



Gifted and Talented Handbook

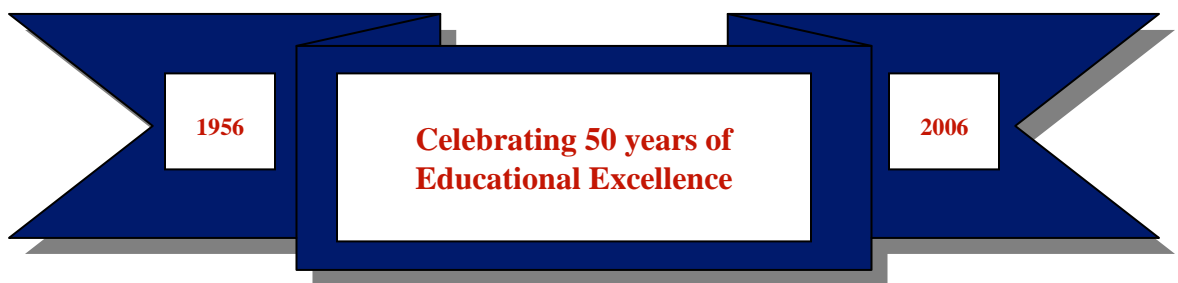


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The Comal Independent School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, marital or veteran status, the presence of a medical condition, disability, or any other legally protected status. Peggy Fuller, Executive Director of Human Resources, has been designated to coordinate compliance with the non-discrimination requirements of Title IX, and Kathy Williams, Coordinator of Special Programs, to coordinate compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

COMAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS

DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Comal ISD, as the foundation of public education, is to provide extensive learning opportunities through the commitment of a broad range of district wide resources to ensure that every student in our diverse community has the opportunity to become a contributing member of our changing society.

DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY OF GIFTED EDUCATION

We believe that every human being is of value, with the right to optimal development. Each person is unique; therefore, we are committed to an educational program that recognizes the special value and needs of the individual student. Providing programs and materials for gifted students who **perform at or show the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment (§ 29.121)** is an integral part of this commitment.

We believe that gifted students need a **continuum of learning experiences that leads to the development of advanced level products and/or performances (§89.3)**. Modifications in instructional strategies, content, and the development of skills and/or products are part of the services provided. The program helps develop self-actualized learners by encouraging effective communication, guiding learners to be focused and self-directed, nurturing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and focusing on independent research study skills, as well as developing critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills.

The purpose of the program is to seek, identify, and provide gifted learners with experiences that develop the potential of each individual. Identified gifted students should be challenged in order to fully develop their abilities.

STATE GOAL FOR SERVICES FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

Students who participate in services designed for gifted students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment. High school graduates who participated in services for gifted students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services. (From the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students, Revised May 2009, Texas Education Agency)

DISTRICT GOALS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

It is the goal of Comal ISD to use the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* as the guide for continuous improvement of district G/T services. Improvement and modifications of services would include:

- differentiated instruction and curriculum options in intellectual, creative or artistic areas, leadership and specific academic fields
- opportunities for acceleration in areas of exceptional academic strength
- depth and complexity as an integral part of the state/district curriculum with students creating sophisticated products and/or performances assessed by experts in the field that is the focus of the product.

COURSE SEQUENCE OVERVIEW

SAGE (Significant Activities for Generating Excellence)/ Gifted and Talented Program - Elementary

The elementary Gifted/Talented Program focuses on general intelligence and uses the core subject areas of language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics as a base for developing higher level thinking skills and problem solving strategies. All of the CISD elementary campuses have G/T facilitators with extensive training, including the 30 hour required state G/T training and 6 hour updates. These G/T facilitators are responsible for directing and facilitating the G/T program at each school by implementing the district's identification process (including referral/screening, testing, notification and documentation), providing differentiated instruction support for classroom teachers, providing pullout classes for identified G/T students, and conducting the annual G/T campus program evaluation. A variety of G/T staff development is offered to all CISD teachers each year—including nature and needs, identification and assessment of gifted students, curriculum and instruction (differentiation), social and emotional needs, and creativity.

Kindergarten:

Kindergarten students who are identified as needing G/T services are provided services by the campus G/T facilitator starting on or before March 1st of their kindergarten year as required by the *Texas State Plan*.

Elementary (1-5):

Identified gifted students are grouped (clustered) together in classes with trained G/T teachers at each grade level. (Clusters of at least three gifted students per classroom are suggested.)

The G/T facilitator provides pullout services on each campus and facilitates higher level thinking skills as outlined in the CISD G/T Program Process Scope & Sequence.

