners, as well as an opportunity for parents to discuss aspects of parenting gifted children and support one another.
3. *Regularly evaluate our efforts and make appropriate changes, constantly striving for a more effective gifted and talented program based on the needs of Cody students and research-based best practices.*

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| *Program Effectiveness* |

In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the StarGATE program, the following questions were investigated:

1. To what extent are the stated mission and goals of the gifted program fulfilled in their actual operation?
2. To what extent is the gifted program meeting the needs of identified students as perceived by relevant groups?
3. What evidence exists to document positive student performance trends for students participating in the gifted program?
4. What are the program strengths and weaknesses in relation to best practices in gifted education?

Data was collected through surveys of relevant groups, analysis of academic growth according to MAP test scores, analysis of Advanced Placement classes and exams taken, and comparison of the program to standards set by the National Association for Gifted Children. A summary of data follows.

**MAP Data/AP Exams**

Analyzing student growth based on MAP data was difficult this year because there was high participation in StarGATE. Last year data was compared based on students who participated in Elementary send out and those who did not. This year slightly more than 90% of students identified to participate in the K-5 StarGATE send-out program and the 6th & 7th grade Enrichment class participated. Because of this, the MAP data was analyzed in several different ways to provide a more complete and accurate picture of the effect of the StarGATE program on student achievement.

*Elementary MAP Data*

First, average growth of students participating in the StarGATE Send-out program was compared with average growth of identified (equal ability) but non-participating students. In mathematics, participating students grew an average of 15.3 points on the RIT. Non-participating but identified students grew an

average of 11.83 points on the RIT. In reading, participating students grew an average of 10.9 points on the RIT. Non-participating but identified students grew an average of 5.17 points on the RIT. In language, participating students grew an average of 9.6 points on the RIT. Non-participating but identified student grew an average of 7 points on the RIT. This translates to about 30% greater growth in mathematics, over 100% greater growth (more than double) in reading, and about 40% greater growth in language for identified students who attended Send-out than for those who did not attend. This is similar to the previous year’s MAP data analysis, in which participating students also showed a greater average growth than those who did not participate. This adds validity to these numbers, but they should still be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size of non-participating students.

Next, average growth of identified, participating StarGATE students was compared with the expected “typical growth” for this group. The “typical growth” is the average growth of students in the same grade level who earned the same beginning-of-year RIT score, according to national norms released by the NWEA. While no information from the NWEA is provided on the ability levels of these students, their initial RIT scores match those of the identified StarGATE students, so most are very high. In mathematics, participating StarGATE students grew an average of 15.3 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 8.67 points for this group. In reading, participating students grew an average of 10.9 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 5.65 RIT points for this group. Finally, in language, participating students grew an average of 9.6 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 4.81 RIT points for this group. This means that identified, participating students grew almost double in all areas compared with the “typical growth” of students in the same grades with the same beginning-of-year RIT scores; in mathematics, the average growth was about 76% more than “typical growth,” in reading, it was about 93% more than “typical growth,” and in language, it was about 99% more than “typical growth.”

Finally, average growth of identified students (both participating and non-participating in Send-out) was compared in classrooms where teachers have been trained in gifted education through the district professional development offerings (last 3-4 years) with those who have not participated in these voluntary trainings in gifted education. In mathematics, students in classrooms with teachers who have participated in these trainings averaged 16.41 RIT points, compared with average growth of 14.56 RIT points in classrooms where teachers have not attended one or more of these trainings. In reading, the average

growth in classrooms with teachers who participated was 13.32 RIT points, compared with 10.34 RIT points

for those who did not. In language, the average growth in classrooms with teachers who participated was 13 RIT points, compared with 7.178 RIT points for classrooms with teachers who did not participate. This translates to approximately 13% greater growth in mathematics for identified gifted students in classrooms where teachers have participated in district-provided training. In reading, the average growth was almost 30% greater, and in language, it was more than 80% greater in classrooms where teachers have participated in the training.

*Secondary Data*

At the Secondary level MAPS data was difficult to compare longitudinally because students only have limited data dating from Fall 2008. So, comparisons were made in participation of the Enrichment class (6th & 7th graders) compared to typical growth, growth of identified 7th grade students who took Algebra compared to 11th grade students Math MAPS scores in the Fall of their 8th grade year, and students who took advanced courses (9th-12th grades) who could have taken the Advanced Placement exams for college credit.

