



Appeal to the Batavia Board of Education from CANDO
Presented to the Batavia Public Schools Board of Education and Administrative
Team at the regularly-scheduled Board of Education Meeting, February 24, 2015

Information about CANDO

The acronym CANDO stands for Challenge Advocacy Network Development Organization, and we are families of gifted and high-ability students in Batavia. CANDO sponsors seminars for parents and educators, networking events for parents and students, and we advocate for the unique needs of gifted and high-ability students in Batavia. Last year, CANDO inaugurated what will be an annual award for Exemplary Educators in Batavia, and we look forward to presenting this award to another group of outstanding teachers and administrators later this year

Our role as advocates for the learning needs of gifted and high-ability students in Batavia is what brings CANDO to tonight's Board meeting. BPS defines gifted students as those students whose standardized testing performance rank them in the top 5% of scores in our district. If we accept this definition, **at a minimum we are talking about a group of about 300 gifted students in Batavia Public Schools. There are another 300+ students who are high-ability students; whose performance on standardized tests place them in the top 5-10% of scores in Batavia. CANDO supports and advocates for this group of over 600 academically talented and gifted students.**

(For more information on CANDO, please visit our website: <http://bataviacando.weebly.com> or find us on Facebook.)

How are gifted students different?

Gifted learners are more than good students. They are not just high achievers. Gifted students approach learning differently than their peers. They learn more quickly, with fewer repetitions. They

tend to approach learning with a combination of curiosity and ability that allow them to go broader and deeper in their study of any given topic. They tend to be highly creative, innovative thinkers that enjoy connecting what they are learning in the classroom with the greater world outside. **Gifted learners have unique learning needs; and when those needs are met with adequate and appropriate support and challenge they flourish, reach their full potential, and develop into the world's innovators, and leaders in their chosen fields.** There is a well-developed body of professional research on the characteristics of gifted learners that distinguish them from their typically-learning peers.

“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.

[What brings CANDO's Executive Board, School Liaisons and parent members to tonight's Board of Education Meeting?](#)

In the recent past, CANDO enjoyed a collaborative relationship with BPS as part of the Gifted Services Committee. This committee formerly consisted of BPS teachers, administrators and CANDO parents who worked together to develop policies and services to support the needs of gifted and high-ability students. Some great ideas in education for Batavia's gifted and high-ability students, 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. CANDO researched and presented the best practices in education for gifted learners; and teachers, administrators and parents came together to construct a structure for services that was designed to offer this population of students the academic rigor and social support they needed.

- **The failure of the Gifted Committee process**

The progress and promise of that collaborative Gifted Committee process has been stalled. Without a philosophical statement, vision, and accompanying goals to guide the development of services for gifted and high-ability students, Batavia has a hodgepodge of services for gifted students that has resulted in inequitable service delivery and instruction for gifted services across settings in BPS. Individual teachers make commendable efforts to design learning opportunities for the students in their classroom, but across the district, the experience of gifted students remains teacher-dependent. While a student might have a great experience in third grade with a teacher who differentiates instruction to provide challenge and opportunities for enrichment, in fourth grade that student may have the opposite experience, and receive instruction below their ability with little or no differentiation.

- **The plight of Batavia's teachers and gifted coaches**

Our dedicated gifted coaches, and some BPS teachers, took the initiative on their own to try to develop courses and create lesson plans that accommodated the learning needs of gifted and high-ability students. Our talented elementary school gifted coaches and many teachers across the district used their personal time to create learning opportunities that they hoped brought challenge and rigor into the learning experience of gifted and high-ability students. On their own gifted coaches and many

teachers pursued professional development and sought out information in the professional body of educational research.

