Colorado Gifted Education Review

Elizabeth School District C-1

Submitted to:
Superintendent Douglas Bissonette

By:
Office of Gifted Education
Exceptional Student Services

January 15-16, 2015
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Executive Summary

The team wishes to express its appreciation to Kim Morrison, Special Education Director and the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Building Liaisons for their professional preparation of documentation to support the Elizabeth Public School Colorado Gifted Education Review (C-GER). The hospitality arranged by the district was welcoming and helpful. Focus group discussions with parents, students, teachers and administrators at Elizabeth High School along with productive conversations with students and staff at Elizabeth Middle School, Running Creek and Singing Hills Elementary Schools helped inform the team with additional insight and perspective.

Strengths

Elizabeth School District C-1 is a new Administrative Unit, created in July 2014; this is their first C-GER visit.

- The district acknowledges they are working hard to develop all of the components of a gifted education program and are open to guidance that will help them identify priorities for future growth and development.
- Staff interviewed were caring and dedicated to their students.
- Stakeholders interviewed were positive about changes currently being considered and are looking forward to best meeting the needs of gifted students.
- The district identified a school liaison(s) at each building to coordinate gifted education and to advocate for gifted students; the liaisons are a support for parents, teachers, and students. The liaisons meet with the Director of Special Education monthly and work and learn together to improve gifted education in the district.
- The district applied for and received a grant to fund universal screening at second and sixth grades and to hire a half-time gifted education coordinator.
- The district is working on a Gifted Education Handbook that will be communicated to stakeholder groups once it is completed.

Next Steps:

Identification

- Provide evidence of the use of a complete body of evidence, as defined in the Rules for Administering the Exceptional Children’s Education Act (ECEA), for identification in all categories of giftedness so that identification is continuous K-12.
- Institute identification review teams as described in the Gifted Education Guidelines on the CDE Gifted and Talented website.

Personnel

- To address the inconsistency in programming created by high staff turnover, provide evidence of annual training for district leadership and teachers in knowledge of gifted student characteristics, effective instructional practices, and analysis of gifted student achievement test data. Provide evidence of implementation of these practices.
- Train unendorsed gifted education staff and increase their skills by providing the necessary support for them to take classes and/or participate in regional professional development so they can provide leadership to their schools and strengthen the district program.
• Review Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children Education Act with administrators, school counselors, and classroom teachers and use the Gifted Education Guidelines to implement these rules.
Introduction

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Office of Gifted Education is committed to improving the outcomes for identified gifted students throughout the state. The Office of Gifted Education strives to assist all Administrative Units (AU) to be “on-target” in all elements of gifted programming and accreditation: communication, definition, identification, programming, accountability, budgeting and reporting. AUs that are distinguished in these areas will serve as models and resources in the State.

Every four years, or earlier as needed, the state conducts a C-GER Peer Review. An on-site team, made up of experts/peers in the field of gifted education, reviews documents and meets with AU stakeholders in an effort to validate the AU’s self-reporting and to provide information from alternative perspectives. This peer review process is not a comprehensive program evaluation, but rather a process designed to acknowledge the achievements and help prioritize future improvements and growth necessary to ensure gifted student learning and high achievement.

The intent of the visit and report is to help promote the process of reflection and to encourage AUs to engage in continuous improvement. The team spent many hours reviewing evidence and artifacts, listening to focus groups, and conducting school visits. Strengths, commendations and recommendations are the result of team consensus based on extensive deliberation about findings and evidence. We believe the following report may be used for future goal determination and action planning.
Communication

Description
Parents and students indicated they would like more information about how students are identified, what programming options are available, and how those options might be reflected more clearly in their students’ Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) as they move through the grades. At this time parents approach school administrators or classroom teachers for information and to provide advocacy for their students.

The district has an older, brief and general Gifted Education Program Description available on their website, but it is not easily accessible.

Strengths
- The district vision for students with exceptional needs is to create a “dynamic partnership between educators and families.” Parents, when advocating for their gifted students, expressed appreciation for the responsiveness of teachers and administrators.
- The district is working on a Gifted Education Handbook.

Next Steps
- Provide clear and transparent communication of the criteria and process needed for identification to parents, teachers, and the public.
- Create and provide multiple methods of communicating with stakeholder groups that include guiding documents to provide information about gifted education. Include, at a minimum, school-specific contact information, state-aligned definition, specific identification tools, and programming options and continuums for all identified areas of giftedness.

Definition

Comments
The district intends to use the state definition as written in law and in the Gifted Education Guidelines.