Appropriately challenging learning experiences related to the four (4) core academic areas (language arts, math, social studies, and science) for gifted and talented students are offered at

the elementary level through a variety of instructional strategies. Examples include acceleration or compacting of grade level curriculum, in-depth critical investigations, and/or thematic units. Curriculum is differentiated in content depth and complexity, process and/or product by those involved in the instruction of identified gifted or talented students. Emphasis is placed upon activities that develop the student as a life-long learner.

Gifted and Talented Program – Secondary

Middle School - Grades 6-8 (See Middle School Curriculum Handbook at comalisd.org)

(Classes open to identified Gifted and Talented students only)

6th grade – Critical Thinking Through Cultural Awareness – (G/T)

This class is designed to meet the specific needs of identified gifted and talented students. Emphasis is on intellectual exploration and the development of critical thinking and problem solving through an appreciation of cultures. An enrichment curriculum integrates core content areas and explores the process of problem solving through both independent and team-based development of advanced projects. This class incorporates aspects of communication, character development, and effective use of technology/resources. Assessment is based on both product quality and process skill.

7th grade – Critical Thinking Through Cultural Awareness – (G/T)

This class is designed to meet the specific needs of identified gifted and talented students. Students will continue to explore the process of critical thinking and problem solving and begin to implement and expand the process through an appreciation of cultures. Research skills and opportunities for creativity will be promoted. High level products and the process associated with critical thinking will be assessed.

8th grade – Critical Thinking Through Cultural Awareness – (G/T)

This eighth grade class is designed to meet the specific needs of identified gifted and talented students. Students will apply the process of critical thinking and creative problem solving through an appreciation of cultures. The course requires high-level, independent and team-based cooperative experiences leading to the development of advanced products. Students will be required to participate in the *Texas Performance Standards Project* in an area of their interest as a final product.

Independent Study (See Middle School Curriculum Handbook at comalisd.org)

- Social Studies Research and Design at 7th and 8th grade
- Science Research and Experimental Design at 7th and 8th grade
- Independent Study Mentorship at 8th grade

At select grade levels, and depending on the quality of students' Independent Study products, they have the opportunity to earn high school elective credit and an advanced measure toward the Distinguished Achievement (DAP) diploma.

High School - Grades 9-12 (See High School Curriculum Handbook at comalisd.org)

Comal ISD high schools offer several options for gifted/talented students. Students may elect to complete a *Distinguished Achievement Plan* for graduation which includes four advanced measures. Any combination of four of the following measures will apply.

- Original research/project (Gifted Students should consider the *Independent Study Mentorship* and work with a mentor from the community for this independent research opportunity)
- Test data – appropriate qualifying scores on The College Board Advanced Placement exam, International Baccalaureate exam, or PSAT exam
- College course credit

Dual high school/college credit courses are offered at each CISD high school. For information on college credit earned from high school courses students should contact their campus counselor.

A variety of Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement courses are offered at each district high school. Pre-Advanced Placement courses offer differentiated content with more depth and complexity and are designed to prepare students for Advanced Placement courses. Students may take Pre-Advanced Placement courses without being required to take Advanced Placement courses. See High School Curriculum Handbook for Pre-AP listings.

Advanced Placement courses, usually taken during the junior and senior year of high school, are college level courses. They receive Comal ISD's Advanced Placement weighted ranking, and generally require Pre-Advanced Placement courses as prerequisites. See High School Curriculum Handbook for AP course listings.



REFERRAL PROCEDURES

A student enrolled in a Comal ISD elementary or secondary school may be referred for the Gifted and Talented Program by:

1. a teacher, counselor or campus administrator,
2. his or her parent/guardian, or by another adult who has knowledge of his/her abilities,
3. himself or herself, or
4. a peer.

Referrals will be accepted year round, but will be solicited during the fall of each year in accordance with the District G/T Referral and Screening Timeline. In addition, all kindergartners will be assessed for the SAGE/ G/T program each year.

Parents are required to complete a referral form which includes written consent for screening their child for the gifted program.

IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES

The formal identification process for the elementary Gifted and Talented Program occurs in the fall for students new to the district and the spring semester for current students. Students may be considered for the CISD Gifted and Talented Program only once within a 12-month period. Assessment in the areas of intellectual and academic fields with a minimum of three criteria, including both qualitative and quantitative measures, is used. A combination of the following assessments may be given.

Intellectual Ability and Academic Achievement – Objective Measures

Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test (NNAT) - This nonverbal test permits accurate evaluation of students with limited English proficiency (LEP, Bilingual/ESL)

Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) Contains measures in Verbal, Quantitative, and Non-Verbal Abilities

Student Characteristics – Subjective Measures

Inventory of behaviors compiled by the parent/guardian

Observation inventory completed by teacher

Portfolio activities completed at school, demonstrating problem solving, fluency, and elaboration may be used.

In the case of transfer students the District G/T Committee may substitute results from other current, comparable tests.

