

# The GAMbit

*An official publication of the Gifted Association of Missouri*

## IN THIS ISSUE

**LETTER FROM THE  
PRESIDENT**

**MEMBER UPDATE**

**SERVICE AS GIFTED  
EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

**CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR  
GIFTED LEARNERS**

**I-REECCH: IMPACTING RURAL  
EDUCATION THROUGH  
EXPANDING CULTURALLY  
RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM,  
COMPUTER SCIENCE  
TRAINING, AND HIGHER-  
ORDER THINKING SKILLS**

**THE POPPIES' PERSPECTIVE:  
COMMON INSTRUCTIONAL  
ASSUMPTIONS OF GIFTED  
LEARNERS AND HOW TO  
ADDRESS THEM IN THE  
CLASSROOM**

**DESTINATION IMAGINATION**

**DESE UPDATE**

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

**GAMBITS AND PIECES**

**FALLSCAPE AND  
WINTERSCAPE PROGRAMS**



## A Letter from the President

*by Heather Tomicich*

Welcome to a brand new school year—one filled with possibility, purpose, and promise.

As educators of gifted learners, you hold a unique and powerful role. You are not only teachers, but also mentors, champions of curiosity, and guides for some of the most complex and creative minds. The students you serve don't just need instruction; they need inspiration, challenge, and deep understanding—and you are exactly the right individuals to provide it.

You already know that teaching gifted students isn't just about going faster or doing more—it's about going deeper, asking *why*, encouraging *what if*, and daring to say, *let's find out together*.

# President's Letter

*continued from Page 1*

It's about recognizing the intense emotions, the perfectionism, the hunger for meaning, and the boundless imagination that often accompany advanced intellect. These are not easy needs to meet, but your compassion, expertise, and resilience make it possible.

This year, may you find joy in the “a-ha” moments, strength during challenges, and support in your community of fellow educators. Remember that every time you offer a student a safe space to take risks, to fail and try again, or to soar beyond the expected—you are shaping not just their academic path, but their lives.

Thank you for your passion, your patience, and your unwavering belief in your students. You are making a lasting difference—one brilliant, quirky, extraordinary mind at a time.

Here's to a year of growth, discovery, and purpose for you and your students.

With deepest respect and admiration,  
Heather Tomicich  
Executive President



PS- Missouri's GAM Conference hosted at MO State University is just around the corner, too. Attending our annual GAM Conference is an invaluable opportunity for professional growth, networking, and staying current with best practices in gifted education. Here's why you should make it a priority to attend:

- 1. Access to Cutting-Edge Research and Strategies:** The conference features expert-led sessions on the latest research, instructional strategies, and innovations in gifted education, helping you better support advanced learners.
- 2. Professional Development:** Gain practical tools and resources you can immediately apply in your classroom or district.
- 3. Networking with Peers and Experts:** Connect with fellow educators, administrators, and specialists who share your passion for gifted education. Exchange ideas, solve common challenges, and build a support network.
- 4. Advocacy and Policy Updates:** Learn about current state and national policies affecting gifted education and how to advocate effectively for your students' needs.
- 5. Inspiration and Motivation:** Whether through keynote speakers, success stories, or new ideas, the conference is a chance to reignite your enthusiasm and commitment to meeting the needs of gifted learners.

In short, the annual state conference is not just an event—it's a professional investment that empowers you to better serve gifted students and grow as an educator. For more information, you can check out [www.mogam.org](http://www.mogam.org)



# MEMBER UPDATE

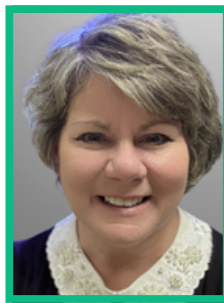
## GAM Updated Bylaws

Our association's bylaws are the foundation of everything we do, and they're designed to ensure we best serve our members. As we look ahead, we invite you to review our revised bylaws to stay informed on how our organization is structured and governed. The items in yellow will be revised by the attorney upon ratification.

Review the Bylaws: [LINKED HERE](#)



## CONGRATULATIONS TO CHRISTA PRICE!



### **Christa was a Semi-Finalist for the 2026 Missouri Teacher of the Year**

Christa is a K-12 gifted educator in Stockton R-I School District. We reached out to Christa to ask her what being a gifted teacher means to her:

*For me, being a gifted teacher is about opening doors. Every day I get to help students find that sweet spot where passion, critical thinking, and joy meet. That's where curiosity sparks discovery, discovery turns into purpose, and purpose circles back to joy. My job isn't to tell students what to think, but to give them the tools and confidence to know how to think—and that's what lasts.*

*In rural schools, this role feels even more important. Opportunities can be harder to come by, and gifted programs often provide the chance for students to stretch, explore, and imagine beyond the walls of their classroom. Gifted education in rural schools opens doors where opportunities may be scarce, helping students see themselves not just as learners, but as thinkers and contributors in a much larger world. When kids are given meaningful experiences that go deep and connect to real life, they grow in ways that benefit both their school and their community.*

*At its heart, gifted education is about protecting that spark of curiosity and preserving the joy of learning. It's a privilege to watch students discover who they are, what excites them, and how their unique gifts can impact the larger world they will one day shape.*

You can read more about Christa in her regional teacher of the year bio [HERE](#).



Gifted Association of Missouri Conference  
2025

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Parents and Advocates for Gifted Education (PAGE)

Find more information about the 2025  
GAM Conference registration, schedule,  
speakers, etc. click the link [HERE](#).

# Service as Gifted Education Curriculum

By Kathryn Fishman-Weaver, PhD.

**GAMbit  
Featured  
Writer**



*Missouri Scholars Academy students pack carrots at the Food Bank for Central and Northeast Missouri*

“Service,” wrote a high school junior, “provides a space to find community wherever you are.”

I couldn’t agree more. As my students at the [Missouri Scholars Academy \(MSA\)](#) would tell you, my guiding belief for community service is that we belong to each other. This summer at MSA—a three-week residential program for 330 of Missouri’s academically gifted students who are ready to begin their junior year of high school—we explored what this belief can look like in practice through a series of community action projects. This approach to learning isn’t just good for the community; it’s good for gifted learners, too.

In fact, community engagement is central to how I think about curriculum development. When building community-engaged learning projects in your classrooms, it helps to anchor your projects on a core idea, central belief, or research question. For long-term projects, I find engagement is highest when these beliefs and questions are student-generated. For shorter term projects, like those from our summer program, a teacher can offer these anchors as a starting place to tether our learning.

