**Suggested Steps to Begin an Independent Study Mentorship (ISM) Program**

**1. Establish an Independent Study Mentorship Research Committee.**

This committee might be charged with visiting schools with an independent study program, making decisions concerning the new program, and at an appropriate time following program development, presenting information to the Board of Trustees. Consider including the G/T coordinator; central office curriculum director; assistant principal for instruction; head counselor; career technology director; AP, Pre-AP, and G/T teachers; SBDM representative; G/T parent representative; etc. Committee members will study The Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP) website ([www.texaspsp.org](http://www.texaspsp.org)) and send committee members to TPSP awareness trainings.

**2. Develop a budget.**

Budgetary considerations include resource materials for teachers and students, office supplies, computers, printers, phone lines, answering machines, e-mail account, travel for teachers, extra-duty summer pay for the teachers, professional services of guest speakers, transportation for class field trip(s), etc.

**3. Decide how credit will be awarded for the course.**

There are many course titles that can be utilized to receive credit. For example, one-half to one credit may be awarded in one or through a combination of the following courses: Independent Study in English, Independent Study in Mathematics, Scientific Research and Design, Social Studies Research Methods, or the G/T Interdisciplinary Studies Mentor Seminar I–IV.

**4. Decide who will teach the course.**

An ideal ISM teacher of record is one who has several years of experience teaching G/T students, good communication skills, good interpersonal skills, an understanding of the community and its resources, and believes that high school students are capable of professional-level work.

**5. Determine what criteria the participants will meet.**

ISM is an elective class for upper-division students. The criteria established should help in selecting students who have a good chance of success in the ISM course. Junior- and senior-level students are more likely to have the maturity and independence needed for a successful independent study. These students are also more likely to have access to transportation to the mentor's workplace. If availability of the course is limited, then students pursuing the Distinguished Achievement Program Diploma should be given top priority. In addition to G/T students, others to consider for recruitment might include those successfully completing AP, Pre-AP, or dual credit classes. Teacher recommendations, at least one of which should be from a teacher of AP, Pre-AP, advanced arts, or dual-credit courses, may be required. A minimum grade point average may also be included among the criteria. Other nonacademic criteria might include good discipline record, good attendance, etc.

**6. Write a course description.**

The counselor will need a course description to be included in the student preregistration packet.

**7. Develop student forms.**

The following student forms need to be developed.

* An application to the program—might include teacher recommendations, checklists, possible areas of interest for the independent study, and a writing sample.
* A student contract—should spell out what is expected of the student in terms of time commitment, etc.
* A driving release form—will give permission for the student to drive to the mentor's workplace; must be signed by a parent/guardian.
* A leave of absence request form—grants the student release time from classes in order to observe at the mentor's work site, attend professional conferences, or observe some other "real world" activity related to the ISM project. At some schools, three such days are allowed per semester for ISM-related absences.

**8. Begin recruitment.**

Develop a brochure, public address announcement, and other publicity to advertise the availability and requirements of the class. Hand out brochures to all G/T students and to all sophomores and juniors enrolled in AP, Pre-AP, and dual-credit classes. (In subsequent years, ISM students may be sent back to talk to these classes.) Make applications available and set a deadline for returning them.

**9. Evaluate the applications and select participants.**

Collect teacher recommendation forms, applications, transcripts, and recommendations. The ISM Committee may use these items to rate an applicant’s probable success in the program. The teacher of record may take the place of a committee in selecting the students. Complete final selection of participants.

**10. Interview students.**

Prior to the end of the school year before the ISM course, schedule one-on-one interviews with students to discuss areas of interest for the independent study. Interviews are usually conducted by the teacher of record.

**11. Schedule a parent/student meeting.**

Notify accepted participants. Invite these students and their parents/guardians to an informational meeting. At the meeting, address requirements of the ISM course, expectations, responsibilities of the student, mentor information, etc. Have students and parents sign driving release forms, student contracts, etc. Invite members of the ISM Committee to attend.

**12. Develop mentor guidelines.**

Develop a mentor handbook describing the program, the characteristics of gifted children, and the commitment required from the mentor. Include information about the school community for the mentors.

**13. Inform the community.**

Talk to the Chamber of Commerce, community organizations, service clubs such as Rotary and Lions, and professional organizations. The support of the community is important in establishing a successful, independent study program, and suggestions for mentors can come from these groups.

**14. Enroll mentors in the program.**

After interviews have been conducted to determine the students' areas of interest for the independent study, the teacher of record begins the search for mentors. This search may continue during the summer prior to the ISM experience or even into the school year if a mentor has not been found. Students or their parents may have suggestions for mentors. Because of possible conflict of interest, relatives of the students are not ordinarily considered for mentor roles. Mentors may be found through professional organizations, college departments, retired professionals associations, government departments, community service organizations, businesses, research institutions, etc. Networking with the community is an important role of the teacher of record. The teacher of record may make the first contact with the prospective mentor, briefly explaining the ISM program and scheduling a visit for the teacher and student. At the meeting, the student is encouraged to talk about interests, plans for projects, and career goals, while the teacher of record gives further details of the mentorship commitment along with a mentor handbook. Following the meeting, the student and teacher decide whether this mentor is suitable. The completion of the Mentor Profile and Participation Agreement Form concludes the enrollment of the mentor.

**15. Produce a student handbook.**

The student handbook might include a course overview, student contract, driving release form, topic selection form, research report formats, documentation information, business communications formats, goal-setting help, time logs, calendar, leave of absence request form, evaluation rubrics, product proposal format, presentation checklist, and course evaluation form.