Committed teachers and gifted coaches have done their best, and their efforts reflect their dedication to their profession and their students. They did this without administrative support, without a guiding philosophy or vision statement, and without financial and human resources that should have been provided to ensure the success of their efforts. What resulted are services that are very-teacher dependent. In some cases, this effort yielded an outstanding experience in one subject area for a group of gifted students. However, delivery of gifted services as a whole is inconsistent, incomplete and inequitable because there is no clear district-wide philosophy, nor accompanying vision, policies and programming and administrative support to guide and support the efforts of Batavia teachers. **So many of our dedicated teachers have shared with parents that they can identify students who “need more” than the standard curriculum, but that without administrative support, training and materials to use for these students, they struggle greatly to find ways to educate gifted and high-ability students so that they, too, may make appropriate educational gains over the academic year.**

- **The inadequate educational experience for Batavia’s gifted and high-ability students**

Some gifted students who received services at the elementary level are disqualified from gifted services through a re-evaluation process that suddenly finds them “un-gifted” as they enter Rotolo Middle School. Disqualified students then enter the already challenging and difficult transition to middle school unnecessarily questioning their academic ability and their self-concept as learners, and being isolated from the peer group they’ve established through participation in gifted services in elementary school. **Then, in a reversal of philosophy, those same “disqualified” students from RMS are encouraged to embrace the opportunity for academic rigor and challenge as they transition to life at Batavia High School.** Suddenly, they’re seen as academically talented students again...magically transformed by the availability of courses to meet their academic needs that did not exist for them at Rotolo Middle School. CANDO believes what the professional body of research illustrates: gifted learners do not “grow out of” being gifted. Once a student is identified as being gifted, they should not be excluded from receiving gifted services through a re-evaluative process as they transition from one level of education to another.

Problems of inequity in service delivery and instruction are most easily illustrated by the various instructional experiences of this year’s third through fifth grade gifted math students, and for this year’s cohort of sixth grade students at Rotolo Middle School:

- Some gifted and high-ability math students walk up to the next grade’s math classes or are in accelerated or compacted middle school math classes. These students receive classroom instruction at an appropriate level every day.
- Some third grade gifted math students receive enriched third grade material (as math acceleration was discontinued beginning with this cohort of students) as math instruction in a pull-out setting one day, and the next day receive instruction as part of their homeroom classes. So, they receive math instruction at their ability level 50% of the time. In some classes, students already proficient in third grade math may be given the option to sit in a pull out room rather

than attend the classroom math lectures. No instructor is present in the pullout room and the students are offered Chromebooks to use for math activities on-line or offered online individual learning opportunities without support or instruction for these topics.

- Some fourth grade gifted math students work independently in a pull-out room or storage closet on worksheets with fifth grade math content. None of the students has a desk, not all of them have access to a writing surface. The students work with the Gifted Coach for a portion of the math period when she is at the school. The rest of the time, no instructor is present. A parent volunteer supervises their math work on days when she is available.
- Some students designated “gifted” through the district’s evaluation and identification process in elementary school, and who received accelerated math or enriched language arts instruction at their elementary schools, were excluded from participation in courses with this level of academic rigor at Rotolo Middle School because the school would not accommodate these gifted and high-ability students by adding additional sections of Math III or Advanced Language Arts. Instead, they were forced to remediate math concepts they mastered as fifth graders, and participate in language arts courses that did not provide the enrichment and challenge previously offered in their elementary school language arts experience.

None of these instructional models for math just described would be acceptable for any other math students in Batavia. Why are they being implemented for gifted math students? Why did BPS limit the number of sections of 6th grade Advanced Language Arts to one section, when more than 30 students qualified for participation? What does this reflect about our educational philosophy as a district? More importantly, what message does this send to gifted and high-ability students and their families in Batavia Public Schools? There is a common misconception that gifted and high-ability students will “do well on their own”—but the truth is that they need and deserve appropriate instruction to excel and meet their potentials, as all students do.

What can BPS do to address these concerns?

We believe that BPS administrators need to seriously consider the following recommendations in order to provide adequate and appropriate instruction for all learners:

1. **Batavia needs to develop a district philosophy regarding gifted services.** We need direction and goals that inform written policies and procedures for services. **Batavia needs to enlist *outside* input from qualified professionals to guide development of an educational philosophy and accompanying policies and programming that ensures that *all* students are always learning, always growing.** This new philosophy should embrace a culture of excellence. **It should reflect a commitment from Batavia Public Schools to expect excellence from our students, teachers, administrators and parents and to provide academic challenge, and support personal growth so that each student will reach their full potential.**
2. **Batavia needs professional development specifically targeted at equipping our talented teachers to differentiate curriculum and instruction within their classrooms to best meet the learning needs of their students.** Teachers need instruction on utilizing pre-, formative- and

summative assessment to guide their instructional approach and pacing. They need training on how to ability-group students for efficient and effective instruction. Batavia's professional educators want to offer their students the best possible opportunities for learning. They have asked for training in differentiation that will equip them to offer this research-supported best practice in instruction. CANDO stands by and supports our teachers in this request for targeted professional development to better meet the needs of gifted and high-ability students.

