
From: Nick Cote
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:07 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Reduction of SWAS, GT, and MAGNET funds.

Dear Board Members,

My name is Nick, and I have been through the SWAS program at Caughlin Ranch, and am currently in 8th grade in the MAGNET program at Swope Middle School.

My experience in these programs has been wonderful. I know many people who share my experience. It would be terrible if eager students would not be able to experience this. I know many great teachers who would be very disappointed in WCSD if they were cut.

Please consider my opinion, and the opinions of others.

Thanks.

From: Vibeth atienza
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:46 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Counselors

Counselors are needed during very stressful times. PLEASE ADD MoRE COUNSELORS! You've been overworking our counselors for a very long time. You need to add more counselors to prepare our kids well for college and assist them during difficult times. Also, I recommend that you have a specific program to assist kids who are new to the district. A new environment can be very stressful for kids and when we were new here, we did not get any support.

Vibeth Atienza

From: Jeremy Murray
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 3:02 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] WCSD Board Meeting - January 26, 2021 - 4.10 GT Concerns

Hello. I have heard there is discussion of reducing or removing GT services in the upcoming school board meeting.

Our family has three students in GT services: a freshman in the Gate Institute, a sixth grader in Clayton Magnet, and a fourth grader in Caughlin Ranch SWAS. Our kindergartener is also looking like she will need these programs.

I'm highly concerned. Agenda item 4.10 shows drastic cuts to GT in all of these areas.

- Hug's Gate Institute was the sole program in the district that provided a learning environment with both accelerated math and science. All other programs indicated our daughter would run out of classes by Junior or Senior year. Hug was strongly recommended as it would support an individual learning focus and concentrate on AP and integrating college courses. So far, it has even shown to be more flexible and student-focused than Davidson. Losing this would be a huge blow - we considered it to be almost the crown jewel of WCSD GT. There is no equivalent in the district and keeping up contact with GT highschool students in other schools around the area has done nothing but prove that further this year.

- Reducing the number of SWAS schools from 3 to 1 does not provide enough information of how this would work, but on the surface it reads as reduction in capacity. Assessments and follow-up are already semi-encouraging students to move to private schooling instead of SWAS. Pullout GT is underfunded and under-supported (some school admins and teachers are actively hostile toward pullout, not to mention some parents). Having dedicated teachers and environments for these early identified students is crucial to them staying engaged in school. SWAS has shown to be great for both the students and the teachers involved and we are very glad it exists. We've used the bus service to send our kids, even when that has been over an hour ride time to and from school every day - that's how important it is to have these kids in class with peers sharing the same learning issues.

- Middle School Magnet Programs as a topic doesn't say what's being considered. From the other points in the same agenda item, I'm guessing it means a reduction of services or closing of a site. Again, usage shows there's a need here. Closing sites doesn't fit that. We have had two children in Clayton Magnet and agree it is a very good program, especially for math.

For these changes, there is no upside, no alternative - it is just a budget reduction.

The discussed changes would gut GT in the district. This will severely affect these bright, hard working, and difficult to teach kids. Mainstreaming GT students reduces their engagement and highly increases the ask of their teachers - many of which don't bother. Most teachers either sideline them, make them unofficial student teachers, or throw busy work at them until they stop asking. These students require high engagement from their teachers, and frankly our educators are, in general, not trained to teach them and do not have the time or energy to make their learning successful. (Speaking from both our personal and fellow GT parent/student experiences.)

This also doesn't talk about the loss of some of the most talented teachers in the district. They work hard for these kids and are a benefit to all the other teachers they work with. Reduction here is a further brain drain on our educators right when we need them more than ever. How many mainstream remote classes are leaning on materials and training from GT right now? Our best remote teachers are from GT and we would be screwed without them.

A student identified as GT does not mean they are better. It doesn't mean they should just be in a higher grade. Their needs are not solely academic; they also have mental and social needs that are served by GT. A student identified as GT needs a different learning environment OR THEY WILL FAIL. It's special education in every sense of the term. When cuts like these are proposed, it feels to me like those making the decisions do not understand the consequences of not having GT.

Where is the GT advocate on the school board? Why are we not fighting as hard for these kids as we're fighting for keeping sports running during the pandemic? These students, these teachers, and these programs are an integral part of our school district and should be treated as such.

Both my wife and I would be happy to discuss this further with anyone if that would make a difference. Please use any or all of this in public comments for both the meeting and the agenda item.

Please do not reduce GT services. We should be investing in these programs, not reducing them.

-Jeremy

bcc - Arianne Sorreta, school board list, some teachers, and some GT parents. Please forward as you like.

Jeremy Murray

Reno, NV 89503

From: marina johnson
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 4:53 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Gifted and talented

Hello,

Today I am writing you about the prospect of cutting the magnet and gifted and talented program. A cut that would not only affect our schools, but our entire city. I began the gifted and talented program in the fourth grade. There I learned critical thinking skills that were not taught to me in the normal curriculum. I was taught things that some students are still learning in highschool, how to voice my opinion, how to create a PowerPoint, marketing skills, and many other things. I was then able to continue my education in Archie Clayton Pre-AP academy. It was there that my true education began. It was there where I truly felt I had a home. I did not have a good relationship at home. I fell into a deep state of depression. It was at Clayton where I felt important. It was at Clayton where I felt wanted. The magnet teachers were my family, they told me how special I was and how I was a great leader. They pushed me to be the best version of myself. By taking away these programs, you are taking away students potential to be leaders, to thrive in an environment where the teachers are trained to deal with advanced students. The magnet program was the best education I have ever received. Please. I beg you not to deprive students of the opportunity to experience what I already have.

Thank you,
Marina Johnson

Sent from my iPhone

From: A Vogel
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 5:52 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE program

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing as an appreciative but concerned parent of two GT students: Eli (SWAS grade 4, CRES) and Calista (Magnet grade 7, Swope). Simply put, the GT program is essential for their realization of their potential. We are counting on the WCSD board to do right by our kids and preserve these programs.

Thank you in advance for your support and have a great weekend,
Alex

From: Varun Giritharan
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 7:37 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT Funding cuts

Hi, I am a former GT student and would like to state that the GT program is a very helpful program that has created success for me and my colleagues
-Varun Giritharan

From: Nanda Reddy
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 8:42 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT funding cuts

To whom it may concern:

This letter is in response to the district's proposal to drastically reduce the GT program, which has already undergone cuts in past years.

Washoe county's GT program has been one of its most successful programs in the county. I make this claim based on my experience (I have one high schooler and one magnet middle schooler, both of whom went through SWAS) and because of the program's exemplary NAGC ranking in 2019. Crippling this gold-star program by further reducing funds will undercut Washoe county's educational system as a whole.

The county's motto is "every child by name and face to graduation." The GT program helps to fulfill that promise in a big way. Children's diverse educational needs should be met in diverse ways, and this program meets the unique special education needs of students who qualify for GT services. Like all special education students, GT students do not thrive in one-size settings. They thrive under the care of the county's talented GT teachers who have been trained to meet their needs. This program allows GT students to feel like they're seen and cared for. Please don't take that away.

Washoe County was unique and revolutionary in setting up such an exemplary program. This program draws families to our state because it promises to meet diverse needs. Good GT services do not exist in many counties nationwide. But that's not a reason to cut it. That's a reason to nurture and expand it.

Simply put, cutting this program will leave children behind. Cutting this program reduces the county's ability to serve its diverse population. Cutting the program takes the county backward, to a one-size-fits-all approach, which does not work.

Please consider all that's at stake when you vote, including the large population of diverse children this program currently serves.

Thank you,
Nanda Reddy

From: Mohanty, Aadarsh
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 8:42 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: GT

I'd just like to say that GT really helped me get to where I am now. My names Aadarsh Mohanty and I moved to Reno in 8th grade and I was very nervous and shy. However the kids I met in gt were great and helped me be more outward with myself. It was interesting because I felt as though we were all completely different but somehow the same. I loved everyone I met in the class and they made me have an amazing year as a new student

From: rosa lester
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 9:46 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE

I am writing in support of keeping as much of the GATE Dept intact as possible. Both of my children are going through various stages of utilization, and I guarantee that this programming is vital to the student population as a whole. With my 2 kids both being twice exceptional, the fact that they have had access to curriculum, teachers and programming that matches their high needs, has been wonderful. Both tend to "check-out" and become behavior problems if they are not engaged and are bored. I know that many teachers don't know the best way to help educate these kids, and so gifted kids get told to pay attention, go do busy work, or sent out of the room for not behaving. I don't expect most teachers to make separate curriculum for the gifted kids to keep them engaged, while having to help those who need a little extra help, ELL and all the other variants of kids that WCSD serves. It is equally important that kids learning English, kids that have disabilities and typical kids get the best education they can. To do this, in my opinion, gifted kids need to be engaged with like-minded peers, and with teachers who know best how to keep them challenged. SPED has its own department because that is a specialty that not all teachers want to or have the ability or time to devote to. ELL has its own Dept for the same reason. All kids benefit from the teacher not having to devote extra time to each learning style, so let's get as many Gifted kids as we can engaged properly. I know there are kids that should be served by GATE and other vital programs, that aren't, because of funding, and this is unfortunate. We are losing learners and opportunities by not funding and prioritizing more programs.

Thank you for your time and for all the hard work you have been doing, especially through the pandemic.

[Sent from AT&T Yahoo Mail on Android](#)

From: Bergen Smith
Sent: Saturday, January 23, 2021 5:57 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Magnet and Gate programs

Hello,

I am a mom to three school aged boys. Two of whom are in programs such as the Clayton Magnet program. I can not tell you how wonderful the programs have been for my children. They have grown, not only intellectually, but also emotionally. I have seen their confidence and problem solving skills blossom. I would really be disappointed if our district cut funding and locations as so many kids depend on it to grow and find themselves. Kids are not all equal and to hold back or limit of gifted students would be a huge disservice to our community and future. Please reconsider.

Bergen Smith

Sent from my iPhone

From: catharine cook
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 2:37 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support of GATE Services

To the Board of Trustees:

It has come to my attention that it has been recommended to cut WCSD GATE services per agenda item 4.10 at the Board of Trustees' meeting on Tuesday, January 26th. Agenda item 4.10 has drastic cuts to all GATE programs. There are no changes to the programs, no suggested alternatives, only drastic budget reductions.

Our family consists of two students, both utilizing GT services; an eighth grader and a sixth grader in the Magnet Program at Clayton Middle School. Our eighth grader was just accepted to the Institute at Hug High and is thrilled to attend this fall.

We moved to NV in 2016 and were initially concerned about the quality of the education provided by WCSD but were reassured by friends and colleagues that the GT program in WCSD was exceptional and nationally recognized. We have been beyond impressed with the quality education our children have received from the Advanced Academic Placement model in elementary school and the Magnet Program in middle school and we are looking forward to the opportunities offered at the Institute.

The needs of GT students are not met in the mainstream classroom. The GT student in a mainstream classroom faces boredom and disengagement. They are overlooked by teachers, thrown busy work, and often become assistants to the teachers, rather than challenged. It is too much to ask of a classroom teacher to teach to these students separately. GT education is Special Education.

GT education provides our students a rigorous academic program that challenges and engages them. These students are bright, creative, and hard-working and to dismiss their educational needs by not providing a rigorous learning environment sets them up for failure. It is special education in every sense of the term.

These students, teachers, and programs are an integral part of our school district and should be treated as such. It breaks my heart to think the district would reduce and/or remove such amazing programs.

Please, do not reduce the GT program. I understand the need for budgetary reductions but there must be other options to explore that would not harm the educational success of so many students.

