

The Role of the Gifted Coordinator

“A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds.”

—Francis Bacon, *The Essays*

I speak with teachers from around the country who suddenly find themselves in the role of gifted coordinator for their schools or districts. Some have applied for the position, some were assigned, and others grew into the role or developed it themselves. The duties of the gifted coordinator vary widely, and regardless of the job design, the primary purpose remains to identify and support gifted students, provide training to teachers, and disseminate information to parents of gifted students.

The duties of a gifted coordinator are determined by the role, which vary widely across the country. Here are the most common roles.

A district level gifted education coordinator who does not teach students

Ideally, this coordinator is solely responsible for gifted services. However, the role is most commonly seen as an additional responsibility for an administrator who wears multiple hats. Either way, the coordinator at the district level has great opportunity to interact with other school or district administrators, which helps embed gifted education awareness and practices into all aspects of the school district.

A district-wide gifted education teacher who teaches at more than one school

This position is the most common type of gifted coordinator. The teacher rotates between schools and serves students on a pull-out or push-in basis. Ideally, pull out would be daily and directly support core content, such as with content replacement and honors classes, but in most cases the teacher serves students through enrichment activities once a week, more or less. Participation in these classes can feel like a lifesaver to many gifted students. They look forward to interacting with peers on engaging projects.

A school level gifted education coordinator who does not directly teach students

These positions are increasingly rare in today's economically strained educational environment. However, they are still prevalent in certain areas. These coordinators are viewed as supports for classroom teachers. Examples of their support include providing ongoing professional development, leading training meetings, running book studies, providing online learning opportunities, identifying resources, and modeling instructional strategies.

A school level gifted coordinator who teaches gifted students

Teachers in these positions usually have numerous responsibilities. In addition to teaching, they may be expected to test and identify students for gifted services, provide notice to parents of testing and test results, create the gifted service schedule, determine and plan the curriculum, and teach gifted students.

Regardless of the particular role, there are several tips that will help all gifted coordinators develop and support gifted services in their schools and districts.

Speak softly and carry a big stick—Remember that many educators do not have training or a background in gifted education. To make great strides coordinators must first share information with all stakeholders. Holding after-school teacher workshops and parent meetings, creating newsletters and an updated website, and using social media are a few ways to communicate. The “big stick” refers to arming yourself with information, facts, data, and policies. When seeking support from administration, you will want to present concise, focused, and convincing evidence at every turn.

Integrate your efforts/goals with every department—Whether you are at a district or school level, build connections with those who oversee or work with assessment, language acquisition, professional development, curriculum, special education, and grants. Building relationships with these departments allows for continual opportunities to embed awareness of gifted and talented students' school needs into the infrastructure of the school system.

Structure your efforts around school, district, state, and/or national initiatives—Gifted education remains on the periphery for many. Successful advocacy requires quiet, concerted efforts to structure services around school initiatives, most of which support district, state, and national initiatives. Ask yourself: What do our gifted students need from the new science (math, reading, etc.) adoption? How should I prepare my gifted students for the new performance-based assessment our state adopted? How can our gifted students benefit from RtI, PLCs, and Common Core? Aligning your efforts to educational initiatives builds awareness of gifted students' needs into standard school structures.

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laboration with a mentor, and they showcase student ideas and advanced projects. There are substantial monetary awards for the winning projects, which help to motivate students as they spend countless hours working on them. While Intel focuses on science and mathematics projects, the Davidson awards also include the arts.

As I wrote to the author of the introductory email: you must set the guidelines and parameters for this to work in your district and stick to them. Your school will have to determine how to code these on the transcript and decide if students should receive a grade for what they do. Pass/Fail options are often overlooked and don't necessarily hold as much merit with higher education institutions. I also recommend that students develop their own independent study proposal or management plan and present it to a teacher or administrator in the school. In it, the student should determine the length of time necessary to complete the project, and work to identify possible mentors.

Independent Study provides excellent curricular op-

tions for secondary gifted students. In fact, they are necessary for exposure to real-world problem solving and success. **THP**

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Connect with others in a similar role—Gifted coordinators often feel isolated: independent individuals trying to conquer dragons and move mountains. If this describes you, know that you are not alone! We are living in a time of instant connectivity. Seek others in your area who are in similar positions working to build programs and services. Create blogs, video conferences, site repositories, and shared groups where you can connect and collaborate with others in similar positions.

Rely on existing resources to support your efforts—Look at your school district's mission statement. Most likely, it claims to challenge all students. As gifted coordinators, we need to attach gifted students' needs to those goals our districts set forth. By embedding gifted education into school initiatives and informing others about these students' needs, school administrators understand the need for including the exceptional learning needs of gifted students into standard school and district procedures.

Supporting gifted education in our schools does not require additional funding. It requires that we allocate our existing resources to fulfill our school districts' mandate to support and challenge all of our students, including the gifted. Your role as a/the gifted coordinator in your school or district guides this process and your gifted students' present and future learning opportunities. **THP**

iMATHINATION

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tate mathematical modeling, implementation tips, and standards that are met with each MEA. **THP**

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