# Service as Curriculum

*continued from Page 7*

## NAGC Programming Standards Often Addressed through Community-Engaged Projects

### STANDARD 3: CURRICULUM PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION

*Educators apply evidence-based models of curriculum and instruction related to students with gifts and talents and respond to their needs by planning, selecting, adapting, and creating curriculum that is responsive to diversity. Educators use a repertoire of instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes and measurable growth.*

3.3. Responsiveness to Diversity. Students with gifts and talents develop knowledge and skills for living in and contributing to a diverse and global society.

3.5. Instructional Strategies. Students with gifts and talents become independent investigators.

### STANDARD 4: LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

*Learning environments foster a love for learning, personal and social responsibility,*

4.1. Personal Competence. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in personal competence and dispositions for exceptional academic and creative productivity. These include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, resilience, independence, curiosity, and risk taking.

4.2. Social Competence. Students with gifts and talents develop social competence manifested in positive peer relationships and social interactions.

4.3. Responsibility and Leadership. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate personal and social responsibility.

4.4. Cultural Competence. Students with gifts and talents value their own and others' language, heritage, and circumstance. They possess skills in communicating, teaming, and collaborating with diverse individuals and across diverse groups. They use positive strategies to address social issues, including discrimination and stereotyping.

This work aligns with the [National Association of Gifted Children \(NAGC\) Programming Standards for Gifted Education](#), particularly Standards 3 and 4 on Curriculum Planning and Instruction, and Learning Environments.

Built on the central belief that we belong to each other, the summer learning projects I led at MSA explored the idea of nourishment. We explored care—for the planet and each other—as nourishment. We engaged in work to support hunger-relief efforts, helping to ensure families, children, and seniors had enough nourishment. One afternoon, I asked students and faculty to raise their hands if they had ever felt nourished by a public library. Over 400 hands shot up. We then traveled to [Boone County Regional library](#) to help stock shelves. When given the opportunity, my experience has shown me that students are eager to participate in these kinds of community-engaged projects.

## Caring for the Planet

“Take my picture,” a young woman called out to me as she balanced on a rock. I snapped the photo, and she grinned. Later she told me, “I signed up for [the park clean up] even though this was way out of my comfort zone. I’m not usually one to get muddy, but,” she smiled again, “this was awesome.”

Our students participated in conservation efforts at Flat Branch Creek and Rock Bridge State Park. According to the [Missouri Conservation Corps](#), in less than two hours, our student team helped remove close to 700 pounds of garbage, scrap, and debris.



# Service as Curriculum

*continued from Page 8*



*Missouri Scholars Academy students participate in a stream clean at Flatbranch*

Several told me the stream team was their service activity from our summer program. As one explained, they loved being able to “see the impact of their efforts in real time.” We also saw this kind of immediate impact when we cut back honeysuckle and cleared away logs to make the trails at Rock Bridge State Park accessible and safe for more people to enjoy.

This kind of environmental work can amplify lessons on common purpose and many of the crosscutting concepts found in the [Next Generation Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#), including cause and effect; systems and system models; stability and change; and influence of engineering, technology, and science on society and the natural world.

## Food is Love

Addressing food insecurity was key to how we operationalized nourishment and the belief that we belong to each other. This included volunteer shifts at two [Feeding America](#) affiliates, [the Food Bank for Central and Northeast Missouri](#) and [Tiger Pantry](#).

“The sheer number of carrots,” wrote one scholar, “that we were able to bag at the food bank was astonishing.” In just two shifts, our students processed over 4,000 lbs of carrots.

In their written reflections, several students shared how powerful it was to learn that the produce they helped process could be in homes within hours of our work. Many also shared that their families have personally accessed food pantries over the years both to receive and to offer help.

# Service as Curriculum

*continued from Page 9*

In addition to the volunteer shifts, we explored ways to transform food systems and promote sustainable agriculture. We partnered with a class on environmentalism to extend these lessons by spending a day working at the [Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture](#).

Projects like this, wrote one scholar, “have played an integral role in reinforcing my belief in the greater good of humanity.”

## Not as Strangers, but as Neighbors and Friends

Over the summer, our students wrote nearly 800 cards for vulnerable populations. These cards are now in the hands and homes of veterans and seniors who receive food assistance and children who are receiving care through St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

“As I wrote letters, my heart felt uplifted,” wrote one student, adding that “the cards might be a bit iffy in terms of art, but the message is clear—no one is alone.”

My research on affective development and gifted learners has taught me that this is among the most important lessons we can teach in our programs.

“When I sat down to write letters,” said another scholar, “I realized the power that words could have, even from a complete stranger.” One student told me that she was able to use her knowledge of Arabic to write a letter to a 14-year-old patient who also speaks Arabic. She called this connection across language and culture “powerful.”

In our card-making sessions, I challenged students to imagine a world where we see each other not as strangers, but as neighbors and friends.

“Seeing this impact over the last few weeks,” a scholar shared, “has redefined my understanding of what it means to serve.”



**Kathryn Fishman-Weaver, PhD**, is the Gifted Association of Missouri featured writer for 2025. She serves as the executive director of [Mizzou Academy](#) and as an associate teaching professor in school leadership and community engagement. She is a sought-after international speaker and the author of several books on education and inclusion in schools.

# Over



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## See who you've been missing in gifted education

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## 2025-26 Gifted Association of Missouri Upcoming Virtual Speaker Series

**MOST Monday Nights 7-8 pm Central Time & one Thursday Night!**

### **Monday, September 15--Riding Out the Storm: Managing Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students with Dr. Matthew Zakreski, PsyD**

Gifted and twice-exceptional individuals are marked by their intensity, particularly their emotional intensity. These emotional outbursts can be very disruptive and dysregulating to the students, their peers, parents, teachers, and community supports. This session will focus on the psychology and neuroscience behind emotional intensity and give concrete, accessible techniques that will allow for the development of self-regulation skills.

Register [HERE](#)

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### **Monday, October 20--Play for Learning with Dr. Denise Ford, PhD**

Do we play enough? We were born to play, and we do some of our most powerful learning when we are at play. Yet, play has become synonymous only with the experiences of our youngest children. How can we foster a more playful environment in our schools, homes, and communities? How can we help our older gifted youth to embrace play? As parents and teachers, we need to play more as well. What's behind all of this? Let me playfully convince you of the many, many benefits of play for all.