Data (identified only by student ID number) is reviewed and analyzed. The District G/T Committee recommends appropriate educational placements. Parents/guardians will be notified of the committee’s decision. Parents/guardians of all qualifying students must give written consent to their child’s participation in the SAGE program.

Parents of non-qualifying students may request a conference with the elementary G/T facilitator to review the test results. If the parent/guardian questions the decision of the District G/T Committee, they may initiate the appeals process. All appeals will go to Terilyn Moore, Advanced Academics Coordinator (830-221-2044; terilyn.moore@comalisd.org).

Students in the Gifted and Talented Program in kindergarten through fifth grade are identified in terms of general academic ability. Students are served through a differentiated curriculum in all core content areas in the regular classroom and are provided social/emotional and higher level activity opportunities in a weekly pull-out situation.

Students in the Gifted and Talented Program in grades six through twelve are served through a differentiated curriculum in all core content areas in the regular classroom, through the G/T Critical Thinking through Cultural Awareness course (6-8 grades), and through numerous independent study opportunities at both middle school and high school.

The District G/T Committee is comprised of the district’s G/T Facilitators and the Coordinator of Advanced Academics.

- See CISD Board Policy EHBB (LEGAL)

GIFTED POLICIES

TIMELINE

Comal ISD’s timeline for referrals, assessment, admission decisions, and services is as follows:

Students new to the district who enroll in the fall will be assessed for the GT program as requested by parents. Referral forms are due by 5:00 Friday of the first week of school. Assessments will be administered during the 2nd week. For new students who qualify, services will begin the 3rd week.

Grade	Referrals	Screening	Parent Notification	Services Begin
Kinder	Due by Nov. 30	Dec. – Feb.	End of February	March 1
1-11	Due by Jan. 30	Jan. – Apr.	Beginning of May	Next Fall

APPEALS PROCESS

A parent/guardian or student may appeal the final placement or exit decision. A written appeal must first be made within 30 days of the notification of placement or non-placement in the G/T program. The appeal should be directed to the Coordinator of Advanced Academics. The District G/T committee shall re-evaluate all testing information/processes, examine additional information provided by the student and/or parents, make a decision concerning the student's qualification for the gifted services, and inform the parent/guardian of this decision in writing.

The district level decision will be based on campus adherence to CISD policy and process. Subsequent appeals shall be made in accordance with Board Policy FNG (LOCAL) beginning at Level Two.

TRANSFER STUDENTS

Transfer students who have been identified for a Gifted and Talented Program in another district will be considered for entry into the CISD G/T program. The campus G/T placement committee will review identification data from the former school district. Additional assessment may be required. An appropriate placement recommendation will be made when the necessary data is available and has been reviewed.

Since high school students work for credits, a transfer student who has already begun instruction in a class for the gifted in the previous school will be allowed to enroll in comparable courses for the gifted until the campus G/T committee has acquired and reviewed the needed data and made recommendations. The G/T committee may require additional assessments with Comal ISD testing instruments.

FURLOUGH

Furloughs are intended to help students who need a temporary break from the program, not to remove non-performing students. The campus G/T committee may grant a furlough when it is deemed to be in the best interest of the student. A furlough may not exceed one academic year. At the end of the furlough period, the student will be re-evaluated by the campus G/T committee to determine if he/she should continue in or be exited from the program.

EXIT PROCEDURES

Elementary students in the Gifted and Talented Program may be exited under the following conditions:

- 1 Refusal of G/T services request from the parent/guardian.
- 2 Decision of the campus Gifted and Talented Committee based upon a review of a recommendation of the parent, G/T teacher, counselor, or principal that this student is not progressing satisfactorily. The parent/guardian must be invited to discuss these issues before the exit decision is final. A furlough period may be provided to offer a break prior to an exit decision.

In each of these circumstances, the parent/guardian will be notified and a conference will be arranged with the G/T teacher and any other appropriate personnel requested by either party. Data gathered will be presented to the campus G/T committee. An Exit Report will be completed, signed, and forwarded to the CISD G/T Coordinator. Any exited student seeking re-entry must be reevaluated using current program criteria.

Note: A secondary student may end participation in an accelerated class but retain the gifted classification if he/she is served in a different content area for the gifted.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Students selected for the gifted program are subject to an informal review at the end of each academic year. Each student's progress will be evaluated based on satisfactory performance in the program. Satisfactory performance is defined as demonstrable development in higher level thinking skills, mastery of major concepts, and development of advanced level products that include independent study habits and initiative. Comal ISD's Gifted and Talented Scope and Sequence is used to determine student progress.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All teachers of gifted and talented students have completed an initial thirty hours of prescribed professional development, including nature and needs of the gifted student; identification and assessment; and curriculum and instruction for gifted students (differentiation). Teachers also receive six hours of yearly update training.

