

Walled Lake pilots elementary program for gifted

By Patricia M. Bowling
Walled Lake News

Recognizing potential is not only the method, but the meaning, of a pilot program for academically gifted students to be launched in Walled Lake elementary schools this fall.

The scheme has a three-fold purpose, according to Dr. Janet Koepke, who coordinated academically gifted programs in six Oakland school districts before coming to Walled Lake as principal of Twin Beach Elementary school.

Through activities tailored for the individual child, the project seeks to stimulate intellectual, creative and personal development of students identified as academically gifted, Koepke said.

"This is one of the exceptional things about this program; it focuses on the individual child. I think that really is powerful," Koepke said. Different ability levels and individual learning styles will be taken into account in each child's program.

Although youngsters identified as academically gifted will remain in normal classrooms, they will be clustered in a single classroom on each grade

level. This will facilitate coordination of special activities and, more importantly, provide these students with support from one another, the second objective of the program, she said.

"ONE OF THE problems is that these children have a mental peer group and a chronological peer group. This causes a strain," Koepke said. Because students feel uncomfortable among chronological peer group, they may believe something is the matter with them.

An elementary child who senses he/she is different from his peers usually concludes that it is because he is "stupid" — even if in reality he is more intelligent than his peers, Koepke said.

Clustering these students in one classroom, within each grade level, helps promote the positive self-esteem they often need.

The third objective within the academically gifted program will be parent involvement.

"Parents want and need to be involved in the education of their children, and the special needs of the gifted require special parent involvement," said Director of Elementary Education Dr. Hugh Davies, who assisted a 14-

member committee of principals and teachers in designing the academically gifted program.

THE PROGRAM involves parents in selecting the talented students and planning and carrying out the special in-school, after-school and summer enrichment activities comprising the academically gifted program.

A special support group consisting of parents, teachers and administrators of the identified students also is planned, Koepke said. This group would share information, experiences and ideas for working with and raising academically talented children.

"Parents of gifted children may have a need to communicate with one another and work together to provide enriched experiences from the home, to share ideas and concerns," Davies said.

"SCHOOLS THAT WILL participate in the pilot program will be identified in the fall based on interest expressed by teachers and principals," Koepke said. Once the buildings are selected, teachers in each grade level will be selected to plan and provide an appropriate program for each identified student. Participating schools will choose a program level, either K-2, 3-6 or K-6.

The identification procedure will begin with a recommendation from the parent, the teacher, or both. A nomination questionnaire will be available to all parents, Koepke said.

The questionnaire allows the parent or teacher to comment on the student's learning, motivational, creative and leadership characteristics.

Learning characteristics of the academically gifted include an unusually advanced vocabulary, a quick mastery and recall of factual information, preference for above-grade-level reading, and unusual perception and insight.

Youngsters who become easily bored with routine tasks, who prefer to work independently, and who are self-assertive, even aggressive, in their beliefs, may be revealing the motivational characteristics of a gifted child.

CREATIVE CHARACTERISTICS may include a great deal of curiosity or keen sensitivity to beauty or art, while leadership characteristics often involve a good ability to carry responsibility and exceptional verbal facilities.

In addition to the evaluations of parents and teachers in these four areas, students will take the Slosson Intelligence Test on an individual basis. Scores on the California Achievement Test, which is given to all students in grades three through six in Walled Lake schools also will be considered.

All test results will be reviewed collectively to determine whether a student should be included in the program. Koepke said the identification process includes consideration of students who

have physical handicaps or severe speech problems.

Next May, the pilot program will be evaluated and modified as needed, she said.

YMCA highlights

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