3. **Batavia needs to allocate *both* human and financial resources to support provision of services for gifted and high-ability students.** Batavia's teachers need **easy access to lesson modules and materials** that facilitate instruction at the pace gifted and high-ability students can learn.

This year BPS asked our teachers to develop their own math lesson modules to meet Common Core State Standards curriculum requirements. Our teachers have performed admirably under the strenuous demands this placed on them. In some cases teachers have found course materials that meet the learning needs of most learners in their classrooms. However, in many classrooms, this approach to aligning curriculum and instruction with the Common Core has resulted in instruction that is too slow-paced even for many typical learners. This process has left teachers no time to develop lessons and materials to differentiate instruction for gifted and high-ability students; leaving those students unchallenged, bored, and in many cases frustrated.

Gifted coaches at the elementary level have willingly taken on more than should be expected from three professional educators; and when our middle school Gifted Coordinator retired in 2010, that position was eliminated, leaving the task of coordinating delivery of gifted services to administrators already overburdened with responsibilities innate to their actual job descriptions. *Elementary- and middle school-level gifted services need the support of additional human resources that can guide program development and serve as resources for classroom teachers.*

[What can we learn from our neighboring districts?](#)

CANDO surveyed our surrounding districts and we discovered that they have incorporated Common Core State Standards into their curriculum and instructional practices, while still maintaining differentiated instruction for gifted and high-ability students. Batavia can learn from the successes of our neighboring districts as we work together to design learning opportunities for our students.

We've included a spreadsheet that describes services for gifted and high-ability students in neighboring districts in the packet of information we've presented to the Board tonight. (Please reference the attached spreadsheet.) In addition, later tonight another CANDO Board member will highlight the victories of a suburban school district whose stakeholders found themselves in a position similar to Batavia's, and who successfully addressed the deficits in their own educational processes to create a better learning environment for all students in their schools, including gifted and high-ability learners. CANDO has attached a written summary of that information as well. (Please reference the attached Hinsdale information.)

How has CANDO advocated for the needs of gifted and high-ability students in BPS?

CANDO parents have approached their children's classroom teachers with our concerns. Parents have spoken to their building principals and their schools' gifted coaches. CANDO accepted the Gifted Services Committee's invitations to prepare materials for and attend the four scheduled Gifted Services Committee meetings this year. In October, we requested a special session of the Gifted Services Committee to discuss our concerns specific to math curriculum and instruction at the elementary and middle school level. (The packet of information CANDO presented at that meeting is available for viewing on our website.)

As we previously stated, the collaborative progress CANDO has enjoyed with the Gifted Services Committee has been stalled. Every meeting of the Gifted Services Committee this year has been postponed twice (one postponement was due to a snow day), and each time rescheduling has been initiated by CANDO and has been very difficult to achieve. Weeks go by without responses to CANDO e-mails about rescheduling postponed Gifted Committee meetings. **In addition, regular classroom teachers are no longer represented on the Gifted Services Committee, so their valuable input is no longer included in those discussions.**

CANDO parents waited four months after our October 20th Gifted Services Committee meeting to hear a response from BPS to our concerns about math instruction and what, if any, changes will be made in gifted and high-ability math instruction for next year. A written response came in February, and reaffirmed BPS101's current positions on math curriculum design and instruction. The only change to instructional practice came from a suggestion by CANDO in January that would provide an alternative for gifted math students currently meeting in a storage closet or pull-out room, without an instructor, during their math time. Since BPS refused to provide a dedicated instructor for daily supervision of these students during their math time, CANDO recommended employing an off-site interactive webcast of an instructor at another school that these students could view. **Meanwhile, the inadequate instructional practices we outlined above *continue* for gifted math students across the district. *This is unacceptable.***

BPS 101 should be providing exceptional learning experiences for *all* students, including our gifted and high-ability learners. 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.**

Please submit any questions or comments you may have to CANDO's website:
<http://bataviacando.weebly.com/>. Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns this evening.

The 2014-15 CANDO Executive Board and Elementary and Middle School Liaisons