Thank you,

Catharine Cook

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Catharine Cook

From: Kai Pruyn
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 2:55 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerned Student

To Washoe County Personnel,

My name is Kai Pruyn and I am a Reno, Nevada native. I am currently attending the University of Utah to study biomedical engineering on a full ride scholarship and am so disappointed to hear about the proposed cuts to the GATE programs. I wouldn't be where I am now if I had not attended the Clayton Magnet program. I learned to love learning, and was finally in a program that challenged me academically and pushed me to be the best student I can be. I chose the Clayton Magnet Program because of the offered diversity, not just the fabulous opportunity for education and great teachers. I see cutting this program specifically as a huge equity issue, impacting underprivileged and at risk gifted kids more than any other students. Gifted education and the GATE program is special education, something I thought was supported and valued in WCSD. These proposed cuts demonstrate otherwise. Without these programs Nevada's students and overall education will suffer even more. The Clayton Magnet Program made such an impact on my life, and I can't imagine that I would've gotten this far academically without this program. Why are you looking at eliminating entire programs, rather than cutting administrative costs? This would be better than hurting students directly, and it seems WCSD administrations have far larger salaries than the funding given to essential special education programs, such as Clayton GATE. I urge you to examine all of your options before cutting programs that offer so many students amazing opportunities for education. I will be severely upset and disappointed should WCSD go through with cutting the Clayton GATE and other magnet programs.

Sincerely,
Concerned Alum Kai Pruyn

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Kai Pruyn
Biomedical Engineering
The University of Utah

From:
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 3:24 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Washoe County GATE program

To the WCSD Board of Trustees:

It has come to my attention that it has been recommended to cut WCSD GATE services per agenda item 4.10 at the Board of Trustees' meeting on Tuesday, January 26th. Agenda item 4.10 has drastic cuts to all GATE programs. There are no changes to the programs, no suggested alternatives, only drastic budget reductions.

Our family consists of two students, both utilizing GT services; an eighth grader and a sixth grader in the Magnet Program at Clayton Middle School. Our eighth grader was just accepted to the Institute at Hug High and is thrilled to attend this fall.

We initially lived in an area in the North Valleys where there was only a GT pull out program which we found insufficient. We purposely moved to a location that provided full GT services at the elementary school level and have bent over backwards to rearrange work schedules to ferry our kids to Clayton. With the cuts that are proposed there will be no option for students that live in the North Valleys.

The needs of GT students are not met in the mainstream classroom. The GT student in a mainstream classroom faces boredom and disengagement. They are overlooked by teachers, thrown busy work, and often become assistants to the teachers, rather than challenged. It is too much to ask of a classroom teacher to teach to these students separately. GT education is Special Education.

GT education provides our students a rigorous academic program that challenges and engages them. These students are bright, creative, and hard-working and to dismiss their educational needs by not providing a rigorous learning environment sets them up for failure. It is special education in every sense of the term.

These students, teachers, and programs are an integral part of our school district and should be treated as such. It breaks my heart to think the district would reduce and/or remove such amazing programs.

Please, do not reduce the GT program. I understand the need for budgetary reductions but there must be other options to explore that would not harm the educational success of so many students. We can not afford to extinguish our shooting stars!

Thank you,

William Cook

From: Lorna Denton
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 5:11 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Proposed Cuts to the GATE Program

I wish to make a comment with regards to proposed cuts to GATE services. In these extremely challenging times, there is a limited budget for education and a need to address funding across the board but targeting the GATE program is short-sighted.

I have two children who have received GATE services in the SWAS and Magnet programs. They have benefited enormously from the targeted education they have received in the programs allowing them to consistently exceed the average levels of attainment of their peer group. They have been engaged by teachers that understand the special needs of these students and the unique learning requirements of this gifted population. Many of which are simply not addressed in mainstream classes due to time, class sizes and lack of resources. From personal experience, I have found that before entering the GATE programs my children were not challenged and spent much of their time acting as teachers aids, supporting other students learning.

I have observed a definite shift in the GATE program over the last several years, particularly in SWAS where constraints have been placed upon teachers to limit student attainment, particularly in regards to Maths. The goal seems to have been to keep the gifted students in check, and more in line with their peers. The message appears to be, we cannot handle accelerated learning in our school district.

These proposed cuts seem another method of enforcing this policy of providing education for all but not responding to the special needs of these gifted students.

Though the current pandemic I have been so impressed by the response of the teachers in the Magnet program at Pine Middle School. They have delivered a curriculum in-person and online that has met and stimulated my student's needs. This is in stark contrast to the general education elective classes.

The districts have goals of improved graduation rates and providing a workforce that meets the demands of specialist companies moving to Northern Nevada, I feel that WSCD is doing a great disservice to these gifted students and the broader community. Further reducing, or removing, the support that these students need to achieve their potential will have far-reaching effects.

A school district's role is to educate all students, and addressing the special needs that gifted students have should be a core function for any individual teacher, school, district or state. Removing Gifted programs, transferring the students back to mainstream classes, and assuming they will thrive because they are bright, is a rather naive approach.

Without specialized programs for gifted students, many will never be identified, challenged or supported and will not reach their potential for themselves or the community.

Lorna Denton

From: Jeff and Darcy
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 6:15 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments for 1/26/21 board meeting: Re Gate Program

Dear School Board Members:

We are parents of a 6th grader who is currently enrolled in the Pine Middle School Magnet program. Our student attended Hunsberger SWAS the previous 3 years and participated in the Lenz Elementary GT enrichment class previous to that. We are writing in opposition to the reductions in GATE programming in Washoe County School District.

Gifted and talented students possess special abilities to soak up information and learn complex concepts quickly. GT students have unique social and emotional needs which differentiate them from other students. GT students needs are best met using a curriculum targeted towards their learning abilities. Reducing the number of locations where GT programs are available limits the ability for families to access these programs.

Reviewing the GT presentation for the January 26, 2021 board meeting we are appalled to learn that between now and 2023 GT staffing will be reduced by up to 16 teaching positions and nearly 7 admin/counseling/support staff. Also concerning is the loss of three locations currently serving gifted students, including 1 SWAS site, the Clayton MS Magnet program and the Hug High GATE Academy. These reductions are hard to understand when community population and district enrollment trends are strongly upward. District enrollment increased from 62,220 in 2011 to 63,794 in 2020. The district responded to this growth by adding new elementary, middle and high schools across the district. Since GT services are available to the top 2% of students, this growth indicates that GT services should be increasing, not decreasing.

Our family's personal experience at the Hunsberger SWAS and Pine Magnet suggests GT enrollment is decreasing. Looking at Hunsberger yearbooks, SWAS enrollment in grades 3, 4, 5 decreased by 65% from 79 students in 2017-2018, to 57 in 2018-2019, to 44 in 2019-2020 and is down to 27 students this year. This year we observed that a significant number of our son's SWAS classmates from Hunsberger opted to attend Herz MS instead of transitioning to the Pine Magnet Program. Most parents we have spoken with thought academically Pine would have been the best choice, but the lack of district transportation from the Hunsberger/Lenz zoning areas prevented them from sending their students to Pine.

If the district is seeing a decline in either the number of students qualifying for GT services or how many families opt in for GT programs a better solution would be to examine assessment techniques or add locations and/or transportation options.

The district began system-wide testing for all elementary students during the 2015-2016 academic year. This move was advertised to give all students a fair shot to qualify for GT services. A few years later the district switched from the CogAT test to the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test again with the goal of fairer assessment of non-native English-speaking students. Did these changes result in more students qualifying? If not, what is the explanation?

If families are not choosing GT options, has the district evaluated the location of where programs are offered. By reducing the number of locations, the district is creating new barriers for participation for families with GT students.

The Reno-Sparks area is attracting top talent to new high-tech industries. With COVID and the increase in telework options other highly skilled individuals are moving to the area. WCSD needs to be pro-actively meeting the needs of our community by strengthening GT programs and providing districtwide access. GT students have minds that are capable of great things. The current services offered by WCSD were nationally recognized at the 2019 NAGC conference as representing the gold standard of public domain GATE services available. Please do not throw away the achievements that our teachers and administrators have made for our gate students. Please give our students options to excel.

Sincerely,

From: Melissa Pruyn
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 7:24 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Taylor, Angela
Subject: [EXTERNAL] replace comments

Use this comment please:

Dear WCSD Board members,

It is with grave concerns that I write about proposed budget cuts to the Gifted and Talented Education program item 4:10.

The GATE program in WCSD is nationally recognized as the gold standard for gifted education. It is a draw to professionals and businesses in our community. The proposed cuts will devastate the program and affect positive growth throughout our area.

Gifted students are special education students. They learn in a unique way and need the support of specially trained educators to help them maximize their potential as future leaders in our community and beyond. This population is at the greatest risk for mental health issues and suicide. They need our support, not cuts!

As a parent of gifted students, I will say that the Clayton Middle School GATE Magnet program changed their lives. Instead of boredom, repetition, and social conflict, their middle school years were full of challenge, excitement, and the development of life-long bonds. This program is life-changing. Our daughters are now enrolled in top college STEM programs with full academic scholarships at their respective schools. This path started at Clayton, which they picked because it was a small program with a diverse population. The reasons that make Clayton unique are also why it is on the chopping block – because our district is only looking at numbers, not STUDENTS!

As the current ELA teacher for the Clayton Magnet program, I know we do our utmost to support this school family and foster deep relationships with our students and their families so they grow beyond any potential they may have in a regular education program. Clayton is the most diverse program and it **will be cut** if nothing is done to financially support education. How can we say our district supports diversity when we allow this to happen?

We also need to look closely at the WCSO proposed cuts. Why are PROGRAMS DIRECTLY SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING being cut when there is so much more that could be removed from administration and other services. Those are our top salaries, let's look there, not at our students!

I ask you to help fund programming for our gifted students. They need our help!

Thank you for your support,

Melissa Pruyn, MA, NBCT
ELA Clayton GATE Magnet
Site and Program Lead Teacher

From: arathi veeraswamy
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 8:30 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Dwarak Vuppalapati
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Changes to GATE program.

According to the proposals, GATE students will have other available alternatives, such as CTE and Signature Programs, Dual Credit, and IB. These are not substitutes for programs designed for highly gifted students. Giftedness does not merely mean a child is academically talented. Often, highly gifted children are overlooked for services due to behavioral issues and inadequate traditional academic achievement. In fact, by conflating giftedness with good grades and high standardized test scores, we do highly gifted students a disservice. The National Association for Gifted Children states that gifted children's needs, concerns, and how they experience development may be quite different. Merely placing these students in competitive academic environments may exacerbate the pressure of perfectionism and anxiety that many of these children experience.

That brings us to another group of highly gifted students who may fail to thrive in the general population; children who are twice-exceptional, meaning students who have an IEP for a disability as well as being highly gifted. For these students, a unique GT environment may mean the difference between success and failure. Standard classes are not set up for a child with an IQ in the 99th percentile but who is also autistic. Our special education teachers are already spread too thin. Will they be given the time and the specific professional knowledge to help these students?

My 2 kids were in the SWAS program for 3 years, I felt a tremendous change in their personality & social movement especially for my shy daughter. She seems have made a lot of friends than I have ever seen her have so far.

She is more confident & works well with her peers, which was always an issue we had to focus on without much success. The difference was like night & day. Once they were enrolled in the SWAS program they enjoyed School again.

I have a another daughter who has started her third grade in SWA S & was hoping she will thrive like her siblings over the years. It would unfair for her, for no fault of hers that she does not get the same opportunities her sibling had enjoyed.

Therefore, I beg you to reconsider limiting the opportunities for children like my kids. Every child in our school district should feel like they have a place. Every child should feel like they too belong no matter how different they are.

