

# Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

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## **Accelerated Academic Education Grant Submission**

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) is in its third year of existence, currently serving students from kindergarten through 7<sup>th</sup> grade, growing to encompass 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the 2014-2015 school year. Our school's mission is that students will become fully proficient in reading, writing and speaking English and Spanish through immersion in both languages as they learn all subjects.

LAAA currently provides Special Education, ELL, and RTI support services to students as required by law. At this time, LAAA is interested in expanding our enrichment opportunities to reach students who demonstrate gifts and talents that exceed that of their typical peers. Since one characteristic of giftedness is the ability for students to acquire new languages quickly, we feel that promoting development of gifts and talents within an environment already structured for rich language learning could serve to enhance and challenge those individual students with the goal of helping all students to reach their full potential.

### **Program Design**

The enrichment program targeted at gifted learners at Las Américas ASPIRA Academy will be known as the QUEST program. This acronym is borrowed from a school in Connecticut and stands for "Quality Utilization and Enrichment of Student Talents".

The program design will be one that is able to evolve to meet the needs of learners. Spearheaded by a special education teacher, the QUEST program will take the approach that gifted education should not be a one-sized fits all model. Though Delaware does not implement a "Gifted IEP" program, LAAA believes that education should mold to fit the child, not the other way around.

The QUEST program will be based on the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) 2010 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards. These standards will provide a framework for identification and assessment, staff professional development, curriculum and environmental planning, and programming.

- **Integration with Existing School Programs and Transportation**

LAAA is not seeking to "reinvent the wheel" with the QUEST initiative but rather to repurpose existing programs to best serve students identified for the program. LAAA currently offers character development clubs one day each week for 45 minutes within the regular school day in which students grades 2-7 can self-select specific extracurricular activities to supplement their learning. This serves to support all learners, including those who exhibit exceptional gifts and talents.

The program will build off of clubs as well as general education teachers existing efforts to differentiate for all learners and *also* provide a separate class with specific goals.

QUEST will be offered completely within the regular school day (therefore requiring no specialized transportation) as an enrichment class which will be scheduled either during student's scheduled enrichment (RTI) blocks (5 days per week, 30 minutes per session, up to 150 minutes per week) or during 2-hour long enrichment courses offered once a week on a rotating schedule. The enrichment will be provided in *appropriate* multi-age small-class grouping with the groups possibly spanning 2 grades with a 3 grade maximum.

- **Proposed Curriculum**

The QUEST curriculum will be primarily focused on developing students' critical, creative, and logical thinking skills as well as problem-solving abilities in a variety of ways. QUEST will be project-based and will be driven by students' interests to the extent possible. LAAA believes that students will gain the most from QUEST if the curriculum can be somewhat led by them. In addition to being based on the NAGC 2010 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards, QUEST will strive to extend students' thinking and learning about their core subject matter as laid out in the Common Core State Standards in Reading and Mathematics as well as the Delaware State Standards in Science and Social Studies with direct application to the world around them.

QUEST will not be based on one set curriculum but will adapt to meet the needs of the learners. In the first year, QUEST will utilize curriculum materials such as Prufrock Press's multiage differentiated curriculum units, in addition to teacher-designed curricula based on standards and student interests, talents, and needs. QUEST will also strive to support the social and emotional needs of all of its learners. Beyond year 1, LAAA would self-assess based on program effectiveness and make decisions about the best curriculum for use in the future.

Another goal of the QUEST program at Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is to integrate quality enrichment support within students' general education classrooms. One such way LAAA plans to do this is by helping students to "identify their preferred approaches to learning, accommodate these preferences, and expand them" (NAGC 1.7.1.). A goal of QUEST will be to help students to understand their strengths and their opportunities for growth to help them to self-advocate in the classroom as well as challenge themselves.

Additionally, QUEST will intend to provide general education teachers with curriculum materials that will help them meet the needs of all learners. Great Books and Junior Great Books materials will be used to extend guided reading lessons for QUEST students. These materials have been chosen based on the alignment with LAAA's core curriculum (Lucy Calkin's Reading Workshop model) and will aid teachers in emphasizing critical and higher level thinking through use of authentic literature. Other materials will include ideas and resources for extending lessons within other subjects and challenging fast finisher type of activities.

- **Instructors**

At this time, the QUEST program will be led by the Education Enrichment Coordinator, Ms. Kristen Cioeta, M.Ed. who is a certified special education teacher. Ms. Cioeta oversees Special Education at ASPIRA, researched, designed, and spearheaded the RTI program in reading in 2012-2013, currently coordinating this program, and supports the math RTI roll out in 2013-2014. Additionally, she helps to coordinate the testing and services provided to ELL students at ASPIRA.

Ms. Cioeta is a member of the Council for Exceptional Children and has experience and contacts within the gifted education system in Pennsylvania. She has conducted much research within the field of gifted education both within Delaware and nationally. Ms. Cioeta is planning on furthering her knowledge in this subject matter through professional development and continued research. She also was recently invited to participate on the Statewide Advisory Council on Programs for Gifted and Talented Students. Additional funding would be used to add staff on a part-time basis to be devoted to this program.