Register [HERE](#)

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### **Monday, November 17--The Social-Emotional Learning Benefits of Academic Competitions with Alex Dzurick**

How can key lessons about teamwork and sportsmanship be extended to academic, co-curricular competitive opportunities? Math contests and other academic competitions provide a rich resource for multidisciplinary social-emotional learning lessons in winning gracefully, losing fair and square, and the spirit of healthy cooperation and competition. Attendees will explore avenues to support SEL and encourage academically inclined students to apply sportsmanship with their own interests.

Register [HERE](#)

**FREE  
PD!**

# GAM Speaker Series

*continued from Page 12*

## **Monday, January 12–What The Heck is Executive Functioning? with Nancy Bonn-Winkler, M.Ed., LPC.**

A long time ago, I asked that same question! Within our hour we will break down this complex sounding topic by defining, naming, and exploring individual executive functioning skills. Special attention will be given to how these skills relate to the gifted child, and those with ADHD and/or ASD. If you are asking yourself if this topic is really that important, the answer is YES! Why? These brain based skills are required to execute and perform all tasks!

Register [HERE](#)

## **Monday, February 9–AI with Colin Davitt (Lindbergh Schools Director of Innovation)**

Unlock your creative potential as an educator in this dynamic, 60-minute session tailored for Missouri teachers! Discover how artificial intelligence (AI) can revolutionize your professional practice—helping you brainstorm fresh lesson ideas, design engaging curricula, and explore innovative teaching strategies with ease. Learn simple ways to integrate AI-powered tools to streamline lesson planning, uncover new approaches to learning, and simplify assessment creation. Whether you're new to digital resources or eager to supercharge your instructional toolkit, this session offers hands-on guidance and practical examples so you can work smarter—not harder. Experience a supportive environment focused on your growth and efficiency, empowering you to become a more inspired, resourceful, and future-ready educator. Parents are welcome to attend too!

Register [HERE](#)

## **THURSDAY! April 16–Hippos Teeth Have Awful Odors (Neuroanatomy Mnemonics for Understanding the Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners) with Dr. Kathryn Fishman-Weaver (“Dr. KFW”)**

A wholehearted, story-rich session on supporting the social-emotional development of gifted learners. Building on her research and school-based practice, Dr. KFW uses memorable mnemonics and stories to teach about neuroanatomy and its connection to emotions, relationships, and learning. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of brain-based learning and practical tools to help gifted learners navigate challenges with confidence, purpose, and even laughter.

Session Objectives:

- Examine brain-based research on the emotional needs of gifted learners.
- Apply practical strategies to support social-emotional development.
- Leverage story, gratitude, and humor to foster connection and resilience.

Register [HERE](#)



# Curriculum Design for Gifted Learners

The fall newsletter is dedicated to curriculum design for gifted learners. We'll explore strategies that go beyond a standard curriculum to provide the depth, complexity, and acceleration gifted learners need. From fostering critical thinking to creating engaging, real-world projects, we'll share practical tips and insights to help educators and parents design a truly enriching learning experience. This issue aims to empower you with the tools to meet the unique intellectual needs of gifted children and help them thrive.

## Principles and Best Practices in Curriculum Design (Hockett & Brighton, 2016)

**Principle 1:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is rooted in the discipline

**Principle 2:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is relevant and engaging.

**Principle 3:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is integrative and balances breadth with depth.

**Principle 4:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is concept-based.

**Principle 5:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is driven by goals and outcomes that emphasize deep understanding and transfer.

**Principle 6:** A high-quality curriculum for all students moves learners toward expertise.

**Principle 7:** A high-quality curriculum for all students emphasizes problems, products, and performances that are true-to-life.

**Principle 8:** A high-quality curriculum for all students is flexible to accommodate challenges and support differences in learner development, strengths, interests, and preferences.

**Principle 9:** A high-quality advanced curriculum pursues advanced levels of understanding through abstraction, complexity, depth, and/or breadth.\*\*

**Principle 10:** A high-quality advanced curriculum more closely approximates the work of an expert disciplinarian or practicing professional. \*\*

*\*\*Principle 9 and 10 are specific to gifted learners.*

It is also important to address the unique psychosocial needs of gifted learners by embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) skills directly within our content curriculum or teaching SEL-specific lessons. Check out these helpful resources for SEL-specific curriculum linked below:

- [MO-DESE SEL online repository](#)
- [GAM SEL Resources](#)





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# I-REECCH: Impacting Rural Education through Expanding Culturally Responsive Curriculum, Computer Science Training, and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

By: Rachel Martino, Lindsey Reinert, Hosna Khorsandi, Wendy Jensen, and Norma Hafenstein

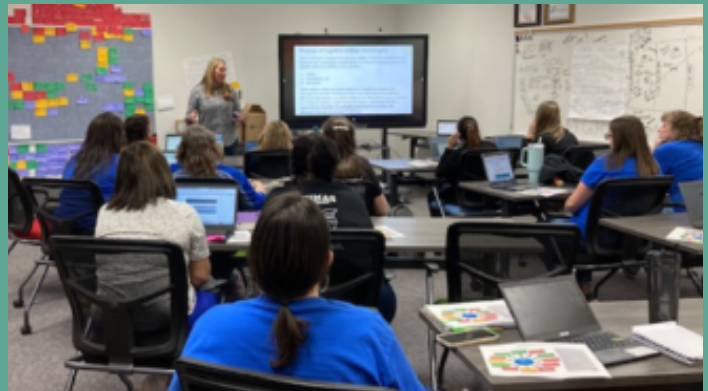
## What is I-REECCH?

The I-REECCH project aims to significantly increase the identification of and services for traditionally underrepresented gifted and talented student populations in rural Colorado. By fostering computational thinking, cultural responsiveness, and critical thinking, the project focuses on expanding curriculum design and empowering educators to recognize and nurture talent in students eligible for free and reduced lunch, English language learners, and students who identify as Hispanic or Native American. This approach ensures equitable access to high-quality learning experiences for underrepresented students in rural communities.

## Computational Thinking: Expanding Opportunities in STEM

One of I-REECCH's core initiatives is equipping rural educators with the tools to integrate computational thinking into their classrooms. Computational thinking involves breaking down complex problems into smaller, manageable parts, identifying patterns, removing unnecessary elements, and creating a clear, repeatable process to solve the problem. The first step in developing an understanding of computational thinking is learning about the

our computational thinking practices: Decomposition, pattern recognition, abstraction, and algorithmic thinking. By enhancing understanding and supporting the implementation of computer programming and problem-solving strategies, students are more prepared for future success in STEM fields. Through the ECHO Series and targeted workshops, which can be found on our website, teachers gain valuable resources and strategies to implement computational thinking effectively.