Arathi vVeeraswamy.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dawn Martens
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 9:20 PM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments; DiMartino, Cheryl
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Gifted Education IS Special Education

Hello,

I am writing in regards to the upcoming board meeting proposal to reduce the district-wide SWAS program to a single site. If this proposal is enacted, many SWAS students will be forced to ride the bus for multiple hours a day, an option that many families find unacceptable for their children. Multiple hours sitting on a bus every day means multiple hours lost that a child could be playing outside, imagining, practicing a musical instrument, or spending time with his or her family. Gifted children especially have "excitabilities" that require these aforementioned activities RATHER than hours sitting on a bus or in a carpool. In addition, many families will have to make a choice between supporting long commutes for their children and maintaining their own employment. In the end, consolidating SWAS to a single elementary school will force some families to decide to unenroll their child from SWAS.

I've heard the argument that schools should not devote funds to gifted children because they're "already smart anyway." This argument could not be further from the truth. Calling these children "gifted" is a misnomer that leads people to assume these kids are "smarter" or "better" or "will succeed no matter what". In fact, these children are SPECIAL EDUCATION students in the truest sense of the term. They learn and interact very differently from children in general education, and they need special services to meet their very special needs. In a general education classroom, these students receive little to no direct instruction and rarely have peers to interact with, leaving their social and emotional needs unmet. Drilled with the same facts that they could abstract upon years earlier, their interest and innate love for learning wanes, and they either cause trouble or learn nothing.

The Davidson Institute says it better than I can: "With all the talk of failing schools these days, we forget that schools can fail their brightest students, too. We pledge to "leave no child behind," but in American schools today, thousands of gifted and talented students fall short of their potential. In [Genius Denied](#), the Davidsons describe the "quiet crisis" in education: gifted students spending their days in classrooms learning little beyond how to cope with boredom as they "relearn" material they've already mastered years before. This lack of challenge leads to frustration, underachievement, and even failure. Some gifted students become severely depressed. At a time when our country needs a deep intellectual talent pool, the squandering of these bright young minds is a national tragedy. There are hundreds of thousands of highly gifted children in the U.S. and millions more whose intelligence is above average, yet few receive the education they deserve. Many school districts have no gifted programs or offer only token enrichment classes. Education of the gifted is in this sorry state, say the Davidsons, because of indifference, lack of funding, and the pernicious notion that education should have a "leveling" effect, a one-size-fits-all concept that deliberately ignores the needs of the gifted. But all children are entitled to an appropriate education, insist the authors, those left behind as well as those who want to surge ahead."

The SWAS programs sought to CHANGE education for gifted children- they sought to teach DIFFERENTLY and to ignite the curiosity and drive of these students. PLEASE do not take this program away from these kids who DESERVE to learn. The SWAS program at Hunsberger has been life-changing for my son, both academically and socially. He has found his "tribe", the kids who get him and his quirks, and an exceptional teacher who teaches project-based learning and pushes him to his full potential.

If you must, please consider combining grade levels at the existing SWAS sites. My son has been in a mixed 3/4 class for the past two years, and it has worked beautifully. The students learn concepts together, albeit with different expectations per grade level, and have breakout sessions as necessary. The older students learn leadership and role model for the younger students, but they still learn all grade-level material and more. Younger students who are more advanced, which is often the case in a SWAS classroom, have access to the more advanced material in subjects in which they excel. A 3/4/5 combo class at Hunsberger would require just a single teacher and would allow a south Reno SWAS site for children from Incline to Double Diamond. I am confident that this solution would allow children at all grade levels to learn while still maintaining a site close enough to home to allow them to stay enrolled in this vital program.

Thank you so much for your consideration,
Dawn Martens

From: Mary Owens
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 9:27 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Board Agenda Item 4.10 Gifted and Talented

Hello Board of Trustees,

Below please find the email I have already sent to my personal trustees (Vice President Taylor and Trustee Nicolet)

January 24, 2021

RE: Comments for Feb. 2nd, 2021 Agenda Item: 4.10

Dear Board of Trustees,

Thank you for reading my comments and information about a population in need of specialized education, Gifted and Talented (GATE) students in WCSD. Although item 4.10 mentions “changes” with no specific actions, I can surmise that it likely means cuts to services/staff from this department that does incredible work for its students and their families. This would be very detrimental to the education of these students.

GATE students need teachers with specialized education aimed at understanding their unique abilities and struggles. Specially endorsed teachers positively impact GATE students so they can reach their highest potential, and have successful, fulfilling futures. GATE students deserve services that focus on their individual and specific needs, just like students who require speech and special education, etc.

Here are a few of the opportunities the GATE department offer students and their families:

- targeted Social and Emotional Lessons to help students master strategies to overcome their over-excitabilities, underachievement, perfectionism, insatiable curiosity, impulsivity, understanding their unique GATE characteristics, and creating positive peer relationships.
- time to work and collaborate with like-minded GATE peers on motivating, rigorous projects.
- projects and lessons that go beyond the regular curriculum in order to challenge GATE students in problem solving, critical thinking, making new meaning, and presenting findings.
- specialized Gifted resources such as articles, books, optional activities inside and outside of school, and web sites are made available to families and guardians of GATE students.
- GATE teachers (who have been certified by the Social Emotional Needs of the Gifted Organization, SENG) offer classes to families on how to support their Gifted child(ren).

Below is information from the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC.org)

What is Giftedness (<https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/what-giftedness>):

- “Students with gifts and talents perform—or have the capability to perform—at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential. Gifted and Talented students:_
 - Come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata.
 - Require access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential.
 - Can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation.

- Need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their areas of talent.”

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A Definition of Giftedness that Guides Best Practices: Position Statement from NAGC link:

<https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Definition%20of%20Giftedness%20%282019%29.pdf>

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the work we do as educators for our GATE students. Please do the right thing by allowing us to continue to best serve the GATE students of WCSD and keep this department whole with no cuts to either staff or services!

Sincerely,

Mary R. Owens

Teacher of Gifted Students

From: Herschel Murray
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 9:36 PM
To: Nicolet, Diane M; Thigpen, Kurt L; Taylor, Angela; Batchelder, Jennifer; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] WCSD Board Meeting- January 26, 2021 -4.10 GT Concerns

Hello.

I am Herschel Murray and I am a fourth grader in Caughlin Ranch SWAS. I am currently in DL SWAS with Dr. Luckey and Mrs. Richards. I want to tell you how important GT is to me.

I started school at Peavine Elementary. In kindergarten, I felt like I had to physically hold myself back. For example, I wanted to write a whole sentence, but the rules said I could only write one letter. I was physically shaking trying to tell myself to stop. In first grade, I could loosen up a little bit. There were some challenges, but not much. In second grade, I learned the most so far in regular classes.

In second grade I was introduced to the GT program. I started with Power Hour and then I went to Pull-out with Mrs. Huntington. These were the most challenging experiences I had while I was at Peavine. I liked it even though it was frustrating at times.

In third grade, I went to SWAS. I had to wake up early to ride the bus one hour to and from school, but I didn't mind. I could sleep on the way home. I learned so much more! At school, I failed a little bit at first because my brain expected less work. Things were easy before. School was harder and I couldn't control my emotions. My teacher, Mrs. Bhatia, helped me calm down and taught me coping skills. I kept trying.

In GT, I have met a lot of people similar to me. It is nice to be on the same level and be able to ask for help from other students. I was always helping everyone before and didn't really get help from others. Even though I am the only one in class that is very emotional, I feel more comfortable expressing it in GT. I feel like people will help me and that they do not think less of me.

This year in distance learning, I still am learning a lot. My brain is still getting used to having harder work, but I am still getting support and being more challenged. We do meditation, music, PE, SEL, and art. I also have the support for my emotions from my mom.

I have made new friends this year, too! I wouldn't have met them unless GT existed. We are all from different SWAS schools. We play and work together.

In conclusion, GT has helped me a lot in school and in making relationships with people similar to me. I have a younger sister in kindergarten and she might qualify for GT, too. Please don't make any cuts to the GT program.

Sincerely,

Herschel

From: Arianne Sorreta
Sent: Sunday, January 24, 2021 9:41 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] WCSD Board Meeting - January 26, 2021 - 4.10 GT Concerns

I strongly disagree with the proposed cuts to the GATE program in agenda item 4.10. Claims of underutilization of this department and the programs it provides are false. We are already underserving this population with teachers and specialists already at a higher student to teacher ratios than is recommended for special education classes. Cutting these special education programs for our vulnerable population of highly intelligent students will be catastrophic for both their education and social and emotional needs. We need to safeguard these services for current and future GT identified students.

I am a parent of four children currently enrolled in WCSD. Three of them have been identified as GT and have participated or are currently enrolled in Peavine Pull-out, Caughlin Ranch SWAS, Clayton Magnet, and the Hug GATE Institute. Our kindergartner will most likely need these same services.

I am also a parent volunteer and have regularly taught classes in art, science, and robotics in mainstream, pull-out and SWAS elementary classes for the past 8 years. I have experienced the difference in these classes and how GT students change dramatically in both engagement and security when they are with GT certified instructors and peers. I seek out volunteer opportunities especially with GT kids. Working with the GT teachers has shown I can teach a subject matter particularly garnered to the learning style of GT kids while focusing on social and emotional needs. It is vastly different than when I teach in mainstream classes – both in expectations and teaching style.

I have seen how much these programs matter with my own eyes. I have worked with children across these settings and can tell you what a difference it makes to have a safe place where your interests are celebrated and encouraged, where you are stimulated and engaged, and where you are not isolated or relegated to a corner by both your teachers and your peers. GT certified teachers provide the environment needed for these highly intelligent children to thrive.

We had quite an experience with our eldest who is now a freshman in the Hug GATE Institute. In her early elementary years, she was scoring in the 98-99th percentile in MAPs. In third grade, she was in GT Pull-out. At the time, her teacher was not GT certified nor able to meet her needs. During a normal school day, she was relegated to a corner to read for HOURS because she was done with her work early. She was told to “not worry” about things she was interested in when she asked for more information. Disengagement occurred and her MAPs dropped to the 70th percentile! GT children are so empathetic and non-confrontive that we did not know what had happened until full disengagement occurred. Our GT teacher, Irene Huntington, helped guide us on our next steps to get her out of mainstream, retested, and into the SWAS program. Had we not had prior identification due to teacher nomination or the support of GATE, we would have been at a loss of what to do.

By 5th grade at Caughlin Ranch SWAS, she was scoring back at the 99th percentile. Her SWAS teachers kept her challenged and she was able to make lasting relationships with her peers. She learned not only lessons in academics, but life lessons that she practices today. She continued with

her education with three years at Clayton Magnet. It is a model of inclusivity. She especially thrived in the math program under Dr. Salls.

Our daughter is currently going to run out of math classes in the district at the pace that she is going. At the GATE Institute, they were able to be reactive and place her in the classes that would keep her fully engaged in her education with GT certified teachers that can adjust to her needs. I can think of no other program that could provide this and think it is truly a pinnacle of what GT education can and should be. Without GATE, our child would have been disengaged from school at THIRD grade and would not be able to thrive in a subject that girls are often shut out of.

To think that these services are underutilized or that there is not a need for them is simply not true. I have known kids that have applied to Magnet and were denied due to space. It had a lasting negative effect on them. They are going through the motions of school, but when you ask them about it, you get answers of apathy and pessimism. I have seen bright children that don't make the cut due to changes in universal testing and no money to be tested privately. They are in mainstream classrooms with no support. Our SWAS teachers last year had high ratios of students to teachers - my son's class had 29 children to one teacher! Pull-out teachers have an even bigger challenge when going to different schools. They are met with different levels of support from administration and teachers while trying to provide an environment for GT identified kids to get enrichment, SEL and support in a mere 2.5 hours a week! Some parents and staff still don't understand this essential special education time for their children and treat it like it is a reward. It is not. Being GT does not automatically equal high achievement. Being GT is being born wired differently and needing a specific learning environment to grow and thrive into contributing adults in our society.

