RAP FOUNDATION SMALL GRANT APPLICATION

1. Name of Organization:

Academic Solutions USA

2. Mission Statement:

It is our heartfelt desire to assist as many individuals as possible in reaching their highest potentials through gifted learner projects, gifted identification, and Irlen Syndrome screening.

3. Provide Contact Person and his/her information regarding this application:

Holly Armstrong
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3. When was applicant organization founded?

March 2018

5. Amounted Requested:

$5,000

6. Describe the program/project:

The Gifted & At-Risk (GAR) project is targeted to identify and work with the special population of gifted juveniles who fall through the cracks because of their atypical gifted traits. For these students to achieve their highest potential, the project will include the following (Note: a full outline can be found at the end of this section):

(A) Meeting with school administration confirming program approach and objectives

(B) Assess nominees (including conducting Irlen Syndrome Screening and identifying giftedness)

(C) Initiate the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) which includes five dimensions to complete by the end of the academic year:

a. Orientation
b. Individual Development
c. Enrichment
d. Seminars
e. In-depth study

Background and Research:

*Note that unlike exceptionalities considered 'special education' there are not statistics about gifted exceptionalities available from our three local school districts (M. Silvestre, Personal communication, Fall, 2018; Director of Gifted Education DSUSD, Jan., 2017), nor does HARC have any (C. Leier, Personal communication, June, 2019).

As revealed in a **longitudinal study** through Purdue University, about **80% of the gunmen in school shootings,** starting with the Columbine incident and ending with the Santee shootings, **were gifted** (SENG, 2020). As such, Academic Solutions USA, 501(c)(3) has prioritized these troubled teens as the highest at-risk.

Potentially within this special population is a sub-population, twice-exceptional (2e learners), those who have both giftedness and one or more disabilities. Due to a masking effect, wherein the disability overshadows the giftedness or vice versa, these students usually are not identified as gifted through traditional testing (Fugate, Zentall, & Gentry, 2013) and are often called "lazy," "dumb," and "bad" when they just need appropriate educational support (Beckmann, & Minnaert, 2018; Dare, & Nowicki, 2015; Baum Schader, & Hebert, 2014). If remediation for the learning challenges *and* rigor for giftedness is not provided, these students have been known to take their own lives (Cross, Cross, Dudnytska, Kim, & Vaughn, 2020).

Because both of these groups of special learners often have social and emotional challenges (Barnard-Brak, Johnsen, Hannig, & Wei, 2015) from their unconventional learning styles and challenges in school (Cleaver, 2008), we have teamed up with SafeHouse of the Desert, who has generously agreed to provide free counseling for both the students and parents.

Since quantitative data is not available, here is qualitative data about the above-referenced pupils. The following are examples of gifted Coachella Valley students who are suffering because of the lack of gifted services:

- At Bobby Duke Middle School, where the principal is interested in benefitting from the GAR project, there is a student who was tested for special education because of his low academic achievement; the results of the evaluation displayed his IQ is in the top 10% of all students his age (M. DeJournett, personal communication, December, 2019). Ms. DeJournett reported that the boy's mother is at a loss for what to do with him because he frequently gets in trouble.
- When I taught Intervention at John F. Kennedy Elementary, a first-grade boy (pseudonym Jake) was referred to me because he did not know the names of the letters of the alphabet. (I recognized him from the detention wall, where he would spend his recesses, even if he was not in detention.) When Jake's classmates asked him to play, he said he did not want to, and would pull his

hood over his face. (I had tried to talk to him when I witnessed this, but he just looked away.) When I started the intervention assessment from the referral, Jake quickly read the first ten letters in three seconds. He then threw himself onto the floor and started yelling that the assessment was so boring and how he hated school. While he was shouting, I noticed his vocabulary was far above the first-grade level. I let him cool down then took him back to class. When I told his teacher, I thought Jake is intellectually gifted and does not need intervention, she rolled her eyes and said he thinks he can teach her class. I then went to the principal and asked if I could use my prep time to work with him. (I was already in my Master's of Gifted Education program), and the principal declined my request, stating Jake is always in trouble. Ironically, I bumped into Jake's grandma, when she was picking him up from school one day. I told her my observations of his high intelligence, and she looked distressed, saying Jake's dad was the same as a boy, and she did not know what to do with his dad either. She said she wished she knew what to do with Jake so he would not go through what his dad did – then she cut herself off before telling me what happened to his dad. I felt helpless and frustrated at his quandary.

