

## It survives under the gun

# How educators evaluate intellectual program

By LYNN ORR

"How do you help kids realize they don't have to be the best in everything?"

"How do people process information?"

"Can we offer educational opportunities that will allow creative thinking?"

These are the kinds of questions posed to the Farmington Board of Education last week in an update on the district's Intellectually Gifted program after its one-year trial.

When the board approved the \$89,000 district-funded program last June, trustees warned that it would be under the gun. The curriculum report during

last week's meeting appeared to satisfy many qualms about the program. Although the program's coordinator, Phil Townsend, stressed that the program has a long way to go, the first year's work has produced goals and patterns to meet those goals, he said.

Developing awareness of the gifted student's unique abilities and needs to staff, parents and the students themselves is a primary goal of the program, he said. And maintaining continuity among grade levels is paramount.

"EVERY PROGRAM is an individualized one designed for that student," Townsend emphasized.

A special committee works up a program from a variety of techniques, including independent study, parent help, counseling, specialized classes, seminars, acceleration, curriculum revision, and mentor (or tutor) help.

Of the 732 students referred to the program through the 1977-78 school year, 413 were placed in the program, while 288 failed to meet the 133-point IQ criteria. Fifty-one students have not yet undergone testing, according to Graham Lewis, special education director who oversees the program.

The individual program is designed so that students may leave the classroom for short periods, study with other gifted students, or perhaps stay

in their regular classrooms with special projects. Each program is based on the particular student's needs, Townsend added.

To update the program for next year, Townsend has applied for a \$25,000 state grant to fund evaluation and continued in-service for staff, as well as some work at the high school level. Currently the program runs from kindergarten through ninth-grade. Farmington is one of few districts self-funding this type of program, administrators added.

Reading specialists coordinate programs for gifted students at the elementary grades, while Sharon Higham and Diane Akers are coordinators at

Warner and Dunkel, and East and Power junior highs respectively.

MS. HIGHAM stressed that the program is also a learning experience for staff members.

"One question we're asking is how people process information," she told board members. Recent studies indicate that learning can take convergent (step by step) and divergent (a mass of data at one time) thinking styles, she said.

While step by step learning is stressed in schools and society, one job as a coordinator is to help students who learn divergently work in a convergent atmosphere.

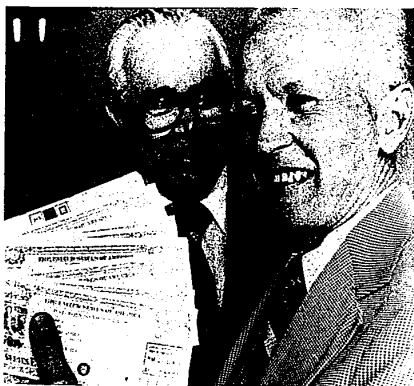
"Perhaps this program is really

going to be a catalyst for other things in the schools," she added.

Specific programs used this year include a "Procrastination—I'd rather do it tomorrow" seminar conducted by Ms. Higham and a series of parent conferences to get parents involved in their children's learning, conducted by Ms. Akers.

About 28 staff meetings, weekly curriculum meetings, and workshops, attended by about 200 staff members, are other ways in which the gifted program is getting off the ground, Townsend explained.

Visitations to Roeper and Gibson Schools (both schools for high IQ students) were conducted as well.



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