



March 2, 2015 Gifted Committee Meeting Summary

Attending: Dr. Brad Newkirk, BPS CAO; Dr. Kevin Skomer, LWS Principal; Julie Preble, Gifted Coach; Dr. Pam Ciway, Gifted Coach; Julie Allen, Gifted Coach; Eileen Pasero, HCS School Liaison; Jessica Kelly, AGS School Liaison; Jodie Pufundt, CANDO Secretary; Deb Grizzell, CANDO Chair; Heather DeBaun, JBN School Liaison; Anna Adams, CANDO Programs Chair; Nikki Rousseau, LWS School Liaison; Norma Fortino, GMW School Liaison

Members unable to attend: Laurie Fiorenza, RMS Vice-Principal over Curriculum and Instruction; Christy Magerkurth, CANDO Advocacy Chair; Heidi LeRette-Kauffman, CANDO Resource Chair; Margie Goliak, CANDO 2E Chair; Collen Nyland, HWS School Liaison; Kerri Still, RMS School Liaison; Kyra Holzmann, RMS School Liaison

Opening Discussion

Dr. Newkirk began the meeting with a presentation on "Partnership". He explained that partnerships work together, but do not always agree. Part of being in a partnership, he said, was discussing differences in opinions in an effort to foster collaboration. In Dr. Newkirk's opinion, there are some areas he calls "mixed messages" that are inhibiting collaboration in the CANDO/BPS Gifted Services partnership. His "mixed messages" follow the acronym "BN" below, and CANDO's response is labeled "CANDO":

- **BN:** Dr. Newkirk is "feeling protective of staff". He feels CANDO's message is that "BPS staff are doing a great job, but" ...followed by "criticisms and put-downs". He says this shuts down lines of communication.

CANDO: Please read any of the documents we've provided to BPS and the speech transcripts and documents provided to BPS at the recent BOE meeting in particular. CANDO has never been critical of teachers. CANDO has repeatedly stated that teachers in BPS are doing their best, but that teachers themselves tell CANDO parents that BPS needs to provide targeted professional development in the area of differentiation for gifted/high ability students, and that teachers need physical resources (textbooks, lesson modules/materials) to meet the needs of this student group. This year, in particular, teachers tell CANDO parents they are overwhelmed at the task of creating lesson modules and instructional resources on their own as BPS aligns curriculum and instruction to the Common Core. CANDO reasserts that teachers need more support from BPS in order to provide differentiated instruction for gifted and high-ability students.

- **BN:** The Exemplary Educator Award presented to Dr. Pam Ciway, Gifted Coach at LWS/AGS was inappropriate because her award was in the category "Exemplary Educator in an Administrative Position". The Gifted Coaches are teachers, not administrators.

CANDO: CANDO deeply regrets any unintentional offense to Dr. Ciway. Dr. Newkirk was notified of the categories to be used for these awards months in advance of the nominations process, and was notified of the recipients in each category prior to the awards. BPS parents and students nominated Dr. Ciway in this category, she received the most nominations for this category, and CANDO hopes she was honored by the sentiment this represents. CANDO will create a new category in order to continue to include Gifted Coaches in the nominations process. The new category name will not use the term "Administrator". Today's meeting was the first time this issue was brought to CANDO's attention.

- **BN:** Last year when the idea of a "magnet school" for gifted 4th/5^h grade students was discussed CANDO opposed it. Now CANDO is supporting it.

CANDO: Two years ago, Dr. Newkirk proposed the idea of a 4th/5th grade magnet as the only viable option that would provide instruction tailored to the needs of gifted students. At that time, CANDO was opposed to the idea for several reasons:

1. CANDO could not find research support for this instructional model
2. According to Dr. Newkirk, none of the surrounding districts were using this model. (CANDO had asked if this was occurring in surrounding districts and with what success? CANDO has since learned that several of our neighboring districts have 4th/5th grade gifted magnets)

3. CANDO felt the newly organized gifted cluster teams at RMS were not yet developed enough to continue this type of gifted instruction when students transition from the magnet to RMS (RMS still has gifted clusters, and advanced or accelerated sections for ELA and Mathematics only).
4. CANDO was concerned that gifted and high-ability students who would be excluded from the magnet would not receive differentiated learning opportunities in their neighboring schools if district resources for gifted learners were housed in a magnet location

CANDO is not promoting a gifted magnet for 4th/5th grade students. None of our written materials promote this instructional model.