# I-REECCH

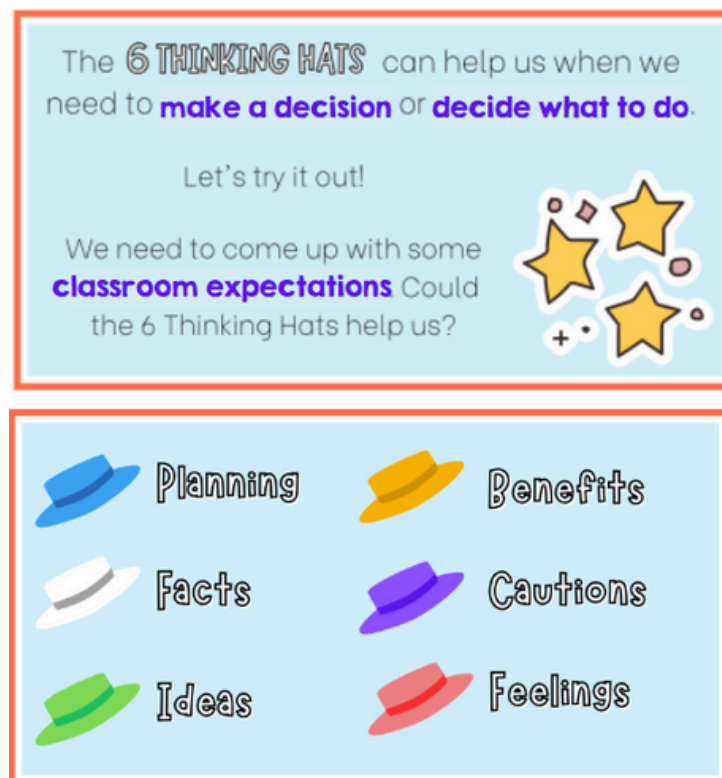
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## Cultural Responsiveness: Supporting Diverse Learners

Cultural responsiveness is essential in designing equitable gifted education programs. I-REECCH provides professional development opportunities to help educators implement inclusive teaching strategies that recognize and support culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Teachers benefit from developing six key characteristics:

- Socio-Cultural Consciousness - Critically examining your own biases and understanding the impact of race, ethnicity, social class, and language on teaching.
- Affirming Attitude - Respect and value cultural differences, creating an inclusive environment that supports students' belief in themselves and their academic success.
- Commitment to Change - Act as an agent of change, overcoming barriers and fostering collaboration to make schools more equitable.
- Constructivist Views on Learning - All students are capable of learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and integrating multiple perspectives.
- Knowledge of Students' Life Experiences - Build stronger relationships and connect learning to students' backgrounds.
- Culturally Responsive Teaching - Supports students in constructing knowledge by incorporating their cultural strengths and examining the curriculum through various lenses.

By fostering culturally responsive classrooms, rural educators can better identify and nurture giftedness in students from all backgrounds.



# I-REECCH

*continued from Page 17*

## Critical Thinking: Building Analytical Skills Across Subjects

I-REECCH promotes the development of critical thinking skills across all content areas. Through specialized training, educators can learn to embed analytical reasoning and problem-solving into daily instruction. This ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for complex real-world challenges. One way to do this is by using the Plus, Minus, Interesting strategy. This strategy can help students frame their thinking by asking them to think about positive, negative, and interesting or intriguing ideas about a statement or item. Another tool educators can utilize is the Six Thinking Hats where students consider planning, facts, ideas, benefits, cautions, and feelings when they need to make a decision.

## Recognized Excellence in Gifted Education

I-REECCH's commitment to professional learning has earned national recognition. The program was awarded the 2022 National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Professional Learning Network Award on behalf of Dr. Norma Hafenstein, Principal Investigator, Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Co-Principal Investigator, and Dr. Lindsey Reinert, I-REECCH Project Manager. The NAGC commended I-REECCH for its outstanding contribution to professional development in rural gifted education.

For more resources and information on our initiatives, visit our website at <https://tinyurl.com/ireecch>





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# The Poppies' Perspective: Common Instructional Assumptions of Gifted Learners and How to Address Them in the Classroom

By Christi Sanderson, Ed.D., NBCT

*With over 25 years of experience in education, Christi Sanderson, Ed.D., NBCT has served in various roles, from teaching grades K-8 to holding administrative positions. Currently, Christi is the Director of mySci School Partnership and Operations at Washington University in St. Louis.*



With over 20 years of experience in gifted education, I have seen and heard from all ages about what it felt like to be labeled as “gifted.” It is often believed being identified as gifted is somehow a reward or honor. However, in my experience, many gifted learners found it to be a label that created extra stress, insecurities, and pressure. After listening to these gifted students tell their stories, I began to realize they were part of the field of tall poppies. Crushing Tall Poppies, or the Tall Poppy Syndrome, is “a social phenomenon in which people of genuine merit are resented, attacked, cut down, or criticized because their talents or achievements elevated them above or distinguished them from their peers.” This phenomenon defined the experiences and situations many of the gifted learners reported.

In order to combat this phenomenon, we must first understand that societal views can shape perceptions about students who are gifted, recognize these common assumptions, and understand how perceptions impact instruction.

As an educator, the first step is to identify the assumptions and perceptions of gifted learners. Below, I have outlined common misconceptions of gifted learners. As you read through the list, ask yourself if you hold these same assumptions and if you are doing everything you can to support gifted learners in the classroom.



# The Poppies' Perspective *continued from Page 20*

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# 1

**Common Assumption 1:** Gifted students are all high achievers, with all receiving A's.

**Reality:** Gifted students are often perfectionistic. Therefore, they may equate achievement with self-esteem, which sometimes leads to fear of failure. This can then interfere with their achievement and grades.

Also, gifted students may be far ahead of their chronological age-mates, resulting in them knowing more than half of the curriculum before it is taught. This can lead to lack of interest, low achievement and low grades.

**The Gifted Learner's Perspective:**

"My parents put so much pressure on me to get straight A's." -8th grade gifted student

"Anytime I do something wrong, people say, 'I thought you were gifted.'" -7th grade gifted student

# 2

**Common Assumption 2:** Gifted students do not need help.

**Reality:** Gifted students often think so abstractly and with such complexity that they may need help with concrete skills. And, though they can often retain information after being exposed only once, they still must learn the new information.

