

WHERE ALL GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN ARE KNOWN, VALUED AND INSPIRED



IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome Back!

By: Christine Hull, Director of Advanced Learning and Gifted Programs, MCSD

Dear St. Elmo Parents,

We are excited about beginning a new school year with many wonderful updates to share with you. We have been working hard since the spring to redefine the focus of our instruction and our environment to better serve the needs of gifted students in the 21st century. In this newsletter, I hope to share with you our plans for the 2017-2018 school year as well as garner your invaluable help. We are determined to accomplish some big goals this year, and we would love for our parents and our community members to help us achieve them.

A Shift in Pedagogy for Gifted and Talented Children

We are continually striving to implement best practices and instructional models that we believe will best meet the needs of the students we serve here at St. Elmo. As your child attends one day a week with us at the center, we know that he or she possesses innate aptitudes that are unique, and we should treat them as such. These students can engage with their world in complex, creative, and interesting ways. **Our job is to**

inspire, equip, and empower each of our students to pursue their academic, creative, artistic, and athletic passions while also teaching them life skills and civic responsibility. This year, we are shifting how we teach our students to an Inquiry-based approach through student-centered, problem-based learning (PBL). We will have two exhibitions that showcase student work—one in the fall and one in the spring—wherein students have real, authentic audiences for their semester-long endeavors centered on broad themes and lines of inquiry. Though the teachers will choose the central theme to unify the classes across the week, the students in each class will drive the learning through their individual passions, questions, and interests. Our teachers need your help! In this newsletter, you will have a glimpse at what we here at St. Elmo are hoping to provide for your children during this school year. We hope that you will partner with us in supporting these classes as they embark on some pretty incredible journeys to discover themselves and the world around them while also developing empathy for others through servant leadership opportunities.



Building Renovations

We've been working hard over the summer to give St. Elmo a new look! Take a look inside to see what we've been up to.

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At St. Elmo, we are engaging students in Problem-Based Learning this year as a means to completely immerse them in inquiry-based, student-driven learning.

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2017 Building Renovation



“Before” & “In Progress” Pics



Our front door was sanded back to the wood and repainted by Mr. Cosby and Mr. Chandler. They also refinished the railing on the stairway and hung a beautiful new light Mr. Chandler found at the Habitat for Humanity Re-Store.



Mr. Chandler, Mr. Foust, Dr. Aguirre, Mrs. Burch, and Mrs. Szentadorjany helped me paint and completely revamp our lobby area for a wonderful first impression for our visitors. We have a new navy interior, painted furniture, chalkboards, a new receptionist desk and sign-in table, and a working TV for scrolling announcements. The new mascot symbol will eventually be added above the TV. We also added a better mannequin to show off our STE merchandise. I purchased new pillows and pillowcases that say, “We believe creative people change the world.” and “Explore, dream, discover.” We repotted our plants in new turquoise planters as well.





IMAGINE
DREAM
CREATE
ADAPT
THINK BIG!



We are currently building our new Makerspace! Plant Services installed a brand new wall for us to block off this space from the new teachers' and visitors' lounge and Michelle Szentadorjany and I painted both walls in chalkboard paint. Beth Williams loaded up 143 boxes of outdated books to make space for our new materials and equipment. We hope to have it up and running by the first of September!

We need your help to stock our MAKERSPACE!

Definition of a Makerspace: "A makerspace is a place where students can gather to create, invent, tinker, explore and discover using a variety of tools and materials. A makerspace can be anything from a repurposed book cart filled with arts and crafts supplies to a table in a corner set out with LEGOs to a full blown fab lab with 3D printers, laser cutters, and hand tools. Makers are artists, crafters, knitters, seamstresses, builders, programmers, engineers, hackers, painters, woodworkers, tinkerers, inventors, bakers, graphic designers and more."—Diana L. Rendina, RenovatedLearning.com

We have a new Makerspace at St. Elmo for our students, but we need your help to supply materials. Regular household items you have lying around your house can be extremely useful. Here is a list of items we can use:

- Paper goods and materials of all kinds
- Sewing materials and tools
- Paint, paintbrushes, paint buckets, tarps, and supplies
- Wood and construction materials appropriate for children
- Toothpicks, popsicle sticks, twisty ties, pipe cleaners, etc.
- Modeling clay
- Tissue paper
- Cardboard and Tri-boards
- Glitter
- Glue of all kinds and glue guns
- Cotton balls, toilet paper, and paper towel rolls
- Markers and colored pencils
- Book binding or making materials including scrapbook materials
- LEDS, batteries, lighting materials
- Legos, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs
- Jewelry making materials
- Dowels, rubber bands
- Origami supplies
- String and rope
- Old board games
- Tape of all kinds
- Technology that still works—cameras, laptops, tablets, etc.

You can bring your supplies to STE at any time, send them by your child, or, better yet, bring them to OPEN HOUSE!

OPEN HOUSE at St. Elmo will be SEPTEMBER 28, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

We will begin in the auditorium promptly at **6:00 p.m.** for a very short welcome. You will have about **15 minutes** with your child's teacher for this semester in their classroom following the welcome. This will not be a time for individual conferences, but you will get to meet your child's teacher, hear about what they are doing in class this semester, and tour the building. We will also have representatives available from our parent organization, GCAGC, to talk to you about membership and its benefits. The Makerspace will also be open for you to bring your donated supplies as well as enjoy some fun activities with your students. We will be finished before **7:00 p.m.**

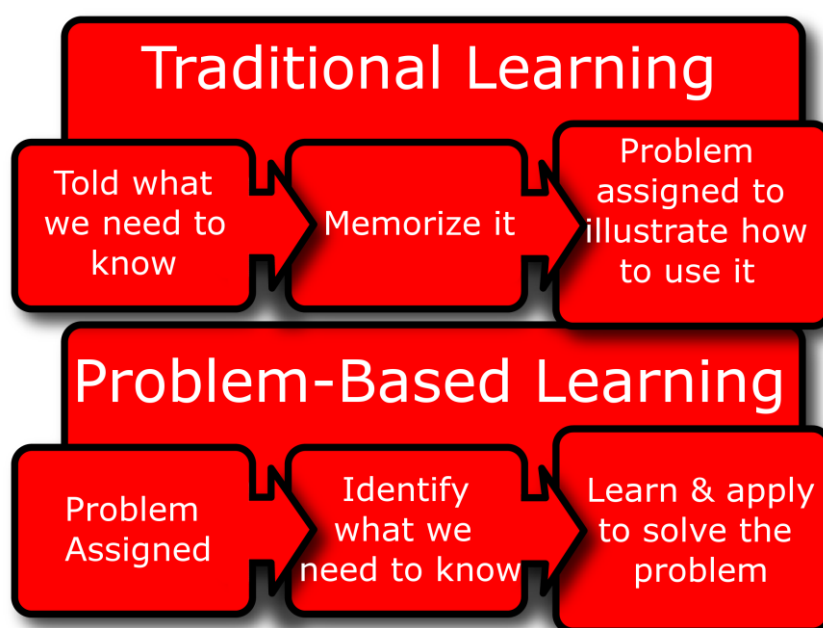
Our New Mascot is Here!

One of our most exciting changes this year is our new mascot—THE DRAGON! The dragon is a powerful symbol across many cultures for wisdom, longevity, life, growth, prosperity, and regeneration. In the Chinese culture specifically, dragons are symbols of energy and good fortune, believed to be the harbinger of incredible luck, prosperity, abundance, consistent success and high achievement for the deserving. Dragons are often depicted as guardians of great treasure, and that what we feel we do here at St. Elmo. We are the guardians of creativity, individuality, intellectual challenge, freedom of thought, and community spirit. We will have a contest for students to name our dragon through a creative writing assignment that will be put to a vote. We can't wait to get your family decked out in our new t-shirts, car magnets, and other dragon gear!