The district is working on a handbook that will clearly outline and communicate the state-aligned definition of the categories of giftedness to stakeholder groups. This new handbook and the revised definition will require the district and community to shift their current thinking and practice regarding gifted education and who is gifted.

Next Steps
- Use this definition as the foundation for all other program plan elements.
Identification

Description
At this time the district’s procedures for identification do not yet meet state requirements. Students are not yet identified in all categories of giftedness. The population of identified students does not reflect the demographics of the district as a whole. Minority students, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, and twice-exceptional students are all underidentified.

The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) is used as a universal screener in third grade. Next year, this screening will occur in second grade.

There is no evidence that referral from parents or teachers is occurring as described in the Program Description. Rather, identification is happening only at the elementary level in third grade. Building gifted coordinators create lists of who is considered gifted based on scores from CogAT and academic achievement tests. Behavior and performance indicators are not included in the body of evidence used for identification. Middle and high school teachers reported that there was no process in place for new identification, either of students new to the district or students beyond third grade, or of additional strength areas for already-identified students.

Middle and high school teachers reported that they were not aware of which students were identified and that student records were not flagged in Infinite Campus to show who was on an ALP.

Strengths
- Some students know how they were identified and what they are gifted in.

Next Steps
- Provide evidence of the use of a complete body of evidence, as defined in the Rules for Administering the Exceptional Children’s Education Act, for identification in all categories of giftedness so that identification is continuous K-12. (Assessment for identification aligns with the categories of giftedness: general intellectual ability; specific academic ability; creativity and productive thinking; leadership; and visual or performing arts.)
- Institute identification review teams as described in the Gifted Education Guidelines on the CDE Gifted and Talented website.

Identification

Indicators

12.02 (1) (c) Identification Procedure shall describe the assessment process used by the administrative unit for identify students who meet the definition specified in section 12.01 (9) and for identifying the educational needs of gifted students. The assessment process shall recognize a student’s exceptional abilities or potential, interests, and needs in order to guide student instruction and individualized programming. The assessment process shall include, but need not be limited to:

12.01(1) (c) (i) A method(s) to ensure equal and equitable access for all students. The program plan shall describe the efforts the administrative unit will make to identify gifted students from all populations, including preschool (if applicable) through twelfth grade students, minority students, economically diverse students, culturally diverse students, students with limited English proficiency and children with disabilities;
12.01(1) (c) (ii) Referral and screening procedures;
12.01(1) (c) (iii) Multiple sources of data in a body of evidence (i.e. qualitative and quantitative);
12.01(1) (c) (iv) Criteria for determining exceptional ability or potential;
12.01(1) (c) (v) A review team procedure; and
12.01(1) (c) (vi) A communication procedure by which parents are made aware of the assessment process for the student, gifted determination, and development and review of the student’s ALP.
Programming

Description
A continuum of systemic K-12 programming is not evident. Programming systems and options are built and rebuilt yearly with no written policy and procedures to ensure continuity or to sustain programming over time; lack of “institutional memory” hinders the growth of programming overall, according to staff and parents.

In the last year, the elementary level has moved from pull-out instruction by a teacher of the gifted to in-class ability grouping and differentiated instruction. Ability grouping and subject-level acceleration in math is provided in the classroom by the general education teacher at the upper elementary level. Reading materials are differentiated in some elementary classrooms. There is little programming in areas of individual interest. Staff and parents reported the use of differentiation strategies is dependent on individual teachers’ skills and their philosophies of giftedness. Students at the elementary and middle school levels indicated that they would like increased rigor in instruction and less repetition. Students also wanted differentiation for gifted students in subjects other than math and language arts.

Currently, scheduling issues prevent most middle school students from taking classes at the high school because the high school is on block scheduling.

Each school has its own ALP format, and programming options and services do not carry over from one school to the next.

Some elementary teachers are asked to help write goals for their gifted students. Secondary teachers stated they have not seen any ALPs, and they do not communicate with parents or students about them.