- **BN:** CANDO said it does not want students in the top 1% (of standardized score percentile rankings) grouped with students in the top 3%, or 5% range for instruction
CANDO: CANDO has never voiced this position, nor has CANDO advocated this position in any of our position papers or supporting documents. CANDO advocates for the support and learning needs of gifted and high-ability students, which BPS defines as the top 5%, and top 5-10%, respectively.
- **BN:** CANDO's use of the term "closet" to describe some of the spaces used for instruction of gifted students is inaccurate and misleading.
- **CANDO:** CANDO relies on the information provided by its parent members. In the evening Parent Forum meeting held Thursday, January 15, 2015, parents voiced their concerns about some of the instructional spaces being utilized for their elementary school-age gifted math students. The space of most concern for parents is a room at HWS originally designed as a pullout room between two classrooms. Although it has windows on two walls, it is now used primarily as a storage room. Parents report that the room houses audio-visual equipment and other instructional materials stacked on shelves "to the ceiling", such that parents and students refer to it as a "storage closet". At the beginning of this school year there were only seats for three of the five students using the room for math, and so two foldable stools were brought in each day for the other two students to use. Parents report that now there are sufficient chairs for all students, but parent volunteers who supervise the group must stand because there is no space available for an additional chair. A comment from a HWS 4th grade parent is included below, with the parent's permission:

Thank you. Please share it. To clarify, this is regarding the 4th grade gifted students at HWS. There are currently 3 cluster students and 2 advanced for math. The teachers have done well

with the bad situation and the students seem to be doing well academically, which can make it hard to advocate for change. Socially and emotionally, my daughter has had a difficult time all year and has already begun to get anxious about next year.

On the days when Mrs Preble (the gifted specialist) is in the building, they are being taught in the small office next to Mr Chavez that serves as the video conferencing equipment room. They were kicked out of Mrs Preble's classroom a few months ago. They are with her every other day for the first 1/2 of math for direct instruction, then return upstairs to work independently in the pullout room between two classrooms. On the days that Mrs Preble is not in the building, they work with Ms Zielke (their homeroom teacher) at the back table in her classroom as a guided math group for the first part of the period, then back in the pullout room for the remainder of the math period. More than 50% of their math time is independent in this pullout room.

I affectionately refer to that room as the closet because it is primarily storage to the ceiling for books and science supplies. At the beginning of the year, there were only 3 chairs for 5 students. The other two used stools and collapsible tables that they would return to the teacher at the end of the period. There are now 2 more chairs at a small computer table, but certainly that room is not designed for 5 children to work.

At the start of the school year, the administration stated that these kids were "walking up" to a 5th grade classroom for math, but that was never the case. Administrators then claimed that the other elementary schools were using this delivery model for the 4th grade students who receive 5th grade curriculum.

CANDO Chair Deb Grizzell contacted BPS101's Chief Academic Officer Brad Newkirk by telephone January 16 to discuss these concerns. Dr. Newkirk said he would talk to staff at the school, and respond to CANDO's concerns. On February 23 Dr. Newkirk sent CANDO a document written in response to our October 20 position paper on Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction for Gifted Math students, as well as our Jan. 29th position paper on the continuum of BPS Gifted Services K-12 and the transitions between 5th/6th and 8th/9th grades. (Apparently Dr. Newkirk first sent this document 2/4/15, but CANDO did not receive it until 2/23/15). In that document Dr. Newkirk responds to parents' concerns about the instructional spaces listed above in this way: "The district strives to use a framework for the gradual release of responsibility (Fisher and Frey, 2014), providing a balanced model that includes whole group, small group, and individual work. We believe that a balance of these is important and that any one should not be overused."

General Discussion on Today's Meeting Agenda Items

Mathematics Instruction

Dr. Kevin Skomer, principal at LWS, heads the BPS team developing elementary school-level mathematics instruction that aligns with Common Core State Standards. He reported that the team's focus currently is on development of the "Core" instruction for the largest group of students served by BPS elementary schools.

The next phase of instructional development will focus on instruction at the remedial level, as well as for gifted/high-ability students. In addition, this next phase will include training for teachers on how to utilize pre-, formative- and summative assessments to inform differentiated instruction.

Dr. Skomer feels BPS is three to five years away from having a fully-developed elementary school mathematics instructional model that also aligns with Common Core State Standards. He says the non-existence of textbooks and accompanying instructional materials with content that aligns with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is the biggest obstacle BPS faces in its efforts to align instruction with these standards.

CANDO asked if texts and lesson materials specifically designed for gifted math students were reviewed in the process of evaluation for CCSS aligned materials. Dr. Skomer said he had reviewed a few, but could not recall the names of the publishers and felt that they did not align with CCSS for mathematics instruction.