The average growth of identified, StarGATE students who participated in the Enrichment class was compared with the expected “typical growth.” In mathematics, participating StarGATE students grew an average of 7.9 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 4.95 points for this group. In reading, participating students grew an average of 4.95 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 2.42 RIT points for this group. Finally, in language, participating students grew an average of 4.9 RIT points, compared with a “typical growth” average of 2.05 RIT points for this group. Similar to the elementary program identified, participating students grew almost double in all areas compared with the “typical growth” of students in the same grades with the same beginning-of-year RIT scores; in mathematics, the average growth was about 60% more than “typical growth,” in reading, it was about 104% more than “typical growth,” and in language, it was about 139% more than “typical growth.”

The Spring Math RIT scores for identified StarGATE students in the 7th Grade Algebra class was compared to the 11th Grade identified StarGATE students Fall of 2008 Math RIT scores. This data would have been the Fall of the 8th grade year for this years 11th graders. The average RIT score for the 7th graders

was a 252.14 and for the 11th graders in the Fall of their 8th grade year was 250.2. This compares to about a 2 point difference. The average typical growth for this group was 2 RIT points. This means that when given the opportunity to take an advanced Math class StarGATE students in the 7th grade made a years more growth than the “typical growth.”

In analyzing advanced courses at Cody High School we wanted to see how many students took advanced courses compared to how many took the Advanced Placement exam. 123 9th through 12th grade students took Physics, Advanced Chemistry, Honors Government, Calculus, AP Biology, Honors World History, AP U.S. History, and both Honors British Literature/Honors American Literature. All the above courses qualified students to take the Advanced Placement exam to receive college credit. 12 students took AP exams with 2 students taking 2 exams in different courses. This means that 11% of students that could have taken an AP exam did. Of the 12, 7 were StarGATE students. However, in 9th through 12th grades 18 StarGATE students took 25 advanced courses and only 9 exams where taken. That means that 58% of StarGATE students took at least one advanced course and of the 25 advanced courses taken 36% of students took the corresponding AP exam for college credit.

**Surveys**

Surveys were administered to five relevant stakeholder groups: school administrators, counselors and school psychologists, K-12 teachers, identified gifted students grades 6-12, and parents of identified gifted students. Results from the surveys were varied, as expected, but some trends did emerge. For example, it is apparent that next year the program needs to increase communication, particularly with teachers, about what exactly goes on in the StarGATE program (curriculum used, goals for student growth, etc.). While there was communication this year in the form of a web site, handbook, voluntary trainings, and regular newsletters, there is still uncertainty. This is something to consider for next year. Additionally, differences in perception exist between the surveys administered to parents/students and those administered to teachers. Many teachers feel that classwork is sufficiently challenging for their gifted learners in most, if

not all, areas, while parents of gifted students and the students themselves frequently feel that it is

insufficiently challenging in most, if not all, areas. Finally, the surveys reveal a general need to provide increased information and professional development to all district staff and the community about the nature and needs of gifted learners and how to meet these needs.

*Administration*

Five administrators responded to the StarGATE administrator survey, with two from the elementary level, two from the secondary level, and one from the district level. All administrators noted support for the goals of the program as stated in the StarGATE program handbook, and all were familiar with the identification

process to select students for StarGATE. Two administrators felt that criteria were fair and two felt they were too broad, with one skipping this question. While most administrators who responded (3 out of 4) felt that all district populations have equitable access to StarGATE because of the identification process, one noted that “I hear folks say there are more students from a particular school because their teachers advocate more and insist more. I wonder.” Two administrators felt criteria are matched to the services the program offers, while two had no opinion.

Most administrators support compacting basic curriculum as an instructional approach for gifted learners (4 out of 5), and all five supported using above grade level content in English and mathematics.

