



20 October 2014

Summary of BPS101's New Approach to Mathematics Instruction and Anecdotal Feedback from Batavia Parents About Mathematics Instruction Sept-Oct 2014, grades K-8

The CANDO Executive Board continues to meet during the summer months. Parents of Batavia's gifted and high-ability Mathematics students were expressing some anxiety and concern about upcoming changes in Mathematics instructional practices at the elementary and middle school levels, and they were contacting CANDO with their concerns. They were encouraged to contact their building principals with questions.

When it was clear that many parents had lingering concerns about the impact of the changes in Mathematics curriculum and instruction on the services their gifted or high-ability Mathematics student(s) received under the previous curriculum model, Deb Grizzell, CANDO's chair, met individually with Mrs. Laurie Fiorenza, Assistant Principal at Rotolo Middle School over Curriculum and Instruction; and also with LWS Principal Dr. Kevin Skomer, who, with AGS Principal Dr. Jan Wright, has been at the helm of the district's effort to align with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Mathematics at the elementary level.

First, a general discussion of terms as we understand them is useful.

- *The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Mathematics* is a nationally-uniform set of specific standards that delineates which content and concepts of Mathematics students should master at each grade level.
- *The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) curriculum* contains guidelines for instruction that will satisfy the requirements of the CCSS, and prepare students for materials they will encounter in the PARCC testing process.
- The *PARCC test* replaces the ISAT test as the measure for acquired knowledge and mastery of skills in core academic subject areas.

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- *Lesson plans* are the instructional units and materials teachers choose to use to convey knowledge and develop students' skills mastery of Mathematical concepts (these may come from sources like Engage NY, Everyday Math, etc.).
- *Mode of delivery* for Math instruction *at the elementary level* is the Guided Math approach, which functions similarly to the Guided Reading group instruction long-used in BPS classrooms, and which may include co-teaching with the gifted coach, flexible grouping, and/or gifted-identified clustering. *At the middle school level*, students in seventh and eighth grade who were previously accelerated one- or two-grade levels will still receive Mathematics instruction at that level. Students who made the transition from fifth to sixth grade this year (2014-15) were re-evaluated for placement in Mathematics courses levels I, II, or III at Rotolo Middle School (RMS). Math I, II, and III represent instruction at grade level, grade level and one trimester of acceleration, or two trimesters of one-grade-level acceleration plus one trimester of two-grade-level acceleration, respectively. As a result of this evaluation process, not all fifth grade students who previously received instruction that was at the highest level of acceleration in elementary school were placed in Math III courses at RMS. Some of those students were instead enrolled in the Math II level course.

Information shared by Mrs. Fiorenza and Dr. Skomer regarding changes in curriculum and instruction beginning this 2014-15 academic year are summarized in the following points:

At the elementary school level:

- 1) *Students formerly receiving gifted services in Mathematics would continue to do so under the new model.*
- 2) *Students would receive Math instruction in a "Guided Math" model (piloted last year at HCS, with reported success)*
- 3) *Students would still work with their building's Gifted Coach on alternate days, but in many cases gifted coaches would be "pushing in" to classrooms, co-teaching or coaching the classroom teacher. This allows students to remain in their classroom (minimizing disruption), and also provides a professional development opportunity for regular classroom teachers.*
- 4) *Beginning at the third grade level this year, students will no longer be accelerated (moved up a grade level) in Mathematics. Instead, teachers will use a curriculum compacting model to instruct gifted and high-ability Math learners. Stated simply, when students show understanding and mastery of new concepts, teachers can move through the material in that topic area much more quickly, use less-repetitive skills practice methods, go deeper into study of that concept and use more applied skills lessons, or move into the next topic area once students display mastery at a pace more rapid than their typical-learner peer groups.*
- 5) *Teachers will utilize pre-assessments, formative assessments and summative assessments to determine and adjust pacing and instructional content. At the third grade level, gifted coaches will co-teach with classroom teachers those students who show early mastery of new concepts in a "gifted cluster" for that unit, which is a similar-ability, flexible grouping of students.*
- 6) *Gifted students will still be identified utilizing the same criteria that has been used in previous years, and will be included in the cluster of students who will receive instruction at a modified*

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pace and/or utilizing "ready-made" extension or enrichment lessons when mastery is demonstrated through pre- or formative-assessments.

- 7) *This year, after voluntarily attending professional development workshops led by Drs. Skomer and Wright over the summer, elementary teachers can "opt in" as a grade level team to teaching using the above described instructional methods in order to align with CCSS in Mathematics. Next year, the 2015-16 academic year, begins this type of instruction across the district.*
- 8) *Teams of teachers utilizing the new approaches for instruction were asked to create lesson plans that satisfied Common Core state standards. In some cases teams purchased or borrowed materials from other states (i.e. Engage New York); other teams chose to utilize commercially produced lesson plans from educational textbook vendors. Many teams are using a blend of materials for instruction. In all cases, selection of course materials that satisfy CCSS is teacher-directed.*
- 9) *A math leadership team with representatives from the elementary, middle school and high school is guiding this transition. At each grade level, teacher task forces are working to write lessons and assessments to support the district curriculum. At the elementary level, grade-level teams have meet once and will meet two more times this year to share and articulate across the district. Teacher grade-level teams are also being given release time to work together to develop lessons aligned with the curriculum. These meetings are the mechanism to promote communication between grade-level teams of teachers across the district about instructional methods and materials needed to make the shift to the new CCSS curriculum guidelines and instructional practices suggested by the Illinois State Board of Education.*

In all cases, parents who approached CANDO during the summer months with concerns or questions about upcoming changes to Mathematics curriculum and instruction were advised to speak with their building principal. The information summarized above was also systemically shared with parents who had specific questions about upcoming changes in Mathematics curriculum and instruction in BPS101. In addition, the above information was shared with all parents who attended CANDO's Back-to-school Picnic in August, prior to the start of the 2014-15 school year.

