



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)
Report No. 17-053

20 June 2017

Gifted Program Review Update

Key Contact: Olga Grigoriev, Superintendent of Learning Support Services, 613-596-8254

PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update on the work of the Gifted Advisory Group relating to the Gifted Program Review.

CONTEXT:

2. In the fall of 2016, staff brought forward two reports relating to a review of the Gifted Program. The review was undertaken in preparation for any shift of the Gifted Specialized Program into the Geographic Model for September 2017. After deliberation by Committee of the Whole, staff was directed to create an Advisory Group to expand options which would improve effectiveness of services for gifted students and to increase equity of access for under-represented groups. Staff was directed to provide an interim report on the development of options by the end of May 2017 and a final report including a plan for the Geographic Model transition, including costing, no later than the end of December 2017.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. The Advisory Group met three times from March to May and was chaired by superintendent of Learning Support Services, Olga Grigoriev.

There were twelve members of the Advisory Group composed of staff of the OCDSB, representatives of OCDSB's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), the Association for Bright Children (ABC), external experts and a trustee. The individuals were as follows:

Superintendent of Learning Support Services: Olga Grigoriev;
Vice-Principal of Learning Support Services: Jenny Dewan;
OCDSB Chief Psychologist: Dr. Timothy Hogan; or alternate
School Psychologist: Dr. Cheryl Plouffe;

Principal of First Avenue Public School: Mark Schenk;
Principal of Broadview Public School: Catherine Deschambault;
SEAC Vice-Chair: Michelle Campbell;
SEAC member and representative of OCASC: Dana Somayaji;
ABC president: Cathy Miedema;
ABC representative: Dragos Popa;
External Expert: Dr. Bruce Shore, McGill University;
External Expert: Dr. Shari Orders, University of Ottawa; and
Trustee: Christine Boothby

Meeting One: March 6, 2017

The focus of the first meeting was a review of the mandate of the Advisory Group, establishing a framework and norms for the discussions, expressing an understanding of the terms “effectiveness” and “equity”, a discussion of the needs of the gifted learner as well as the challenges of the current model of gifted programming within the OCDSB.

Meeting Two: April 3, 2017

The focus of the second meeting was to discuss what is working with respect to the current model for gifted programming within the OCDSB. The following questions were posed and a discussion ensued:

“What benefits would we not want to lose with any new program considerations?”

“What characteristics would we want to see in a new program model?”

“What would well-being and safety look like for gifted learners?”

Meeting Three: May 1, 2017

The focus of the third meeting was to discuss specific program elements that might be considered. The principles of programming for gifted students developed by renowned gifted psychologist, Joseph Renzulli, and implemented widely across North America, was proposed as a means to address concerns about equity of access to gifted programming. This would include a multi-faceted approach to determining who would benefit from a continuum of gifted services. This is a community school-based model which focusses on identifying and supporting specific strengths and talents, in conjunction with cognitive ability. It is not limited to programming for gifted students in separate congregated classes.

Current Thinking of the Advisory Group

The Committee has been very productive and established a very open and positive approach to exploring ideas and different ways of supporting our students. At this stage, the Advisory Group has not identified options for changes to the current Gifted Program delivery model, but rather has focused on strategies to enhance supports for gifted learners placed in the regular classroom and community school environment. The Advisory Group recognizes the merits of student learning in a community school and the need to support students with giftedness in a variety of ways that are more inclusive of all students. With that in mind, the Advisory Group proposes the following plan of action, starting September 2017:

- a. Continue with the current model of specialized classes for gifted students;
- b. Initiate a pilot model at a small number of school locations using some of Renzulli’s principles for gifted programming;

- c. After a minimum of two years of implementation and evaluation, and if success is seen, consult with stakeholders for potential roll out of a revised model for gifted programming in the 2020-21 school year; and
- d. Continue to build staff capacity for IEP implementation and gifted programming in the regular classroom through workshops, PD and the Gifted Google forum

Rationale for keeping the current model – The Advisory Group recognized that the changes that had been proposed to the Specialized Gifted program were seen as a loss by parents of gifted students accessing this program and that this concern would be extended to any replacement program delivery model that had not been previously trialed within the OCDSB. The Advisory Group felt that it would be better to maintain the current program while piloting a new model that supported gifted learners placed in the regular classroom. If the pilot proves to be successful and upon consultation, it may be continued or expanded.

The thinking of the Advisory Group is to support and evaluate the success of this approach, and, if over time, students are experiencing desired outcomes such as learning, engagement and well-being, we could then look to formalize this as an approach for serving many of our gifted learners across all of our schools.

At that time, we would consider supporting specific groups of gifted learners in a fully specialized congregated approach according to need.

Geographic Model

The Board motion directed staff to bring back a report in December 2017 regarding the implementation of the Geographic Model. Based on the thinking of the Advisory Group, the implementation of the Geographic Model would be based on the current specialized class program model and could begin in September 2018. This would require the relocation of some of the existing specialized Gifted Program classes.

Screening Tools

In the meantime, staff will continue to explore universal screening tools and other assessment measures, surveys and inventories which will help us be more inclusive of learners we may now be inadvertently excluding from the provision of additional supports.

Ongoing Role of the Advisory Group

The Advisory Group has been effective and has defined a path forward that is based on a balance of maintaining the status quo in the short term and of moving towards the piloting of Renzulli's principles of programming for gifted learners. At this point, the group has not determined a new model to be recommended to the Board for gifted learners; however, currently it seems unnecessary to explore other options for program changes but rather to shift our focus on the development of the pilot program. After experience with the Renzulli model, the Advisory Group may propose that this or other options be considered for gifted programming. The Gifted Advisory Group will continue to meet throughout the fall of 2017 to discuss implementation and evaluation of the pilot model. Some questions the Group will address are:

1. What does a model based on the principles of Renzulli look like in schools in which it has been implemented outside of the OCDSB?
2. What would it look like in the OCDSB, given the wide range of possibilities within Renzulli's framework?
3. What would be needed in terms of human and material resources for program development, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation?
4. What would the challenges or opportunities be within the context of the OCDSB?
5. What would the success indicators be in order to monitor effectiveness?
6. Where/when might we pilot such an approach?
7. How could we ensure better equity of access using this model?
8. How does this align with the current service delivery model within the OCDSB including the tiered approach?
9. Who needs to be included in the development of the pilot model?

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

4. Possible costs
 - Site visits to Districts using Renzulli's framework.;
 - Human Resources for the implementation of the pilot; and
 - Human Resources for research

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

5. The Advisory Group has not yet discussed other options for consultation. If there is currently no formal change to our gifted specialized program model, the need for public consultation about options for changes to the program to enable a Board decision is deemed unrequired at this time. However, the gifted community is aware of the work of the Advisory Group and will need to be informed of the progress being made and the path forward. This will be discussed at SEAC and communicated through ABC as well as directly to parents of gifted students.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

6. The review of special education programs and services for students with giftedness align with the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, particularly in the areas of Learning, Equity and Well-Being.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

7. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
 - Does the recommendation of the Gifted Advisory Group address the need to improve equity of access to under-represented groups and improve programming for all gifted learners?
 - What are the implications of the recommendations made by the Group on the previous Board motions regarding the Gifted Review?
 - How might resourcing for the implementation of the pilot be afforded?

- How might the departments of Learning Support Services, Curriculum Services and Business and Learning Technologies collaborate in the implementation of the principles of the Renzulli model?
- How might this initiative connect with other system objectives such as furthering the implementation of Exit Outcomes throughout the District?

Olga Grigoriev
Superintendent of Learning Support
Services

Jennifer Adams
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board