Administrators and counselors are also required to have at least six hours of administrative training in nature and needs; identification and assessment; curriculum and instruction; and program options for gifted and talented students.

All CISD classroom teachers are provided opportunities to attend trainings throughout the year in a variety of settings such as district workshops, state level conferences, or workshops offered by the Education Service Centers, the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, and/or the College Board. Teachers are responsible for implementing their training in the classroom to meet gifted students' needs.

FAMILY-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As per the *Texas State Plan*, the district provides an orientation meeting for all parent/guardians of identified gifted students. This orientation meeting will be held in the fall.

The district also provides an information meeting each fall to solicit referrals for the G/T program from any parent and/or community member.

The district recognizes the vital importance of parent/guardian support and community involvement to the success and growth of the Gifted and Talented Program and students. Comal ISD has an active parent association for the gifted/talented. Notices of meetings will be posted on the district website and in district and campus communications.

Community volunteers are encouraged to share their expertise by presenting lectures/demonstrations on various topics related to the themes studied in each grade or as mentors to students who are involved in independent study in an area of special interest.

Support and assistance in G/T program planning and improvement is encouraged through the Advanced Academics Advisory Committee. Representatives from a parent advisory committee will sit on the Advanced Academics Advisory Committee, along with district/campus administrators and teachers, to participate in G/T program planning and improvement.

CURRICULUM

The curricular and instructional needs of gifted students are met by modifying the depth, complexity, and pacing of academic content, learning processes, and evaluation products relevant to the general school program. This modification is accomplished through a **differentiated**, academically enriched learning environment, as well as through instructional methods and materials that encourage independent scholarship.

The following are principles of differentiation that came from the National Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and Talented and continue to be the basis for differentiated experiences.

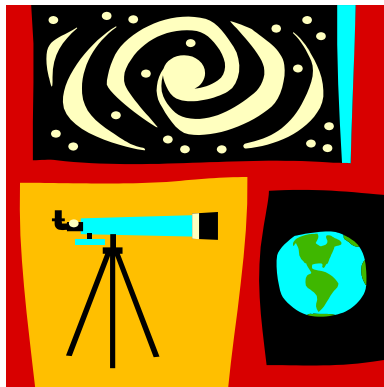
1. Present content that is related to broad-based issues, problems, or themes.
2. Integrate multiple disciplines into an area of study.
3. Present comprehensive, reinforcing, mutually related experiences within an area of study.
4. Allow for the in-depth learning of self-selected topics.
5. Develop independent or self-directed study skills.
6. Develop research skills and methods.
7. Focus on open-ended tasks.
8. Develop productive, complex, abstract, and/or higher level thinking skills.
9. Integrate basic and higher level thinking skills within the curriculum.
10. Encourage the development of self-understanding, i.e., recognizing and using one's abilities, becoming self-directed, appreciating likenesses and differences between oneself and others.
11. Encourage the development of products that challenge existing ideas and produce new ones.
12. Encourage the development of products that use new techniques, materials, and forms.
13. Evaluate student outcomes by using appropriate and specific criteria through self-appraisal, criterion referenced and/or standardized instruments.

The principles of differentiation fall into three categories: content, process, and product. The content items are the first four principles and deal with what is taught. The process items are the next five and include how we obtain skills and develop thinking. The final four principles are

product items. Products are the ways in which we demonstrate learning—how we communicate what we have learned.

Elementary Gifted and Talented Scope and Sequence Critical Thinking Skills Process

Concept	Foundational Topic	TEKS/ TAKS	Specificity	Resources/ Skills/Activities
Critical Thinking	Problem Solving	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Perceiving	Observing Comparing/ Contrasting Making analogies
			Analyzing	Grouping Labeling Classifying Categorizing Ordering Sequencing Prioritizing
			Patterning	Visual Auditory Language
	Judging/ Evaluating	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Inductive Reasoning	Gathering and analyzing information Hypothesizing solutions and validating hypothesis Formulating new ideas
			Deductive Reasoning	Forming a problem statement Hypothesizing Gathering data Revising and finalizing hypothesis
			Judgment	Forming a question Considering and analyzing responses Cross examining and defending ideas Forming conclusions



Elementary Gifted and Talented Scope and Sequence Creative Thinking Skills Process

Concept	Foundational Topic	TEKS/ TAKS	Specificity	Resources/ Skills/Activities
Creative Thinking	Fluent Thinking	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Producing ideas	Brainstorming, discussions, debates, current events, personal opinions, creative problem solving, etc.
			Accepting ideas	
			Building on ideas	
	Flexible Thinking		Speculating on a situation	
			Adapting an idea	
			Seeing connections	
	Elaborative Thinking		Embellish ideas	
			Refine ideas	
	Original Thinking		Creating ideas	
			Inventing ideas	
			Envisioning ideas	
			Refining/ Reassessing	