Cutting these programs would cause a devastating blow not only to our children currently receiving these essential services, but also to future GT students not yet identified. This population will fail. They will become the problem children in the classroom. They may not even make it to graduation. We need to keep these programs available for our highly intelligent children. For most GT students, this is the only path to success.

I implore you to observe any of these classes – both distance and in-person – to see the benefits of these programs in action. I would gladly talk to any of you in person, via zoom, or on the phone if you'd like to hear more of my unique perspective.

Please do not reduce these essential GT services. We should be investing in them, not reducing them.

Arianne

Arianne Sorreta

Reno, NV 89503

From: Vogel, Eli
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 7:26 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc:
Subject: SWAS comment

When I'm in my SWAS classroom, I know I can be myself. I always felt like "the nerd" in general education. SWAS lets me appreciate who I am, not always wanting to be someone else. This school year we learned about germination, fossils, order of operations, writing 5 paragraph essays, and much more. I'm not going to tell you not to cut anything, because that's completely unrealistic. But I am asking you to think about this when deciding what to cut, because that feeling is the best part of being in SWAS.

Thank you,
Eli Vogel
SWAS 3/4
CRES

From: Jorge Delgadillo
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:00 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerns with GATE funding

To whom it may concern,

As a father of two students who are a part of GATE, I would like to ask that the great benefits of this program be considered when deciding the distribution of funds. This program is essential to the development and success of these young minds in the future. Based on my children's education, I have seen firsthand the difference of a learning environment this program created for them and it would be disappointing to see this program downsized. Before being tested and admitted my children found themselves bored and unchallenged in their regular classrooms. The GATE program has allowed them to develop and make the most of their skills and talents. I hope that you take the opinions and concerns of many GT families with great consideration before making a decision that will severely impact the education of these students.

Best regards,
Jorge Delgadillo

From: Andrew Q
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:00 AM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding the GATE Institute

Dear Washoe County School District Board Members,

My name is Andrew Quispe, an alumni of Hug High School and the GATE Program. It is my understanding that recent legislation has been passed which may directly affect the GATE Program in a negative manner.

GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) is very important to me, and is to all high-achieving students alike, as well as all teachers and educators which work within the program helping students be challenged academically. It is because of this program that I was challenged academically for most of my school years. I have benefited from this program a great deal, such as having earned enough college credits (through AP classes) to make me a Junior in university, which would ultimately help me become an officer in the military much quicker than I could've imagined. Currently, I am enlisted in the Marine Corps (an institution I do not speak on behalf of) and have been able to do well for myself due to the professionalism and etiquette, especially in speech, taught by the GATE Institute. I would wish that these same outcomes can benefit several more students to come.

It is because of this that I write to you today, to the Board Members of my school district, including the president of the board, Angle Taylor, a previous alumni of the same high school I graduated from. I have fought alongside of the board for a new school on Wildcreek Golf Course, having made public comments in support during business meetings and the like. And now I am fighting to keep my program alive and thriving, a program I fully believe in and fully support. If Nevada as a state is to not rank near last in education, keeping these programs well-funded gives hope into bettering our state as a whole, and not just the county.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email, and I hope we can take keep the GATE Institute alive.

Sincerely,
Andrew Quispe

From:
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:00 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT Budget Concerns

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jorge Delgadillo, and I am a student at Swope Middle School in the GT Magnet program. I appreciate the hard work of my teachers and have enjoyed being in this program compared to being in a normal classroom, where I feel like I am not learning or challenged enough. It would be greatly appreciated if you consider the opinion of my peers and I, since it will affect not only me but the other people in this program who also enjoy it. Downsizing the Gifted and Talented program would take away the opportunity for students to grow academically and be in an environment where they can succeed, which I think is the school district's responsibility to provide.

Sincerely,

Jorge Delgadillo

From: Riley Gillis
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:01 AM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Agenda Item 4.10 – Comments From Riley Gillis

Good morning,

I am Riley Gillis, a student attending the GATE Institute at Hug High School and a prior SWAS and Magnet student. I am submitting this comment to not only warn, but beg you to not vote to approve the actions recommended in this agenda item (4.10). As a long-time participant and advocate for these Gifted And Talented Education programs, I can tell you first-hand how critical these are for not only individual growth of the students involved, but also the growth and well-being of our entire school district. GATE students are a different species of student that are truly special education. They do not function on the same level academically or socially as other students and as such require these programs to succeed. Anecdotally, I will tell you that these programs are invaluable. SWAS puts elementary school students who are eager to succeed in a realm of opportunity that truly challenges them, gives them more opportunity to grow than even high school or college courses (with individualized challenge, a plethora of accelerated subjects, and even challenges to non-academic skills (for example: public speaking through requirements of 15-20 minute memorized presentations, a challenging task that surpasses even advanced high school levels)). Most Magnet students will begin high school at higher levels of math than regular high schoolers graduate with (if given the opportunity at places like the GATE institute), and will enroll in 4 years (or 3 for social studies) of AP or college classes for each primary subject. Objectively, the GATE institute and its pathway consistently produces students that attend the most prestigious universities of the entire world, oftentimes on full-ride scholarships. Whether it be Princeton University, Rice University, or even untraditional yet incredibly prestigious pathways like that of the United States Military Academy at West Point, the GATE institute at Hug High School performs time and time again, ensuring success of its students and bringing pride to the Washoe County School District.

Additionally, had I not participated in these programs I would certainly not be where I am today: at the top of my class tri-enrolled at the GATE institute, Health Science Academy, TMCC, president-elect and current Vice President of my Health Science Academy and HOSA chapter, treasurer of my National Honor Society, Regimental Sergeant Major of my JROTC regiment (in charge of around 200 students), Captain of our Raider Challenge (strength and agility training) mixed-team, a part of 2 varsity sports, a concert pianist working for several professional-level local and state orchestras, a student ambassador for a healthcare organization, just worked as the Program Coordinator for a local healthcare organization for ~9 months, and pursuing admission at Johns Hopkins and West Point upon graduation in 2022. I assure you this is not bragging, I see this as average compared to what I am around at the GATE institute; all of these students strive for success and are active in their community. These programs teach students like me to work hard and be active in our community. It is a unique experience for unique students who will only grow in specific environments. This k-12 pathway provides that environment as well as the intended outcomes.

The goal of this agenda item is to "ensure annual student academic growth," by approving this agenda item, the only thing that is ensured is that opportunities are wasted, futures are destroyed, and lives are decimated. Sinisterly, if these students are not challenged through these programs, they will lose interest and turn from the top scholars of America into high school dropouts. Even more disturbingly, I 100% believe that it will cost lives. These students have higher rates of depression and suicide, if one were to take away one of the only things that keeps us going, I am certain it would cost the lives of the greatest minds this district has to offer and suicide rates will increase among this population during these already low-morale times (referring to the COVID-19 pandemic). These students have a very special way of thinking that requires special attention from teachers k-12, not skipping grades or extra busy work from teachers that already have enough on their plates. These programs need more funding, not less, these above-average minds are the future of America; we need to foster their growth, not threaten their education. I understand that funding is a precarious and complex situation, but this is not the solution.

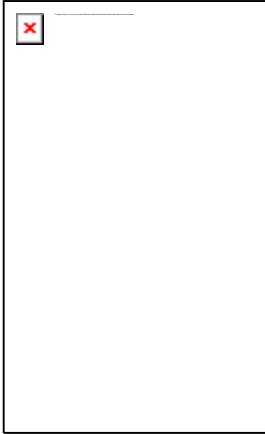
These students' lives are in your hands, it is up to you whether you will loosen your grasp and allow them to grow into the auspicious high achieving scholars they can be with these programs or tighten your hand, suffocating these programs and condemning their students to lives of misery and failure.

I hope you are able to see things from our perspective. Please choose wisely.

Thank you,

Riley Gillis

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Riley Gillis

Concert Pianist | Instructor

Reno, NV



From: Spencer Gillis
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:00 AM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE Program Funding

Trustees,

I am writing this email, along with several of my classmates and current members of the GATE Institute to express my concern for item 4.10 on the board meeting taking place on 26JAN21.

My name is Spencer Gillis, and I graduated with the Hug High School class of 2019. I am a product of the GATE program. There is no doubt in my mind that the experiences afforded to me by the GATE program, beginning all the way back in second grade, have shaped me into the person I am today. I have participated in the GATE pull out program, SWAS program, the middle school magnet program, and most importantly, the GATE Institute. 13 years of my education so far were provided through the GATE program, so it would be unfair to claim that it has not had a serious and relevant impact on my life. I write to you now, however, in defense of these programs. Many times in the past budget cuts have been proposed. Some have experienced more success than others, but since middle school I have done my best to defend these programs and will continue to do so the rest of my life because I have seen firsthand that they are truly life changing.

I am currently studying mechanical engineering and a member of a D1 athletic program at a small public school on the Hudson. This college had been a dream of mine throughout high school, and although COVID has significantly impacted our operations, it remains my proudest achievement. I strongly believe that the primary contributing factor, outside of having parents invested in my education, would be the GATE programs, and in particular, the GATE Institute. I am a member of the second class to graduate from the GATE Institute, so in reality, I have only experienced it in its infancy. Myself, along with many of my classmates, have seen our dreams come true and continue to excel every day because of the foundation that was developed in high school. The GATE Institute provided us with more than just the option of taking more advanced classes than any other high school in the district, it also did so at no expense to our access to the activities that often define our high school experiences. Did the differential equations course I was able to take help foster an interest in math and engineering, and reinforce the idea that I wanted to study engineering? Absolutely. Did the Capstone program expose me to college level writing and open my eyes to the complexity of research? Most definitely. But when I think of high school, I think of the athletic programs I was able to participate in, the band trips and concerts, the leadership challenges I faced in JROTC and NHS... the courses I took were certainly important, and have helped accelerate my education to levels that would have otherwise been inaccessible to me, but the experience would just not be the same without the ability to live life as a high schooler for four years. The challenges placed in front of me by the curriculum, in combination with the experiences and opportunities to grow that I had through participation in extracurriculars, not only made me a better and more educated person, but they also earned me a ticket into my top choice of college - one which has changed the course of my life forever. Mr. Thigpen... I think it would be appropriate to mention here that the GATE programs offer more than just the ability to accelerate education. As you are probably aware, gifted students are oftentimes 'quirky' and do not always fit in with their other classmates, and are frequently subject to ostracism at a young age. GATE programs group together these kids, who think alike and act alike, and provide them with a social environment that makes them feel comfortable with themselves and comfortable at school. These programs are where I made lifelong friends, and that experience is concurrent with many others who go through these programs.

The journey to my own personal success did not start there, however. Since second grade I have been a member of the GATE program, and this accordingly set me up for success at the GATE Institute. After a couple years of participating in the pull out program, I was in SWAS through sixth grade after which I went to the magnet program at Mendive. These

experiences, for myself as well as hundreds of other students, have led us into and prepared us for the most competitive high school programs in the district. To my dismay, however, many of my peers chose not to attend the GATE Institute. This was for many reasons, but the primary two are as follows. For one, like I have already mentioned, I went through this program in its infancy. Even though I was the second graduating class, many of the methods used today were tested out on us (but the program continues to adapt). Many of my peers as well as their parents were concerned that it didn't have the structure necessary to create successful students, so opted for the tried and proven IB program or AACT. I think it has since become somewhat obvious that the GATE Institute is miles ahead of any other program in the district when it comes to providing opportunities for its students to excel, but unsurprisingly, there is still hesitation from many families about sending their students there. This is because the other reason, the one I suspect held many parents back, is that Hug has a false reputation that is perpetuated throughout the school district, within communities of students, parents, and teachers. I know that I need not inform any of you about this, or that many of the rumors and myths about Hug are not indeed true (as climate surveys every year prove), but the reality is, this has hindered the recruitment process for the GATE Institute.