**The Gifted Learner's Perspective:** "I feel bad about myself when I can't understand something." -6th grade gifted student

# 3

**Common Assumption 3:** The social and emotional development of gifted students is the same as their intellectual development.

**Reality:** Many gifted students are asynchronous. This means their chronological age, social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development may be at different levels and stages. Therefore, you may have a 2nd grade student in your class who has the vocabulary of a 9th grader, but who cries when their crayon breaks. Understanding this asynchronous development can help you understand the gifted child.

# 4

**Common Assumption 4:** Teachers challenge all students, so the gifted students will be fine in the regular classroom.

**Reality:** A national study indicated that 58% of teachers have not received training on teaching academically advanced students. Seventy-three percent of teachers see many of their brightest students as often bored and under-challenged.

**The Gifted Learner's Perspective:** "The thing that frustrates me the most is not being able to grow in school." -7th grade gifted student

# The Poppies' Perspective *continued from Page 21*

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# 5

**Common Assumption 5:** Gifted students enjoy being role models in the classroom and teaching other students.

**Reality:** Gifted students often resent being the “teachers” to other students in the classroom. They feel this is almost a punishment for understanding or getting finished with their work early and often results in contempt from their peers.

**The Gifted Learner's Perspective:** “People think I can do all of the work in groups.”-8th grade gifted student

# 6

**Common Assumption 6:** More Work = The Way to Challenge Gifted Students

**Reality:** Gifted learners do not want more work. They want challenging work that will allow them to think critically and creatively. By providing more work, as opposed to higher level work, gifted students are essentially being punished for being gifted. The remedy to this is differentiation in the classroom and providing opportunities for students to take the learning standards and dig deeper. This does not equate to more work...but to different work.

**The Gifted Learner's Perspective:** “It is frustrating to do assignments that are about the same exact thing, especially when I had gotten it the first time with no problem.”-7th grade gifted student

Identifying the misconceptions of gifted learners is the first step in supporting them in the classroom. Understanding what it means for them to be “gifted” and the struggles they often encounter can help us champion tall poppies, rather than crushing them. As educators, we can remedy this phenomenon through our actions and support in the classroom.

## Resources

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Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)  
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## → GIFTED EDUCATION CERTIFICATION PREPARATION

Complete the 18-credit-hour gifted education  
coursework needed for certification from the state.  
This program is meant for current educators seeking  
certification in gifted education. Finish in as few as  
three semesters.



Both programs put Mizzou's renowned faculty  
and resources at your fingertips. Regardless of  
your choice, Mizzou Online's gifted education  
options are affordable, practical steps to  
furthering your career.

- Connect to a diverse professional network of  
dedicated educators like you and increase your  
earning potential while working full time.
- Hone research-based skills in differentiated  
instruction and gifted pedagogy.
- Transform your classroom, bolster student  
success and broaden your impact on learning that  
lasts a lifetime.

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# Destination Imagination

By Jody Thompson (GAM District 2 Co-Director; K-12 Gifted Education Specialist for Camdenon School District)



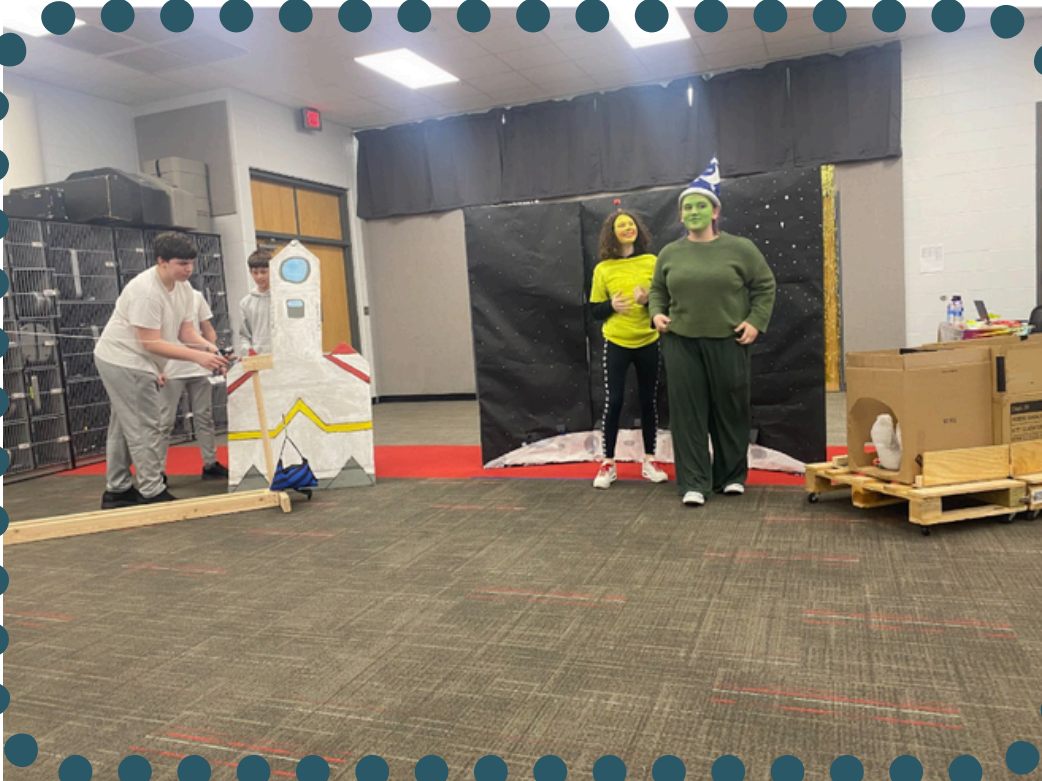
Do you want to find a way to allow your gifted students to develop their gifts and talents while building real world skills and friendships? Well, I have the competition for you! It is called Destination Imagination (DI). I was first introduced to the idea of DI while attending the Gifted and Talented program at Arkansas State University. I was intrigued by the way it encapsulated many of the best practices gifted educators can use to cultivate a gifted program that reinvigorates our dispassionate gifted students. We can inspire students to develop their gifts and talents by giving them the tools to take charge of their own learning. Teams of 2-7 members choose from one of the 6 challenges provided by the well named program Destination Imagination.

