



Challenge Advocacy Network Development Organization

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

14 April 2014

Dear Gifted Services Committee members,

Following our focus group sessions this month discussing the cluster group model of service delivery at RMS, we held sessions to discuss issues relevant to twice exceptional students and their families. There is a sizable group of CANDO families who have children in the twice exceptional category of learners, and we would like to focus on issues they face during one of our Gifted Committee meetings next year (2014-15). In addition, we will be adding a Twice Exceptional Resource Chair position to our CANDO Board at our May General Membership meeting, so that we can better serve the needs of this population of students.

In light of this, we wanted to share a list of topics of concern discussed by parents who attended last week's focus group meetings as a sort of preview to a possible discussion by the Gifted Committee at one of our meetings next year. We hope you'll find this helpful as we all think ahead to next year's work together.

Issues discussed at CANDO Parent Focus Group meetings in April 2014 on the topic of Twice Exceptional Learners at all grade levels in BPS

- RTI and/or Problem Solving Process

For twice exceptional students, grade-level requirements are often met because these students can compensate with areas of strength for learning or other disabilities that affect their classroom experience. Parents feel concerned that the focus for RTI/problem-solving process is often to bring the students to grade-level functioning, when their potential is actually much higher. Staff who attend the meetings sometimes have a lack of understanding about issues relevant to gifted learners, or seem reluctant to consider these issues because of the students other learning issues (i.e. ADHD, dyslexia, etc).

- Identification/evaluation for gifted services

Twice exceptional learners may not be identified through the current process. The instruments BPS uses may not reflect "gifted" characteristics when the student is twice exceptional. Many parents seek testing and evaluation from private resources at great personal cost in order to establish their child's

“gifted” designation. Parents would like BPS to administer the WAIS IV or another NAGC-recommended instrument to students whose teachers/parents feel they might benefit from gifted services. Subscores obtained from the WAIS IV would be very informative in designing the best possible learning environment for twice exceptional students.

The “appeals process” for parents who feel their child should have been evaluated for gifted services, or who feel their child was wrongly disqualified for gifted services, is difficult to navigate. Parents at CANDO focus groups had utilized the Problem Solving Process and regularly scheduled IEP and 504 plan meetings, with less than satisfactory results in many cases. Again, parents felt they needed to provide the recommendation of professionals outside the BPS system to justify reconsideration of their child for gifted service eligibility.

- Emotional and behavioral issues relevant to 2E students

Many parents worried that their child’s emotional or behavioral issues related to their diagnoses prevent teachers from recognizing them as gifted learners. Parents felt their children acted out, or withdrew when their learning needs were not being met.

Other parents expressed concern about classroom discipline and management of daily work for their 2E students. Some examples parents shared were: ADHD students who were denied recess because they did not complete daily work, students whose unfinished daily work was allowed to accumulate to an unmanageable level and then was sent home as homework for completion with near due date.

- IEP and 504 Plan issues

Some parents felt it was difficult to initiate the IEP or 504 Plan processes because their 2E student often performs at grade level, but has less apparent learning needs related to their 2E status. Parents whose students have IEPs or 504 plans because of their LD or other diagnoses felt BPS staff were resistant to including accommodations that relate to their child’s gifted learning needs, because of their co-existing diagnoses.

Summary and conclusions

Many of the parents of 2E students were able to describe very positive experiences with particular teachers, specialists and administrators who showed great understanding and professionalism in creatively approaching problem-solving for their 2E student. However, they shared that with each new school year, they often had to begin again and hope that the new teacher and classroom would meet the unique learning needs of their student.

Parents were sympathetic to the difficulties of working with 2E children. They were often tearful as they described the level of intense involvement parenting a 2E child demands. It can be emotionally, mentally, physically and financially draining. However, as those of us with 2E children know, the experience can also be immensely rewarding. Just like parents of typical learners, those of us with 2E learners want our children to

reach their highest potential; and we hope the adults and children who interact with our children can see their strengths and the many wonderful aspects of their personalities. Parents of 2E students felt strongly that there would be so many advantages to their students, and the other students in their classroom, if their gifted learning needs could be addressed alongside their other learning needs.

Thank you for your willingness to begin a discussion with CANDO about Batavia's twice exceptional students.

Warm regards,

The 2013-14 CANDO Executive Board

The 2013-14 CANDO School Liaisons