



Statement to the Batavia Board of Education from CANDO

(To be read at the Batavia Public Schools Board Meeting scheduled for February 24, 2015)

Good evening. My name is Deb Grizzell, and my husband Matt and I have six children who attend, or have graduated from Batavia Public Schools. I am the chair of a volunteer-led organization called CANDO. For those of you in tonight's audience unfamiliar with our organization, the acronym CANDO stands for Challenge Advocacy Network Development Organization, and we are families of gifted and high-ability students in Batavia. Tonight, three of us from CANDO's Executive Board will speak *representing the families of over 600 gifted and high-ability students in Batavia Public Schools*. Many of our parent members were prevented from attending this meeting with us tonight by prior family and work commitments. We've encouraged them to contact the board via e-mail to voice their support for our statements tonight. **At this time, I would invite our CANDO Board members, elementary and middle school liaisons, and other CANDO parents in attendance tonight at this meeting to stand. Thank you for your support! You may be seated.**

Gifted learners are more than good students. They are not just high achievers. They have unique learning needs, and when those needs are met with appropriate support and challenge they *flourish* and develop into the world's innovators, leaders in their chosen fields. "Giftedness" is not something that can be coached, or taught. It is a style of learning; an innate ability to learn at a faster pace and with greater depth of understanding and creative thought than typical learners. *A student cannot "grow out of" giftedness. It is a characteristic that gifted learners retain throughout their lives.*

Our role as advocates for the learning needs of the over 600 gifted and high-ability students in Batavia Public Schools brings CANDO to tonight's Board meeting. CANDO parents are so grateful to the individual teachers and gifted coaches who have made commendable efforts to design learning opportunities for the students in their classroom; but **across the district, the experience of gifted students remains completely teacher-dependent and inconsistent.** *Without a philosophical statement or accompanying goals to guide the development of services for gifted and high-ability students, the*

service delivery model and instruction for gifted services has become untenable and inequitable. CANDO's other speakers tonight will further illustrate this point in a few moments, but allow me to share just one example of the inconsistencies found in Batavia's current delivery of gifted services:

*After receiving widely-varied gifted services at the elementary level, gifted students can be disqualified from gifted services through a re-testing and re-evaluation process at the end of fifth grade that suddenly finds them "un-gifted" as they enter Rotolo Middle School. Then, in a complete reversal of philosophy, those same "disqualified" students from RMS are encouraged to embrace the opportunity for academic challenge as they transition to life at Batavia High School and enroll again in courses that offer increased academic rigor. So suddenly, in this transition, they're seen as academically talented students again...magically transformed by the availability of a sufficient number of courses to meet their academic needs that did not exist for them at Rotolo Middle School. **This unfortunate experience for gifted students further illustrates the absence of a coherent district philosophy, and accompanying policies and programs. What does this reflect about our educational philosophy as a district? And more importantly, what message does this send to gifted and high-ability students and their families in Batavia Public Schools?***

In the recent past, CANDO enjoyed a collaborative relationship with BPS as part of the Gifted Services Committee. Some great ideas, including clustering gifted students within a classroom at the elementary level or on a specified team at the middle school, came from those Gifted Committee meetings. **The progress and promise of that process has been stalled.** *Meetings this year have been consistently cancelled and only rescheduled as a result of CANDO's repeated requests and after lengthy delays. Classroom teachers are no longer included in the meetings so their valuable input is missing. Four months after we again brought our specific concerns about mathematics instruction to BPS in an October Gifted Committee meeting, we received a formal written response stating that BPS would remain on its current path, with only slight deviation that considered offering off-site instruction via webcast of gifted math students on alternating days when their gifted coach instructor is not present. This is the alternative CANDO suggested to alleviate the students' current situation, which is independently working on math worksheets in a storage or pull-out room without an instructor present. It was only offered as a solution because the district refused to provide a teacher so that this group of gifted math students could receive instruction in math every day. CANDO offered this unusual webcast solution to resolve this urgent problem in January, and it has yet to be enacted. The situation of the students remains largely unchanged.*

CANDO parents have approached their children's classroom teachers, building principals and their school's gifted coaches with their concerns. *However, without an overall district philosophy to provide guidance, any resulting change has only impacted the situation of an individual student, or a cluster of students in one classroom.* These changes do not reach students in other classrooms or schools across the district, making this process inefficient and ineffective.

So tonight, *CANDO is appealing to the Board of Education for your assistance.* **CANDO is asking the Board of Education to:**

- 1) Allocate human and financial resources toward developing a philosophy of learning, a vision statement, and accompanying goals to guide the development of curriculum and instruction for *all* students *by bringing in outside experts* to guide this process,
- 2) Allocate financial resources to ensure that teachers receive targeted professional development opportunities that result in differentiated instruction in our classrooms, and
- 3) Promote a Culture of Excellence in Batavia that includes support for well-trained teachers who differentiate instruction to meet students' needs; *and* academic challenge and support for *all* of Batavia's students.

The position of CANDO parents and our gifted and high-ability students is sadly unique. District policies prohibit us from fundraising efforts like selling hoagies, or yard lines on a football field to raise funds to train teachers or buy learning materials for our students. What our students need can only be provided through the financial and human resources you, as a Board of Education, allocate to adequately meet their learning needs. Our ultimate mission as a school district should be to educate our students. All of Batavia's students--including gifted students--must have the opportunity to learn and grow!

Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns this evening.

Deb Grizzell, 2014-15 CANDO Chair