Four out of five also support acceleration to a higher grade for a single subject in English and mathematics, and the majority (3 out of 5) support whole-grade acceleration. Three out of five also supported cluster grouping of gifted learners and pre-testing. Two administrators supported “testing out” of material or classes. The most commonly used differentiation strategy employed for gifted learners, according to administrators, is problem-finding and problem-solving, with four administrators noting this goes on in their schools. Three administrators noted the emphasis of higher order thinking skills, high-quality products, the development of skills to be self-directed learners, and independent study in their schools. Two administrators said that compacting is used for acceleration in their schools, and only one administrator noted that “we pretest to determine students’ content mastery,” “we employ an interdisciplinary approach,” or “we develop students’ research skills.”

In general, administrators felt that students are challenged sometimes but not always in language arts

(3 out of 4). Administrators were split (two and two) between “sufficiently challenged” and “challenged sometimes but not always” in math and science. In social studies two administrators felt that students are challenged sometimes but not always, one that they are sufficiently challenged, and one unsure. All administrators responded that they are satisfied with instruction in StarGATE classes.

Half of administrators attended a training on gifted education in the last two years and half did not, and responses from staff development related to gifted education, according to administrators, was varied. Two administrators noted the feedback has been “excellent,” two that it has been “adequate,” and one that it has been “poor.” All administrators cited an emphasis on critical and creative thinking skills and on independent learning skills as important benefits of StarGATE to identified students. Three out of five

noted that mastery of core areas of learning at an appropriate pace and depth, opportunities to learn with students of similar abilities and interests, improved social skills and leadership ability, and the development of coping strategies for emotional challenges commonly associated with giftedness are benefits of the program to students. Three out of five administrators felt that send-out/enrichment classes, small group instruction, and resources are beneficial services to teachers/students at their schools. Two out of five noted professional development as beneficial to teachers/students at their schools.

*Counselors/School Psychologists*

Six counselors or school psychologists responded to the StarGATE survey. Two of them work at the elementary level and three of them at the secondary level. Their training in gifted education is evenly split between no formal training, some district in-service training, and at least six hours of course work. Four of the responders support the goals of the gifted program as stated in the StarGATE handbook, while two were unfamiliar with the goals. All counselors/school psychologists are familiar with the identification process to select students for StarGATE. Two felt that all student populations have equitable access to StarGATE, while three felt that underachieving students do not have equitable access and one skipped this question. Five of the six respondents have attended no workshops or conferences related to gifted education in the last two years, while one has attended two to three. One respondent rated staff development experiences related to gifted education in the last two years as “excellent,” while one rated them as “poor” and four marked “did not attend.” Three counselors/psychologists felt somewhat prepared

to work with gifted students and two felt well-prepared. One noted that “I do not work with gifted students by law.” Four out of six responded that they are satisfied with instruction in StarGATE classes. One was very satisfied and one did not know. All felt that the opportunity to learn with students of similar abilities and interests is an important benefit of StarGATE to identified students. Five of six noted that improved social skills and leadership ability and the development of coping strategies for emotional challenges commonly associated with giftedness were important benefits for students. Four of the six responded that mastery of core areas of learning at an appropriate pace and depth, emphasis on critical and creative thinking skills, and emphasis on independent learning skills are important benefits of StarGATE for students.

*Students grades 9-12*

Eighteen students responded to the StarGATE survey in grades 9-12. Most students (83%) responded that StarGATE helps them to develop higher level thinking skills “often.” Students responded that StarGATE helps them to develop communication skills “often” or “always” (55%), with 44% responding “rarely” or “never.” Half of students noted that they are “often” given the opportunity to accelerate or receive different work in the regular classroom, with 33% responding “rarely,” 11% responding “always” and 6% responding

“never.” Most students (89%) noted that the regular class work is too easy and not challenging “often.” Most students responded that being in a classroom with equal ability peers helps to develop their learning “often” (56%) or “always” (28%). Half of students responded that the StarGATE teachers helps them with their special needs “always” or “often,” with 39% noting that they haven’t needed any help.

Most students “rarely” (56%) or “never” (33%) have to hide their ability in the regular classroom. While some students are teased about being smart “always” (17%) or “often” (11%), most are teased “rarely” (44%) or “never” (28%). Half of students noted that being in StarGATE has helped them make friends of similar ability “often” (33%) or “always” (17%), while half felt this was a benefit of StarGATE “rarely” (44%) or “never” (6%). Most students rated their intellectual growth in StarGATE as “a lot” (28%) or “some” (44%), with some students rating it “a little” (22%) and one student rating it “none.” More than half of students rated their social growth as “a lot” (6%) or “some” (50%), with 22% rating it as “a little” or “none.”

