



# **I**dentify **D**evelop **E**xecute **A**nnounce **S**elf-reflect

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Dear Parents,

My how time flies! I can't believe we have already finished the first trimester. I am very pleased with how our independent projects are going despite the little time I have with the students. Within the next week I think almost all of the students will have **identified** a topic, **developed** some questions and resources, and decided how they will **announce** what they have learned. You may have noticed that I skipped a step here. We will be **executing** our projects in the second trimester, however in order to know what type of information to collect it helps to have some idea of what type of project you will do in the end.

Being a parent of two elementary students myself, I know that sometimes the information that comes home is difficult to interpret. It is also hard to know sometimes what a teacher intends and how much you should be doing at home. I wanted to take this time to explain this project a little more and also invite you to contact me with any questions or concerns you might have regarding GT or the IDEAS project.

Let me first give share with you how I developed this curriculum and my philosophy about it. I first began working with gifted kids about ten years ago. I worked with a team of teachers in Iowa that did a lot of work with creative problem solving. I was working on my Master's dissertation at the time and noticed that the process I was going through was closely aligned to the creative problem solving process. I began to develop the IDEAS curriculum with my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade GT students. They worked in teams to develop proposals, carry out their learning plans, and then share what they learned. I had great success in using this with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at several schools. Last year, I adapted it for use with 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and focused on the theme of inventions. My goal this year is for the students to work through this process in order to learn about a topic of their choice. I believe that all children, but especially high ability students should have interests and be able to explore those interests and share what they have learned. While I may be able to teach a few research skills along the way, at this level I mostly want them to get excited about learning something and finding a creative way to share that knowledge. I want them to discover some ways of organizing information which I think may occur more effectively through their failures than through giving them step by step procedures. I also want them to persist and stick with a topic for an extended period of time, which is partly why this project will take all year. This is essentially the same process I used to write two dissertations so I know it will be a useful process for these students as they continue to all educational levels and in my experience has really been useful in getting kids excited about learning.

So let me explain what we have done so far and what you can expect in the next trimester. We started by brainstorming topics and then using various criteria to **identify** the best ones for this project. Here are the topics the students will be exploring:

Insects, science, rhinos, sports, basketball, hockey, pet care, Egyptology, natural disasters, football, acting, movies, computers, dolphins, inventions, robots, space, black holes, butterflies, animals, pastry making, dogs, military life, hagfish, monopoly, geography, bow and arrows, physics, math, magic, creativity, and machines.

The students are now **developing** some questions related to their topic. Every student has also been given at least one web-site or age appropriate piece of material related to their topic. This is where you can help. I have limited time with the students and some of the information gathering will need to be accomplished at home. I would suggest that students gather information about their topic from at least 3 different sources such as books, internet, museum visits, interviews, or experiments. The following site is useful for finding kid friendly search engines and web sites: <http://ivyjoy.com/rayne/kidssearch.html> . This is a good time for students to explore different ways of collecting information. I will be showing the students how to take notes with post-its or a note taking sheet, but you may have some ways to share also (remember the note cards from high school). My own kids glue library pockets in file folders and write topic headings on them and then collect facts on note cards and put them in the right pocket. Some kids like to make webs. Others prefer to draw pictures and make pictorial connections. Many high ability kids don't like to take notes at all but prefer to consume all the information they can and then share their wealth of knowledge. Let's remember that these are kids, not graduate students, and let them play with ideas and ways of gathering and recording information.

Hopefully before winter break all of the students will also have some idea about the type of project they will want to do in the end. I think it is easier to gather information with an end goal in site rather than just randomly collecting facts. Some of the project choices that have been identified so far include: inventions, board games, videos, models, and books.

Following winter break I will meet with each of the students to develop their plan and timeline for completing their projects and share details and rubrics that they can use to guide how they make their final project. We will work on the projects until the end of April. I am looking to schedule a few longer periods with the students so that they can really work on the project. Some work may be required at home, but they will be sharing a contract with you and also agreeing to exchange time for your services. For example, if they want a parent to type something, they will have to do something in exchange like empty the dishwasher or help clean up. I want them to know that this project is their responsibility not their parents (but your help and support is always appreciated!!!!).

Finally, sometime this spring I am hoping to have a Celebration of IDEAS in which we will have some sort of event for students to share their projects. We will combine what we have learned into a how to book to share at each school. We will also spend time reflecting on the process and what we have learned.

I hope this gives you some insight into what we are doing at school and how you can support the IDEAS project. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns or if you have great news to share. Email is the best – [cpete1@district16.org](mailto:cpete1@district16.org) or you can try my phone at 763-785-5561.

Have a great winter break!  
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