

CANDO QUESTIONNAIRE

Ellen Knautz

March 2015

What experience do you have with Batavia Public Schools' gifted services and what knowledge do you have about gifted education in general?

Two of my children had math services at the elementary level. One son received math services from Mr. Recchia in 4th and 5th grade. In middle school he was placed in an accelerated math class and has continued on that path. In 3rd grade, my other son was part of a math enrichment group taught by Mrs. Preble. In 4th grade, he is now in the classroom for math. While I was never informed about this change, I heard that there is not math enrichment available from a gifted specialist to 4th grade students at HC Storm which is confirmed by the *Batavia Public Schools Gifted Services Handbook* available on the BPS101 website.

Through my personal experience and from conversations with other parents in the district, the gifted services provided by BPS101 seem to be provided differently every year at the elementary level. It is also my understanding that in 5th grade students are re-evaluated for gifted services in 6th grade which can negatively impact a student's confidence in their academic skill set. At the middle school level, "gifted services" are provided in the form of accelerated math and enriched literature/language classes. Currently at the high school the definition of "gifted services" is offering Honors/AP courses and there are parents who would like to see that definition expanded.

My knowledge of gifted education is mostly based on personal experience – as a student who had gifted services in public school 30 years ago and as a parent whose children have had gifted services from BPS101. I have also gained knowledge through magazine articles, school district websites and internet research including www.nagc.org.

What is your vision for gifted education in this community?

My vision for BPS101 gifted education is two-fold.

When applicable, I would like to see high-ability learners in kindergarten through 8th grade served through differentiation and acceleration in literature/language arts and math. In theory, a strong curriculum in these subject areas from kindergarten through 8th grade should accommodate differentiation in the classroom and acceleration to higher-ability classes. This model should:

- Ensure that elementary differentiation/acceleration is consistently implemented across schools
- Clearly identify and communicate criteria for differentiation/acceleration
- Create provisions that would allow students to qualify for differentiation/acceleration at any grade level
- Allow students to remain on an academic path as long as his/her performance in the classroom meets expectations.

Secondly, for those gifted students who simply do not thrive in the previously described setting, accommodations should be made on a case-by-case basis. In this situation, the gifted specialist would work with the student, parents and teacher(s) in order to develop a specialized plan for that student.

An administrator located in the central office should be assigned to oversee gifted education in order to:

- Ensure that gifted education is delivered with consistency across elementary schools
- Oversee a seamless transition in gifted education from elementary to middle school to high school
- Conduct regular evaluations of gifted education in order to identify successes and areas for improvement.

Assigning this responsibility to an administrator at RJAC demonstrates the importance of gifted education to BPS101. I have not done enough research of other districts to base an opinion regarding if this responsibility would be full-time or part-time.

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What issues do you believe BPS101 needs to address in its academic programs and course offerings so that students can reach their full potential and be college or career ready by the end of their tenure in Batavia schools? What changes would you recommend?

Before the mandate to align curriculum to Common Core state standards, the curriculum at BPS101 for math and literature/language arts for kindergarten through 8th grade gave most parents confidence that their students were on the path to be college/career ready by the end of high school. Parents now have concerns regarding how BPS101 is managing the implementation of Common Core standards and how that implementation is affecting learning in the classroom on a daily basis. I would recommend that the district address this perception by communicating to parents how it is implementing Common Core changes swiftly and according to best practices as demonstrated by other school districts.

So that students can reach their full potential, Batavia High School provides an AP/Honors path for math, science, literature/language arts and social studies. A concern is the new practice of requiring incoming freshmen who are recommended for the social studies AP/Honors path to take AP Human Geography. Some parents and teachers have a concern that AP classes are not appropriate for a majority of high-achieving freshmen and could have a negative effect. I would like to see BPS101 revisit this policy and only provide optional AP courses to freshmen if resources allow.

If elected, what criteria will you use to evaluate proposals to maintain or develop the existing gifted services available to students in BPS101?

Prior to being a stay-at-home parent, I was a management consultant in the IT industry. When evaluating existing processes for improvement, I would interview stakeholders and research best practices. If elected, I would use similar techniques to evaluate proposals to maintain or change gifted services at BPS101. I would ask questions of administration. I would seek input from parents, teachers and if appropriate, students. I would look to best practices demonstrated by other school districts and recommended by local, state and national organizations who advocate for quality gifted services.