Webster Elementary ACAT Program

Alternative Classrooms for the Academically Talented

Handbook

Livonia Public Schools
Webster Elementary
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Webster ACAT Mission Statement

The community of Webster Elementary School dedicates itself to ensuring a safe and nurturing learning environment that facilitates personal growth and meaningful interaction of all children and adults. Students will leave our school empowered to think clearly, care deeply, and act wisely.
Webster ACAT Vision Statement

Why do we exist?
- To provide an enriched, accelerated full-time magnet school for academically talented and gifted students.
- To provide a curriculum that is differentiated in pace and depth.
- To be partners with parents in educating academically talented and gifted children.
- To provide a responsive learning environment that includes: access to a variety of materials and activities; support for exploration, choice and student need; and psychological safety for all students. Based on the research of Dr. Barbara Clark, expert on gifted education (see resources.)

What kind of school are we?
- A school that is a research-based professional learning community, where parents, staff and students are all learning.
- A school where positive relationships are forged.
- A school that honors the social, emotional and academic needs of gifted children.
- A school that meets the unique needs of our population.

How do staff create this kind of school?
- We commit ourselves to be lifelong learners.
- We strive to have positive relationships throughout the learning community based on open communication, respect and dialogue.
- We allow ourselves to be open to change and new ideas.
- We make decisions based on current research and best practices.
- We continue to learn about educating gifted children and we draw upon our mentors, including Dr. Barbara Clark.
• We work towards in-depth understanding of concepts being taught, using a multidisciplinary approach and differentiated instruction.

**How do we achieve our goals?**
• We commit to becoming a professional learning community.
• We are researchers ourselves to insure that we put theory into practice.
• We create common assessments in order to let our own data drive instruction.
• We set measurable and attainable goals. Our results are based on collected data.
• We follow the continuous improvement process outlined by NCA - AdvanceED. This includes feedback and monitoring from district personnel.
Philosophy of Gifted Education

Entrusted with the education of all children in the school community, Livonia Public Schools is dedicated to maintaining the well-established tradition of striving to provide the most appropriate educational experience for each individual student. Seeking to be consistent with the major goals of education for the district and aware of vast differences and needs among children in the school community, Livonia Public Schools accepts the obligation to provide an effective education for gifted and/or talented young people.

We believe gifted and talented students are those who, by virtue of outstanding ability, achievement and/or motivation, are capable of high performance in academic achievement and in intellectual ability. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or service beyond that normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

The democratic ideal includes the nurturing of the unique gifts and talents that students possess. Cooperatively, the home, community and school district seek to implement programs designed specifically to nurture the identified gifts and talents. The fulfillment of the educational rights of the gifted and talented offers a valuable return to the society that upholds these rights.

In a democratic society, all students should have equal opportunity for personal growth. It is clear that equal opportunity does not mean identical opportunity. Educational programs for gifted students cannot just be different, they must be qualitatively different. These programs must include the same goals for gathering knowledge and developing skills as we find in the regular program and share many of the same strategies and concerns. The gifted program must go beyond fact gathering and process development, toward emphasizing opportunities for gifted students to find their own areas of interest and ability, to experience the problems of their chosen areas, and, through personal effort, to develop real solutions to these problems. These factors characterize a program for the qualitatively different learner we call gifted.
Delivery System

Instructional Delivery:

Students in grades one through six, from across the district, become full-time students in the ACAT Program. The program’s home is Webster Elementary School, which also houses a center program for children with moderate cognitive impairments.

ACAT is supported by a Principal and a part time Gifted /ACAT teacher facilitator. The program also has the support of an Elementary Student Assistance Provider (ESAP) Specialist/ social worker and a psychologist.

Youngsters are placed in multi-age classes, within family settings of grades 1 and 2 (called Family 1), 3rd and 4th grade (Family 2) and 5th and 6th grade (Family 3.) This is the method of choice and provides teachers the opportunity to place children in groupings to most productively meet their needs.

Students receive teacher-directed large group instruction, small group instruction and one-on-one instruction. Youngsters work in small groups or teams to share knowledge and to learn the skills of teamwork and cooperation. A centers approach is used in the lower grades to meet individual learning needs, as well as to give our children the opportunity to make choices and practice decision-making skills. Centers are learning stations in which students have a variety of ways to learn or practice academic skills or concepts.

The alternative classroom structure provides a nurturing environment, a differentiated curriculum, and the opportunity for essential interaction among children with like abilities, interests and talents.
The delivery of the differentiated curriculum is based on Dr. Barbara Clark’s Integrative Education Model (IEM). Clark uses current knowledge of the brain and its functioning to suggest strategies to optimize learning for children.

The following are basic to our philosophy of gifted education:

*The Responsive Learning Environment.* The environment is viewed as a support for optimizing learning. Within this component is a concern for both the social-emotional environment and the physical environment. The teacher, the parent and the student are a team in achieving effective learning.

*Relaxation and Tension Reduction.* The human brain processes more and retains information longer when tension is reduced. Strategies for reducing tension are important tools for both teachers and learners.