Re-evaluation (testing) for Participation in Gifted Services in the Transition Between 5th/6th Grade

Dr. Newkirk reports that this is a "parallel process" to the one that occurs when students are initially identified for participation in gifted services at the end of 2nd grade.

CANDO reminded the group that re-evaluation/identification for participation in gifted services is not research-supported. In fact, gifted learning styles are a lifelong approach to learning, not a trait or behavior that children "outgrow". In addition, the experience of being excluded from participation upon entrance to middle school is damaging academically, emotionally and socially for students at a very vulnerable point of transition from elementary to middle school. And, these same students are then

strongly encouraged to enroll in honors or AP courses as freshman entering BHS, which is a confusing “mixed message”.

Dr. Newkirk said he is willing to consider eliminating the re-evaluation/identification process between 5th/6th grade , and consider offering testing only for students who have not previously participated in gifted services, but whose standardized test scores indicate that they may benefit from participation.

CANDO asked Dr. Newkirk to clarify the “appeals” process for parents who feel that their child not being considered for participation in gifted services should be tested. The “Problem Solving Process” is the mechanism parents should utilize to address these concerns, and they initiate that process by speaking to their building principal.

Providing enrichment opportunities for gifted/high-ability Kindergarten Through 2nd Grade Students

Dr. Newkirk would like to enlist the help of CANDO parents as facilitators for Primary Education Thinking Skills (PETS) groups at each elementary building in BPS. (<http://www.primaryeducationthinkingskills.com>) He would like CANDO to provide parent representatives to work groups on this topic in the near future.

Developing a Vision That Provides Opportunities for All Students

Both Dr. Newkirk and Dr. Skomer would like to move away from labeling students as “gifted” or “talented” and develop a vision for education in Batavia that provides the best opportunities for *all* students.

CANDO assured the group that having their child labeled “gifted” or “talented” is not the goal of our parents. Rather, CANDO parents’ goal is that their child receives instruction appropriate to their ability and their potential for learning. Ideally, all children would have that experience in BPS. However, unless children are identified as having that ability/potential, their needs go unnoticed. In addition, identifying and grouping these students makes it easier for teachers to differentiate instruction. This approach is also the best practice in education for gifted and high-ability students that is research-supported.

Re-evaluating the “Top 5% Locally” As the Defining Characteristic for Participation in Gifted Services

CANDO has advocated the position that the standard used to identify gifted students should be the top 5% of student scorers when compared with national score averages. Dr. Newkirk said he is willing to consider using this standard in the future.

When should students be identified as gifted?

Dr. Skomer asserted that identification/designation as “gifted” should not occur until middle school. He also expressed the desire for more students to experience the types of opportunities offered to gifted/high-ability students.

CANDO responded that our members felt children should actually be identified sooner, as early as Kindergarten in some cases, and offered instruction appropriate to their ability/potential. Many CANDO parents feel that third grade is “too late” for gifted students in the primary grades who would benefit from instruction at a faster pace and/or greater depth.

CANDO has adopted Hinsdale’s D181 Superintendent Dr. Kurt Schneider’s philosophy that we must “raise the floor to raise the ceiling”. Offering more rigorous, challenging learning opportunities benefits all learners, gifted and high-ability learners in particular.

How should instruction for gifted students look?

Dr. Newkirk told the group that gifted learning opportunities “will not look the same everywhere”. By necessity, adaptations must be made based on the needs of the participants at the various sites.

While CANDO agrees with this statement, students should expect to receive the same standard of content, so that all elementary students arrive at least at the same minimum level of readiness for middle school coursework.

Next Steps for Gifted Services

- Dr. Newkirk will reach out to colleagues in D181 (Hinsdale) to understand better their process for re-defining their district’s educational philosophy, and in particular how it changed their approach to gifted services.
- BPS is soon adopting a new strategic vision. Gifted services should follow suit with a redefinition of philosophy and vision. Work groups of CANDO parents,

teachers and administrators can come together to develop these guiding principles.

- Dr. Newkirk would like to form a group of CANDO parents, teachers and administrators to revise the Gifted Handbook.
- Dr. Newkirk would like to further examine services for gifted/high-ability students in grades K-2, and would like to form another work group to discuss these issues.
- Suggested meeting dates for the next Gifted Committee meeting, to discuss the progress of the work groups: May 4 or May 11.
- CANDO will coordinate recruiting School Liaison parents for participation in the three work groups.