My first DI competition was this past school year. I had been researching it for several years and had been using DI Instant Challenges on Fridays with my gifted middle schoolers for the last 4 years as a fun way to build creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork skills. The DI team graciously offered to help me with the writing portion for an Impact Grant, which funded the purchase of the \$265.00 team membership. This membership gave me access to all the downloadable materials and educational videos to support me as the Director and Team Manager. In addition to the cost of the membership - each challenge has an allotment for expenses, most are 200 or less. Parent meetings are a great way to gain support and share information. These meetings give parents a chance to volunteer as a team manager. Of all the challenges including: technical, engineering,



# Destination Imagination

*continued from Page 24*





# Destination Imagination

*continued from Page 25*



fine arts, service learning, and improvisational, my students chose to do the Engineering challenge for the 24/25 year which was titled High Wire Act. This challenge required the students to design a device that would carry weights across a tournament provided cord at varying degrees. They were also required to create and perform a contemporary style circus while incorporating the transport device into the performance. The teams also compete in an Instant Challenge. The students selected a team name (The Not So Civil Printers), read through all of the challenge information, and then began working through the 5 stages of the DI creative process which include: Recognize, Imagine, Initiate, Collaborate, Assess, Evaluate, and Celebrate. Due to this being my first year with DI and 2 weeks of snow days, my 48 minute, 5 days a week class period for my middle schoolers was not enough time. I ended up offering a few after school work days and a couple of Saturday work days to keep the team on track for Competition in March. When asked what stretched them and what they enjoyed most this school year, all my students said Destination Imagination! Next year, I will start in December instead of January. That way we have time to pick a team name and a challenge before we come back from winter break. Please consider signing up for a team membership and come compete with us!



## DI Resources

- [Intro to DI for Team Slides](#)
- [DI Parent Meeting Slides](#)
- [Example Instant Challenge](#)
- [Purchase Instant Challenges](#)



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**ED 550 G** – Introduction to Gifted and Talented\*

**ED 605 G** – Psychology of Exceptional Children^

**ED 619 G** – Gifted Internship^

**ED 626 G** – Creativity\*

**ED 633 G** – Research in Gifted Education^

**ED 652 G** – Affective Needs of Gifted\*\*

\* Offered first 8-week session

\*\* Offered second 8-week session

^ Full semester

## SUMMER 2026

**ED 550 G** – Introduction to Gifted and Talented  
(1st or 2nd, 5-weeks)

**ED 605 G** – Psychology of Exceptional Children  
(1st or 2nd, 5-weeks)

**ED 626 G** – Creativity\*

**ED 650 G** – Identification of Gifted\*\*

**ED 652 G** – Affective Needs of Gifted\*

**ED 653 G** – Programming and Administration of  
Gifted (1st or 2nd, 5-weeks)

\* Offered first 5-week session

\*\* Offered second 5-week session

## FALL 2026

**ED 550 G** – Intro to Gifted\*

**ED 604 G** – Professional Learning: Gifted Policy,  
Practice, & Research\*\*

**ED 605 G** – Psychology of Exceptional Children^

**ED 619 G** – Gifted Internship^

**ED 633 G** – Research in Gifted Education^

**ED 651 G** – Curriculum for Gifted  
(1st 8-week session or full semester)

\* Offered first 8-week session

\*\* Offered second 8-week session

^ Full semester

Learn more at:  
[gifted.truman.edu](https://gifted.truman.edu) or



Email  
[gifted@truman.edu](mailto:gifted@truman.edu)



DESE Gifted Education Update  
August 29, 2025  
Christine Nobbe  
Director of Gifted Education  
[Christine.Nobbe@dese.mo.gov](mailto:Christine.Nobbe@dese.mo.gov)



## Important Reminders

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The latest version of the [Gifted Education Program Guidelines](#) became effective on November 30, 2024. If **you are using an older version, it is important to update.**

By now, your district/charter school should have completed the annual [Gifted Program Application](#) for the 2025-26 school year and Screen 25 of Core Data. Remember that accurate reporting in MOSIS on the number of gifted students being served (GS) and identified but not served (GN) is essential. The October MOSIS data is used to determine withholdings if there is a 20% decrease in GS. **Please ensure that identified gifted students are marked in the student information system before the last Wednesday of September.** (However, updates can still be made.) [The Core Data/MOSIS Manual provides in-depth information.](#)

Gifted education specialists in Missouri must be properly certificated. [Section 162.720, RSMo](#), states: "For school year 2024-25 and all subsequent school years, any teacher providing gifted services to students in districts with an average daily attendance of more than three hundred fifty students shall be certificated in gifted education. In districts with an average daily attendance of three hundred fifty students or fewer, any teacher providing gifted services shall not be required to be certificated to teach gifted education, but such teacher shall annually participate in at least six clock hours of professional development focused on gifted services. The school district shall pay for such professional development focused on gifted services."

In small districts (ADA of 350 or less) where the teacher is not gifted certified, the gifted educator must complete professional learning in gifted education, and the **district should maintain a record.** Educators in larger districts who do not have gifted certification [must apply for temporary authorization](#). For more information on certification or universities offering coursework, please email [Christine.Nobbe@dese.mo.gov](mailto:Christine.Nobbe@dese.mo.gov).

[More information is in this DESE Administrative Memo.](#)

## Please Join the Gifted-Ed Listserv!

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The DESE Gifted Education Update is published quarterly, but you can stay current by [subscribing to the Gifted-Ed listserv](#)! (Plus, cool resources are shared in the listserv.)

## MO School Funding Modernization Task Force

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The Task Force shall develop recommended changes to modernize the state funding structure for K-12 education. Per Governor Kehoe's Executive Order 25-14, the Task Force will submit a final report to the Governor by December 1, 2026, detailing recommendations for potential state funding models for K-12 public and charter schools. The report will include up to three alternative recommendations or components of the recommended model, as well as a summary of feedback garnered from stakeholders. [Please visit the task force webpage for more information](#), including agendas and presentation slides.

## MSA and MFAA

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The 2025 [Missouri Scholars](#) and [Fine Arts](#) Academies were amazingly successful! I visited MSA on two days and Commissioner Eslinger and Assistant Commissioner Lisa Sireno also visited. Dr. Kendra Franks, DESE Director of Fine Arts, visited MFAA. Everyone commented on the positive energy and passion for learning they observed. State funding for 2026 is set at \$850,000.

Please review both websites and begin identifying eligible students to apply. Please watch the listserv for additional information; at the time of this writing, application information and due dates have not been announced.

## SY 2025-26 is Off and Running!

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*Run when you can, walk if you have to, crawl if you must; just never give up.* — Dean Karnazes

This quote reminds me of a school year in which we jump in excited and energetic and ends with counting down the days to rest and rejuvenation. I hope this message finds you running along, having caught your stride.