*Movement and Physical Encoding.* The use of the physical/sensing function of the brain provides support for learning by increasing understanding and retention of concepts. Physical encoding strategies are considered an important part of the teaching process.

*Empowering Language and Behavior.* The brain uses emotions to trigger the production of bio-chemicals to enhance or inhibit the thinking functions. IEM encourages the use of language and behavior that empowers learners, between the teacher and the learner and among learners. This component includes strategies which build community and positive intrapersonal and interpersonal communication.

*Choice and Perceived Control.* Choice and perceived control play an important part in the success and continued achievement of the learner. Strategies that build skills of decision-making, build ability to align personal and school goals, and foster alternative thinking and self-evaluation are encouraged. The teacher must include choice in the environment and in the learning experiences if optimal learning is to be achieved.

*Complex and Challenging Cognitive Activities.* Because there are at least two ways to process thinking, opportunities must be provided for learning that allows use of both linear, rational and spatial gestalt processing. By providing novelty, complexity, variety and challenge in the classroom, the education process becomes more brain compatible.
Curriculum:

The curriculum for our academically talented youngsters is an outgrowth of Livonia Public Schools’ Core Curriculum, which is aligned with our state’s content expectations (GLCes), a document which defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes we believe all students must attain in grades 1-6. The ACAT curriculum is differentiated, which means it is different in pacing, depth, breadth and methodology.

Curriculum for the gifted and talented should:

- Focus upon major ideas or themes that integrate knowledge within and across disciplines.
- Emphasize explicit instruction in problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking and logic.
- Promote self-directed and self-initiated learning.
- Foster the development of communication skills through a variety of forms and techniques.
- Foster self-understanding and through that, the understanding of other individuals and institutions.
- Be continually assessed by procedures that include self, peer and content assessment rubrics.
Language Arts Curriculum

Our language arts program is a combination approach: reading, writing, speaking and listening occur in an integrated fashion.

Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop

Students at Webster have opportunities to grow as readers and writers through a workshop format. Through this format, each child makes purposeful choices as to how they will use their reading and writing time. The workshop format provides for time for whole group lessons, small group instruction and individual conferences.

During the reading workshop, students are encouraged to choose “just right” challenges as reading choices. Students might read to learn more about a particular area of interest, study a genre, analyze a character or to participate in a book club. Students may leave “tracks” of their thinking, insights and observation in a reading response journal or other forms of notes. In addition to pursuing personal projects and interests, students participate in ongoing units of study.

Development of decoding skills, phonetic skills and sight vocabulary occurs within reading context and through direct instruction. Comprehension strategies are taught at all levels with varying levels of complexity.

An environment rich in language invites youngsters to become proficient in all forms of communication.

Literature and informational text are used in content areas. Reading becomes integrated into the writing, social studies and science curriculum being studied.

During the writing workshop, students participate in ongoing units of study. Students study and learn to write in a variety of formats. They may study memoir or personal narrative, nonfiction writing, personal essay, poetry, persuasive essay as well as on-demand writing. Writing is presented through a process approach: a cycle of craft which improves with time and effort. Student writers draft, revise, and edit. The emphasis is on improving and refining skills.

Word Study and Mechanics

Language skills, spelling strategies and writing craft are taught within the context of writing workshop. These lessons may occur in large or small
groups or individually in a conference. Language mechanics and spelling, along with handwriting, are a part of writing instruction.

The reading and writing workshop encourages children to discover ways to use reading and writing to do powerful things in the world in which they live. Reading and writing are more meaningful experiences when the purpose begins with the individual. The opportunity for choice also allows each child to discover his or her own challenge at a more individualized pace.

Mathematics

Our youngsters have a wide range of math knowledge. To meet their varied needs, they work in instructional groupings. Basic computation skills, concept building and application are taught and a heavy emphasis is placed on problem-solving. A text supported by curricular materials and manipulatives are utilized.

At Webster, students use the University of Chicago School Mathematics Program. The Everyday Mathematics program is used by most of the students. Students have opportunities for differentiation in mathematics. Based on the results of a placement test, students may be instructed at grade level or one year above grade level. Embedded in the EM program are opportunities for differentiation within each lesson. Students who are working above grade level are offered a prealgebra program in 6th grade. This program is called Transitions and is also published by the University of Chicago.

Social Studies

The social studies curriculum integrates history, civics, geography and economics. The content cycles through local, state, national and international areas and through time from ancient to the present and into the future. Teachers of our youngest students carefully choose the areas of study to fit their students’ interest and developmental needs.

Current events is an integral component of the program for our students. Simulations, role-playing, research and communication skills are utilized. Future projections and problem solving are integrated into the curriculum. Field trips, outside speakers and mentors may enrich these studies.

Science

The framework of our science curriculum is a balance of life science, earth science and physical science. Students learn the skills of hypothesizing,
validating, inferring, interpreting and generalizing often through hands-on experiences. Science gives youngsters an excellent opportunity to use problem solving, divergent thinking and critical thinking skills.

Special Classes

Students have weekly instruction in art, music and physical education. They also learn both research skills and informational technology skills in the Library Media classes.