- **Efficiency of spending**

LAAA would require some funding to implement and execute the QUEST program as lined out within this document as the current enrichment coordinator oversees many facets of the enrichment program at this time. Therefore, funding would help to provide a staff member to be dedicated to this program on a part time basis. This person would help with the referral and identification process and be responsible for instruction of QUEST students. Additionally, this dedicated resource would work with general education teachers to plan lessons and extensions for QUEST students to be supported within the general education environment. The QUEST coordinator would also be responsible for attending training and professional development around the education of gifted and talented students and then coming back and disseminating the training information to the appropriate staff. We estimate dedicating 25% of a fully-loaded special education teacher/coordinator's salary to this program would cost \$15,000.

The requested grant would also help to expand the breadth of instructional resources available to support this program as depicted below:

Materials	Description/Quantity	Price
Prufrock Press Differentiated Curriculum Units	\$45/each (with shipping), will require 2-3 units/every 2-3 grades= 8 total	\$240
Supplemental Reading and Various Materials for P.P. Differentiated Curriculum Units	~\$100/each for 8 units	\$800
Sages-2: Screening assessment for gifted elementary and middle school students	1 unit	\$360
SIGS: Scales for identifying gifted students	1 unit	\$175
Games, puzzles, and activities to support logic skill development and create thinking. A variety of MindWare, Mensa, Prufrock Press, and related companies' products will be employed to support this goal.	to be shared among all the grade levels within the QUEST program	\$1,000
<b>Total</b>		\$2,575

Therefore, LAAA feels that they could successfully implement an effective, functional, cohesive program of enrichment for students exhibiting exceptional talents and gifts with approximately \$17,575.

- **Sustainability**

If funding were to become available to LAAA to help to get this program off the ground, we would commit resources towards dedicating an additional staff member on a part-time basis to be dedicated to the QUEST program. The requested grant would also help to expand the breadth of instructional resources available to support this program.

Without funding opportunities at this time and into the future, QUEST students will be supported within LAAA's educational enrichment program by existing staff members. The QUEST coordinator will offer broader ideas to general education teachers about ways to accommodate their advanced learners.

- **Evaluation**

Though Delaware does not regulate a gifted IEP process like other states such as Pennsylvania do, LAAA feels that the best way to evaluate a program of this nature's effectiveness would be to look at individualized student growth. LAAA plans to look at students on individual bases to determine the student growth. An effective program would show that students identified for this program would show growth based on individualized goals. By nature of the identification process, QUEST students may be outperforming grade level expectations but closer evaluation would push these students to show growth based on individual progress. Evaluation would look at students' accomplishment of individualized goals, positive rates of improvement on AIMSweb benchmarking curriculum-based measurements, accomplishment of instructional DCAS growth targets, etc. Additionally, results of a parent satisfaction survey will be used to determine overall program effectiveness.

## **Identification**

LAAA plans to utilize multiple data sources to determine student eligibility for this program which will begin in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. As the program rolls out this year (2013-2014), eligibility will initially be determined on a rolling basis. Beginning in the spring of 2014, there will be set dates in the spring and the fall of each academic year by which all nominations will need to be submitted to be considered for eligibility into the program.

The initial identification process will include a parent/teacher nomination form, consideration of report card and other classroom assessment information, state assessment data where applicable, benchmark data including: AIMSweb (mathematics, English reading, Spanish reading), Fountas and Pinnell reading, and Words Their Way, as well as other curriculum-based measurements. If a student is shown to be meeting or exceeding benchmarks in several of these areas, then LAAA intends to use all of this combined screening information in addition to the Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS) which will be filled out by both home and school personnel as well as the Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students (SAGES-2) to determine whether a particular student would benefit from the enrichment support

inherent to this program. Decisions would be made as a team, thereby eliminating any individual person's bias and providing multiple viewpoints as to whether a student should be offered support through the QUEST program.

Parents will be notified of their child's nomination and testing that will be taking place to determine whether their child would be a good fit for this program. Upon reaching a decision, the team will provide parents with a comprehensive summary of their decision when an eligibility determination is made.

- **Encouragement of Participation of Students from Diverse Backgrounds**

It is the position of LAAA that the school needs to develop a program such as the QUEST program *for the purpose of* ensuring students from diverse backgrounds have access to this type of enrichment support in addition to the services already provided at our school. LAAA's population at this time consists of 29% white students, 56% Hispanic students, 12% African American students, and 3% students of other ethnicities. Additionally 50% of students receive free or reduced lunch. Therefore, it would be unjust to the students at our school to *not* provide this type of enrichment support.

Additionally, consideration for and equal treatment of students from diverse backgrounds is a central theme of Las Américas ASPIRA Academy's mission statement. This cornerstone of our school will also be important to identifying students to our QUEST program. The measures selected for eligibility were chosen in part due to their efforts to eliminate racial, gender, age, and ethnic bias. The SIGS was chosen as opposed to other similar products because it provides home rating forms in Spanish in addition to English which will be useful in collecting this imperative information from our Spanish-dominant parents, of which there are many. Furthermore, since this program is being designed by a special education professional, adaptations to account for any type of disabilities will be easily implemented as necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission. Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is excited and grateful to be given this opportunity to broaden our offerings to effectively educate and reach all of our students and ensure we are doing our primary job of serving Delaware's children to the best of our ability.

### **References**

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