When I heard about the new school being built, I again showed up with my classmates to convince the board that this was a necessary improvement for the Hug community. I care very deeply about Hug as well, and I know that this school will make a positive change in the lives of many in the Hug community. Dr. Taylor, Mrs. Minetto, and Mrs. Calvert, I know that you are all too familiar with the current state of Hug's facilities, and I know you will also agree with me as fellow Hug alumni that the children in the Hug community deserve better than that. Even more importantly than the improvements of the actual school, though, I hope that the new location and mix of populations from several schools will help dispel the Hug myth. As a result, I believe that this will be the first time that the GATE Institute is given a fair chance at success, and I'm excited to see what it will accomplish. But it won't be able to accomplish anything if it is phased out, and one of the best attractions at the school will be nothing more than a faded memory of a time when the school district did its best to provide for all students.

Many of us writing to you today no longer have any skin in the game. We all graduated. Very few of us have siblings in the program. A good portion of us may never even live in Reno again. What we do know though, is that the GATE Institute is something truly special. The college I attend has some of the greatest geographic diversity in the nation. Students attend from all 50 states, and more than 1 in 80 students are from other countries. I have not heard of a single program that is even comparable to the GATE Institute. I have no doubt that similar institutions exist, however, they are few and far between and for a state that is consistently ranked among the bottom three in the country for public k-12 this is an organization to be proud of. There have only been three years of graduates thus far, but I have no doubt in my mind that each and every one will go on to do something great, largely due to the GATE Institute. THAT is why we are writing. We have been fortunate enough to be granted this opportunity, and we feel that it is our duty to ensure that same opportunity is granted to other kids like us. It is far too easy to see high achieving students and forget that they need a specialized education to reach their maximum potential. Many gifted students will falter in generalized education. When school becomes boring, when a child is not challenged by the work he or she receives, and when they inevitably lose the motivation to learn, then their schooling has failed them. These children need an accelerated program to stay engaged in their education, and quite frankly, many of these children will eventually grow up to have massive contributions to their society far greater than what it cost the state government to educate them. Cut that education short, or fail to provide it at all, and at best you have an unfinished product.

We write to you because we acknowledge that these children matter. They matter to far more than us or even their families, though. They matter to society. Every time one of these GATE programs is cut or downsized, children are cheated out of the education that they not only need, but deserve. This population may be small, but take note of the amount of response you are getting today. For the few that this would impact, it means a great deal to them. Several of us are writing to you even though we were already able to squeeze by and luckily dodge every dagger pointed at the heart of the GATE programs! If nothing else, consider the funding required to educate a gifted student an investment. As with any student, the money spent on a child's education will eventually make its way back into that child's community. I know that none of you want to make budget cuts, and I am aware that GATE students fall outside of the acceptable range for per pupil funding. I am also aware that it would be naive to suggest a particular course of action to remedy the situation here, but I am no stranger to bureaucracy. Naturally, as somebody employed by the largest employer in the

entire world, I have already seen my fair share of situations where it seems impossible to accomplish something that should be very straightforward and easy. I have also seen that there is ALWAYS a solution, and I trust that you all will find one. Mr. Church, our experiences in the military are probably very different thus far, but I know that you will understand as a former O-5 the importance of looking out for the welfare of your subordinates, or in this case, your constituents. Ending any of these programs would cause a cascade of effects for several children that could include repeating 2+ years of their education before they start learning anything new. Mr. Caudill, this may seem somewhat removed from your sphere of influence but many of your constituents will be moving to the new high school soon so this impacts them greatly.

If nothing else, take note of the magnitude of responses from parents, current students, and alumni of the GATE program. I think you would be hard pressed to find any other k-12 program in the nation that has such a significant portion of its former students coming back to defend it. If there is anything else we can do to secure the future of young gifted students' education, let us know... we aren't ready to back down.

Very respectfully,
Spencer Gillis

From: Ana Delgadillo
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:03 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE Concerns

To whom it may concern:

Hello, I am Ana Delgadillo, and I am a part of the GATE Institute's graduating class of 2020. I was first introduced to the GATE program in 6th grade where I participated in the Maxwell Elementary School pull-out program, I later moved on to Swope Middle School Magnet, and finally the GATE Institute at Hug high school.

I have nothing to say but wonderful things about my experience as a GATE student, this program created an environment that allowed me to thrive as a student, an opportunity I did not find in a regular classroom. While I am no longer a student in this school district, I am still concerned for the future of the GATE program because it had a huge impact on my education. My younger brother is a part of Magnet at Swope Middle School and has plans to attend the GATE Institute for high school. I'm extremely grateful for the academic opportunities GATE provided for me and I'm 100% certain that I would not be where I am today without it. I want my brother and the many students who are a part of this wonderful program to experience it to its full potential. They have worked hard to achieve what they have and deserve the opportunity to be in an environment that allows them to thrive.

The Washoe County School District prides themselves in their motto, "Every Child, By Name And Face, To Graduation", I believe that in order to uphold this statement the GATE program must be a priority when considering the distribution of funds. Gifted and talented students in this school district, just like all students should be given the opportunity to be a part of a learning environment that allows them to grow and develop their skills and strengths in their path towards graduation. It is no secret that every student has a unique way of learning and that educators try their best to accommodate for different learning styles. The GATE program has been one of the best investments this school district has made because it has done just that, the program allows for students to study at their level and develop skills that would otherwise stay dormant in a regular classroom.

The GATE program is not just helpful to students in an academic aspect, it provides a well-rounded school experience for students that aids in preparing them for the real world. The uniqueness of GATE is that students receive a fully comprehensive school experience, while still attending classes that are at their level and taught by teachers endorsed in gifted and talented education. This education model has been nationally recognized and shows that WCS D has been taking steps in the right direction. It would be disheartening to see this progress gone in a matter of years simply because its overwhelming benefits were not taken into consideration. I firmly believe that GATE is making a significant impact on the success of many GT students as well as the overall future education this district will provide. I sincerely hope the success and benefits of this program are taken into consideration when carefully deliberating the future of GATE.

Very respectfully,
Ana Delgadillo

From: Ana Macias
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:05 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE Funding

To whom it may concern,

My name is Ana Macias, I am the parent of two children who have the great opportunity to be in the GATE program; with the recent discussions about the future funding for this program I would like to express my concern for how the possible changes could impact the education of students in GT. Because of the GATE program my children have been able to have a full day of classes that challenge them, and most importantly that they love. I worry that if not enough funds are allocated for this program GT students will suffer tremendously. The GATE program allows students to grow academically by creating an environment where they can interact with like-minded peers. I saw the frustration of my children when they were in their regular classes because they were not able to learn at their pace. GATE made a difference in their education because it allowed them to thrive. I hope that these concerns are taken into consideration when discussing a decision that could impact the education and future of these bright kids enormously.

Sincerely,
Ana Macias

From: Vogel, Calista
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:09 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: GT Magnet Comment

To whom it may concern,

I moved to Reno for second grade and was part of the general curriculum (with some GT time once a week) until joining magnet at Swope Middle School in sixth grade. As part of the GT community, I have been provided with teachers who will go the extra mile to make sure that their students understand the concepts being taught, contrary to what I found outside of the program. Being in Magnet surrounds me by like-minded students who want to accel and grow which makes my personal school experience enjoyable. It has come to my attention that the gifted and talented program's funding could be reduced, but I ask that you consider the resources necessary to make GT teaching/learning effective.

Calista Vogel
Swope Middle School
Magnet, 7th grade

From: NATALIE Vogel
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:14 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE parent comment

To the Board,

I understand you have the impossible task of managing a large state deficit. I write to let you know how important the GATE program is to my family. I am a physician, as is my husband, and we both practice in this community. We believe in public schools and feel very lucky to have found the GATE program. Unlike the schools we attended as kids in Massachusetts and California, our children were tested to see if they might belong in the WCSD GATE program. Our daughter was tested a year after we moved here and enjoyed the pull-out GT curriculum alongside her general education classroom. Our son joined the SWAS 3/4 classroom in 3rd grade and is now in 4th grade. Our daughter is now at Swope Middle School in the Magnet program.

I cannot overly emphasize how much they are THRIVING. Although they enjoyed school prior to these experiences, they are now being educated rather than helping to educate the other kids in their classroom. The curriculum matches their interests and learning speed, unlike what they experienced previously. Given large classrooms in a large district, they were appreciated but not attended to in the general education classroom, understandably. Socially, they feel much less isolated.

I do understand that perhaps the GATE parents and students are better able to advocate for their needs than parents in other parts of the Special Education curriculum. Given that, I hope you are able to balance the cuts you are forced to make in an equitable way across programs. I care about all the kids in our community.

Thank you,
Natalie Vogel, MD, FAAP

From: Sharon Cabangon
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 8:22 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Proposed Cut to GT services

Dear Board Members,

As a GT math teacher, I am disappointed in the upcoming agenda item 4.10:

4.10 PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO APPROVE THE DEPARTMENT OF GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (GATE) PROPOSED CHANGES TO PROGRAMMING INCLUDING: USE OF GIFTED AND TALENTED (GT) ITINERANT TEACHERS, SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL (SWAS), MIDDLE SCHOOL MAGNET PROGRAMS, THE GT INSTITUTE AT PROCTER R. HUG HIGH SCHOOL, AND THE GT DEPARTMENT (FOR POSSIBLE ACTION)

More specifically, the recommendations brought forth:

SUPERINTENDENT’S RECOMMENDATION: That the Board of Trustees approves the proposed changes for Fiscal Year 2022 to the Gifted and Talented Department and proposed changes to Gifted and Talented services including; relocation of School within a School (SWAS) programming to one elementary school, reduction of the Middle School Magnet Program, reduction of two GT itinerant staff, and phasing out the GT Institute at Procter R. Hug High School beginning in Fiscal Year 2023.

The students that are identified as GT deserve better than this. The reduction of sites and services will impact the equity and diversity of the program. This will also impact the ability of teachers in our district to support GT students all over the district. The support students get from their GT certified teachers is invaluable. We aren’t just pushing them further in content, we are challenging them to think deeper. We aren’t just assigning them menial tasks to keep them busy, we are allowing them to explore their passions to change their world. We aren’t just monitoring them, we are helping them see the value in executive functioning skills so that they can be successful for their lifetime. Our students are supported in ways most people don’t realize they need to be.

All students who are identified as gifted and talented deserve to be given the services that best match their needs. With fewer sites and fewer teachers, how will this be accomplished? How will this change the equity and diversity of the program? So many strides have been taken to increase the equity and diversity of the program, we should not be taking steps backwards.

I implore you to take a deeper look at how these cuts to our program will affect the students, families and community that we serve.

Sincerely,
Sharon Cabangon

From: Cathy Hollomon
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 9:19 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE Institute Funding

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on agenda item 4.10 of the January 26, 2021, Washoe County School Board of Trustees meeting.

I would like to go on record stating that I am against any future cuts to or the elimination of the GATE Institute at Procter R. Hug High School. This Institute provides very important programs that not only benefit the students but our community as well. I might add that the constant threat of funding cuts to this Institute serves as a deterrent to families enrolling children in the program. Please vote to ensure that necessary funding is provided to this very important Institute.