Developing curriculum to fit the needs of these children is an ongoing process. The teachers begin with basic skills and then design the program to enrich and extend the understandings of the youngsters they serve. The interests and abilities of the children are considered as they implement a differentiated curriculum to fit the needs of academically talented youngsters.

Units of study in both science and social studies often culminate in an experience where youngsters share their knowledge with the larger community of learners. Students share through Learning Fair activities, school wide assemblies and demonstrations to other classes and grades. Some past examples of these activities have been MarbleWorks Fair, Biography Fair, National Parks Expo, Life size Polar Animal display, Marsville, Science Fair exhibits and cell model display, to name a few.
The Learning Environment

The environment is flexible, cooperative, and caring. Students, teachers and parents participate in the learning process. Planning, implementation and evaluation of learning experiences is shared.

We believe positive self-esteem is of prime importance to any learning. Viewing oneself as a capable, loving person who is cared for is essential. So too is actively caring for others. Opportunities to develop self-esteem are important to helping each child become the best learner possible. Teachers recognize this as an important part of the instructional program for children.

We also understand that learning occurs in settings which are comfortable, non-threatening and focused. To this end, teachers use empowering language and work to create learning communities that are emotionally safe.

We actively seek to develop each child’s “inner locus of control.” We seek to help children understand that they are ultimately responsible for themselves and their learning. We do this by providing continual options and alternatives. We model the process of identifying choices, making decisions and evaluating the results. We believe that children can and should be actively involved in decisions about their learning experiences. We provide clearly stated behavioral guidelines, often generated through classroom discussions. Students can feel secure in knowing what the expectations are and can practice appropriate behaviors in a safe and nurturing environment. Our program has adopted 3 behavioral guidelines which all students are expected to follow. They are "take care of yourself, take care of each other and take care of the environment." Students have opportunities to learn and practice these rules to live by and when there is a violation of one of the rules, students will have a logical and age appropriate consequence.
Research studies show that success in later life is in direct correlation to how much inner locus of control the individual has developed. This perception of responsibility for and control over one’s life is cited as the single most important condition for success, achievement, and a sense of well-being.

The teachers are comfortable in the on-going give-and-take involved in dealing with very capable, knowledge-filled students. They understand their role is not one of “all knowing” but rather a teacher of basic skills and a facilitator to aid in setting goals, locating resources, organizing ideas, questioning, hypothesizing, urging the “carry through” and eventually assessing.

The classroom environment is enriched and the classroom extends into the community. When available, mentors bring a world of interests and experiences to the students. Mentors may come once and share with a group, or they may work with a group on an ongoing basis. Our students may participate in field trips in connection with areas of study and community service. We often use sites such as Cranbrook and the Henry Ford/Greenfield Village to extend youngsters’ learning. Typical projects evolving from community interaction may include planting flowers at Greenmead, producing musicals, participating in science fairs, social studies walks, a writing anthology, and outside programs such as Math and Social Studies Olympiad. Our lunchtime Enrichment Adventures program offers even more opportunities. Some of the activities offered have included math club, knitting, writing clubs, book clubs, foreign language activities, technology clubs, and cooking, just to name a few.

The environment that peer interaction elicits can be an exciting one! Giving youngsters the opportunity to work productively with peers of similar ability is important to their personal growth, as well as educationally sound. The interaction among youngsters stimulates their thinking as they share ideas, interests, and concerns. They learn to appreciate the talents of others as they begin to see their own abilities in a realistic light.

Being a part of the ACAT program is often the beginning of academic challenge. Youngsters are given instruction and then an opportunity to practice process skills which will enable them to become life-long learners. They are encouraged to become risk takers. They are taught that they are in charge of themselves and their learning and that it is their responsibility to develop their gifts. That job requires hard work, time, energy and consistent effort. Finding one’s own place in the larger community becomes realistic in this environment.
ASSESSMENT

Student assessment and student self-evaluation are ongoing and integrated into the teaching and learning process. The staff has developed a unique report card that shows student progress and captures Webster ACAT’s curriculum by grade level.

We view self-evaluation as the key to quality learning. Students use may use plan sheets and assignment books as organizational tools. Rubrics that spell out criteria for quality work are given for major assignments and projects. Teachers and students may keep portfolios of carefully chosen work samples.

Reporting occurs quarterly and often includes a Student-Led Conference in which students share their portfolio after carefully planning the discussion they will lead. Parent conferences occur in the fall, with additional conferences at the parent’s request.

Families receive a report card at the end of each marking period. This report card reflects student achievement as well as progress in life and learning skills.

Livonia Schools Testing Program includes:

- CogAt (Cognitive Abilities test), grades 3 & 6
- ITBS, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, grades 3 & 6
- Michigan Education Assessment Program: Reading and Math, grade 3-6; Writing, grade 4; Science, grade 5 and Social Studies, grade 6.
- District benchmark tests in reading, writing and mathematics, starting at grade 2.
SELECTION PROCESS FOR SEPTEMBER - GRADE ONE THROUGH GRADE FIVE YOUNGSTERS

Parents of kindergartners through grade four youngsters may nominate their students from November through February. Notification occurs in Livonia Public Schools’ official publication, “Dialog,” as well as in a letter carried home in January by the youngsters in Livonia Public Schools. Notification is also posted on the district website and appears on cable TV.

