



# Walla Walla Public Schools Classroom Close-Up



TEACHER NAME: Mary Cortinas

SCHOOL: Sharpstein Elementary

Position: Explorer Teacher

YEARS IN DISTRICT: 10 years

Q. What is the academic focus of the Elementary Explorer Gifted program?

A. This is a math and science enrichment program.

Q. What are the grade levels of the students you teach?

A. I teach 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students from schools throughout the community. This year I have 75 students total. As a general rule, we like to have about three percent of the total elementary enrollment.

Q. How often do you have them?

A. I work with the students two half-days per week. I get them one morning and one afternoon each week.

Q. How do students qualify for the program?

A. The students have to score in the 95th percentile in their verbal and math areas. Students test for this program each spring.

Q. Why is it important to have a gifted learners enrichment program?

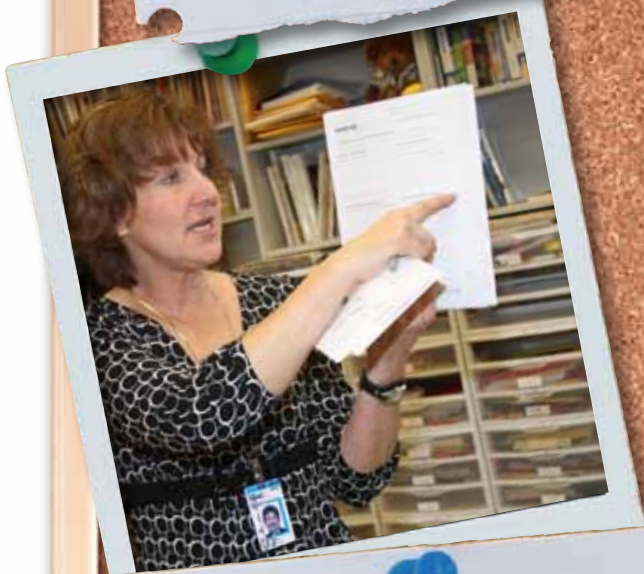
A. We need to find ways to stretch students academically to allow them to do their best. These students think differently and they need the extra challenge. Explorer students also learn how to work independently so they can be more productive in the traditional classroom.

These students tend to finish their work quickly, so it's important for them to have the skills to take command of their own learning and become self-motivated learners. I also work with their classroom teachers so we don't duplicate work in order to truly make this an enrichment program.

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MOMENTS & MEMORIES FROM  
MARY CORTINAS' CLASS:



COMMENTS FROM MARY...

I get a lot of support from the Sharpstein teachers. I was a Sharpstein classroom teacher before becoming the Explorer teacher. I think they see me as a Sharpstein teacher first and then as an Explorer teacher.

Students in the Explorer program are very creative. They solve problems, communicate with their peers and enjoy learning.



My students get weekly progress reports so the parents and students know exactly where they are academically. We also have family nights and activities to connect with parents.