If given the opportunity to take an AP or Honors course instead of a regular course, all students responded that they would have taken at least one regular course as an AP or Honors course, with Physical

Science coming in as the course most students would have chosen to take AP or Honors (83%), with English 9 (72%) and English 10 (67%) close behind. Half of students would have taken College Prep Biology or World History as an AP or Honors course. 44% would have taken health as an AP or honors course and 39% would have taken U.S. History as an AP or Honors course. One student said “all math classes” and one said “pretty much everything.” Most students felt that they knew 80% or more of the material presented in English 9 (67%) and Health (56%) before they took the course. Forty-four percent of students felt that they knew 80% or more of the material presented in English 10, and a third of students felt that they knew 80% or more of the material in physical science and U.S. History. When asked which courses they found challenging out of a list of high school courses, the most commonly cited courses were Algebra II and Trigonometry, while others noted additional courses, but only 1-3 responded yes for each of these. Of those students who took the AP/Honors World History course online this year, all felt that it was beneficial to their learning “a lot” (5 of 7 students) or “some” (2 of 7 students). Eleven students did not take this course. Comments on AP/Honors courses included “It was nice to be able to learn at a faster pace than the rest of class and go further in depth into topics than in normal class. It helped me to be able to learn a lot more about the world history compared to what I’ve ever learned” and “I took AP Bio first semester this year and it really

prepared me for college because it put most of the responsibility on the students instead of the teacher. The motivated students read the material, were prepared, and therefore did very well in the class.”

Student comments and suggestions were varied, but included a desire for more general education teacher approval and involvement with StarGATE, more independence, and more intellectual rather than social/emotional discussions. Some students noted that they enjoyed the StarGATE retreat and appreciated being able to test out of some classes. Comments included “I wish I would have taken part in StarGATE more. I was kind of reluctant to miss class” and a request to “schedule in time for the group to discuss a topic of their choice in depth.”

*Students grades 6-8*

Nineteen students responded to the StarGATE survey at the middle school level. Most students at this level noted that being in StarGATE helps to challenge their thinking always (42%) or often (47%). They noted that it helps to develop their research skills often (58%) or sometimes (37%), and that it helps to develop

creative thinking skills always (32%), often (42%), or sometimes (26%). One student remarked that, “I can be more creative than in other classes.” It helps them to develop communication skills always (32%), often (37%), or sometimes (32%). Students noted that being in a classroom with equal ability peers helps them learn often (47%), sometimes (37%), or always (16%). They responded that the teacher in StarGATE tries different ways to help them learn and understand new ideas always (37%), sometimes (32%), or often (26%).

The StarGATE teacher assists them with emotional needs often (42%), sometimes (26%), always (16%), or never (16%). Most students did not have to hide their ability in the regular classroom (63%), but some students have to hide their ability sometimes (21%) or often (16%). Most are not teased about being smart (53%), but almost half are teased sometimes (42%) or often (5%). Most students responded that being in StarGATE has helped them to make friends of similar ability always (42%), often (26%), sometimes (26%). Most students rate intellectual growth in StarGATE as a lot (21%) or quite a bit (63%) and social growth as a lot (37%), quite a bit (26%), or some (21%), with 16% rating social growth as “little.” One student, in all capital letters, rated his social growth in StarGATE as “MORE THAN A LOT.” Most students rate emotional growth in StarGATE as a lot (21%) or quite a bit (32%), with 16% rating it as “some” and 32% rating it as “little.” Most students rated the effect of StarGATE on their motivation to achieve in the regular classroom as quite a bit (58%) or some (26%), with 11% rating it as “a lot” and 5% rating it as “little.”