Present kindergarten through 2nd grade youngsters take individually administered reading and mathematics tests and, based on those results, are then administered a group ability test. These measures are administered by LPS staff. Please refer to the chart on page 18 for our criteria. Supporting information from parents and teachers is reviewed after all testing has been completed.

District-wide testing for Livonia Public School third graders occurs in the late winter and those results are used for those nominated youngsters. All other nominated Livonia third and fourth graders who do not attend LPS schools are administered group ability and achievement tests in reading and math.

Supporting information from parents and teachers is reviewed after all testing has been completed. This review may include records from the student’s prior schools. While students nominated for the ACAT program
may meet academic and ability criteria, in order to ensure a successful fit, this supporting information, including social, emotional and behavioral history, will be considered in the selection process and may lead to the decision not to select a student for the ACAT program.

The selection committee consists of the Director of Elementary and Special Programs, the building principal of the ACAT Program, the school psychologist, ESAP/social worker the ACAT Facilitator, and staff from the ACAT Program. The committee considers students based on the test data and the child’s school history, teacher information and parent information.

After the selection committee has met, all nominees are informed of results. There is no appeal process. However, parents of unsuccessful nominees may elect to have their student retested the following year.

Selected youngsters and their parents are invited to Webster School. An informational meeting is presented to parents and youngsters are invited to visit the classroom before a decision is required. Students attend Webster Elementary School the following September.

Our goal is student success in all areas. On rare occasions, some students are not successful at Webster. In this case, student progress will be monitored as it pertains to program philosophy and goals. A “match” of the student to the essential components of the ACAT program may be reviewed periodically with the parent or guardian. Needless to say, any child who is experiencing obstacles in the academic, social or emotional area at any grade level is provided assistance, via the EPT (Educational Planning Team) process. Support staff meet with a child’s teachers and parents to design supportive interventions during the EPT meeting. These meetings are held to determine what assistance might be beneficial to the student. An outcome of an EPT could be further evaluation and assessment for educational programming and planning. Some students need a more intense level of support than can be provided at Webster. If district staff determines continuation in the program is not appropriate, the student will be reassigned to his or her home school at an appropriate time.
# ACAT Screening Process Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACAT Screening Process</th>
<th>Current K, 1, and 2 grades LPS residents</th>
<th>Current 3rd graders in LPS Schools</th>
<th>Current 3rd and 4th LPS residents in non-LPS schools and 4th grade LPS students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents or Teachers submit Nomination Forms</td>
<td>Included in nomination packets, available at LPS school offices, or online starting in the fall.</td>
<td>Included in nomination packets, available at LPS school offices, starting in the fall or online.</td>
<td>Included in nomination packets, available at LPS school offices, starting in the fall or online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available online at [<a href="http://livoniapublicschools.org/webs">http://livoniapublicschools.org/webs</a> ter](<a href="http://livoniapublicschools.org/webs">http://livoniapublicschools.org/webs</a> ter) or call Webster at 734.744.2795</td>
<td>Return to ACAT Facilitator Webster Elementary 32401 Pembroke Livonia 48152 Deadline to apply: Feb. 8, 2013 This date is firm</td>
<td>Return to ACAT Facilitator Webster Elementary 32401 Pembroke Livonia 48152</td>
<td>Apply by Feb. 8, 2013 This date is firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1 of ACAT Screening</td>
<td>Students are individually tested on math and reading abilities. Testing appointments take about 1 hour. Kindergarteners must score in the 98th percentile or above in all sections to be considered for the next part of testing. 1st and 2nd graders must score in the 96th percentile or above on all tests. Results are mailed to the child’s home within 2 weeks of testing. Parents will be notified whether or not their child is eligible for Part 2 of the test.</td>
<td>Students take standardized tests at Webster Elementary. It is the parents’ responsibility to provide transportation to and from the test location. The test takes approximately 4 hours and is broken up into 2 sessions. Students must attend both sessions. Results are mailed to the child’s home within one month of testing.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2 of ACAT Screening</td>
<td>Students whose achievement tests qualify them for further testing will take an ability test. This will be a group administered test and will consist of 2 sessions of approximately 2 – 2 ½ hours each.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3 of ACAT Screening Teacher/Parent Questionnaires</td>
<td>Parents and teachers of qualifying students will receive questionnaires to complete.</td>
<td>Parents and teachers of qualifying students will receive questionnaires to complete.</td>
<td>Parents and teachers of qualifying students will receive questionnaires to complete.</td>
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</table>
Frequently Asked Questions - FAQs

MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS . . .

1. What are multi-age groupings and why are they used?

Multi-age groupings are classroom configurations made up of more than one grade level.

Students are selected to be a part of the Webster program on the basis of test scores, teacher recommendation and parent information. Program openings are the basis for the number of students selected for the program. Multi-age groupings are used to bring conformity to class size, which at Webster is the same as the rest of the district.