Focus groups reported that ALP academic goals do not guide day-to-day instruction because they are only related to test scores and monitored sporadically through Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. No other interim monitoring was reported. Elementary students are aware of ALPs and participate in the goal-setting process. ALPs are shared with parents at the elementary level. Some secondary students reported that their ALPs had been updated this year. Parents and teachers indicated they would like more feedback regarding student achievement and progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programming Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) Programming: The program plan shall describe the programming components, options, and strategies that will be implemented by the administrative unit and schools to appropriately address the educational needs of gifted students. Programming shall match the strengths and interests of the gifted student. Other educational needs shall be addressed according to the individual student’s profile. The program plan components, options, and strategies shall include, but need not be limited to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (i) Alignment of assessment data to programming options in the areas of giftedness;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (ii) Structures by which gifted students are served at the different school levels (e.g., the general classroom, resource, and/or pullout);</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (iii) Support in differentiated instruction and methods (e.g., acceleration, cluster grouping and higher order thinking skills);</td>
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<td>12.02 (1) (d) (iv) Affective and guidance support systems (e.g., social skills training, early college and career planning);</td>
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<td>12.02 (1) (d) (v) Diverse content options provided for gifted students in their areas of strength (e.g., mentorship, socratic seminars, advanced math, honors courses);</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (vi) The means by which articulation for preschool (if applicable) through grade 12 is planned and implemented; Amendments - Rule 12 - Eff. 10/31/2008 108;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (vii) Pre-collegiate and/or pre-advanced placement support;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (d) (viii) ALP development and annual review conducted through the collaborative efforts of the teacher(s), other school personnel (as needed), parents and the student (as appropriate); and</td>
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<td>12.02 (1) (d) (ix) Post secondary options available to gifted students.</td>
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</table>
Affective goals are being set with elementary students, but there was wide variety in reported specific instruction and support or guidance to help students attain those goals.

Some faculty questioned whether students were still gifted if their achievement dropped, while some felt that it was better to see why gifted students were not achieving at high levels rather than relabel them. The Program Description says that students will be exited from GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) if achievement does not remain high, but evidence of that was not observed.

No Early Access procedures are in place.

**Strengths**

- Students are accelerated in math based on student achievement data beginning in fourth grade.
- Options exist for students who are talented and/or interested in arts, music, and leadership.

**Next Steps**

- Provide evidence of a cohesive plan for consistency of programming between schools and a smooth transition process between grades and levels that includes discussion of student strengths, continuity of programming and content, effective strategies for individual students, and a systemic scope and sequence across the district that includes acceleration options.
- Define and implement a clear process for developing and maintaining ALPs that guide instruction (i.e., who will write the initial ALP, how it will be monitored and communicated to parents and all teachers who interact with the student, how it will be reviewed for goal attainment and new goal-setting, and who will be involved with review and revision of the ALP on a regular cycle).
- Offer an array of challenging options in all areas of giftedness as stated in the state definition.
Evaluation and Accountability

Description
The district uses a variety of assessments to measure student progress (e.g., Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) and classroom assessments). Gifted student data are included in the District’s Unified Improvement Plan (UIP).

The district does not yet have a stakeholder group advisory committee for gifted education.

Strengths
- The elementary level is beginning to include affective goals in the ALP process.
- The Director of Special Services recognizes that data analysis is essential for evaluation and accountability.

Next Steps
- Disaggregate gifted student achievement data to compare different student groups (e.g., separate advanced scores from proficient, by level and by gender) to identify trends and possible disparities.
- Define methods by which student affective growth is measured for continual development.
- Conduct a comprehensive program evaluation that includes teachers, parents, students and administrators to provide insight into district needs and to guide goal setting.
- Provide educators with enrollment and achievement data to strengthen the monitoring of trends and as evidence to support instructional needs and practices.

Evaluation and Accountability Indicators

The administrative unit provides:
12.02 (1) (e) (i) Methods by which student achievement is monitored and measured for continual learning progress and how such methods align with the state accreditation process (e.g., intervention progress monitoring data sources, advanced learning plan goals, and performance, district, and state assessment data);
12.02 (1) (e) (ii) Methods by which student affective growth is monitored and measured for continual development (e.g., rubrics for personal journals and anecdotal data, student surveys, demonstration of self-advocacy, and student career and/or college plans);
12.02 (1) (e) (iii) Methods for ensuring that gifted student achievement and reporting are consistent with accreditation requirements (i.e., disaggregation of state assessment data for gifted students, identification of discrepancies in the data, goal setting and demonstration of growth);
12.02 (1) (e) (iv) Methods for self-evaluation of the gifted program including a schedule for periodic feedback and review (e.g., review of gifted policy, goals, identification process, programming components, personnel, budget and reporting practices, and the impact of gifted programming on student achievement and progress); and
12.02 (1) (e) (v) Methods by which parents, educators, and other required persons are informed about the methods described in 12.02(1)(e)(i-iv) above.
Personnel

Description
The district employs a Director to oversee the program plan and gifted education across the district. Each school has identified a teacher liaison(s) to serve as school site coordinator.