Students noted that they are given the opportunity to accelerate in the StarGATE enrichment class always (42%), often (26%), or sometimes (21%), with two students selecting “never.” In their regular classes, most students (72%) said that they are sometimes able to accelerate, with two students marking “always,” two marking “often,” and one marking “never.” Most students said they were able to accelerate in mathematics (95%), with 58% noting that they were able to accelerate in language arts/English and 32% in science and social studies/history. Most students noted that the StarGATE classwork is too hard sometimes (68%), with three students each noting it is too hard often or never. They also said that the StarGATE class work is too easy and not challenging never (68%) or sometimes (26%), with one student responding “often.” One student remarked that “It is challenging, but not to the extent in which we cannot succeed,” and another student noted “most of the time it is just right, but it is rarely easy.” In language arts, most students felt StarGATE units were sufficiently challenging (47%) or were challenging sometimes but not always (35%). In math, most students felt that StarGATE units were sufficiently challenging (57%) or

challenging sometimes but not always (23%). In science, most students felt units were sufficiently challenging (47%) or challenging sometimes but not always (32%), and in social studies most felt units were sufficiently challenging (44%) or challenging sometimes but not always (33%). In electives/other, most students felt that units were sufficiently challenging (38%) or challenging sometimes but not always (50%). Students responded that regular class work is too easy and not challenging sometimes (63%), often (16%),

always (11%), or never (11%).

In general, most students felt that their regular education coursework in language arts was challenging sometimes but not always (41%) or insufficiently challenging (41%). In mathematics, most students felt that regular education coursework was sufficiently challenging (42%) or challenging sometimes but not always (37%). In science, most students felt that coursework was challenging sometimes but not always (37%) or insufficiently challenging (42%). In social studies, most felt that class work was insufficiently challenging (47%) or challenging sometimes but not always (41%). Students responded that being in a cluster group has helped teachers challenge them in the regular classroom a little bit (37%), some (26%), always (16%), or never (16%). One student responded that he/she was not in a cluster group at the middle school. When

asked what improvements they would make to the StarGATE program, the most common answer was that students would like their own classroom for StarGATE, rather than using that of another teacher’s during his/her planning period. Unfortunately, space is tight at the middle school, making sharing a necessity.

*Parents*

Thirty-six parents responded to the StarGATE parent survey. Of these, 20 were K-5 parents, 17 were 6-8 parents, and 5 were 9-12 parents. Nearly eighty percent (78.8%) of parents who responded to this survey noted that the StarGATE program is better at meeting the needs of gifted students than the regular education programs.

Many parents (43%) felt that teachers in the regular classroom do not modify curriculum and instruction significantly to meet the needs of gifted learners. However, some noted that teachers employ independent study and research (37%), create differentiated centers (31%), or other strategies (all less than 30%). Most parents feel that StarGATE teachers modify curriculum and instruction for gifted learners in their classes by emphasizing higher order thinking skills (77%), employing independent study and research (74%), using

different materials and resources (74%), covering topics or concepts in greater depth (71%), by adding units of study (57%), by creating differentiated centers (43%), or by using other strategies (less than 30%). In AP/Honors classes, 10 parents responded to this question. Most of these parents are unaware of how teachers modify curriculum and instruction (60%), but 40% noted covering topics or concepts in greater depth and emphasizing higher order thinking skills, and 30% noted moving through material more quickly

and employing independent study and research. Most parents responded that the StarGATE program emphasizes critical and creative thinking skills (91%), research and problem-solving skills (88%), offers opportunities for more cooperative learning (76%), adequately meets the social and emotional needs of gifted learners (76%), and emphasizes self-directed learning (73%). Parents perceived lower areas in the program to be the emphasis of understanding of concepts, themes, and issues in disciplines and across disciplines (49%), emphasis on creative expression and aesthetic values (46%), and expectation for high-quality products (31%).

Many parents feel that students are not sufficiently challenged in the regular curriculum in science (53% with 33% responding “challenged sometimes but not always”), social studies (47%, with 38% responding “challenged sometimes but not always), and electives/other (48%, with 16% responding “challenged sometimes but not always). In math, there was an even split between “not sufficiently challenged” (38%) and “challenged sometimes but not always” (38%), with 23% reporting that students are sufficiently challenged. In the StarGATE curriculum, most parents felt that students were sufficiently challenged in math (69%). Half of parents responded that students are sufficiently challenged in science, while 27% were unsure. Almost half (42%) noted that students are sufficiently challenged in language arts, with 33% unsure. In social studies (42%) and electives/other (67%), parents were unsure of the challenge level in StarGATE. In general, parents rated the communication level between themselves and the StarGATE teacher as adequate (59%) or excellent (21%). The major methods for parent involvement with gifted education were a local group of parents of gifted students with regular meetings, Advanced Learning Plan meetings and parent conferences, and program evaluation through surveys. The lowest area was volunteering in the classroom.