Multi-age groupings give us the opportunity to place children where they can be most successful. Multi-age classes can give a child the opportunity to be in a modeling or leadership role. It may put a child in a spot where s/he is asked to stretch. It can allow the combining of a group of youngsters who are particularly adept. It allows a youngster the opportunity to spend another year with a teaching team. Multi-age classrooms provide youngsters with additional opportunities to learn and grow when they are carefully constructed by knowledgeable, thoughtful teachers.

*Ideally, students will stay in the same multi-age classroom for 2 years which we call “family groups.” Family 1 is grades 1 and 2, Family 2 is grades 3 and 4 and Family 3 is grades 5 and 6.*
Our teachers have a broadened awareness of developmental readiness for learning and are responsive in their planning to provide for individual students. Their flexibility, creativeness, joy in inventing and redefining bring an exciting dimension to learning in our classrooms.

Occasionally, we will have staffing changes that do not make it possible for students to spend both years in a family group with the same teacher. This may occur for a variety of reasons including child care or family leave, transfer to another role in the school or district, retirement, illness or the like. If this occurs, it is our policy to have students stay in the same homeroom with his or her age level peers for year 2 of the family grouping. This provides a known community for the “veteran” students and an opportunity to play leadership roles in the classroom. This policy helps keep our classroom environments as stable as possible during a period of change.

We value your input regarding the learning environment that is best for your child. Parents and guardians may describe that environment in the spring of the year their student enters or when he or she changes family grouping level and submit that description to the principal. While we will make every effort to provide a just right learning environment for your child, we ask that you do not make specific teacher requests.

On the rare occasion that the multiage classroom your child is assigned to may not be the best fit during year one, teachers and/or parents may request a child study or educational planning team meeting during that school year. Together, we will make adjustments or accommodations as appropriate or may suggest a change to a different classroom for year two.

Additionally, because our enrollment process is based on entrance criteria, enrollment can either decline or increase and it is necessary to adjust staffing based on student population. Changes in classroom configurations may have to occur and if that is the case, careful considerations will be given
to your child’s placement. Final decisions regarding student placement in classrooms are the responsibility of the principal.

Multi-age classrooms are the method of choice and opportunity at Webster.

2. **How does this program deliver services?**

The 1-6 program at Webster is a very structured program. The curriculum is structured to meet the unique learning needs of our academically talented youngsters and our environment has been carefully structured to develop a youngster with high self-esteem and the skills of a learner.

3. **What is the structure of the curriculum?**

The structure begins with the LPS core curriculum and continues with a more indepth pace and methodology. This design allows our youngsters to see how bits of information fit into a larger framework of knowledge. Social studies and science content, along with the literature selected, is all carefully integrated. Math is integrated whenever it makes a good fit. The art, music and physical education curriculums, when possible, are designed to enhance the theme. Guest speakers, assemblies, fall Open House, and many other activities are structured to blend with our theme. Field trips are an important part of this integrative approach to the curriculum. They are used as an integral part of the learning of a particular unit of study. Students are expected to participate in all of them.

Structure is built into predictable daily classroom routines, with morning and afternoon priorities. The plan for the day is readily available on the board, so students know what to expect and can anticipate the events of the day.

Structure is also evident in the learning activities designed by our teachers. The activities are structured to meet the needs of youngsters at various levels and to assure that they will all find some successes and much challenge.
Structure is readily apparent when assignments are made. Plan sheets, rubrics or assignment books provide a framework and direction for our students. The expectations for quality work are also discussed by the teacher when an assignment is given. Rubrics are used so that students know the criteria that will be used to assess their work before they begin.

4. **How has the environment been structured?**

While our classrooms are child-centered with many students working independently, our teachers always guide and monitor the activities of the children. The choices that our youngsters have are those planned by the teachers. Our youngsters learn and experiment in a safe environment where their choices have been carefully designed.

Our classrooms are very rich environments full of books, math manipulatives and learning games. You will see a myriad of work stations, including desks, tables, bean bag chairs, work spaces and open spaces. Our classrooms have been equipped with materials that promote active learning.

Our classrooms are working well when you see many students busy learning different things in different ways. Youngsters will be working alone or in small groups or teams. They may be at desks, computers, in a comfortable chair or at a piano. You may need to look carefully to locate the teacher in the midst of the students. It is very likely parents will be helping with activities, giving spelling words or designing bulletin boards. There will be the sound of children at work as well; busy, active children interacting with materials and each other. Our very verbal, highly-engaged youngsters do a lot of discussing, questioning, answering, exclaiming and quite often laughing!

At times, you will also see whole classes or small groups receiving directed instruction from their teacher or watching a movie or instructional DVD together. There is a great deal of whole group discussion because these students have so much information to share. When students study different facets of a topic, there is a real need to share knowledge and begin to build connections.

Structure also comes with clearly stated behavioral guidelines, often generated through classroom discussions. Youngsters can feel secure in knowing what the expectations are and can practice appropriate behaviors in a safe and nurturing environment. Our program has adopted 3 behavioral guidelines which all students are expected to follow. They are "take care of yourself, take care of each other and take care of the environment.” Students have opportunities to learn and practice these rules to live by and
when there is a violation of one of the rules, students will have a logical and age appropriate consequence.