Thank you,
Cathy Hollomon
Reno, NV

From:
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 9:41 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] New Attendance issue

Hi my name is Carol Tyler and I have two kids in the Washoe county school district. The reason for this email I was informed on Friday January 22 2021 that my kindergarten son has a attendance issue. Every time he has been absent I have sent in doctor's note because he has chronic asthma and has missed a few days of school and the dean of students said he is absenteeism. She also sent me a link with the student absent rules stating that none of those absent are excused and the attendance policy has changed. My question is why weren't the parents notified of said change.?. I then read through the policy and it's contradicting because it also states if u bring in a note or verbal excuse then it will not count against the student. Also my son has speech therapy at a private facility every other week and I take him out of school early and the dean said those absent are excused because he has a iep but when I enrolled my son I brought in doctor's note and his medical equipment for his asthma. So how can one be excused but not the other? Can u please clarify this issue for me because the dean of students at his school has no answers.

Thank you for your time

A concerned parent

Carol A Tyler

From: Kelly Li
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 9:46 AM
To: Public Comments; BoardMembers
Cc: kelly.li1979; Bill Jackson
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerns about the cuts to GT in Agenda item 4.10

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing in response to the discussion of reducing or removing Gifted and Talented (GT) services. My son, Daniel Jackson, is a 7th grader in the Clayton Magnet program and my daughter, Sonia Jackson, is to attend the Caughlin Ranch SWAS program next school year. I am very concerned about the cuts to GT in Agenda item 4.10 in the upcoming school board meeting.

Equity issue in closing the Magnet program at Clayton Middle School: Closing the site at Clayton is an “Equity” issue. Clayton Magnet program is the most diverse even though it is small. Most students attending the Clayton Magnet program are zoned for Clayton Middle School. Closing this site will leave these gifted Middle School students little chance to receive GT services due to the issue of transportation to other Magnet sites. These gifted students are a vulnerable group and require special education! My son told me that the Magnet program at Clayton Middle School is a good program. This program keeps him challenged by offering a more advanced curriculum and the teachers at Clayton Middle School are wonderful and knowledgeable teachers and know how to keep the gifted students engaged. So, please don’t close the Magnet site at the Clayton Middle school.

Reducing SWAS to 1 location will not work well for the gifted Elementary Students around

Reno/Sparks/Verdi: Considering the reduction of SWAS staffing from 7 to 3-4 teachers, reducing the number of SWAS schools from 3 to 1 will result in fewer gifted students getting admitted to the SWAS program . Therefore, some profoundly gifted students will NOT receive the appropriate GT services. Again ,transportation may be a significant issue; how will bus transportation work if all the SWAS program students need transportation to a single SWAS site? Will buses and bus drivers be delegated to the SWAS program students?

Please do not reduce GT services. Gifted students need the GT-appropriate services at the proper locations.

Best Regards,

Kelly Li

From: Melanie Lahren
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 9:55 AM
To: Public Comments; BoardMembers
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Reduction in GATE Funding and Programs

Dear Board of Trustees,

My daughter is currently taking part in the GATE Magnet program at Sky Ranch Middle School. It has come to my attention that this program is in danger of being reduced in some capacity due to budget cuts. While I appreciate that deciding where to make cuts within the school district is a difficult task and I don't envy your position, I would ask that you please reconsider making reductions to this program.

GT is a form of Special Education. As such, this form of Special Education should be regarded in the same manner as any other form of Special Education. These children need to be challenged and in a place where they feel safe and understood, both by teachers who have been trained to work with highly intelligent students and by other students who relate to and understand them.

If my daughter is asked to leave Sky Ranch Middle School, as she is not zoned to attend here without the Magnet Program, it will be the second time she's been removed from a GT program in the past two years by the district and the fourth time she's been required to change schools, both to attend and to be removed from a GT program. This is not healthy for a child to have to continue to feel unsettled and that she'll be asked once again to change settings, curriculum and friends.

Gifted children are not only very bright, but they oftentimes have deep emotions, as well. They don't always do well with change and general education teachers don't always know how to help them succeed. My daughter has been made to clean classrooms and teach classmates because she has sped through her assigned work in a traditional classroom setting. General education teachers sometimes feel that they need to pile on extra work, rather than giving them meaningful, challenging work. The wonderful teachers in the Magnet and SWAS Programs cater to the students' needs in a way no other teachers can.

These children need to be seen and fought for just as much as anyone else in the district. It feels as though they are first to be reviewed when budget cuts are necessary because they already meet and exceed educational standards. They're important, too, and their complete well-being needs to be considered.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Melanie Lahren

From: Stephanie Lee
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 10:10 AM
To: Public Comments; Heidi.Gansert@sen.state.nv.us; Teresa.BenitezThompson@asm.state.nv.us
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT in Washoe County School District

Hello. I have heard there is discussion of reducing or removing GT services in the upcoming school board meeting.

I'm highly concerned. Agenda item 4.10 shows drastic cuts to GT in all of these areas.

- Middle School Magnet Programs as a topic doesn't say what's being considered. From the other points in the same agenda item, I'm guessing it means a reduction of services or closing of a site. Again, usage shows there's a need here. Closing sites doesn't fit that.

For these changes, there is no upside, no alternative - it is just a budget reduction.

The discussed changes would gut GT in the district. This will severely affect these bright, hard working, and difficult to teach kids. Mainstreaming GT students reduces their engagement and highly increases the ask of their teachers - many of which don't bother. Most teachers either sideline them, make them unofficial student teachers, or throw busy work at them until they stop asking. These students require high engagement from their teachers, and frankly our educators are, in general, not trained to teach them and do not have the time or energy to make their learning successful.

This also doesn't talk about the loss of some of the most talented teachers in the district. They work hard for these kids and are a benefit to all the other teachers they work with. Reduction here is a further brain drain on our educators right when we need them more than ever. How many mainstream remote classes are leaning on materials and training from GT right now? Our best remote teachers are from GT and we would be lost without them.

A student identified as GT does not mean they are better. It doesn't mean they should just be in a higher grade. Their needs are not solely academic; they also have mental and social needs that are served by GT. A student identified as GT needs a different learning environment OR THEY WILL FAIL. It's special education in every sense of the term. When cuts like these are proposed, it feels to me like those making the decisions do not understand the consequences of not having GT.

These students, these teachers, and these programs are an integral part of our school district and should be treated as such.

Please do not reduce GT services. We should be investing in these programs, not reducing them.

Credit to Jeremy Murray for most of these points - thank you for assisting us advocating as parents.

-Stephanie Lee
Parent and Constituent
Golden Valley, Nevada

From: Rebekah Mayne
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 10:17 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT Education Funds

Dear Board Members,

My name is Rebekah, and I am in the GATE program at Hug.

I wanted to share my experience with you.

I didn't join GT education until my freshman year when I came to the Hug GATE program. Before then I had bounced around public and charter schools attempting to find a good fit, and kept encountering the same problem, the teachers couldn't give me the level of engagement I needed.

In third grade I had placed too high in math and so while everyone else did normal 3rd math, I was given a workbook of 5th grade math, and told to go through it on my own. Being left to learn on my own made it so that when I didn't understand something I would just skip it, a habit I didn't break for many years. My teacher didn't have the time to help me, she had over 30 other students that needed more help.

This became a pattern throughout schools. And in more classes than not, I was either given new material with no instruction, or was left to do whatever I wanted to. This absolutely wasn't any of my teachers' fault either, the school system wasn't set up in a way they could feasibly help me, and even then, many still tried to help as much as they could.

It wasn't until freshman year, in the GATE program, when I finally was engaged. It was the hardest year I had ever had, teachers didn't just let me read or do something by myself, they had the ability to focus in and make sure I was learning. I honestly didn't like it at first, it was hard and I was frustrated with not automatically getting things and being pushed to keep trying. But it was the best thing for me, and I've grown so much because of it.

Without the GATE program, I wouldn't be in the same place I am today. Because of the GATE program I have a clear path for my future, and I feel prepared to be able to work hard for what I want. Something that wouldn't have been as possible for me without the experience GT learning has given me.

The GT programs are incredibly important, and you would be taking away the opportunity to be able to learn for many people if you cut the funding.

Please consider my experience and opinion, and the experiences and opinions of others before you take away very important resources for many students.

Thank you for your time.

From: Kasey Reisinger
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 10:52 AM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Former Students Perspective on the Longevity of the Gate Institute

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to ask that the GATE institute is not terminated. It was the best experience I had in my entirety of education and inspired me to follow my career into being a teacher. I would not be achieving as high as I am in college if I did not have this wonderful resource. A rigorous program to keep students interested in school is essential and we should be expanding its reach, not contemplating getting rid of it. Please reconsider getting rid of this program which provides an education I will be eternally grateful for. The teachers and students were the most passionate I ever met. The effort being put in to create a wonderful learning environment is too rich and important to get rid of. As a previous student of the institute, I do not know where I would be without the program and I fear for the students who would miss out on one of the most impactful life experiences out there right now. Thank you!

With gratitude,
Kasey Reisinger

From: Hollie Perocho
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 12:29 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] In regards to GATE funding cuts

Dear WCSB Board,

As a parent of twin highly gifted children in the CRES SWAS distance learning classroom, I am writing to express my concerns for potential future funding cuts towards the GATE programs. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to volunteer in my daughters' classrooms since they were in kindergarten throughout second grade. My daughters' have had wonderful teachers throughout K-2 in general education that always went above and beyond to keep them both engaged and motivated in class. However, hearing and seeing them in their *first* year in their SWAS distance learning classroom, I can visibly see that the SWAS program keeps them considerably more engaged, motivated and *challenged*, something they haven't ever been granted by no fault of their previous general education teachers. The girls love their SWAS learning and it has been the least restrictive environment in terms of learning and growing into their gifted selves and they should continue to be given the opportunities to do so. Further cuts into staffing and locations make it harder for students such as my girls to thrive in an environment that is best suited for them. Also, it would be amiss to not mention that before they were in the SWAS program, they also benefitted from the GT pull out program with Mr. Burkhouse last year. Mr. Burkhouse inspired and engaged the girls and it became one of their favorite times during the year.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,
Hollie Meier
3rd grade SWAS parent (CRES-distance learning curriculum)

From: Jared Lu
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 12:32 PM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GT Program comment

Hello, I am Jared Lu.

I am also a former student of the GATE Institute at Hug high school and I would like to voice some concerns and opinions. GT is getting smaller and this is obviously bad, especially since it's the early and middle stages of the program if you follow it all the way through. Having gone through GT's Pull-Out program, Magnet, SWAS, and the GATE institute, I can say that without the larger scope that these programs cover, I would have had less opportunity for a better K-12 education. The importance of K-12 education cannot be argued against, since it is so early in life and establishes all the habits and schedules we eventually follow later in life. So I urge the board members today to make sure they make a decision knowing full well that they can affect the education of hundreds of children that need this program.

Thank you.

From: AJ Salvato
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 1:16 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE program Incline Village children

Dear Board Members:

I am writing to you because you are voting on the GATE program. My son, and many other children, are currently enrolled in the GATE program in the Incline Village Schools. This participation is vital in their education. Cutting the program from Incline Village would be devastating. It is not feasible for these children to be driven to Reno for classes. Please consider this when voting. Thank you!

Aldo Salvato

From: Thane Houghton
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 1:28 PM
To: BoardMembers; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding Item 4.10 of Today's Board Meeting

To whom it may concern,

It has come to my attention that Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs may come under serious jeopardy due to new legislation discussed in item 4.10 of today's board meeting. While it will no longer directly benefit me to continue the program, as a former Gifted and Talented student pursuing higher education in Nevada I strongly contend that all Washoe County GATE programs should remain in their current form at all institutions, and the GATE Institute should transfer from the old to new Procter Hug high school location once construction is finished, rather than disbanded.