Most parents rated the overall quality of StarGATE as very good (61%), adequate (18%), or excellent (15%). No parents rated the program as poor, although two parents marked “I don’t know.” In general, the change that most parents would make to the StarGATE program is better integration with the general education

curriculum. Parents noted a variety of areas that StarGATE has helped their children to grow, with the majority noting students’ ability to solve problems and to see problems from different points of view (74%), their ability to think about complex or “big” ideas (65%), their ability to cope with common emotional challenges associated with giftedness (58%), and their ability to interact effectively with others (52%). Other high areas were their ability to do research (48%), their ability to be more responsible for their own learning

(45%), their ability to use technology (45%), and their ability to develop leadership skills (42%). Comments from parents were varied, but increased communication was requested by several. Parents would like to better understand what goes on in the StarGATE classroom(s). Several parents also noted that the program needs to be individualized for students, and a number also mentioned a desire for increased differentiation for gifted learners in the regular education classroom. Comments on the program included “This program has been helpful with my child seeing he isn’t so different and can work with others effectively. It’s given him a chance to feel confident joining school activities and still associating with his friend group.” and “My son has been very challenged by this program. I like how he is pushed to be better yet supported at the same time. I highly value that and I’m grateful for this option for my son.”

*Teachers*

Forty teachers responded to the teacher survey, of which 20 were high school teachers, 13 were middle school teachers, and five were elementary teachers. Two did not indicate their grade level. Twenty-four of these teachers (62%) indicated that they have had some district inservice training in gifted education within the last three years, while 10 (26%) had no formal training. Five teachers (13%) indicated that they have had at least six hours of graduate level course work in gifted education. Twenty of the teachers (54%) responded that they support the goals of the StarGATE program as stated in the StarGATE program handbook, while 3 teachers (8%) do not support the goals and 14 teachers (38%) remain unfamiliar with the goals. Thirty teachers (77%) are familiar with the identification process for StarGATE.

The most commonly used instructional approaches used by elementary teachers in working with gifted students include higher-order questions, grouping based on readiness, and inquiry-based problem-solving activities, although none were used by more than seven teachers in any given subject area. Strategies such as menus, extension options, tiered assignments, and compacting were rarely used (0-3 teachers indicated

the use of these strategies in each subject area). Most common responses from teachers suggest that they generally feel that gifted students in their schools are sufficiently challenged in language arts (43%), math (61%), and science (46%) and are challenged sometimes, but not always in social studies (38%) and electives/other (40%).

Overall, teachers feel that the communication with gifted specialists is adequate (45%), with seven

teachers (18%) indicating that it is excellent, six teachers (16%) indicating that it is poor, and eight teachers (21%) indicated that it is inconsistent. Staff development is generally considered to be adequate (45%), and the majority of teachers remain unsure of what exactly goes on in StarGATE classes (46%) or feel neutral toward instruction in these classes (28%).

In general, the most common benefit of StarGATE classes to gifted students is considered to be the development of coping strategies for emotional challenges commonly associated with giftedness (60%), while other common responses were opportunities to learn with students of similar interests and abilities (58%), improved social skills and leadership ability (58%), and emphasis on critical and creative thinking skills (46%). Comments and suggestions from teachers vary widely, but several requested increased communication and information about the program and/or professional development in meeting the needs of advanced students. For example, one teacher noted: “I would like to develop my skills as a teacher to provide improved instruction for advanced students and for StarGATE identified students. I would welcome additional training/staff development and time to develop activities that will better meet students needs.” Some teachers also remain concerned about “elitism” and pulling students out of other classes to receive gifted education services.