- At Carrillo Ranch Elementary, when I was a guest teacher in an all-day class for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I was assigned to work with a girl I will call Samantha. When I introduced myself, Samantha did not say a word to me. I helped her get started with her first assigned task, and within a few minutes, she stood up, yelled, then started twirling in circles and humming. I did not stop her immediately but directed her back to her work. When I told the classroom aides Samantha appeared to be artistic, they told me to take her to art class after lunch. I did, and when we arrived, she followed all the directions from the teacher, displaying a different side of her personality. When she opened her folder, inside was a picture of Van Gogh's Starry Nights. Shocked, I asked if she painted it? She replied, "Yes." "Free-hand?" I asked. "Yes." Until that point, I had not known if she talked. She pointed to his print on the classroom wall. I was still extremely impressed by her painting talent. I then asked the open-ended question as I pointed to the rolling stars, "What is that?" With eloquence, she stated, "That's Aurora Borealis." (I did not even know what that meant at that time.) After more conversing, I found out she reads at home because she loves to read, but she does not read at school. It was devastating to see her so frustrated when she performed menial tasks all day.

Two examples of my ability (perhaps my gift) to intuitively discover students' needs and how to work with them:

- Twenty-two years ago, during my student-teaching, I was hired to tutor a girl who could not read. She would occasionally come into the special education classroom during her recess. One time I walked in to find her cutting random

shapes out of construction paper. I asked her what she was doing, since it looked like pieces of scrap paper. She told me to come back after lunch and see. When I returned, the bulletin boards were decorated with Halloween pictures made from these seemingly random shapes, and it looked like a professional was hired to decorate. When I approached my mentor teacher, she said Erika (not her true name) had an aunt who was supposedly a famous artist, so perhaps the gift was genetic. One evening, when I was waiting to tutor Erika in the public library, she arrived thirty minutes late, handed me the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, and told me she had to have it memorized to present in class the next day. We only had 30 minutes left until the library closed, so I took a deep breath and began. *Remember, she could not read. I told Erika I would read each line, and she needed to draw a picture that reminded her of the words. At the end of the session, she completed all the pictures, but we had no time to practice. I had not seen Erika after that, but in the hallway, her teacher stopped me and asked if I was Erika's tutor. She then told me Erika was the only student who could recite the Preamble that day, verbatim.

- When I worked as a guest teacher for Special Education at Kennedy Elementary, before I was the Intervention Specialist, I led the students in playing Around the World with sight words (the most common words in our language, which kids learn by seeing the word, not sounding it out phonetically). One fourth-grade girl never talked in this class. Every time she tried to read the word before the other student, she squinted and held her breath but never read one word. However, one day when it was her turn, I revealed the word card, and she said the word INSTANTLY, while simultaneously the other students shouted, "It's upside down!" I looked at the word then showed her multiple words upside down, and she read them all very quickly. The special education teacher from a different classroom pulled me aside later that week and congratulated me for helping her because for all the years she was in special ed, no one picked up on that. The girl talked to me after that, and she also found one friend, when she previously had none.

Included in the project is Irlen Syndrome (IS) Screening that 15% of the general population has, 30% of individuals with ASD have, and 50% of those with learning disabilities have. Irlen Syndrome (formerly known as Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome) is a perceptual processing disorder (Irlen, 2019). When an individual has IS, text appears distorted (glaring light or moving text); therefore, those who have IS suffer from eye or head pain and even nausea when reading, writing, or calculating on paper. The distortions adversely affect peoples' ability to read and can decrease their math achievement scores. Worst of all, if a person with IS reaches high school without being identified, they are sometimes so depressed that they become suicidal (Personal communication, Sheryl Deeds, 2013). An example of one student I screened who had IS

was a boy who had been held back in second grade; he went on to third grade but still struggled, so the teacher was thinking about holding him back again. After screening, he immediately academically achieved to grade level. There is a wonderful testimonial letter of another such student on our website. When identified through the GAR, we will provide free remediation of colored overlays and computer clings.

Fortunately, if students are nominated into the GAR because they are very bright or talented but not formally identified as gifted, Holly Armstrong can identify them using the **Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, 5th edition** (WISC-V), which is the most popular and reliable tests of intelligence in the United States. It is because we work to identify students who cannot afford to pay for educational evaluations that Ms. Armstrong has been qualified to administer the while still earning her doctoral degree. She also received training, from gifted experts when she attended the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) national conference in 2018, about how the test was re-standardized for gifted students. Because gifted learners do not always score high in every sub-test of the WISC-V, they may not be identified as gifted; therefore, Ms. Armstrong knows what to look for in testing. She also can test for creative giftedness via the **Torrance Test of Creative Thinking** (TTCT). It is the most popular and viable test of creativity in the World to date. This test is important since creative individuals are often misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder-Hyperactive type (SENG, 2020). Finally, we use the **Raven's Progressive Matrices** non-verbal test, which demonstrates visuo-spatial giftedness, one factor of intellectual giftedness most applicable to STEM. Raven's is useful for identifying gifted students with reading and writing difficulties and and English Language Learners.