Gifted and Talented Education is without a doubt among the most positively influential parts of me and many others' upbringing. Without it, I know I would be worse off in both my educational pursuits and in my relations with others. While the changes discussed would not entirely dismantle GATE in Washoe county, it would certainly make it far less accessible to many. This is a crime considering how beneficial these programs can be to eager students who would receive support and accelerated education to better suit their needs, students who may miss out on these opportunities due to not being able to reach a school with a GATE program in place. Additionally, each student requires only a small amount more funding than what is already recommended per pupil. It is unjustifiable not to have these programs in place or to cut them down from their current size, seeing as they help propel forward and enrich the lives of future leaders, doctors, lawyers, educators, and Nevadans.

I beg you to reconsider, and to ensure current and future gifted children will receive the education and support that will benefit them to give back to Nevada later down the road.

Best regards,

Thane Houghton

From: Teresa Benitez
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 1:57 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment for Item Agenda Item 4.10 on 1-26-21

Dear Trustees,

We are parents of three children who are currently enrolled in GATE programs. We have one child in S.W.A.S and two in the middle school Magnet programs; 7th and 8th grade respectively. We count ourselves lucky to have these programs for our children. We believe in public education's ability to serve all children, and our experience supports that belief because of the G.A.T.E programs.

We understand budget constraints are forcing this conversation to occur. However, we ask the Trustees to delay this item until the upcoming legislative session ends. The Governor's recommended budget restores the funding for gifted and talented students that was cut during the 31st Special Session. Delaying the decision until summer 2021 will allow the board to work with actual vs projected figures, including restored funding.

We want to encourage the Board of Trustees and Superintendent to continue the G.A.T.E Programs with the following considerations:

1. Maintain multiple SWAS sites. Consolidating the SWAS program to 1 location is not supported by the heat map data. The heat map provided to Trustees as the last meeting supports the current location of SWAS school sites. The heat map data makes an argument for an additional site in the Northeast area.

2. Do not end the high school GATE program at Hug High School. This program alone continues the educational trajectory established in the middle school magnet program. The students are not well served by alternative programs, such as dual credit or CTE programs. These students will be enrolling into universities who do not value community college credits in the same way we Nevadans do. The alternative programs are not merit based, so there is no guarantee this population of children will have access to them. We will most likely have to seek out educational programs outside of WCSD to meet our children's needs.

Thank you for your time, and for considering our input,
Teresa Benitez-Thompson and Jeff Thompson

From: Renee Fox
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 3:42 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Gate Institute

Why were parents not informed about the closing on the GATE institute? Why wasn't the public made aware of this program downsizing? the GATE Institute is not like other programs (IB, CTE, etc). They have specialized classes that aren't offered at the other high schools and a different math and English pathway. They have a unique English sequence that incorporates AP Capstone Seminar and Research so they get English credit for those 2 classes junior and senior year. It's also the only high school level integrated math option for kids on that pathway out of magnet. Many teachers at Hug completed their GATE endorsements and they cluster the kids in the same sections for AP classes whenever possible. They are also able to work out very unique schedules to accommodate dual credit classes.

llo,

I am writing to you to express my shock and concern on hearing that the school board is even considering cutting the GT program to almost non existent. My two sons... Haiden who is in 8th grade and Hunter who is in 6th grade both attend Clayton middle school in the GT program. Haiden just learned that with his exceptional grades and MAP scores he was accepted to the GATE institute next year! Now imagine the tears and questions I got when I told them it all might go away... just to save some money. My boys have FLOURISHED in the GT programs, in both elementary and middle school settings. They have found a love for learning, for challenging themselves... they have found friends who are like minded and made bonds over learning and extra curricular ties. Haiden used to read alone on the playground ALONE... EVERYDAY in elementary school because he was the "weird smart kid" .. but when he was in the GT program.. he blossomed into a confident young man. Now the district is punishing the highest achieving students they have.. dangling the "new HUG high school" in their faces.. only to strip it away from them. This year has been incredibly challenging on them already... don't take away the only place they feel comfortable to learn and express themselves and challenge themselves!! I am writing to you because when I voted for you... I voted because I knew you would stand up for the students.. and not give in to the political smoke screens that so many fall to. I'm writing to you... no I'm BEGGING YOU PLEASE DO NOT TAKE GT AWAY FROM OUR SPECIAL POPULATION OF STUDENTS.. would you take away rights from IEP STUDENTS?? From students with special needs.. learning disabilities.. then why the gifted ones? They need stability and security just as much as any other students.

Please be then change I saw in you when I voted for you.

Renee Fox

Second grade teacher at Sarah Winnemucca Elementary school

Sent from my iPhone

From: Beverly Philpott
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 3:45 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE

I am writing this letter to try and reverse the proposal to defund this program. I am a retired educator (37 years), and I have seen every possible scenario when it comes to meeting the needs of gifted children. SWAS, Magnet, and the Institute are very wonderful programs. My two grandsons have both benefited so much from being involved. I volunteered in their elementary classrooms, and I have witnessed first hand the difference experiencing higher level thinking can make in a child's life. Please consider all possible avenues to maintain and I would hope improve GATE. Are there grants available? There might be foundations that would step up for our kids. Don't just throw this away. Sincerely. Mrs Beverly Philpott. Sparks

[Sent from Yahoo Mail Friday or iPhone](#)

From: Martin, Melody
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 4:00 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Letter in Support of EL and GT Teaching Positions

To Whom it May Concern;

I am in fervent support of our EL programs in WCSD and as well in the state of Nevada. These second language speakers and their regular classroom teachers need the support of trained educators in the EL programs to help with the learning of English. This is especially true since the new ELA series, Benchmark, didn't include the purchase of any books or materials that align with the series. EL teachers work daily to scaffold and support not only the education of second language students, but we also coach and support their classroom teachers too, through reiteration of daily lessons taught. I have time to coach and work through lessons with key concepts using strategies that regular classroom teachers just often don't, or can't as they are not licensed as language specialists. We need EL teachers in our highly transient district who educate so many children from many different countries and diverse backgrounds and whose parents work in the hospitality industry or as educators at UNR. Please do not vote to end this program nor the GT program that challenges our most gifted students. If that happened it would certainly be considered as reverse discrimination. Our GT students need that special time to explore the different curricula that challenges our brightest students many of whom will be the inventors of our future.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Yours truly,
Melody Martin

Melody Martin, M. Ed.
EL Teacher, Donner Springs Elementary

From: Hollyh
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 4:07 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] No cuts to GT

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to formally comment on my opposition to the proposed cuts to the GT programs in the Washoe County School District. Both of my children are enrolled in this program and it would be an incredible loss to their learning if it were to be eliminated or funding were to be reduced. This program is a place where they can be with their peers and thrive. Many school districts nation-wide treat GT with the same status as special education. These students need differentiated instruction. We should be supporting and challenging our most capable students who might not otherwise meet their full potential in the future. Supporting these students benefits all of us. Please do not reduce funding to these programs.

Thank you, Holly Hemming

Dear Washoe County School board,

Hi, my name is Lola Skroch, and I am a GT student. Ever since I was little, I was that kid in the back of the classroom. The kid who knew the answer to every question, the kid that was always done with their work first. Everything that the teachers taught I already knew. Once I was done with my work, I was often given extra worksheets or was a tutor. People that were regular ED were often teasing me because I was smart. When I got into the Magnet, everything changed. I was not the smartest kid in the class, and I was often challenged. No one in my class teased me or called me a Nerd. I am among people who understand what it is like to be different. The magnet program helps me connect with people who understand what I am going through. My Teacher Mrs. Roberts or Mrs. Is the most wonderful teacher in the world. Not only does she challenge me in multiple academic areas, but she also pushes me to be better. The magnet program helps me to prepare for success. I will be able to take more advanced courses. In some cases, I would be able to graduate high school with an associate degree. The Magnet program helps educate tomorrows leaders. Without the Magnet program I will be put back into a normal ED class with everyone else. Please reconsider cutting the Clayton Magnet Program.

Sincerely,

Lola Skroch

From: John Michela
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 5:37 PM
To: Public Comments; Church, Jeffrey; Minetto, Ellen; Caudill, Andrew B; Thigpen, Kurt L; Taylor, Angela; Calvert, Jacqueline M; Nicolet, Diane M
Subject: [EXTERNAL] January 26, 2021 Agenda Item 4.10 (SWAS & GATE)

To Whom it May Concern:

We are writing to you to oppose consolidating the School Within a School (SWAS) to one elementary school and the elimination of GATE high school program.

We are the parents of a 3rd grader in the SWAS program at Hunsberger Elementary. The SWAS program is exactly what he needs. He is challenged both by the curriculum presented in his SWAS class and by his SWAS class mates who are all at least as smart as he is. We also appreciate that the Hunsberger SWAS program is not too far from Double Diamond Elementary, where he is zoned. Its proximity makes it much easier for us to accommodate what he needs to effectively learn to his abilities.

We think this accommodation is fair and reasonable. To the best of our knowledge, every other student with special needs, whether it be ESL, an IEP, or other special need, is accommodated at the school where the student is zoned. Our SWAS students' special needs are just as important as other students' special needs. As such, we ask that the accommodation of three SWAS elementary schools be continued.

Additionally, we ask that none of the other reductions, such as the elimination of the GATE high school be adopted.

Taking care of all students with special needs is important. The least you can do is maintain the current accessibility of programs for our SWAS students' special needs and enable them to continue learning to the best of their abilities.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

John and Alicia Michela

Monday, January 25, 2021

Washoe County Board of Trustees
425 East Ninth Street
Reno, NV 89510

Dear Trustees,

I write concerning Agenda Item 4.10 of the upcoming January 26, 2020, meeting. I am a parent to 3 GT students, one a 2018 graduate and two who are still students in the District. I have been involved with the GT community in Reno for almost a decade. I was a member of the Gifted and Talented Advisory Council (GTAC), a group of parents and teachers who worked alongside the GT Administration to improve accessibility and promote a widening of the GT Program¹. I participated in group planning sessions with Superintendent Martinez, who advocated for an expansion of the program. Following the expulsion of Superintendent Martinez and a turnover of the GT Program's Administrator, GTAC was no longer welcome to interact with the staff of the GT Program. Instead, GT Program leadership created the Gifted and Talented Advisory Panel (GTAP); I was a volunteer member of GTAP in its inaugural year of 2016.

For over six years, the District has overseen the steady contraction of the GT Program. I believe the shrinking of the program was intentional and is a direct result of the District's sole reliance on computer-based testing for entry into the GT Program. Even the National Association of Gifted Children advocates, "Tests are common assessment tools for identification, but should not serve as the sole source of identification. Tests often exclude underserved gifted students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), disabled, or from minority or low-income backgrounds. An identification strategy that includes multiple assessments—both objective and subjective—is the best way to ensure no gifted learner is overlooked."

Now that the District has steadily minimized the GT Program by throttling the admittance of new GT students into the program, its administrators and District leadership advocate to further shrink it when faced with budget shortfalls. The thinking of "There are not enough students to support this program" is false and hollow.

Between 2015 and 2019, Washoe County grew by roughly 30,000 (www.worldpopulationreview.com). Year after year, the general population has grown, yet year after year, the GT Program has noticeably shrunk. Even on the District's own site, the data shows a steady decline in the GT student population.