5. **What is the philosophy behind this structure?**

We have designed a very structured environment for our students so that we may safely give them many opportunities to practice the skills of a learner and the skills of a good problem solver and decision maker. These are the skills which will make them highly valuable people in the workplace of the 21st Century.

Students at Webster have many choices and options. Choices **may** include when to do an assignment—first, last, at home; where to work—their desk, the floor, the LMC, the hall; who to work with—alone, a friend, a group; and how to share their learning—verbally, a diorama, a written essay, a skit. Often a youngster’s topic of study will be by choice within a broad category defined by the teacher.

We believe that by giving students lots of opportunities to make choices and evaluate their results in a safe, helpful environment, they will learn to be strong, independent, empowered learners.

6. **What does teaching look like at Webster?**

Teaching at Webster comes in many forms. You will see whole group instruction. You may also see small groups of youngsters clustered for skills. Lots of one-on-one teaching occurs as teachers check understanding of learning individually with their students.

You will also see peer teaching, as cooperative learning is a strategy used in our classes. Across all content areas you will see evidence of students working in teams to study and solve problems.

Although our youngsters are active consumers of knowledge, they also have much information and many learning strategies to share. There is a healthy balance between what our children contribute and what our teachers contribute to the gathering of knowledge.

Teachers apply most recent research and best practices in their teaching. Briefly, they understand that teaching for understanding goes beyond “knowing” something. When a student knows something, the student can bring it forth upon demand—tell us the knowledge or demonstrate the skill. Understanding is a matter of being able to do a variety of thought-
demanding manipulatives with a topic—like explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying or representing the topic in a new way.

Children don’t learn to ride a bike by reading instructions and watching others, although these may help. They learn by riding their bike; and if they are a good learner, by thoughtful riding. They pay attention to what they are doing, capitalize on their strengths, and work on their weaknesses.

Learning for understanding means there must be actual engagement by the learner. The learners must spend the larger part of their time with activities that ask them to generalize, find new examples, carry out applications, and work through related understandings. This must be done in a thoughtful way with appropriate feedback to help improve performance.

Our students will need the process skills of learning in order to have the ability to take facts and apply them in identification of the problems and construction of the solutions.

This is why our environment has been built for active, hands-on learning. At Webster our structure, our environment, our curriculum and our delivery system have all been designed to teach for understanding.

7. How is the Livonia Core Curriculum used?

Teachers at Webster begin with the Livonia Core Curriculum to assess a particular group of youngsters in their understanding of the learning outcomes.

The core is the base for our students. These academically talented youngsters receive a differentiated curriculum designed to meet their unique learning needs. The curriculum at Webster typically moves at a faster pace and goes into greater depth, breath and complexity.

We use a two-year rotation in science and social studies content. While specific content may not be covered at the core designated grade level, all skills necessary for state testing are covered.

One important reality about some of our academically-talented youngsters is that they may have difficulty with some academic expectations. For some of our students, memorizing number facts is very hard. Some of our students have trouble spelling. Some have poor fine-motor skills and their handwriting is illegible. This does not make them any less talented. All of our students have areas of strength which we honor and room for growth.
which we support. We try not to let this get in the way of our vision of what each youngster is as an individual and as a student.

8. **What resources are used?**

We use textbooks as teaching tools in mathematics. We also use them as reference materials in content areas.

In addition, we use children’s non-fiction and fiction books to effectively individualize student learning and provide our students with materials appropriately matched to their individual reading and developmental levels.

Through trade books we are able to build a large collection of resources on a particular topic at a variety of reading levels. Trade books provide the opportunity for extensive, concentrated study and understanding of a subject. This is particularly important for our youngsters who are eager to examine topics in-depth and in a more complex manner. Trade books often are first-hand accounts and may be time-sequence stories which allow youngsters to compare and contrast ideas they encounter. Trade books frequently include effective illustrations and graphics. Finally, trade books provide a richness of content and more current information which we find enhances our students’ motivation and learning.

We have a comprehensive literacy library, stocked with books that will provide “just right” challenges for bright learners. In addition, we take advantage of a 12,000 volume media center lovingly overseen by a media specialist who is an expert in choosing books for both of our programs.

9. **What about homework?**

The policy of Livonia Public Schools states, “The Board of Education supports educationally relevant homework at all levels. Requirements should be made with careful consideration for the physical and emotional health of students and with knowledge of the total load of school and out of school responsibilities carried by students.”

Webster teachers may assign homework to individual youngsters who need to complete a class assignment. They also assign projects and some work will possibly need to have support from home. When work is done at home, we expect there may be some help from our families. Certainly, your interest and attention are necessary if you expect quality work from your youngster. On the other hand, too much help from home makes it impossible for your youngster “to develop the confidence and responsibility needed to be an independent, successful learner.”
Another kind of homework is assigned by Webster teachers. It is work which can only be done at home or needs family input. For example, when asked to estimate family water usage during a three-day period, a youngster will have to accumulate the data at home with the cooperation from the whole family.