Elementary Gifted and Talented Scope and Sequence Independent Inquiry /Research Skills Process

Concept	Foundational Topic	TEKS/ TAKS	Specificity	Resources/ Skills/ Examples/Activities
Independent Inquiry/ Research Skills Process	Research	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Research Skills	Selecting and refining of topics Identifying audience Determining possible products Using research methods/materials Gathering information Organizing information Presenting original products Evaluating outcomes
	Product Production	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Kinesthetic	Construction, demonstration, drama, games, experiments, simulations, etc.
			Verbal	Characterization, discussions, debates, interviews, literary forms, musical presentations, oral interpretation, oral reports, speeches, etc.
			Visual	Brochures, centers, collages, cubes, designs, displays, drawings, flipbooks, flipcharts, maps, journals, graphs, models, photo essays, posters, scrapbooks, sculptures, slideshows, timelines, transparencies, videos, etc.
			Written	Advertisements, booklets, brochures, comic strips, crossword puzzles, diaries, journals, magazines, newspapers, notebooks, pamphlets, plays, poems, reports, research, songs, stories, travelogues, etc
		Technology	Word processing, internet usage, spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, multimedia presentations, podcasts, digital storytelling, movies, etc.	



Elementary Gifted and Talented Scope and Sequence Social/Emotional Process

Concept	Foundational Topic	TEKS/ TAKS	Specificity	Resources/ Skills/Activities
Social/ Emotional Process	Interpersonal	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Receiving	Accepting assigned tasks Respecting authority Acknowledging giftedness in self and others Respecting learning
			Responding	Respecting others and their rights Displaying/responding to humor appropriately Using appropriate manners Interacting effectively in group situations
			Valuing	Accepting divergent ideas Tolerating imperfection in self and others Accepting praise, punishment, and criticism
	Intrapersonal		Intrapersonal skills	Exhibiting self-direction Modeling trustworthiness Accepting consequences for action Accepting giftedness in relation to self and others Demonstrating independent action



Critical Thinking through Cultural Awareness (G/T)
Grades 6th, 7th, 8th
Assurance and Scope and Sequence

Throughout the year, students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Gifted and Talented Elective will develop and utilize the following skills through cultural awareness.

Concept	Foundational Topic	TEKS Statement and Objective	Specificity	Resources – Teachers may select, but are not restricted, from the list below. Technology and other resources are part of each lesson.
Culture	Study Skills Problem Solving Critical Thinking Communication	All TEKS are considered for each grade level and content area	Note taking Research Time Management Organization Test-Taking Logic Inductive/Deductive Reasoning Reading Critically Analytical writing Creative Writing/Expression Creative Questioning Oral Non-verbal Listening	Geography Art Literature Archeology Science Mathematics Technology Social Studies Humanities Psychology Philosophy Propaganda Media Bias Economics



**Comal Independent School District
Middle School Independent Study Mentorship Elective
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

1. What is the Independent Study Mentorship (ISM) Elective course?

The ISM course is based on the Exit Level Texas Performance Standards Project and offers a non-traditional learning experience to those gifted and/or high achieving students who have the ability to create innovative products. The course provides students the opportunity to explore an area of personal talent and interest at levels of depth and complexity comparable to those experienced by professionals in the field of study.

2. What is an advanced measure?

Advanced measures are those items that meet the two standards included in 19TAC§74.13(a)(3): they reflect student performance at a college or professional level and are assessed by external evaluators.

Students who fulfill specific course requirements and who successfully complete four (4) advanced measures qualify to graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program.

3. What does it mean when a student meets Exit Level criteria?

Exit Level criteria are the scoring criteria established by Texas Education Agency (TEA) for high school credit and advanced measures under the Independent Study Mentorship course. The nine (9) scoring dimensions include:

- Knowledge and skills
- Innovation and application
- Analysis and synthesis
- Ethics/unanswered questions
- Multiple perspectives
- Methodology and use of resources
- Communication
- Relevance and significance
- Professional quality

The Exit Level criteria form the basis of the Scoring Scale that is used to evaluate (1) the student's learning process, (2) his/her effective communication, and (3) his/her final product. **A student must earn a minimum score of 2 in each of the areas—process, communication, and product—in order to receive high school credit and an advanced measure.** See TEA: <http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/ScoringCriteriaExit.pdf>

4. What are the required project components?

A project consists of the long-term development of a question or idea that is significant to professionals in the student's specified field of study. Grounded in the content of the TEKS, the project allows students to develop an important content area question or idea in depth, but it does not necessarily reflect broad content knowledge of the field. Additionally, the project will demonstrate the use of sophisticated and advanced research methods and the use of technology appropriate to the field of study. The project results in learning that is demonstrated through products appropriate to and comparable in quality to those of a professional who works in the field of study. A project consists of:

- a product
- an abstract
- a process record
- a presentation
- a question-and-answer session

The selection of the format of the product must convey the knowledge and skills learned in the project. The **product** is the focus of the scoring process. This culmination of the student's comprehensive study must exhibit mastery of content and thinking skills. Developing the final product is the focus of the student's learning process.

