

campus

# Bryan gifted program grows

By LOUIE ARTHUR  
Battalion Staff

For many years, children with high IQs sat at their school desks and looked out the window, waiting for their classmates to complete the task they had finished long before.

Sometimes, if they were too far ahead of their peers, these gifted students were pushed ahead a grade or two. Then they faced the problem of fitting in with older kids whose cliques weren't open to new students, especially those who bore the label, "the brain."

Three years ago, Bryan school officials recognized these problems in their schools and started a program designed to fit the special needs of gifted students.

The gifted student program is expanding this year due to a \$62,500 grant awarded to the Bryan Independent School District by the Texas Education Agency, Doris Ruffino, who supervises the teachers involved in the program, said.

Ruffino said the school district does not advocate grade-skipping as an answer to students who are not sufficiently challenged by normal classroom curriculum.

"We're trying to place the emphasis on horizontal enrichment and broadening rather than accelerated course work," Ruffino said. "There is more to development than advanced reading or math. We want to help the student become a total, well-rounded person."

Students are chosen for the program by teacher assessment of grades and development and on the basis of mastery, achievement and intelligence test scores, Ruffino said.

"We're really ahead of many other schools," Ruffino said, "considering the state has not put up any money until this year." The program has been supported by the school board for the past two years.

Ruffino said the money from the state will enable BISD to start a formal program for kindergarten through fourth grade by hiring three itinerant teachers for the nine K-4 campuses. In addition, the new funds will provide new instructional materials and supervisory assistance for the 600 gifted students at all BISD schools.

Rebecca Huchingson, who teaches gifted fifth-graders at Lamar School, said the main thrust of their program is enrichment in the communication skills area.

Gifted students at Lamar take special field trips (i.e. going to the ballet or art exhibits) and spend more time in creative thinking activities. Five hours of their school day is spent in the program; the remaining time is used for regular studies with the class.

"Instead of drilling these students, you only have to say things once," Huchingson said. "Ask them to read one book and they've read three. Motivation is not a problem for most of them. They enjoy being able to express themselves and have others appreciate their work."

Huchingson claims neither her gifted students nor their classmates in the regular curriculum have much trouble adjusting to the program.

"These kids are natural leaders in many cases," she said. "They participate in outside activities like football and Little League. There may be some resentment (among regular students) but most of them are proud of their friends."

The emphasis of Stephen F. Austin's gifted student program, as in the other Bryan schools, is on enrichment activities rather than acceleration.

Lucille Foster, who teaches the junior high school's gifted eighth graders, said her students gain skill in creative thinking and problem solving.

"These are bright, fun kids with novel ideas," she said. "Gifted students are able to master the material

in 60 percent of the time. They become bored in regular class."

Foster's gifted pupils work together on group studies, visit museums in Houston, hear special lecturers and have produced their own magazine.

"A lot of them have developed stronger leadership qualities," Foster said. "They need to realize they are different. I try to get them more product-oriented, using their special skills to help other people."

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