Some of you may find your youngster spending what seems like inordinate amounts of time on homework. If this is assigned homework, you will want to contact the teacher regarding the appropriate amount of time your youngster should be spending. Some of our perfectionists would never be finished, and this is a separate issue which needs to be addressed by Webster staff.

During these years children need time to investigate their many interests. After school hours allow for the precious time to try their hand at lots of non-academic activities. Unstructured time, time with peers without adult direction, is also important for practicing the skills of being a friend, getting along with others and playing by peer rules.

Homework is seldom given over extended family vacations because so much of the learning at school comes from interacting with the group, using resources and manipulatives, and hands-on learning. Beginning collections, keeping scrap books, reading maps, keeping a journal and producing a photographic essay are all suggestions we make for vacation activities.

10. How do you report to parents?

Webster School views the areas of student assessment and student self-evaluation as extremely important components of your child’s education. We view assessment as ongoing and integrated into the teaching and learning process. We believe self-evaluation is the key to quality learning.

At our fall conference, both a discussion with one of your child’s teachers and a Student-Led Conference may occur. During the Student-Led Conference, our students participate and conduct their conference with their parent(s), utilizing their portfolio of work and a carefully prepared script as a guide for their discussion. Teachers and students spend time in preparation and practice for the important day. This conference allows our students to take ownership of their work and acknowledge their accomplishments. Together, parents and youngsters reflect on the learning which has taken place. We believe this process allows parents to be meaningfully involved in their youngster’s learning. They can become familiar with the content being learned, celebrate successes, help set goals when appropriate, and above all, witness growth over time.
We believe these assessment procedures will produce responsible learners who are curious, inquisitive and empowered with the skills and resources necessary to pursue answers to their problems.

11. **What are some things we as a family should consider as we make our decision about next year?**

For a youngster to be committed to their education, they must have input. For a youngster to be asked to take sole responsibility for an educational decision is too great a burden. This is a grown-up decision which needs grown-up input. When you are raising an academically-talented child, they often fool you. They seem to know so much and they can often do so much that you as the parent can easily forget that this is a young child. Your youngster needs your perceptions, your life experiences, your wisdom and most of all your support in assuring that a good decision is made.

In making your decision, we suggest your family:

- Read everything in the packets that you have received.
- Participate in the Child/Parent visit at Webster.
- Ask questions of the people who can be the best help: teachers here at Webster, your youngster’s teachers, parents of our students and our students themselves, our ESAP Specialist, our Gifted/ACAT Facilitator and our Principal.

We also suggest that your commitment be for a year. For some children it takes that long for the adjustment to occur. Knowing that they will not leave “at the end of the month” helps a child to understand that their parents believe a good decision has been made and that they will be successful here.

Webster Elementary School may be the perfect match for your child and your family. It may not. Whether or not you choose Webster, please remember that you are your youngster’s best advocate, and you have the right to appropriate programming for your youngster.

12. **What is a good way to explain our decision to relatives and our child’s friends at their former school?**

First, it is important to come to terms with how you feel about choosing an alternative school for your youngster. When you are comfortable with your choice, it will be easier to convey your intent to others.
You have identified that your youngster has some particular academic needs which you want addressed. Simply, your youngster has developed more rapidly in the academic arena than most students of the same age. You want provisions to be made in order that his/her potential can be realized.

You may want to explain your choice of schools just as you would explain a choice made to accommodate your youngster’s musical or athletic abilities. Parents advocate for their youngsters all the time by providing the opportunity for a talent to emerge. Typically they will arrange classes or private lessons, buy instruments or equipment, find teams and generally do whatever is needed so that their child’s potential will be realized. Parents provide money, time and energy to nurture their child’s talent. They also speak quite candidly and comfortably about their child and her/his area of expertise.

Be assured it is all right to look for a specialized program to meet your youngster’s academic needs. It is all right to look for teachers who have training and expertise in facilitating your youngster’s potential. It is all right to speak of your child’s accomplishments.

You are about finding the best “match” between your child and her/his education. Your family might just say, “After lots of researching, Webster seems like a good match for (Jessica/Brandon/me) and a place where they will help (her/him/me) learn!”

**13. How can I help my child make the transition to Webster?**

Change in any form is almost always difficult. Parents can be instrumental in helping in this transition period. Your youngster will sense your feelings about the move; it is important that you are secure in the decision your family has made. This is also why we suggest a one year commitment, because change takes time.

First, recognize the loss your child is experiencing in leaving his/her former school. Encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings. Just recognizing the feeling as normal is very important. Expect some anger and some acting out as a normal reaction to moving and adjusting to a new school. It is important that you not overreact. Listen and acknowledge that you understand. Ride the ups and downs. Two steps forward and one backward will most likely be the rule.

Probably one of the best ways to help you and your child is to think of a successful experience they have had already. Moving to a new neighborhood, joining a team sport or starting private music lessons are all
scary at first! Remind them of previous successes and assure them that they can be successful again.