Finally, we will gather an affect baseline using the Behavior Assessment System for Children, 3rd edition (BASC-3), taking inventories from the students, a parent/guardian, a teacher, and, when possible, a counselor. This evaluates the perceptions of students' self-esteem, efficacy and mental health. After the program we will provide the same assessment to help evaluate the success of the project (along with other quantitative and qualitative measurements).

The model we will us is the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) was created by underachieving gifted students who were "disenchanted with school" and has been successfully utilized with this population (most widely used in public schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico). The Model was promoted by the late Dr. George Betts. His protégé, Dr. Dennis Higgins, coached Holly Armstrong on the implementation of the model. When these students are partnered with authentic peers, they thrive (Hidalgo, 2018). That is, consider that IQ's of intellectually gifted individuals reside in the top 10% of the Bell curve (of learners their age). They naturally can relate to only that 10% of their peers; hence, if there is a class of 30 children, only three are likely to be like them, although if they are not purposefully clustered, they may not have any other gifted

children with whom to associate. Authentic peers, then, are those who are at the same academic level, even if that level is far above their age-grade e.g., one student Ms Armstrong observed at Bridges Academy school for 2e students was a second grader taking calculus. Her math competence was far more advanced than her grade. She would have been frustrated in a general education classroom. These students need each other to **thrive academically, emotionally, and socially** (Baum et al., 2014).

Implementation of the ALM includes direct instruction, virtual meetings and ongoing virtual communications during the academic year with Gifted Specialist, Holly Armstrong. She will also assist general education teachers with differentiation, as needed. All assignments will align with curricular standards as well as U.S. gifted standards set by the NAGC. The approach is constructivist, so the educator, in this case Ms. Armstrong, initially leads the instruction and gradually releases the responsibility to the students, allowing them to develop their autonomy. However, instruction comes second to emotional needs, so each session will begin with mindfulness exercises; also, Ms. Armstrong will monitor their cognitive loads, assisting with metacognitive scaffolding (assistance) and self-regulation. At the end of the program a presentation will be made to the students' families, the educational team, support team, grant funders, and media, with approval from all parties.

The program outline is as follows:

1. Meeting with administration to review and plan proposed project
    a. Assist administration and/or educators in nominating project candidates. Students can self-nominate for giftedness; as well, their families, peers, and educational and counseling professionals can nominate. Gifted students prefer self-identification and peer gifted identification, and 90% of the time they are accurate (Akar & Akar, 2020).
2. Assess nominees
    a. Conduct Irlen Syndrome Screening for all candidates, providing remediation for positives (for more information, check my website: AcademicSolutionsUSA.org)
    b. Identify giftedness with WISC-V and/or Raven's and/or TTCT
3. Reconvene with administration to organize initiation of project
4. Autonomous Learner Model (ALM)
    a. Orientation for students and parents/guardians
        i. Outline the program

ii. Self-discovery

iii. Identification of support team (peer, educational, family, community, mentor, field expert)

b. Individual Development viz., Specialized Action Plan (SAP)

i. Through collaboration of available educators: Gifted Specialist, administration, educators, and supporters, develop a plan utilizing gifts *and* passions for home and school.

c. Enrichment

i. Gifted Specialist assists students in identifying and carrying out appropriate enrichment activities

d. Seminar

i. With the support of the Gifted Specialist students will conduct a seminar to collaborative team and ask for approval for in-depth study

e. In-depth study

i. Students will independently complete a full project and present to collaborative team, professional supporters and scouts, and financial partners of the project

References:

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Barnard-Brak, L., Johnsen, S. K., Hannig, A. P., & Wei, T. (2015). The incidence of potentially gifted students within a special education population. *Roeper Review, 37*(2). 74-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2015.1008661

Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Hebert, T. P. (2014). Through a different lens: reflecting on a strengths-based, talent-focused approach for twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 58*(4). 311-327. https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986214547632

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Cross, T. L., Cross, J. R., Dudnytska, N., Kim, M., & Vaughn, C. T. (2020). A psychological autopsy of an intellectually gifted student with attention deficit disorder. *Roeper Review, 42*(1), 6-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2019.1690081

Dare, L. & Nowicki, E. A. (2015). Twice-exceptionality: Parents' perspectives on 2e identification. *Roeper Review, 37*(4). 208-218. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2015.1077911

Fugate, C. M., Zentall, S. S., & Gentry, M. (2013). Creativity and working memory in gifted students with and without characteristics of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Lifting the mask. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 57*(4), 234-246. http://doi.org/10.1177/00169862135000069