Parents, teachers and administrators expressed interest in increasing teacher knowledge about current practice in gifted education and effective differentiated instructional strategies. Teachers and parents expressed that, because of a high teacher turnover rate, frequent review and training is necessary to create more consistency in the district and between the schools over time.

Strengths
• On-site school liaisons provide advocacy and support to students, parents and teachers.
• The Director of Special Education has experience with gifted education.
• The district works closely with their Gifted Education Regional Consultant to access local training and professional development related to gifted education.

Next Steps
• To address the inconsistency in programming created by high staff turnover, provide evidence of annual training for district leadership and teachers in knowledge of gifted student characteristics, effective instructional practices, and analysis of gifted student achievement test data. Provide evidence of implementation of these practices.
• Train unendorsed gifted education staff and increase their skills by providing the necessary support for them to take classes and/or participate in regional professional development so they can provide leadership to their schools and strengthen the district program.
• Review Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children Education Act with administrators, school counselors, and classroom teachers and use the Gifted Education Guidelines to implement these rules.

Personnel Indicators

12.02 (1) (f) (i) The program plan shall describe the personnel who provide instruction, counseling, coordination and other programming for gifted students. Personnel shall be knowledgeable in the characteristics, differentiated instructional methods and competencies in the special education of gifted students. Qualified personnel with endorsement or an advanced degree in gifted education are preferred in specific programs and classrooms consisting of mainly gifted students. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, every administrative unit shall employ or contract with a person who is responsible for:

12.02 (1) (f) (i) (A) Management of the program plan; and
12.02 (1) (f) (i) (B) Professional development activities, the purposes of which are:
12.02 (1) (f) (i) (B) (I) To improve and enhance the skills, knowledge and expertise of teachers and other personnel who provide instruction and other supportive services to gifted students, and
12.02 (1) (f) (i) (B) (II) To increase, to the extent practicable, the number of qualified personnel providing instruction to gifted students.
12.02 (1) (f) (ii) Administrative units are highly encouraged to collaborate with universities and colleges for the development of qualified personnel.
12.02 (1) (f) (iii) Personnel responsible for the instruction and learning of gifted students in core academic areas must meet the requirements under federal law for highly qualified teachers.
**Budget**

**Description**
The budget, created by school administrators, supports stipends for school coordinators and additional allocations to address supplies and materials associated with providing services for gifted students. The actual school allocation is based on the number of identified gifted students in the school. The budget did not identify any additional allocations for gifted education from the general fund.

**Strengths**
- The budget is designed through a collaborative process to include the needs of students at all schools.

**Next Steps**
- Collaborate with school liaisons when developing the annual budget to review priorities and ensure alignment of district/school expenditures to program goals.

**Budget Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funds requested from the Department may be used for:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (g) (i) salaries for appropriately certified, endorsed, or licensed personnel serving primarily gifted students (e.g., gifted education directors, coordinators, resource teachers, counselors and teacher of gifted classrooms);</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (g) (ii) professional development and training related to gifted education;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (g) (iii) activities associated with gifted programming options specific to gifted students and their advanced learning plans;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (g) (iv) supplies and materials used in instructional programming for gifted education; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.02 (1) (g) (v) technology and equipment necessary for the education of gifted students, not to exceed twenty-five percent of the total amount requested from the Department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reporting

Comments
The district complies with state requirements regarding reporting to the Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education. Required yearly reports are filed.

The district includes information about achievement levels of identified gifted students in their Unified Improvement Plan (UIP).

Next Steps
- Strengthen the UIP planning process by analyzing disaggregated data, defining performance challenges, determining root causes, setting appropriate targets, and creating and implementing a specific and focused action plan to increase gifted student achievement monitored with interim measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.03 Reports.</strong> Any AU receiving funding under the provision of Section 12.00 shall submit to the Department by September 30 a report for the prior fiscal year, including:</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (1) a detailed report of financial income and expenditures;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (2) the number of formally identified gifted students served through gifted student programming reported by:</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (2) (a) each grade level, preschool (if applicable) through grade 12;</td>
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<td>12.03 (2) (b) gender and ethnicity;</td>
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<td>12.03 (2) (c) twice exceptional; and</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (2) (d) gifted preschoolers served through early entrance per local policies and procedures, if applicable;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (3) the number of non-identified students served through gifted student programming;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.03 (4) the percent of students in the AU who have been identified as gifted and talented through a formal identification procedure;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (5) the number of qualified personnel;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (6) the types of programming strategies utilized most commonly at each school level to address the needs of gifted students reported by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (6) (a) programming options for each area of giftedness as specified in 12.01(12) of these Rules;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (6) (b) methods of articulation through the grades; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (6) (c) methods and tools used in accountability to monitor gifted student achievement and commensurate growth related to the implementation of the programming components; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.03 (7) administrative units and their member districts, if any, shall comply with the requirements of accreditation, pursuant to Article 11 of Title 22, C.R.S., with regard to gifted student achievement, identification of disparities in the data, instructional goals, growth and reporting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Record Keeping

Comments
The district keeps financial records according to the accepted principles of governmental accounting.