Begin now to involve yourself in Webster. Make contact with families in the area, particularly with those children who are near the ages of your own child. Be a participating parent get involved in the school and community. Join the PTA and Western Wayne Alliance for Gifted Education. This will demonstrate and model behaviors which you want your child to emulate.

Encourage contact with friends from the “old school” and the neighborhood. Continuing contact with friends and maintaining activities like sports, scouts and church groups is an important part of the transition and will minimize the feeling of isolation and loss. Let your child know they will be meeting new people and will find some that will become their friends.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help for your youngster and your family. A meeting with our ESAP Specialist is an excellent place to begin. Our ESAP Specialist will be involved in making your child’s transition easier next fall and is able to help now.

14. **What total school experiences may I expect for my child?**

Our school serves 3 magnet programs, the ACAT program for gifted and talented students and the MoCI (moderately cognitive impaired) program for students with cognitive disabilities and the ASD program for students with autism.

Our ACAT program and students are referred to as “1-6” students and our program for students with cognitive impairments and ASD are referred to as Act 18 students.

Webster serves these two diverse populations of students which require distinct differences in curricular content and educational needs. There is a strong commitment by students, staff and parents to be a caring community of people learning together. We foster three levels of interaction among our students.

The first is proximal interactions, defined simply as being in the same vicinity. Children from both programs have classrooms near each other. Our youngsters move through the hallways, share the LMC and other facilities and participate in recess and some assemblies as one student body.

The second is helping interactions, defined as one student voluntarily giving support to another. For instance, one of our students designed an overlay
for a voice output communication system for an intermediate student. Our 1-6 student identified the vocabulary that our intermediate student needed to communicate her needs at lunch, drew logos to represent the ideas, and through the overlay she designed, helped her friend make her needs known. Many Family 3 students have service squad responsibilities to help their primary or intermediate friends during the lunch hour.

The third level is reciprocal interactions when both students are meeting their own appropriate learning goals together through one activity. “Reading Buddies” is a good example as perhaps a first grader is improving reading aloud skills by reading to a primary student whose goal is listening. Older students practice fluency and expression during their reading buddy time. Our ACAT students gain important social and life skills by mentoring and interacting with primary and intermediate students. Other examples might include students from both programs enjoying a Detroit Symphony Orchestra concert together. These are appropriate learning experiences beneficial for both youngsters.

As a school, we share many activities which have built a strong sense of school pride and spirit. These include Spirit Days, Open House, Science Fair, several shared student assemblies, School wide assemblies Jump Rope for the Heart, Walkathon, Festival of the Arts, musicals, Field Day, camp, service squad, community field trips, Reflections and Youth Making a Difference, gingerbread house making, cardmaking for soldiers and veterans and buddy bowling.

Research tells us that service learning benefits gifted students. Harry Passow tells us that according to research,

gifted children have the potential for greater and more profound social, moral and ethical concerns. We need to nurture this potential. We talk of the gifted exercising future leadership but seldom design educational programs that will help them develop the skills, motivation, and the values of leadership. (Roeper Review)

We feel that interaction and activities with the Primary/Intermediate students provide such learning opportunities.

**15. Does my child have to requalify for Webster ACAT each year?**

No. A student needs to meet the entrance criteria once. However, student progress will be monitored as it pertains to program philosophy and goals. A “match” of the student to the essential components of the ACAT program may be reviewed periodically with the parent or guardian. If district staff determines continuation in the program is not appropriate, the student will be reassigned to his or her home school at an appropriate time.
Students who wish to continue on in the Livonia Public Schools academically talented program may consider the MACAT (Middle Alternative Classrooms for Academically Talented) Program for middle school. The MACAT program uses scores from 6th grade Stanford/OLSAT testing as well as other measures. If students do not qualify for the MACAT program or choose not to attend, there are accelerated classes from which to choose at each Livonia middle school.

Needless to say, any child who is experiencing obstacles in the academic, social or emotional area at any grade level is provided assistance. Support staff meet with a child’s teachers and parents to design supportive interventions.

You need to know that you always have the option of your neighborhood school. If you choose Webster and later feel it is not a good match for your child, you may return to your neighborhood school.

16. Can I use the outside psychological evaluation or testing I have obtained be used in place of the LPS tests?

While outside tests may provide both good information about your child and some direction in planning for your child’s education, all nominees must be tested by LPS staff using LPS testing measures. There is no appeal process.

17. I moved to Livonia in the spring/summer. What are my options for having my child tested?

If you have recently moved to Livonia, please contact our office about your options.
Resources for Families of Academically Talented Students

- **Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education**
  - MAGE is an organization dedicated to providing leadership, advocacy, and support of differentiated education and services for meeting the unique needs of gifted, talented and creative students in Michigan.
  - website: [www.migiftedchild.org](http://www.migiftedchild.org)

- **National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)**
  - website: [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

- **GT World**
  - website: [www.gtworld.org](http://www.gtworld.org)

- **Hoagies Gifted Education**
  - website: [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

- **National Research Center for Gifted and Talented**
  - [www.gifted.uconn.edu](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu)

*Growing Up Gifted, Barbara Clark, Book*

This textbook is the work of our mentor, Dr. Barbara Clark, PhD.