**Comparison to NAGC Gifted Program Standards**

In fall of 2010, the National Association for Gifted Children released new standards for the evaluation of K-12 gifted programs. These standards cover six main areas: Learning and Development, Assessment, Curriculum Planning and Instruction, Learning Environments, and Programming. An analysis of the current StarGATE program in relation to these standards was conducted by the StarGATE team, a group consisting of teachers and administrators from a variety of grade levels throughout the district, as well as several parent representatives. They then used these evaluations to develop recommendations for program improvement.

The evaluation determined that the StarGATE program is demonstrating at least some evidence-based practices in all standard areas. While it is not possible to determine a simple “met” or “not met” with the current format of the NAGC Standards, the StarGATE program demonstrated all or most evidence-based practices in the areas of Learning Environments, Learning and Development, Curriculum Planning and Instruction, Professional Development, and Assessment. Its weakest area, in which it demonstrated some/ evidence-based practices was in the area of Programming This weak area could be improved through increased coordination in services, more community and district involvement and collaboration, and more alignment in programming.

Some areas of strength identified by the StarGATE team evaluators included a solid, standards-based identification process; the use of data, including MAP data, to determine student academic goals; a strong learning environment in the gifted send-out classes; and the development of Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) for identified gifted students. Additionally, evaluators noted that some teachers who have been trained through district professional development opportunities are working very well with these students in their general education classrooms. Areas of weakness commonly noted by the StarGATE team evaluators included the lack of a coordinated program for developing mentorships and internships for students to pursue talent development outside of the classroom; difficulty in assessing growth of gifted learners through a variety of measures (currently, the MAP test is the primary way of measuring yearly growth of gifted students); a small audience for professional development opportunities leading to

widespread misunderstandings about the characteristics and needs of gifted learners and how to help them by individuals throughout the district and community; inadequate collaboration between gifted teachers, general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and specialists to provide coordinated services to gifted students; and the lack of a Response to Intervention or similar model to determine appropriate interventions for both high-achieving and underachieving gifted learners in general education classrooms.

The evaluation process led to the following *recommendations* from the evaluation team for improvement in the future, to bring the program closer to standards-based best practices. ***Although not all recommendations are immediately possible (particularly the final two recommendations), they do provide a picture of where the program might proceed in the future.***

These recommendations include:

1. Develop a mentorship/internship program for gifted learners that involves the wider Cody community,
2. Provide additional, on-going professional development through a variety of modes to reach a wider audience in the district and in the community,
3. Expand the Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) process to include more people, including administrators, and improve follow up to ensure that ALP is being utilized,
4. Improve coordination and collaboration between StarGATE teachers and general education teachers and specialists, in part through the use of general education teachers’ scope and sequence to assist in the development of StarGATE send-out classroom plans,
5. Provide improved communication about the StarGATE program to parents/guardians of low-income students so they more fully understand the program and the identification process,
6. Employ a gifted education specialist at each building to provide a “push-in” program model for students, and
7. Seek additional funding for the gifted program.

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| *Vision for the Future of StarGATE* |

The StarGATE program constantly strives for improvement in meeting the needs of gifted learners according to research-based best practices in gifted education. The annual evaluation process provides information to assist in this process. In an effort to improve services for gifted students next year, the following goals will guide program improvement during 2011-2012:

1. Provide increased professional development opportunities district-wide, particularly to cluster teachers, including one-on-one training and planning, team teaching, and other important assistance in differentiation,
2. Employ the use of a progress report, with individualized goals for students, to assist in assessment and progress monitoring,
3. Develop a Response to Intervention model to share with teachers and administrators in the district detailing appropriate, research-based interventions for high-ability students, including those who may not qualify for StarGATE services,
4. Initiate development of a mentorships and/or internship program for gifted learners that involves the wider Cody community as well as the school district,
5. Invite administrators and other specialists to participate in Advanced Learning Plan meetings,
6. Increase coordination with general education cluster teachers, in part by requesting their scope and sequence plans for the year to assist in planning for StarGATE,
7. Provide district-wide professional development in differentiation and in the nature and needs of high ability learners (including the continuation of the annual “StarGATE Retreat”),
8. Maintain current communication methods, invite teachers to observe in the StarGATE classroom, and share StarGATE student work with general education teachers, and
9. Provide information about the nature and needs of gifted learners and ways to meet these needs in a variety of formats, from Powerpoint presentations on the StarGATE web site to information sheets to formal professional development opportunities.