When submitting a project for scoring, the student should include an **abstract** that summarizes the project. The abstract includes:

- the title of the project
- the purpose or goals of the student's project
- a description of the student's product
- a brief description of the project's relation to the TEKS

Along with the product, each student submits a **process record** that documents the student's learning advancement. The process record enables a reviewer to follow the student's learning throughout the project. Each student also submits a **videotape** of a public presentation, consisting of a brief explanation of the project and a question-and-answer session with the audience. The teacher/facilitator/teacher/facilitator may have additional requirements.

5. Who determines whether or not a project is successful and meets the standard for high school credit and an advanced measure?

Every Independent Study project will be reviewed and scored by a panel consisting of:

- a counselor
- an administrator
- a content expert
- a high school teacher in the content area
- a district-level Curriculum Coordinator

- a G/T teacher

6. **What happens if a student completes the project but the project does not meet the Exit Level criteria?**

Final project submission/due dates will be established far enough in advance to allow students the opportunity to significantly revise their projects in order to meet the Exit Level criteria.

If a student chooses not to revise his/her project, he/she will receive middle school elective credit based on the quality of the work submitted.

If a student does choose to revise his/her project, the timeline for revision will be established by the teacher/facilitator, and the project will be deemed “Incomplete” in the interim. The timeline for revision will not exceed the end of the school year in which the project was begun.

CAUTION: Independent Study Mentorship projects receive weighted grade points that help determine a student’s ranking at graduation. For this reason, students are encouraged to carefully consider the negative effect a failing grade or an “Incomplete” may have on their final transcript and their class standing.

7. **How does my student enroll in the Independent Study Mentorship course?**

Students who are interested in the Independent Study Mentorship course must see their counselors in order to enroll. Students must complete an application process and sign a contract in order to participate.

**Comal Independent School District
Middle School Independent Study Mentorship Elective
Student Application/Questionnaire**

1. The Independent Study Elective course is time-intensive, requiring that **students complete the majority of the work on their own and outside of the regular school day.**

a. From your past experience provide specific examples of times you successfully completed tasks/projects on your own, outside of the regular day.

b. What specific traits do you possess that enable you to be a successful independent worker?

2. In what other elective courses and/or extra-curricular activities do you currently participate?

3. How will you manage the time required for your other courses and/or extra-curricular activities against the time required for your Independent Study project? Be specific.

4. Both the ability to follow through, work under pressure, and meet deadlines is critical to the successful completion of an Independent Study project. From your past experience, briefly describe a time when you successfully completed a task/project under such conditions.

5. In connection with your Independent Study project, what topic are you interested in exploring? Why are you interested in this particular topic?

6. As you reflect on the topic you wish to explore, who might serve as your teacher/facilitator and/or mentor?

7. In connection with your Independent Study, what specific learning goals have you established?

8. Why are these learning goals important to you? Be specific.

9. What product do you plan to create?

10. How, specifically, will the product you create help you achieve your learning goals?

11. Your successful completion of an Independent Study project requires an exceptionally high level of commitment from you. As you reflect on your current situation and circumstances, what obstacles are you aware of that *might* interfere with your ability to successfully complete your Independent Study project?

12. List three references who know you well and who can provide information on your ability to work independently, to work under pressure, and to meet deadlines.

a. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

b. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

c. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

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Comal Independent School District Middle School Independent Study Mentorship Elective Student Contract

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in the Independent Study Mentorship (ISM) Program where you will have the opportunity to explore one of your areas of interest in depth. If you are interested in science, you will conduct studies much as a laboratory scientist would do. If you would like to be a costume designer, you might like to take an original collection from conception to runway show. Many students graduate from high school, and even college, without these valuable experiences.

You will be given a structure for your participation, but it will be up to you to identify an important question or idea that is of interest to you to explore. Your project should reflect professional quality work.

Projects

A **project** consists of the long-term development of a question or idea that is significant to professionals in your specified field of study. Grounded in the content of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the project will develop an important question or idea in depth and will not necessarily reflect broad content knowledge of the field. Additionally, the project will demonstrate the use of sophisticated and advanced research methods and the use of technology appropriate to the field of study. The project will result in learning that is demonstrated through products appropriate to and comparable in quality to those of a professional who works in the field of study. A project consists of a **product, abstract, process record, and presentation/question-and-answer session**.