*-Christine*



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



## Missouri State Capital Report

By Kyna Iman (GAM Governmental Affairs Consultant)

### Missouri to pilot new way of measuring student learning

As national test scores reveal worrying trends in student achievement, Missouri is stepping into the spotlight with a new approach to state assessments. The state was recently selected as the only participant in a federal pilot: the [Success-Ready Student Assessment \(SRSA\)](#).

Beginning this school year, the SRSA is designed to replace sole reliance on the traditional “one-shot” end-of-year exams. Instead, students in participating districts will take a series of shorter, modular tests across the year in core subjects. These will be paired with a summative assessment to ensure compliance with federal and state laws.

The intent is to offer teachers and families more timely feedback, identify challenges earlier, and allow instruction to be adjusted during the year rather than after it ends.

At least 25 districts will join in the pilot as it phases over two years. If successful, the SRSA could eventually be folded into Missouri’s statewide assessment system — transforming testing from a snapshot into a tool for continuous improvement.

### Missouri's task force examines school funding best practices

At its August 13 [meeting](#), the **Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force** heard from **Bonnie O’Keefe**, Senior Associate Partner at [Bellwether](#), who presented on how other states are updating their K-12 funding systems. Bellwether’s work modeling changes to Missouri’s formula, and their expertise offers an invaluable perspective as policymakers weigh reform options.

Examples of other states’ recent reforms were shared with the committee.

- **Tennessee** and **Mississippi** both overhauled their decades-old formulas, changing them to student-based systems that direct more resources to students with greater needs.
- **Michigan** was highlighted for their “[opportunity index](#)” funding to better support districts with concentrated levels of poverty.
- **Colorado** and **Pennsylvania** targeted additional dollars toward at-risk students, English Learners, and rural communities.

These comparisons underscored that **change is possible**, and that **Missouri is not alone** in confronting tough trade-offs.

# MO State Capital Report *continued from Page 29*

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## Key policy issues remain

Task force members engaged with several policy questions. Should Missouri continue to rely on **attendance** instead of enrollment for student counts, one of only a handful of states to do so? How should the state determine a rational **base cost per student**? And what's the best way to allocate funding for students in poverty, English language learners, and students with disabilities?

Missouri's heavy reliance on local funds also drew attention. Presentations noted that state allocations are still calculated based on **2005 property values**, leaving nearly **\$5 billion** in local revenue outside of the state's calculation. Updating these valuations remains politically difficult, but doing so would ensure we are accounting for the revenues actually raised by Missouri school districts.

These conversations are difficult and changes to the formula will take time. But examining best practices from across the country is a valuable step as the task force level sets and explores all the facts.

The Gifted Association of Missouri remains committed to providing rigorous analysis, transparency, and focus on our students to help guide any modernization of Missouri's funding system.

## Legislature Passes Omnibus Education Legislation:

During the 2025 legislative session, the Missouri General Assembly passed Senate Bill 68, which contained numerous provisions relating to elementary and secondary education (DESE). Below, are sections that may be of interest to you....

### GRADE-LEVEL EQUIVALENCE (Sections 160.518 and 160.522)

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shall develop and use a grade-level equivalence metric to assess students' knowledge and performance for grades 3-8. DESE shall define and categorize performance-level descriptors for advanced, proficient, grade level, basic, and below basic achievement, as described in the act, with each level representing varying degrees of mastery over educational content and readiness for the next grade level. The grade-level equivalence for each student shall be determined at the time of the statewide assessment and provided alongside the student's assessment score to both the student and his or her parent. DESE shall also ensure that data related to grade-level equivalence is made publicly accessible on a building, school, district, and statewide level, while ensuring that no data is disclosed in a way that allows for the personal identification of any student, except by the student and the student's parent. DESE may engage a third-party nonprofit entity to assist in developing the grade-level equivalence metric. The grade-level equivalence data shall be included in the annual performance reports DESE is required to compile under current law.

# MO State Capital Report *continued from Page 30*

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## TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES ON THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (Section 161.026)

The act modifies the appointment of teacher representatives to the State Board of Education by providing that, for the second and succeeding appointments, the teacher representative shall not be appointed from the same congressional district as the two immediately preceding teacher representatives, rather than requiring all appointments to be made in rotation from each congressional district. The act further repeals the August 28, 2025, expiration date of these provisions.

## STEM CAREER AWARENESS (Section 161.264)

This act creates the "STEM Career Awareness Activity Fund" for the purpose of establishing a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activity program for students in grades nine through twelve. Under the act, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shall select a provider to deliver a teacher-led program that involves facilitating a cohort of students to conduct STEM activities at state, national, or international competitions. DESE shall select a provider that presents data demonstrating the effectiveness of the program in achieving certain goals specified in the act. DESE shall begin soliciting applications from providers by January 1, 2026, and select a provider by March 1, 2026.

## ELECTRONIC PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS DEVICES (Section 162.207)

Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, each school district and charter school shall adopt a written policy regarding students' possession or use of electronic personal communication devices. Such a policy shall be designed to promote students' educational interests and ensure a safe, effective working environment for staff and volunteers. The act defines an "electronic personal communications device" as a portable device that is used to initiate, receive, store, or view communication, information, images, or data electronically.

At a minimum, the policy shall prohibit students from using or displaying these devices from the beginning until the end of the school day, including, but not limited to, during instructional time, meal times, breaks, time between classes, and study halls. The policy shall also outline disciplinary procedures for violations and include exceptions for students who need devices due to specific educational or health needs, such as individualized education plans or 504 plans under federal law. Exceptions may allow device use in emergencies, as defined in the act, or for authorized educational purposes. The policy shall be published on the school district's or charter school's website, and school employees or volunteers shall be immune from liability if they act in good faith and follow the policy's disciplinary procedures.

## MINIMUM TEACHER'S SALARY (Section 163.172)

This act repeals the requirement for a teacher's master's degree to be in an academic teaching field directly related to the teacher's assignment in order for such teacher to qualify for the minimum salary for teachers with a master's degree and at least 10 years of teaching experience.

# MO State Capital Report *continued from Page 31*

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## SUBSTITUTE TEACHING IN RETIREMENT (Section 168.036)

Currently, the limitations for members of the Public School Retirement System and the Public Education Employee Retirement Systems (PSRS/PEERS) to work as a substitute teacher after retirement are waived until June 30, 2025. This act waives such limitations until June 30, 2030.