I argue that the District has purposefully downsized the GT Program with the sole intent of ultimately eliminating it. The District is once again lacking the transparency that parents and students have sought from it. The District has purposefully, steadily constrained the number of students allowed to participate in the GT Program with the overarching goal to end the program by claiming there is not enough need for those services.

¹ The Washoe County School District Gifted and Talented Advisory Council (GTAC) serves as an advisory body to the Washoe County School District (WCSD) and focuses on enhancement and improvement of Gifted and Talented Programs in Northern Nevada. GTAC consists of parent, teacher, and administrative representatives from elementary, middle and high school levels. <https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/r13118>

My daughter, Millie, who is now in 8th grade in the Sky Ranch Magnet Program, was one of the very last students to receive an in-person test administered by a school psychologist. Her test in late spring 2014 put her in the top 99%, allowing her to go to SWAS when she entered 3rd grade. In 2015, when she entered Jerry Whitehead for 3rd grade, she was part of an incoming class of 18 3rd grade students. When she entered 4th grade in 2016, the incoming 3rd grade class was 10 students. When she entered 5th grade in 2017, the incoming 3rd grade class had roughly 7 students. When she entered 6th grade in 2018, the incoming 3rd grade class had roughly 3 students. In 2019, the Jerry Whitehead SWAS site was shut down.

My son, who was a student in the Mendive Magnet Program, experienced loss in 7th grade (2015-16) and 8th grade (2016-17) when GT electives were eliminated due to the magnet program losing teacher allocations. The shrinkage of the program that started with the loss of magnet program teacher allocations four years ago continues today with the District's proposal to further shrink the GT Program footprint by eliminating two more SWAS sites, shrinking the Middle School Magnet Program, and phasing out the GT Institute – the supposed star in the GT Program's crown.

When fiscal constraint is at hand, students who are designated as gifted are chronically overlooked as not being in as dire of need for services as the general student body. The norm for a gifted student is already so above average that it is easy to dismiss a gifted student's needs as being over and above what a school district is obliged to provide.

I have been told many times my kids will be just fine with less intense instruction; they are already above average. This is a falsehood and those who espouse that point of view are usually people who have had no direct contact or interaction with a gifted student. My daughter's IQ is 140. General education is not enough. It is not challenging enough. It is not intuitive enough. It is not profound enough to satisfy a gifted brain. General education, and the methods by which these subjects are taught, are redundant, repetitive, and so tedious that a gifted student shuts down. I know mine did. Unchallenged academically themselves, gifted students are relegated to helping others in the classroom, running errands for a teacher, or assisting the school librarian. Mine has.

I challenge you to look for another way to satisfy budget deficits. The GT Program was once a thriving entity, full of growth and progress. It was a leader in Project Based Learning, something that many general education classrooms use today. The GT Program is nationally accredited; many families move to Reno to purposefully take advantage of the program. The GT teachers are specially trained and are as high achieving as their students. Please understand the GT Program is literally a life saver for so many students.

The Board would be doing this community a huge disservice to further shrink this program.

Best regards,

Cassandra Grieve

From: Molly Ivans
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:05 PM
To: Church, Jeffrey; Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] GATE Funding Cuts
Attachments: GATE Statement 26 January 2021.docx

Dear Board of Trustees,

I am deeply concerned about the proposed budget cuts to the GATE Department. As the parent of a gifted student and a GATE school counselor, I have firsthand experience with the unique characteristics and needs of gifted students. Gifted students require gifted programming and GT-specific supports in order to reach their full potential.

My son was in the SWAS program from 3rd-6th grade. He greatly benefitted from receiving guidance and instruction from GT-endorsed teachers and a GT-endorsed counselor who understood his unique strengths and needs. He flourished in his cohort of like-minded, high ability peers. Prior to this program, my son was not being appropriately challenged in his grade-level classroom; and this resulted in him becoming disinterested in school and disengaged in class. He was known to daydream in class (due to boredom) and became disruptive to his peers. Finally, the proposal to limit the SWAS program to one school will be a huge deterrent to families. Few parents relish the idea of their child having to endure hours on the bus to and from school each day.

This year, due to lack of transportation for Magnet students, we opted to stay at our zoned school. Not providing transportation for Magnet students is a huge barrier for students who would otherwise attend the Magnet program. Having said that, it is essential the district continues to offer differentiated instruction from GT-endorsed teachers to students' at their zoned middle schools.

The GATE Institute at Hug High School is the only GATE specific option for high school students. Cutting this program would be a huge disservice to students and families. CTE & Signature Academies, AP classes, Dual-Credit, and IB are not a replacement for the self-contained gifted programming students receive from GT-endorsed teachers at the GATE Institute.

Finally, gifted students have unique characteristics and needs that are supported by GT-specific counseling and support services. Please see the attached document which outlines GATE counseling services.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Molly Walker Ivans

GATE Counseling Talking Points

As a GATE parent and GATE counselor, I will address the unique needs of gifted and talented students; and the supports and services existing state funding has allowed us to provide.

- GT students have unique and diverse developmental needs requiring specialized guidance and counseling services.
- Research suggests that GT students share certain characteristics such as perfectionism, idealism, heightened sensitivity, and emotional intensity. These characteristics may lead to increased levels of depression and anxiety.
- Some GT students experience boredom in school when their curiosity and intellectual drive are unappreciated. I have witnessed this lead to disengagement, underachievement, and behavioral issues.
- GT students may find "school unreceptive to and unresponsive to their knowledge and talents (Rimm, 2003). Discomfort related to poor fit may continue throughout the school years. Consequent social and emotional difficulties may arise."
- GT students may experience difficulties in peer relationships due to unusual talents or interests and asynchronous development, which is a discrepancy between emotional maturity and cognitive ability.
- High achieving GT students "may experience high levels of stress related to expectations of self and others, high levels of involvement in activities, heavy academic loads, and decisions related to postsecondary education (Peterson et al., 2006)."

As GATE school counselors, our services are aligned with American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) standards.

- The ASCA Position Statement reads, "The school counselor delivers a school counseling program to meet students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs. Gifted and talented students have unique and developmental needs that are addressed by school counselors within the scope of the school counseling program and in collaboration with other educators and stakeholders".
- Also, NAGC Standards state that, "while educators need to understand the cognitive development of students with gifts and talents, they also need to know about psychological and social and emotional needs that need to be addressed that support talent development in the contexts of school, home, and the larger community."
- As GATE counselors, we advocate for the unique needs and exceptional abilities of GT students. We deliver classroom guidance, small group counseling, and individual counseling to address GATE specific topics such as executive functioning skills, perfectionism, anxiety, stress management, underachievement, social skills and peer relationships, self-regulation, and twice-exceptional students; these students are gifted and talented with a disability.
- Our services include providing GATE specific strategies, interventions, and resources to students, parents, teachers, and administration, as well as facilitating connections between home, school and community.

In closing, please consider the powerful impact GATE counseling services play in supporting GT students in realizing their full potential. Thank you! Molly Walker Ivans

From: Ingrid Meier
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:11 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SWAS Changes

Dear Washoe County School Board,

I am a third-grader enrolled in the SWAS program. My parents told me that SWAS may be relocated to a school that does not have experience with SWAS students. Although I am in the distance learning program, I believe that Caughlin Ranch provides a good learning atmosphere for me. I think it would be difficult for me to move to a different school that has never had SWAS students there. Also, Dr. Luckey is an excellent teacher and I hope she stays in the SWAS program.

Sincerely,

Ingrid Meier

From: Lori Breuch
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:13 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] proposed cuts to Gifted and Talented Programs

Dear Board Members,

I am currently working as the in-person GT magnet Social Studies teacher at Clayton Middle school. This is a temporary position for me--normally I am an itinerant with GT. This is a valuable program that serves an often overlooked segment of our student population. The students in the Clayton magnet come from a diverse background. We claim, as a district, to want to know every student by name and face by graduation, the Clayton Magnet takes it a step further. We know our students--who they are, their hopes and dreams, and what their individual educational and social/emotional needs are. We challenge them and offer support and guidance. Many travel quite a ways to attend. This program should be promoted more fully, not cut. This program stands in stark contrast to my work as an itinerant in district middle schools. Providing differentiated curriculum for gifted students not in the magnet program is at the discretion of individual classroom teachers. Gifted students look forward to their time with itinerants, particularly if they are not challenged in their regular classes. Students in middle school crave the opportunity for extra attention the itinerants bring, be it from the itinerant or the regular classroom teacher. Cutting itinerants will lead to less student contact, less "knowing" of our students.

If cuts are needed, they should be kept out of the classroom. Honoring the student-teacher relationship, when we claim this in our mission statement, should be the budget priority.

Thank you
Lori Breuch
Gifted and Talented Teacher

From: Eleanor Meier
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:20 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SWAS Change

Dear Washoe County School Board,

I am a third-grader in the SWAS Program. I was told by my parents that there is a possibility that the SWAS students will be relocated to a school with no experience with SWAS. Caughlin Ranch is an awesome school and even though I am in the distance learning program, Caughlin has a great learning atmosphere. Moving to Roy Gomm would be okay, since I have friends there and it's close. But to a whole new school is just difficult, overwhelming, and altogether a bad idea. My current teacher Dr. Luckey is awesome and I hope she will remain in the SWAS teaching program.

Sincerely,
Ellie Meier

From: Jackson, Maureen
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:25 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Fund our GT programs!

This letter is regarding the reductions in GT allocations. Both of my children are currently enrolled in the GT program in WCSD. One is in the GATE program at Sky Ranch and the other is in the GATE Institute at Hug High and has been part of the GT program for 3 years prior.

Before my children started in the GT program, they were not challenged in the regular ed program. They earned all A's while giving average effort. School was easy, dull and redundant. It wasn't until they both entered the GATE programs that they finally were challenged and become part of rigorous education. My freshman is now working her way through the program, including being enrolled in the Human Development Signature Academy and taking PE credits outside of school. She is very motivated and desires the challenge. She is on track to earn the Capstone AP diploma which may be taken away from her if the Trustees don't support our GT programs.

Please continue to fund these programs! They are invaluable to a percentage of students who deserve the best in their education. I fear both of my children will fall through the cracks if these programs are removed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Maureen Jackson

From: Nancy Telliano
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 6:33 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please reconsider cuts to GT

Dear Board of Trustees,

I am the parent of a GT student who attended the SWAS Program at Caughlin Ranch Elementary School and currently attends the 7th grade Magnet Program at Clayton Middle School. I am very disappointed to hear you are considering cuts to the GT Program and I beg you to reconsider.

My son was identified as gifted at the end of second grade. This was after a year of countless notes home and phone calls that my child was not participating in class and not completing his school work. When he started third grade in the SWAS program it was like night and day. He was finally in a classroom with other kids just like him, with teachers teaching to his ability and level, and he THRIVED. And he continues to thrive, thanks to his amazing, dedicated, passionate teachers, some of whom I imagine will be out of a job if you cut back these services.

I have heard it said that general education classrooms are a good fit for the 68% of students that fall within one standard deviation of the median, and that those within two standard deviations of the median, ie 95%, still succeed, sometimes with additional services. However, you would never expect those students in the bottom fifth percentile to succeed in a mainstream classroom. So why aren't you applying the same logic to those in the top 5%? These kids think differently. They are differently wired. They NEED these GT programs!

WCSD Strategic Goal 1 states: "To ensure annual student academic growth through a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is aligned, rigorous, and relevant. Instruction will be designed to meet the needs of every child in our diverse student population." Cuts to the GT curriculum will not help meet this goal. It will be a failure to your diverse student population.

I know these are tough times. I understand you have to make cuts somewhere but I beg you, make them somewhere else. Please support these students, ALL of these students, by not cutting back on GT services.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nancy Telliano