

Santa Barbara School Districts
Gifted and Talented Education: Secondary

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Robin Sawaske, Associate Superintendent

Sandy Robertson, District GATE Coordinator

October 16, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians and other GATE/AP Program Supporters,

I am writing to bring you up to date regarding our dire budget situation. I am well aware that everywhere you have gone these last weeks during the opening of the school year, you have heard from everyone about the financial crisis we are all facing. Our GATE Program is no exception. In order to be completely transparent, I want to share information with you regarding how our GATE funds were used last year.

Last year at this time, we received approximately \$83,000.00 from the State to run our GATE program. The District also contributed its traditional \$10,000.00, which gave us a little more than \$93,000.00 with which to run our program. This amount is completely separate from the donation monies raised annually by our GATE and AP Program parents.

How are the monies from these two sources spent? Typically, the State and District money is used for salaries for our GATE Coordinator, for our secretary, Annette Makwana, and for our Site Coordinators at each school. It also covers operating expenses such as phone bills, testing materials (including a test proctor for each testing session), subscriptions, and memberships in professional organizations (California Association for the Gifted, for example), and when we could afford it, some teacher professional development to further their understanding of gifted students and increase their teaching skills to better meet the needs of gifted students. The largest portion of this fund covers the salaries and benefits for our personnel.

The money we receive from parent donations is usually spent on classroom supplies, materials, equipment, field trips, and other enrichment experiences for students. Over the past couple of years, the parents of our District Advisory Council also voted to spend donation monies on professional development (conferences, workshops, etc.) for teachers as the District was unable to provide such funding.

Additionally, *as with all non-profit organizations*, some donation money was spent on operational necessities: for instance, stamps, envelopes, printing, and other requirements for conducting the fundraising itself. The entire cost of the copier we have in the GATE Office has been covered by donation monies, since the majority of its use is for producing materials for parents and/or copies for students in classrooms. The amount of the donation money spent on these operational expenditures has run about 6% of the total of our donation monies over the last few years.

This year, however, we need to inform you that we have suffered a 55% cut in our funding from the State. Because of this funding drop, we will need to use approximately 38% of the money we received from parent donations for support services. In other words, some of your donations will be used to off-set the budget cut from the state.

In order to minimize the impact of the budget cuts, and to maintain the integrity of your donations, we have instituted the following cuts:

1. Salary reduction for District GATE coordinator
2. Fewer testing sessions offered during the year
3. Fewer mailings to parents
4. Elimination of teacher professional development through state funds

The greatest expense for any organization is its personnel. We would like to maintain the excellent service we provide for our GATE families and teachers by continuing to have our Site Coordinators on board; we can only do that, however, by making use of the donation monies for that purpose.

We will, of course, monitor the budget situation closely and attempt to reduce the amount we need from the donation funds to maintain our program. Hopefully, as the State's finances recover, that will be sooner than later.

On behalf of our GATE teachers and students, I thank you for your understanding and continued support.

Sincerely,

Sandy Robertson, Coordinator
Secondary District GATE Program
805.730.7775