## MODELS OF READING INSTRUCTION (Section 170.014)

Phonics instruction for decoding and encoding words shall be the primary instructional strategy for teaching word reading in school districts and charter schools. Instruction in word reading shall not rely primarily on strategies based on the three-cueing system model of reading or visual memory. Visual information may be used in reading instruction to improve background and add context, but shall not be used to teach word reading.

## TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION SCHOLARSHIPS (Section 173.232)

The act adds "educational costs" related to teacher preparation to the costs covered by the Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Scholarship Program.

If the number of scholarships or maximum amount awarded does not exceed limits established in current law, the act requires DESE to use any remaining funds to award additional scholarships to students who are in the final semester of a state-approved baccalaureate-level teacher preparation program and are student teaching. DESE shall determine the amount of each scholarship awarded under this provision based on equal distribution of remaining funds among all eligible students. No amount granted shall exceed the amount of tuition charged a Missouri resident at the University of Missouri-Columbia for attendance for one semester.

The act provides that DESE "shall", rather than "may", sell to the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority loans of scholarship funds that were awarded to scholarship recipients who failed to teach in a hard-to-staff school or hard-to-staff subject area as required under the Program. The act repeals a provision that a school district that hires such an individual as a teacher shall repay 25% of the 1/8 portion of such teacher's scholarship that is not subject to repayment as a loan.

## INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE EXAMINATIONS (Section 173.1352)

This act requires public institutions of higher education to adopt a policy to award undergraduate course credit to student who receives a score of four or higher on an International Baccalaureate exam.

For a copy of the full bill text, click here: [SB68.pdf](#)

Please let me know if you have any questions at [kynaiman@earthlink.net](mailto:kynaiman@earthlink.net)

Kyna Iman  
GAM Governmental Consultant





OCTOBER 11TH

# FALLSCAPE

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# Fallscape and Winterscape Programs

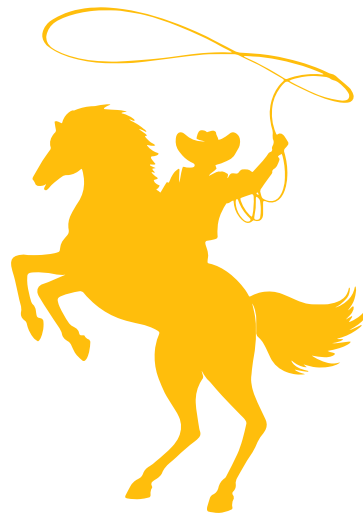
By Ariele Lee and Mary Potthoff

**GAMbits  
and Pieces**

Fallscape and Winterscape Saturday programs are offered for students in Pre-K through 6th grade on Drury University campus. These one-day camps expose students to fun/advanced learning while experiencing a college campus. An exciting part of the day is walking across campus to eat in the cafeteria with college students. “This is my favorite restaurant”, said one camper.

Last year’s Fallscape was October 12, 2024, and 94 students from all over Missouri attended and studied The Wild, Wild West. There were six excellent gifted instructors and 15 volunteers from our high school summer camps focusing on specific topics about the wild west. Many hands-on activities were enjoyed, including:

- Making jam & butter
- Nature journaling
- Water wheel design
- Study of trading and commerce
- Old time photography
- Electricity/energy exploration
- Quilting



For more information:

[www.drury.edu/giftededucation](http://www.drury.edu/giftededucation) or [mpotthof@drury.edu](mailto:mpotthof@drury.edu)

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# GAM District Regional Directors



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<b>Region 1</b> is located in southeast Missouri and includes the following counties: Carter, Ripley, Ste. Genevieve, St. Francois, Perry, Madison, Wayne, Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Butler, Stoddard, Scott, Mississippi, New Madrid, Dunklin & Pemiscot.	Region 1 Director	<a href="#">Crystal Koenig</a>
	Region 1 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Tara Pruett</a>
<b>Region 2</b> is the central/east region of the state, covering Audrain, Boone, Callaway, Camden, Cole, Cooper, Gasconade, Howard, Lincoln, Miller, Moniteau, Montgomery, Morgan, Osage, and Warren counties.	Region 2 Director	<a href="#">Brian Stuhlman</a>
	Region 2 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Jody Thompson</a>
<b>Region 3</b> is located on the west side of Missouri and includes Platte, Clay, Jackson and Cass counties.	Region 3 Director	<a href="#">Jenna Nelson</a>
	Region 3 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Jody Brison-Molina</a>
<b>Region 4</b> is located in northeast Missouri and includes the following counties: Putnam, Schuyler, Clark, Sullivan, Adair, Knox, Lewis, Linn, Macon, Shelby, Marion, Chariton, Randolph, Monroe, Ralls, Scotland, and Pike.	Region 4 Director	<a href="#">Emily Woodall</a>
	Region 4 Assistant	<a href="#">Angie Cochran</a>
<b>Region 5</b> is located in the northwest corner of Missouri and includes the following counties: Atchison, Nodaway, Holt, Andrew, Buchanan, Clinton, Dekalb, Gentry, Worth, Harrison, Daviess, Caldwell, Mercer, Grundy, and Livingston.	Region 5 Director	<a href="#">Ashley Zeiler</a>
	Region 5 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Sarah Mason</a>
<b>Region 6</b> is located in the middle of the southern region of Missouri and includes the following counties: Franklin, Washington, Crawford, Maries, Phelps, Pulaski, Texas, Dent, Iron, Reynolds, Shannon, Howell, and Oregon.	Region 6 Director	<a href="#">Michelle Bobo</a>
	Region 6 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Christina Wallace</a>
<b>Region 7</b> is located in the southwest region of Missouri and includes the following counties: Vernon, Barton, Jasper, Newton, McDonald, Cedar, Dade, Lawrence, Barry, Stone, Taney, Ozark, Douglas, Christian, Wright, Webster, Greene, Polk, Dallas, and Laclede.	Region 7 Director	<a href="#">Heather VanOtterloo</a>
	Region 7 Assistant Director	<a href="#">Christina Landburg</a>
<b>Region 8</b> is located in the eastern portion of Missouri and includes the following counties: St. Charles, St. Louis, and Jefferson.	Region 8 Co-Director	<a href="#">Jennifer Blank</a>
	Region 8 Co-Director	<a href="#">Aisha Hasan</a>
<b>Region 9</b> includes the following counties: Bates, Benton, Carroll, Cass, Henry, Hickory, Johnson, Lafayette, Morgan, Pettis, Ray, St. Clair, Saline, and Vernon.	Region 9 Co-Director	<a href="#">Kristine Torres</a>
	Region 9 Co-Director	<a href="#">Jodi Blumhorst</a>