

FUTURA PARENT HANDBOOK

Developing the Intellect through Inquiry and Investigation



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FUTURA Program

The FUTURA program seeks to enhance and to develop the intellect of fourth and fifth grade students who have been formally identified as generally intellectually gifted. FUTURA is a pull out program where identified students receive enrichment and challenges one day a week in a center at another school. Some students receive services in their own school through the In-House Model. Students are immersed in lessons that correlate the themes Structures and Systems to the Virginia Standards of Learning Objectives for the core content areas. FUTURA offers a stimulating environment focusing on higher level thinking skills and activities including:

- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Evaluative Thinking

History

The FUTURA program began in 1975, in Loudoun County Public Schools, with 100 students and two teachers. By 1989, there were 231 students in the program and four teachers. Today there are more than 1500 students and 14 teachers. There are 10 FUTURA centers throughout Loudoun County.

The name FUTURA is an original acronym that means:

Facilitating
Understanding
Through
Utilizing
Real-life
Application

*“You cannot teach a man anything.
You can only help him discover it
within himself.”*

- Galileo Galilei

Philosophy

Developing the Intellect through Inquiry and Investigation

Intellectual development of gifted and talented students occurs best when the students are

challenged to inquire, investigate, reason, communicate, and collaborate with depth in a positive and supportive environment. The FUTURA environment offers opportunities for students to make cognitive connections, design practical applications, solve complex problems, and collaborate meaningfully with peers. FUTURA seeks to develop the intellect of the students through an inquiry and investigative process, which asks them to make informed decisions, to practice sound judgment, to think critically, to solve problems rationally, and to exhibit creativity. This process often involves authentic applications or “real-world” situations.

LCPS Gifted Education Program Goals:

1. To become divergent creative thinkers who recognize problems and solve them.
2. To construct personal meaning and understanding of others and of the world around them.
3. To develop the capacity for self-assessment.

These goals provide students with support and structure for finding challenge in the school environment while encouraging students to achieve their maximum potential.

“I found the creative, hungry-for- info, leader of the pack, and the what's the rest of the story sides of me in FUTURA.”

- FUTURA Student

FUTURA Curriculum

The LCPS Gifted Education program is designed to develop 21st century skills through a concept-based multidisciplinary curriculum. Gifted students will gain the ability to develop complexity and depth within the context. FUTURA is ability based, not achievement based, and focuses on developing thinking skills.

FUTURA goals are achieved through a concept-based curriculum. Concepts are universal abstracts that cross disciplines and areas of cognitive thought. Organizing topics around a concept promotes a richer integrated curriculum. Themes provide a framework with many facets to allow choice in content. In the two-year cycle of curriculum for FUTURA, Systems and Structures are the overarching themes. These themes are relevant to the Virginia Standards of Learning and to life outside of school. Embedded in each of these themes are the following five essential understandings:

Structures Year

- Structures meet the needs of the designer/user
- Structures provide frameworks
- Structures are self-supporting
- Structures can be modified
- Structures are meaningful arrangements of elements

Systems Year

- Systems have a design
- Systems have a function
- Systems have boundaries
- Systems can change
- Systems have parts that interact

Units include a wide range of problem-finding and solving skills associated with reading, research, information analysis and evaluation, scientific inquiry, and effective oral and written communication.

FUTURA Performance Assessment

The FUTURA Performance Assessment describes skills and learning behaviors that are required for success in the 21st century society and workplace. FUTURA provides opportunities for students to demonstrate and acquire these skills, which include critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, creativity and innovation, communicating, and making connections.

Unlike a traditional academic report card, the FUTURA Performance Assessment indicates how students are performing in terms of the expected learning behaviors and outcomes within the FUTURA program. The students assess themselves and reflect on their progress in each of the categories. Research has shown that such reflection by the learner adds value to the learning experience through increased awareness.

“Learn avidly. Question repeatedly what you have learned. Analyze it carefully. Then put what you have learned into practice intelligently.”

- Confucius

Notes about Assessment

- At the end of each semester, both students and FUTURA teachers complete the performance

assessment evaluating student progress in the FUTURA classroom.

- Please keep in mind that assessments are based on a once-a-week observation of your child in the FUTURA program.
- Additional assessments occur throughout the year.
- Projects often involve assessments based on the categories and skills found on the FUTURA Performance Assessment.
- Please encourage your child to discuss his/her assessment with you.

The FUTURA Day

All times are approximate and will vary by FUTURA center.

8:45 am – 9:00 am – FUTURA bus picks students up from base school.

9:00 am – 9:15 am – Students arrive at their FUTURA center.

- Centers – Students work independently on a center or independent project they choose.
- Systems/Structures Investigation – Students learn through units based on these themes. Projects often include developing a product.
- Creative Problem Solving – warm up activity, strategy development, logic puzzles, etc.
- Lunch
- Recess/Diversions

1:45 pm – 1:50 pm – Students depart FUTURA center and return to base schools.

Note: Students do not participate in specials at the FUTURA Center.

FUTURA Essentials

Attendance:

- Unless a student has an authorized excused absence from school, he or she is expected to be in FUTURA on the assigned day. If your child must be absent on a FUTURA day,

please call the base school and the FUTURA center (an email to the FUTURA teacher is fine).

- Any change in gifted services (missing a FUTURA day) must be documented in writing/email by a parent/guardian and given to the FUTURA teacher before the change occurs. This includes staying at the base school for any reason on a FUTURA day.
- If there is a delay in school opening, students will attend FUTURA. If there is a one-hour delay, FUTURA will begin one hour late. If there is a two-hour delay, FUTURA will begin two hours late.

Emergency Forms/Medications:

- At the FUTURA center, the FUTURA teacher can access student emergency forms electronically. Parents are requested to provide the clinic aide at the FUTURA center with any required medications for their child.

Lunch:

- Students may bring their lunch from home or purchase a lunch from the cafeteria of the FUTURA center. Lunch money on an account at the base school can easily be accessed at the FUTURA center.

Make up work policy:

- FUTURA students are expected to make-up class work missed on FUTURA days as deemed necessary by the general education classroom teacher and based on the student's academic needs. Most likely, this will not include all missed daily work. The classroom teachers will explain these expectations to FUTURA students at the beginning of the year.
- Whenever possible, tests and special events should not be scheduled on the days students attend the FUTURA program.
- Assignments due on FUTURA days are to be turned in on or before the day.
- Students have two days to make-up essential base school work. (Example: FUTURA on Monday means work is due on Thursday) *Please let both teachers know if this becomes a stressful issue for your child.

Parent Conferences:

- Parents may schedule a conference at any time by calling or emailing the FUTURA teacher and setting up an appointment.

Withdrawals or changes in placement:

- Concerns should always be communicated directly to the FUTURA teacher.
- A parent/guardian may withdraw their child from the program at any time by written notification. A Withdrawal Form (available online) should be completed, signed, and sent to:

Wendy S. King, Supervisor, Gifted Education
21000 Education Court
Ashburn, VA 20148

- A request for a change in gifted services may originate from parents, regular classroom teachers, and FUTURA program teachers. Gifted service changes are made only after an effort has been made to resolve the situation. (This is in accordance with the State Approved Division Plan for Gifted Education.)