

An Enrichment Cluster Approach to Using SEM with Summer Programs

Oftentimes, students from communities marked by poverty are not afforded the same academic experiences as their counterparts in more affluent areas. In many cases, this “opportunity gap” can hamper academic achievement, limit college and career opportunities, and continue the detrimental cycle of poverty. To combat this issue, the Neag Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development has developed a summer enrichment program. The program provides students of all ability levels with an opportunity to engage in challenging enrichment activities designed to foster confidence and excitement for learning.

The program provides in-depth learning opportunities in areas typically not covered during the normal academic year. Research indicates that exposure to exciting topics and areas of study leads to the development of passionate interests. Once an interest is sparked within a student, advanced academic inquiries are often pursued. Students can then propel these interests into careers by focusing on them during high school and college.

Key Features

- The summer program follows the format of Enrichment Clusters where interest-based groups of students who work together to produce a product, service or performance based on their common interest.
- The groups meet to work on determining what they want to focus on creating, researching those topics, and finding authentic audiences to present what they have created.
- Group members may differ in age and expertise, but work together through a division of labor to accomplish their goals.
- Teachers act as facilitators, while students act as practicing professionals in their chosen topic.
- Enrichment Clusters promote authentic, inductive, learning.

Benefits

Students have the opportunity to Think, Feel, and Do what practicing professionals do in the delivery of products and services:

- Students receive opportunities to apply their interests
- Students acquire advanced level understanding of knowledge
- Students develop authentic products or services for an audience
- Students develop self-directed learning skills in planning, problem finding/focusing, organization, resource utilization, time management, cooperation, decision making, and self-evaluation
- Task-commitment, self-confidence, feelings of creative accomplishment, and ability to interact with other students and adults

Teachers will be provided with an opportunity to experience the joy of teaching by developing and facilitating enrichment clusters based on their own interests and talents.

Logistical Considerations

- Interested school districts will establish a contract with the Neag Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development to assist with the planning and training for the summer program.
- Through the contract, staff from the Neag Center will provide on-site training to the teachers, site coordinators, and administrators involved with the program.
- School districts will be responsible for the staffing of the program, program supplies, providing transportation for the students, and meals (if applicable).

If you are interested in pursuing this exciting venture, please contact Nicole Waicunas, SEM Outreach Coordinator at nicole.waicunas@uconn.edu or Lisa Muller, Executive Program Director at lisa.muller@uconn.edu.