Inquiry-Based Instruction & PBL Classrooms

This year at St. Elmo, we have transitioned to an inquiry-based approach with problem-based and project-based learning. Each teacher has chosen a unifying theme for their students to connect with their own questions, thoughts, and ideas. This is student-driven learning with the teacher as a facilitator of children's learning processes. We are hopeful that your child will learn to independently and cooperatively problem solve, think creatively about real world issues, work as a team to complete major projects, and explore his or her own passions and interests within the overarching theme of the class. Every teacher is also engaging in service learning with their classes wherein their students will navigate through authentic problems in their communities (locally and globally) and work toward a solution for those issues.



Our goal is to utilize our students' gifts, talents, and passions to help them focus on creative problem-solving in authentic, real-world scenarios. We also want them to be able to research/gather, process, analyze, apply, and evaluate ideas, scenarios, problems, and issues of great importance to them at high levels. As the PBL expert John Barell writes, PBL is **"a way of challenging students to become deeply involved in a quest for knowledge—a search for answers to their own questions, not just answers to questions posed by a textbook or a teacher."** We want our students to be a part of a community of inquiry where they feel free to pose tough questions, learn from and build upon each other's questions, are open to different points of view, listen to and respect each other's ideas, and can work collaboratively, productively, and reasonably toward conclusions that will show just how much they can accomplish as gifted students (Barell, 2007).



CLASSROOM EXHIBITIONS BUILT ON STUDENT-DRIVEN PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING PROJECTS!

THEMES:

- *The Shark Tank
 - *What is a Hero?
 - *While You Were Sleeping...
 - *The Sky is the Limit
 - *Around the World in 80 Days
 - *The Digital World
 - *Conundrums
 - *Believe It or Not!
 - *Pathfinders
- and others!

How You Can Help Your Student with PBL

- Read communications from your child's teacher and learn about the classroom theme
- Ask your child regularly what he or she is doing at St. Elmo for their personal and/or group problem-solving
- Help provide extended opportunities for learning about your child's chosen path of inquiry at home
- Help provide materials, tools, and expertise that your child may need to complete his or her exhibition piece
- Work on fostering creativity and completing problem-solving activities with your child:

<https://www.encourageplay.com/blog/creative-problem-solving-activities-for-kids>

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/how-you-can-help-children-solve-problems/>

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/7_ways_to_foster_creativity_in_your_kids

<http://thesecondprinciple.com/creativity/children-creativity/killingcreativityinchildren/>

- Come to our Fall and Spring Exhibitions to see what your child has created! **The Fall Exhibition—NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM—will be the week of December 4-8 (more to come)**

Life-Worthy Learning: Life Skills 101

As part of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce's Columbus 2025 Initiative (<https://columbusga2025.com/>), several MCSD leaders completed an Industry Bus Tour to major industries in our community (AFLAC, TSYS, Pratt Whitney, BCBS) and heard about what employers in our area are seeking when hiring young people out of high school and college to work for their businesses. They have a long list of "soft skills" that they look for when hiring professionals and reiterated the importance of instilling these skills in our students. This year at STE, we will be working with your child on Life-Worthy Learning. These are the skills and concepts that your children will need not only now, but in life after school. What will matter to a 5th grader 10 years from now? 20 years from now? 50 years from now? We want to make sure that we are helping your children grow into contributing members of society and that we are educating them for a quickly changing world. Every teacher at STE is charged with helping your student obtain the following Life Skills at their appropriate age-level of understanding:

- Can collaborate with others and understands the value of building relationships
- Is willing to learn new skills
- Is willing to adapt to a changing environment
- Can zero in on the "unasked" question and dig deeper than surface-level understanding
- Pays attention to detail
- Is skilled in basic customer service and uses customary manners
- Uses active listening skills
- Adheres to a schedule and meets deadlines
- Utilizes formal communication skills—not text language or shorthand
- Is innovative and forward-thinking
- Embraces problem-solving and out-of-the-box thinking
- Appropriately challenges the status quo for the betterment of the group
- Is passionate about ideas, people, etc.
- Conveys ideas articulately
- Navigates disagreements appropriately
- Understands how to have collegial conversations
- Perseveres through difficulty and digs deep even when uncomfortable
- Engages in research that is problem-driven using sound methodologies
- Strives not for perfection, but for excellence
- Holds high standards for themselves and others
- Understands how to bring value to the organization or group
- Can have a professional conversation with a stranger
- Enters a room or a situation with positive presence and maintains positivity
- Is aware of cultures and others beyond themselves and behaves respectfully