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Irlen. (2019). *What is Irlen Syndrome?* https://irlen.com/what-is-irlen-syndrome/

SENG (Retrieved 2020, May 4). The misdiagnosis of gifted children [YouTube Video]. https://academicsolutionsusa.org/did-you-know%3F

7. What need will be impacted by this Small Grant?

Currently, there is **no Federal Funding** for gifted education. Additionally, **California** Department of Education **does not give funds budgeted specifically for gifted education**; rather, the department has elected to give only about $25,000/year of gifted funds as part of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), so the funds can be used for whatever the district finds suitable. At least one of our three Coachella Valley school districts only has enough money to test second graders for giftedness but not to provide further services (M. Silvestre, Personal communication, Fall, 2018). This leaves gifted education the responsibility of the families. Therefore, this **project is the first in decades** (since the Sputnik era) **to provide appropriate gifted education services to learners** who are greatly in need.

For the individual learners, this grant will be impacting both their **long-term academic achievement** *and* **mental health**. With this instructional design, families and general classroom teachers (who often don't know what to do with these brilliant but troubled learners, especially since they have been homeschooled due to the pandemic) will get relief and become more aware as they learn about their students' precocities and social/emotional needs. Finally, because these multiple-layered special populations can pose a risk to themselves and society, as presented above, **lives may literally be saved**. Furthermore, this project may **keep some of them out of the School-to-Prison Pipeline**, which costs three to six times the amount to teach a student per year, according to CNN Money (https://money.cnn.com/infographic/economy/education-vs-prison-costs/).

Due to COVID-19, parents are challenged by working from home; some are no longer employed and concerned about their families' well-being. Some educators are already disenchanted from having to virtually teach, while schools and district administrators are uncertain what will happen and how they will provide appropriate education in the next few months. As such, students are left to work independently, capable or not. Instead of this special population falling through the cracks, they now fall into an abyss.

If in-person teaching is prohibited, our Gifted Specialist is prepared to teach via Zoom and already has interest in the project at Bobby Duke Middle School in Coachella as well as discussions with the other two districts. Ironically, the pandemic has created a greater need for the Gifted Specialist's skills and experience since our she has over 20 years of experience with individualizing instruction.

8. Describe the population(s) that will benefit from this grant.

This project will benefit the **high-risk special population of gifted students**. The **higher risk sub-special populations** who are potentially within this group are those who are gifted but **under-identified and under-served**:

5. unidentified and in trouble
6. potentially dangerous to society and themselves
7. economically disadvantaged
8. English Language Learners
9. twice-exceptional
10. females
11. LGTBQ+
12. underachieving

9. What is the geographic area to be served?

The Coachella Valley

10. Name and explain the role of potential partners & collaborators for this project/program (if applicable).

- **SafeHouse of the Desert** has agreed to provide free counseling for the students and, separately, parents/guardians of students.
- **Mentors & experts** will collaborate on the curriculum and enrichment activities/projects
- **A**ll **stakeholders** will provide input throughout the program.
- Furthermore, we have two **radio D.J.'s** who are interested in interviewing Holly during their shows.
- If consent for photos of any participants is provided, we will share their stories through interviews and online through our **website and social media**.

11. Evaluation

a) Name at least one form of qualitative evaluation that will be used to gather data and evaluate outcomes.

1) The BASC-3 (mentioned above)
2) behavioral observations
3) dynamic assessments
4) semi-structured interviews with one representative from each stakeholder group

b. Please name at least one form of quantitative evaluation that will be used to gather data and evaluate outcomes.

1) The BASC-3
2) general class assessments

12. Number of persons to be impacted directly?

12 or more learners

13. Number of persons to be impacted indirectly?

At minimum, 84, plus an unmeasurable portion of society, by the learners potentially greatly contributing to society with their innate gifts

14. Complete budget template and provide narrative for the budget line items.

See attached excel spreadsheet.

15. Will other grantors be approached to fund the project/program? If so, how

much money is being or will be sought from other funders?

- ✓ **Anderson Children's Foundation** has already donated **$5,000** (remaining funds from two years ago) to apply toward this program.
- ✓ We have placed a request for $5,000 from Chase Bank.
- ✓ We have applied for the COVID-19 SBA loan.

The remainder of funds will be requested through all other grants and fundraising means such as

- Tribes
- Banks
- Riverside County COVID-19 Relief grant
- When researching advertising costs, we found if we host a fund-raising event for this and our other projects, we can get television coverage through our local network.
- Additionally, another project, a free educational web engine will be providing advertising opportunities which will further provide revenue in the future.
- Finally, we are actively seeking interns, one of whom will lead a fundraising campaign.