The selection of the format of the product must convey the knowledge and skills learned in the project. The **product** is the focus of the scoring process. This culmination of your comprehensive study must exhibit mastery of content and thinking skills. Developing the final product is the focus of your learning process.

Along with the product, you will submit a **process record** that documents your learning advancement. The process record should enable a reviewer to follow your learning throughout the project.

You will summarize the project in a formal **abstract**.

You will also make a **public presentation**, consisting of a brief explanation of the project and a **question-and-answer session** with the audience. Your teacher of record may have additional requirements.

Support

You will be supported in a variety of ways during the course of this project:

- The educator responsible for guiding you through the project is known as your **teacher of record**.
- Any person with content expertise in your area of study and who may work closely with you on your project is known as your **mentor**. Your mentor might also be your teacher of record.
- **Other educators**, such as counselors, library/media specialists, campus administrators, and district and regional gifted/talented coordinators, will help you locate resources and provide additional support as needed.

Timelines and Deadlines

Your teacher of record and your mentor (should you have one) will work with you to establish interim timelines for your project and final completion date. **It is your responsibility to meet the obligations of the agreed-upon timelines and deadlines.** To receive continued school support for your project, you must show evidence of timely progress. **If you repeatedly and substantively fail to meet agreed-upon timelines and deadlines, you may be withdrawn from the project.**

Project Assessment

The Texas Education Agency has established the criteria and scoring scale that will be applied to your final product. They focus on *process, communication, and product*. **You should become very familiar with these criteria and scoring documents, using them to assess your own progress throughout the project.** In order to earn high school credit and an advanced measure toward Distinguished Achievement, you must earn a minimum score of “2” in each of the three (3) criteria. Your teacher of record and your mentor (should you have one) will meet with you regularly to assess progress, revise plans, and provide you with feedback based on the scoring scale.

CAUTION: Independent Study Mentorship projects receive weighted grade points that help determine a student’s ranking at graduation. For this reason, students are encouraged to carefully consider the negative effect a failing grade or an “Incomplete” may have on their final transcript and their class standing.

I understand the requirements/responsibilities of the Independent Study Mentorship and agree to abide by the terms of this contract.

Student signature

Date

I/We grant our child, _____, permission to participate in the Independent Study Mentorship. We understand and agree to the requirements/responsibilities our child must fulfill.

Parent signature

Date

Parent signature

Date



Comal Independent School District High School Independent Study Mentorship Elective Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Independent Study Mentorship (ISM) Elective course?

1. The ISM course is based on the Exit Level Texas Performance Standards Project and offers a non-traditional learning experience to those gifted and/or high achieving students who have the ability to create innovative products. The course provides students the opportunity to explore an area of personal talent and interest at levels of depth and complexity comparable to those experienced by professionals in the field of study.

2. What is an advanced measure?

Advanced measures are those items that meet the two standards included in 19TAC§74.13(a)(3): they reflect student performance at a college or professional level and are assessed by external evaluators.

Students who fulfill specific course requirements and who successfully complete four (4) advanced measures qualify to graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program.

3. What does it mean when a student meets Exit Level criteria?

Exit Level criteria are the scoring criteria established by Texas Education Agency (TEA) for high school credit and advanced measures under the Independent Study Mentorship course. The nine (9) scoring dimensions include:

- Knowledge and skills
- Innovation and application
- Analysis and synthesis
- Ethics/unanswered questions
- Multiple perspectives
- Methodology and use of resources
- Communication
- Relevance and significance
- Professional quality

The Exit Level criteria form the basis of the Scoring Scale that is used to evaluate (1) the student's learning process, (2) his/her effective communication, and (3) his/her final product. **A student must earn a minimum score of 2 in each of the areas—process, communication, and product—in order to receive high school credit and an advanced measure.** See TEA: <http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/ScoringCriteriaExit.pdf>

4. What are the required project components?

A project consists of the long-term development of a question or idea that is significant to professionals in the student's specified field of study. Grounded in the content of the TEKS, the project allows students to develop an important content area question or idea in depth, but it does not necessarily reflect broad content knowledge of the field. Additionally, the project will demonstrate the use of sophisticated and advanced research methods and the use of technology appropriate to the field of study. The project results in learning that is demonstrated through products appropriate to and comparable in quality to those of a professional who works in the field of study. A project consists of:

- a product
- an abstract
- a process record
- a presentation
- a question-and-answer session

The selection of the format of the product must convey the knowledge and skills learned in the project. The **product** is the focus of the scoring process. This culmination of the student's comprehensive study must exhibit mastery of content and thinking skills. Developing the final product is the focus of the student's learning process.