BIG IDEAS:

- Agility & Adaptability
- Multiple Pathways to Success
- Authenticity and Relevancy

You can help us at home by encouraging your child to practice these skills and fostering a growth mindset for your child: <https://www.mindsetworks.com/parents/default>

STE Behavior Code & Continuation of Services Procedure

BEHAVIOR CODE FOR ST. ELMO CENTER FOR GIFTED EDUCATION:

- We abide by all rules and policies as set forth in the 2017-2018 Handbook and Code of Conduct for Muscogee County School District.
- Students may not accumulate more than 3 unexcused absences at St. Elmo Center for Gifted Education without coming under review for continuation of services.
- For student offenses, the following protocol is in place (barring serious offenses as outlined in the Handbook and Code of Conduct):
 1. First Offense: Teacher conferences with student. Teacher implements chosen disciplinary action as appropriate.
 2. Second Offense: Teacher conferences with the parent and strategies for correction of behavior are implemented.
 3. Third Offense: Office Referral to Regional Gifted Facilitator
 4. Fourth Offense: Office Referral to Director
- Services may be revoked if students fail to comply with the MCSD Handbook and Code of Conduct or have more than three unexcused absences.

Criteria for evaluation of gifted classroom performance:

- Satisfies performance requirements for gifted education courses
- Satisfactory Attendance
- Appropriate Classroom Conduct

When a student fails to fulfill any criteria for evaluation, his/her performance shall be deemed unsatisfactory. The teacher of record should notify their principal and the Regional Gifted Facilitator at the end of each semester with a list of gifted students who do not complete the above criteria. The Regional Gifted Facilitator will initiate the following plan of action.

Consequences of unsatisfactory performance:

- a. At the end of the first semester, all gifted students' performances are evaluated. The student must satisfy performance requirements in their gifted courses. If performance is deemed satisfactory, services are continued.
- b. If performance is deemed unsatisfactory, student performance will be under review (compliance with SBOE probationary period) for nine weeks.
- c. If at the end of this review period, the student's performance is satisfactory, services will no longer be under review.
- d. If at the end of the review period, the student's performance is unsatisfactory, the services will be discontinued.

Continued Participation

- Student satisfies performance requirements for gifted education courses as assessed by a rubric designed and developed by the teacher with student input as part of inquiry-based learning.
- Student maintains satisfactory attendance: Elementary gifted resource students will be under review after three consecutive absences.
- Student maintains appropriate classroom conduct with minimal chronic disciplinary problems or out of program suspensions and no more than three behavior incidents resulting in disciplinary action by the Director.

The gifted resource teacher must notify the student and the parent/guardian if achievement, attendance, and/or behavioral data indicates a review is a possibility. The student will have an INDIVIDUAL GIFTED PLAN where areas of strength, weaknesses, and strategies as well as interventions will be noted. The gifted resource teacher must also coordinate with the appropriate Regional Gifted Facilitator.

STE Website and Contact Information

Visit our new landing page on the MCSD District site at:

<https://public.muscogee.k12.ga.us/Schools/STE>

Visit our new website for St. Elmo Center for Gifted Education at:

<http://sites.muscogee.k12.ga.us/stelmo/>

Visit our new Gifted Facilitator's website at:

<http://giftedfacilitators.wixsite.com/alps>

Visit our new Advanced Learning Programs landing page on the MCSD District site at:

<https://public.muscogee.k12.ga.us/p/Divisions/TeachingandLearning/AdvancedLearningPrograms/Information>

Donate Used Books for Ms. Sadler's Classes' Little Free Library!

Bring used books to Open House or send them with your child! Please also use the Little Free Library yourself if you are in the area. This is a completely free, take one-leave one system for readers of all ages.

