



Challenge Advocacy Network Development Organization

Advocating support and challenge for Batavia's gifted and talented students

23 September, 2013

Dear Gifted Services Committee members,

The CANDO Executive Board and School Liaisons look forward to the discussions we'll share at this year's four joint meetings, beginning today! As we have prepared for this first meeting, we researched the designated topic: The Unique Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted and High-ability Students. In addition, we met with two parent focus groups attended by parents from across the district who shared their experiences and ideas on this topic, as well.

The attached document contains the information we found most pertinent and prevalent both from our review of the body of professional research on this subject, and the anecdotal experiences shared by the parents at our two focus groups. Parents came forward with *many* positive experiences of reaching out to Gifted Coaches or other BPS staff members last year--and some already this school year--with concerns in this area of their student's life at school. We want to express our collective gratitude for the compassion and professionalism that benefitted individual students, and sometimes groups of students, by Gifted Coaches and other BPS staff who are dedicated to meeting the needs of "the whole child" who is their gifted or high-ability student as they responded to these expressed concerns.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and ideas with you on this topic. We have enjoyed the process of gathering this information, and hope it is both informative and useful in our shared work of meeting the unique social and emotional needs of this student population.

Warmest regards,

Deb Grizzell, 2013-14 CANDO Chair and the CANDO Executive Board and School Liaisons



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The Unique Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted and High-ability Students:

Results of research in the professional body of research on the topic, and anecdotal experience of BPS families in subject area

The experience of parenting or teaching a gifted or high-ability student is qualitatively different in some important ways from these experiences with typical learners. Parents in Batavia felt that the characteristics and needs of this student population, as described in the professional body of research, mirrored their own experience as parents of these children. **Research consistently identifies several characteristics in the gifted population, and many of these traits are also recognizable in other high-ability learners.** They are summarized nicely in a recently-published article found in the popular press on the byrdseed.com website: <http://www.byrdseed.com/10-facts-about-social-emotional-needs-of-the-gifted/>. Briefly, here are the 10 needs the article identifies:

1. Be aware that strengths and potential problems can be flip sides of the same coin.
2. Gifted students' physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth is often uneven.
3. Gifted students may doubt that they are actually gifted.
4. Gifted students may face social challenges not just from peers, but parents and teachers as well.
5. As they get older, gifted students may take fewer risks.
6. Gifted students can have surprisingly heightened emotional sensitivity.
7. Gifted students are often shy, know they're shy, and know shyness is often looked down upon.
8. Gifted students' abstract intuition may conflict with teachers' desire for concrete thinking.
9. Gifted students' needs cannot be met by one style of learning.
10. Gifted adults wish they were better informed about giftedness as children.

As we met with parents to discuss their children's social and emotional needs, their comments could be condensed into four areas that are well-illustrated in the body of professional research

on this subject: sensitivity, perfectionism, intensity and introversion or social-difficulty. We have grouped parent focus group comments into those four areas below:

Sensitivity

- These students are often very schedule-focused. Unanticipated deviation from planned or typical schedules in their school day can be unusually upsetting.
- These students can seem hyper-sensitive to comments from peers, parents or school staff; and at times they may seem emotionally over-reactive.
- These students are sometimes more sensitive to environmental factors that do not pose difficulty for others in the same setting.

Perfectionism

- These students may have unrealistically high expectations for themselves, others or situations they encounter.
- These students have a tendency to be self-critical.
- These students may have a lower tolerance for deviation from their perceived norm.
- Individuals or experiences that do not meet the high standards or expectations of these students may unknowingly illicit emotional distress in the gifted student.

Intensity

- These students often enjoy becoming deeply absorbed and involved in single subjects or ideas.
- These students often have an emotional response that seems over-reactive to experiences.
- These students are often high-demand in terms of their need for interaction or stimulation.

Introversion or Social Difficulty

- *These students are frequently introverted in relational style, and do not enjoy highly socially-interactive situations.*
- *These students often have difficulty forming and/or maintaining friendships.*
- *These students may misinterpret social cues.*
- *These students frequently have one or two close friends, versus a large friend group.*

As was expressed in the accompanying cover letter, **parents in our focus groups shared many positive experiences of appropriate and thoughtful responses to their expressed concerns in the above areas.** In many cases, parents felt that if they had not raised their concerns, school staff would not have anticipated nor had awareness of the issues their gifted or high-ability student faced. They expressed the hope that through **teacher/staff training or staff development opportunities, more awareness could be raised that might anticipate difficulties for gifted and high-ability students, and more done to prevent problems from occurring.**

Parents felt social skills training specifically targeting these gifted and high-ability student groups would be very beneficial. In particular, adolescent girls were thought to be at particular risk in this area. This is supported in the research we found on this sub-topic, as well. **Parents also felt that their gifted or high-ability students were more-often the targets of bullying.**

Focus group parents appreciated efforts to help their students' maintain difficult-to-form friendships and peer groups, and to form new friendship networks when pull-out services take these students out of their typical classroom setting. For this population, it seems particularly important to include some opportunity for social interaction within the school setting, as they often feel isolated from the friends they most enjoy. **In addition, as there are often fewer numbers of girls, compared with boys, in accelerated math sections, sensitivity to this dynamic is helpful.**

Whenever possible, providing advance warning for changes in routine, setting for instruction, composition of work groups, and other deviations from typical classroom norms helps to prevent emotional distress for these students. This creates an opportunity for success in the novel setting or situation.

In terms of the needs of these parents, as they guide their students through their educational experience, there was a repeated desire for more communication from schools about their children's curriculum and instruction. **Many parents expressed a desire for a "curriculum night" that details their child's anticipated experience as a gifted or high-ability student. Parents wished they could have the level of detail about their child's daily school experience that they perceive parents of typical students receive at curriculum night, and again at parent-teacher conferences.**

When the process of identifying gifted students begins and concludes, parents felt a meeting explaining the process and offering an opportunity for questions and answers, would be very helpful. They found printed materials they have received to offer some information that was confusing or difficult to interpret.

Suggestions from Parent Focus Groups

- Wellness topics and discussion groups focused specifically on the needs of gifted and high-ability students
- More teacher training and staff development devoted to familiarizing school adults with the characteristics and needs unique to this student population
- Specific intervention targeted at gifted and high-ability girls- especially at the middle school level, because they are particularly susceptible to self-criticism or the negative effects of perfectionism
- More opportunity for project-work by students that allows exploration of subjects in greater depth and breadth
- Summer bridge work+ for students who will enter accelerated math at the next grade level; possibly school-sponsored, parent-led study groups+for this population of students
- More information, perhaps delivered in a meeting for parents, about what to expect in the transition to middle school
- More and better communication between classroom teachers and Gifted Coaches about the needs of gifted and high-ability students
- A general meeting, very early in the school year, for parents whose children will receive gifted/accelerated/enriched services during the school year that provides information and opportunity for questions and answers about their child's educational experience in the coming year

Once again, we thank you for your time, interest and dedication to meeting the needs of our gifted and high-ability children in your school. Your hard work and efforts are so appreciated!