

## Faculty at Independent Day School-Corbett Campus Receive Gifted Education Endorsement

*Teachers complete graduate-level course in gifted education through a grant with USF College of Education.*



*Through a partnership grant from the USF College of Education Gifted Program, and under the leadership of its coordinator, Dr. Elizabeth Shaunessy, teachers and administrators at Independent Day School-Corbett Campus have achieved endorsement in gifted education. The collaboration between USF's Shaunessy and IDS reinforces the philosophy on which the school was founded more than 40 years ago: that gifted education strategies can benefit all learners.*

**April 4, 2011 (TAMPA, Fla.)** – The way teachers at Independent Day School-Corbett Campus see it, even the best athletes in the world continue to train and strengthen their abilities in the quest for gold. It's this type of Olympic mentality that underscores their continuous, year-round professional development efforts, which include weekly Tuesday afternoon meetings, monthly half-day in-services, and annual pre-planning week workshops in August.

Over the years, this commitment to lifelong learning and practicing the most current research-based teaching techniques has led to international and national recognition, including designation from the International Baccalaureate Organization as an IB Middle Years and Primary Years Program School, and national recognition as a Blue Ribbon School.

Recently, IDS teachers and administrators completed a major milestone in their professional development effort to achieve endorsement in gifted education.

Last December, thanks to a partnership grant from the USF College of Education Gifted Program and under the leadership of its coordinator Dr. Elizabeth Shaunessy, IDS teachers and administrators completed five graduate-level courses in five straight semesters – courses that focused on the multitude of ways students can be gifted, along with the study of creativity, self-esteem, problem solving, assessment and curriculum design – to earn the “merit badge of knowledge” in gifted education.

According to Shaunessy, “The strategies and approaches that have traditionally been limited to gifted learners are practices that can benefit *all* students because they ‘raise the ceiling’ on learning. They enable all students to develop their abilities to the highest levels.”

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## **IDS Legacy in Gifted Education**

The collaboration between USF's Shaunessy and IDS reinforced the philosophy on which the school was founded more than forty years ago.

In 1968, teachers Marilyn Gatlin and Betty Anderson had completed their master's degrees through USF's first gifted education program and were to help launch gifted education for selected students in local public schools. They decided, however, that gifted education was really for and about all learners, and they proceeded to establish Independent Day School under that premise.

"Because of the unique atmosphere at IDS that honors students' individuality, teachers are open to recognizing who their high-ability students are and to providing the best educational opportunities for this group of children. They understand how gifted education can work in conjunction with the myriad of other strategies they use to benefit all learners," said Shaunessy.

Doing so begins with the premise that there can be multiple areas in which students may be gifted.

"In most schools in the United States, the definition of gifted is driven by IQ, but it's not a perfect way, nor the only way, of coming to understand a child's gifts," said Shaunessy. Individuals can demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in a wide variety of areas, including intellectual, a specific academic aptitude, creative, visual or performing arts, leadership, psychomotor, social, emotional, and more.

"I prefer a more inclusive and broader approach where we find a student's strengths and interests and tailor the curriculum accordingly. And that is how IDS has approached thinking about giftedness, as well."

"The gifted training that we received from Dr. Shaunessy taught us that there are multiple ways one can be gifted, and that validates what we have always strived to do at IDS," said primary multi-age teacher and IDS alumna Sammi Borosh. "We find the gifts in everybody and differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of each student."

"The coursework reinforced for us that you have to take the time to understand a child's strengths and how to build on them. At the same time, you need to realize that there are areas where those students may be challenged, and you want to work on those, as well," said Borosh's teaching partner Jen Jones.

In addition, Shaunessy's training validated for teachers that differentiating curriculum begins with detailed planning and ongoing assessment.

"When I plan, the face of each and every student pops into my mind," said Spanish teacher Sonia Morgan.

In preparing lesson plans, the Spanish team – Morgan, Odette Figueruelo and Cathy Clark – know they must meet the needs of beginning speakers, while also providing opportunities to continue to engage native speakers that enable them to go richer and deeper into culture or literature.

According to the middle school math team, students are pre-assessed and instructed based on knowledge in specific areas enabling every student to be challenged with each new unit of study.

"Teachers at IDS understand that gifted education is all about meeting learners where they are and challenging them to continue to grow and develop," said Shaunessy. "They truly believe that there's no cap on what a child can do."

*Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, nonsectarian private school located on Orange Grove Drive in northwest Hillsborough County with over 500 students from PreK3 through 8th grade. At IDS, all children experience the International Baccalaureate Programme in a highly academic and nurturing environment focused on excellence and excitement in learning. IDS-CC has become recognized as an exemplary school with over 6,500 visitors observing and learning from IDS-CC teachers. For more information, visit [www.idsy.es.com](http://www.idsy.es.com) or contact the Admissions Office at 813-961-3087 for a personal tour.*