When submitting a project for scoring, the student should include an **abstract** that summarizes the project. The abstract includes:

- the title of the project
- the purpose or goals of the student's project
- a description of the student's product
- a brief description of the project's relation to the TEKS

Along with the product, each student submits a **process record** that documents the student's learning advancement. The process record enables a reviewer to follow the student's learning throughout the project. Each student also submits a **videotape** of a public presentation, consisting of a brief explanation of the project and a question-and-answer session with the audience. The teacher/facilitator/teacher/facilitator may have additional requirements.

5. Who determines whether or not a project is successful and meets the standard for high school credit and an advanced measure?

Every Independent Study project will be reviewed and scored by a panel consisting of:

- a counselor
- an administrator
- a content expert
- a high school teacher in the content area
- a district-level Curriculum Coordinator

- a G/T teacher

6. **What happens if a student completes the project but the project does not meet the Exit Level criteria?**

Final project submission/due dates will be established far enough in advance to allow students the opportunity to significantly revise their projects in order to meet the Exit Level criteria.

If a student chooses not to revise his/her project, he/she will receive high school elective credit based on the quality of the work submitted.

If a student does choose to revise his/her project, the timeline for revision will be established by the teacher/facilitator, and the project will be deemed “Incomplete” in the interim. The timeline for revision will not exceed the end of the school year in which the project was begun.

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7. **How does my student enroll in the Independent Study Mentorship course?**

Students who are interested in the Independent Study Mentorship course must see their counselors in order to enroll. Students must complete an application process and sign a contract in order to participate.



**Comal Independent School District
High School Independent Study Mentorship Elective Program
Student Application/Questionnaire**

1. The Independent Study Elective course is time-intensive, requiring that **students complete the majority of the work on their own and outside of the regular school day.**

a. From your past experience provide specific examples of times you successfully completed tasks/projects on your own, outside of the regular day.

b. What specific traits do you possess that enable you to be a successful independent worker?

2. In what other elective courses and/or extra-curricular activities do you currently participate?

3. How will you manage the time required for your other courses and/or extra-curricular activities against the time required for your Independent Study project? Be specific.

4. Both the ability to follow through, work under pressure, and meet deadlines is critical to the successful completion of an Independent Study project. From your past experience, briefly describe a time when you successfully completed a task/project under such conditions.

5. In connection with your Independent Study project, what topic are you interested in exploring? Why are you interested in this particular topic?

6. As you reflect on the topic you wish to explore, who might serve as your teacher/facilitator and/or mentor?

7. In connection with your Independent Study, what specific learning goals have you established?

8. Why are these learning goals important to you? Be specific.

9. What product do you plan to create?

10. How, specifically, will the product you create help you achieve your learning goals?

11. Your successful completion of an Independent Study project requires an exceptionally high level of commitment from you. As you reflect on your current situation and circumstances, what obstacles are you aware of that *might* interfere with your ability to successfully complete your Independent Study project?

12. List three references who know you well and who can provide information on your ability to work independently, to work under pressure, and to meet deadlines.

d. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

e. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

f. Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

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Comal Independent School District High School Independent Study Mentorship Elective Student Contract

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in the Independent Study Mentorship (ISM) Program where you will have the opportunity to explore one of your areas of interest in depth. If you are interested in science, you will conduct studies much as a laboratory scientist would do. If you would like to be a costume designer, you might like to take an original collection from conception to runway show. Many students graduate from high school, and even college, without these valuable experiences.

You will be given a structure for your participation, but it will be up to you to identify an important question or idea that is of interest to you to explore. Your project should reflect professional quality work.

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Parent signature

Date

Parent signature

Date



RESOURCES

World Council for the Gifted and Talented Children, Inc.

www.SENGifted.org

The purpose of the *World Council* is to focus world attention on gifted and talented children and ensure the realization of their valuable potential to the benefit of humankind.

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

<http://www.nagc.org>

NAGC invests all of its resources to train teachers, encourage parents, and educate administrators and policymakers on how to develop and support gifted children and what's at stake if high-potential learners are not challenged and encouraged.

National Society for the Gifted and Talented (NSG/T)

<http://www.nsg/t.org/resources/organizations.asp>

The mission of NSG/T is to advance the development of gifted, talented, and high potential youth, in the United States and abroad, through opportunities, advocacy, and exemplary programs and practices.

American Association for Gifted Children at Duke University

www.aagc.org

The American Association for Gifted Children (AAGC) is the nation's oldest advocacy organization for gifted children. It was established in New York in 1946.

AAGC publishes information for parents, educators and the public only on the web site. Publications located on the web site include an occasional series called *Working Papers* and information on research-based educational practices, including the Javits Research Project, Bright IDEA 2 funded by the US Department of Education to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with AAGC.

Texas Association of Gifted and Talented (TAG/T)

www.txgifted.org

The Texas Association of Gifted and Talented has a parent affiliate group membership that provides a wide range of resources for parents.