Next Steps
- Develop and implement a consistent method for storing ALPs so that they are available to staff.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record Keeping Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 Record Keeping.</strong> Amendments - Rule 12 - Eff. 10/31/2008 111 Any administrative unit receiving funding will have the following record keeping and reporting responsibilities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 (1) Financial Records.</strong> Financial records shall be kept in accordance with generally accepted principles of governmental accounting. Recommended accounting principles are listed in the Financial Policies and Procedures Handbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 (2) Inventory.</strong> An inventory shall be maintained of all equipment for which funding was received. These records shall be maintained throughout the useful life of the equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 (3) Student Education Records.</strong> The ALP shall record programming options, and strategies utilized with individual students and shall be part of the student’s record. The ALP shall be considered in educational planning and decision-making concerning subsequent programming for that student and be used in the articulation process, preschool (if applicable) through grade 12. Gifted student records shall describe the body of evidence that identifies strengths, interests and needs, and the ongoing programming and student achievement results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 (4) Confidentiality of Student Education Records.</strong> Individually identifiable records of students referred, assessed, evaluated, and/or served through programming for gifted and talented students in any administrative unit shall be held to be confidential and protected in accordance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.05 (5) Maintenance and Destruction of Student Education Records.</strong> Gifted student education records and ALPs shall be maintained, retained and destroyed consistent with the ongoing system of student record keeping established in the administrative unit, including its member districts or the Charter School Institute for student records, preschool (if applicable) through grade 12.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Dispute Resolution

Comments
The district has posted a Dispute Resolution procedure to address identification decisions and changes to existing program placement on their website as part of their Gifted Education Program Description. The process includes several levels of review and decision deadlines to facilitate a timely response from the district.

Next Steps
- Share dispute resolution procedures during the identification process and when reviewing and revising ALPs.

Monitoring

Comments
The district is in compliance with all state requirements for monitoring.

Dispute Resolution

Indicators
The program plan shall describe a dispute resolution process to be used for resolving disagreements about the identification and programming for gifted students. The dispute resolution process shall, at a minimum, afford the aggrieved individual notice of the decision giving rise to the dispute and an opportunity to be heard before the decision is implemented.

Monitoring

Indicators
12.07 (1) Each administrative unit shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations regarding the program plan, identification and special educational services for gifted students.
12.07 (2) Each administrative unit shall be subject to ongoing monitoring by the Department concerning implementation of the program plan.
12.07 (3) Monitoring procedures shall include: Amendments - Rule 12 - Eff. 10/31/2008 112
12.07 (3) (a) A determination of compliance with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, and
12.07 (3) (b) An assessment of program quality based on the standards established by the Department of Education.
12.07 (4) Monitoring activities shall include:
12.07 (4) (a) A review of the program plan;
12.07 (4) (b) A review of the annual report;
12.07 (4) (c) A planned comprehensive on-site process integrated with the continuous improvement and monitoring process in the Department of Education; and
12.07 (4) (d) Follow-up activities including the provision of technical assistance in areas of non-compliance and verification that areas of non-compliance have been corrected.
Conclusion

The review committee finds Elizabeth School District C-1 is not yet meeting all details of state regulations for gifted education. The following components of the program plan are not in compliance with state statute.

| ☒ Communication | ☒ Personnel |
| ☒ | Definition | ☐ Budget |
| ☒ | Identification | ☐ Reporting |
| ☒ | Programming | ☒ Record Keeping |
| ☒ | Evaluation and Accountability | ☐ Dispute Resolution |

**Improvement Target Areas**

A timeline to improve the indicators in *Identification* and *Personnel* is due to the Colorado Department of Education within six weeks of the receipt of the final C-GER report.

Implementation of revised expectations and procedures are required within one year of submission of the Improvement Timeline to CDE. This timeline will allow the AU to plan collaboratively with stakeholders during the next school year and prepare for systemic and responsive improvements. Technical assistance and peer support are available through the gifted education regional network system. The aim is to provide guidance so the goals of the Administrative Unit improvement timeline may be met.