Elementary School Parents' Anecdotal Feedback

- *Confusion exists about how BPS101 is approaching the change in delivery of Mathematics curriculum that aligns to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). While some parents received information from their child's classroom teacher at curriculum night, others heard both from their classroom teacher and saw a recorded presentation about CCSS and changes in instruction from their building principal.*
- *Parents were told by their classroom teachers who "opted in" to instruction based on CCSS that lesson plans would be "created as we go", and that students in many cases would not be utilizing textbooks for instruction. Parents could expect to see a variety of course materials from a variety of sources this year. This makes it difficult for students and parents to access on-line resources or textbook explanations that have been helpful at home when students are completing homework assignments. Parents are also concerned about and sympathetic to the*

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extra demands this places on their child's classroom teacher to "create" lesson modules, versus relying largely on uniform, pre-purchased lesson materials or texts.

- *Gifted service delivery has changed.* Parents at many curriculum nights were told that "students would no longer be accelerated". Instead, teachers and/or gifted coaches would adjust the pace and/or rigor of lessons to meet students' learning needs. Some students and parents report less frequent interaction with their building's gifted coach, and/or no apparent differentiation in classroom instruction to accommodate the needs of their gifted learner.
- Gifted Math students report that the *pace is "too slow"* and that they are tired of the repetition of concepts they have mastered more quickly than their peers.
- Parents are *not seeing evidence of pre-assessment nor formative assessments* that allow students to move more quickly through or at greater depth within a concept where they have demonstrated mastery.
- Many gifted Math students are expressing *frustration with the increased amount of written narrative required* in explanation of their Math processes.
- Students and parents are reporting an *increased amount of time that gifted math students are working independent of instruction* (on days when the gifted coach is at another building, for example) and are *instead completing worksheets in a group with their fellow cluster students.*
- Parents are reporting a *decreased rigor* in their student(s) experience with Mathematics and *less excitement/enjoyment* by their student(s) of their Math studies under the new model.
- Parents are *concerned that no one is tracking the various pilots* at the different schools and systematically determining which methods are achieving the best results.
- Parents are concerned that with so many instructional modules and lesson plan formats, students will arrive at their middle school experience with widely varied understanding of and competence in Mathematical concepts. In other words, that we *have lost equitable instruction in Math across the district.* This concern was best illustrated by the mother of third grade triplets who reported that her students' classroom experiences in the same grade level, at the same school, yield homework that reflects dramatic differences in the concepts being taught and the materials and methods being utilized.
- Parents *see the new model of instruction and the change from acceleration to curriculum compacting as a "setback"* in the development of gifted services in Mathematics, which is particularly frustrating as the clustering/acceleration model was very recently adopted and parents saw many advantages to their gifted students under the previous model and felt it better met their learner's needs.

Middle School Parents' Anecdotal Feedback

- Parents who approached RMS and district administrators with questions about evaluation and placement in gifted services at the middle school level received *inconsistent information about that process.* This may, in part, be due to lack of written process and procedural guidelines for the middle school gifted services in the Gifted Services Handbook. However, this heightens parents' anxieties and concerns about evaluation and appropriate placement for their student(s) in RMS Math courses. *Parents do not have a written resource at the middle school level that*

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compares to the information contained in the Gifted Services Handbook for elementary school gifted services information.

- *Some students who previously received accelerated Mathematics in the gifted cluster at their elementary schools, were, upon evaluation at the end of fifth grade, placed in the Math II course at RMS. This required those students to repeat learning of material and concepts for which they had already demonstrated mastery. Parents were told that teachers would be closely monitoring this sub-group of students within the Math II sections and modifying content and/or pace of instruction to reduce or eliminate repetition, but this has not been the case.*
- *Parents' request that a summative assessment of sixth grade Math conceptual understanding be used to determine placement in Math III vs. Math II for students who were being placed in Math II after receiving accelerated Math instruction in the gifted cluster at their elementary school was denied. That opportunity was not an option in the appeals process. This was seen as a frustrating setback for parents and students, and reportedly made the transition to middle school more difficult emotionally and in terms of self-concept for that group of students.*
- *Parents were told at curriculum night presentations that teachers in the Math II course at the seventh grade level were "making up lesson plans as [they] go", and that there would not be a textbook for that course. This has made it more difficult for parents to assist students with homework (without contextual reference typically available in a textbook) and made it more difficult to access on-line resources independently.*
- *Some parents are concerned that students will not progress as quickly or as far in the series of Math courses offered in BPS101 (into high school) because of the changes in course content at the levels of instruction in Math II and Math III.*
- *Some parents express the concern that there is less opportunity for creative or out-of-the-box Math thinking within the new curriculum guidelines and instruction.*

Conclusion

Despite efforts at individual buildings to verbally communicate information about changes in Mathematics curriculum and instruction, there remains a lot of confusion for parents and students about how these changes are being implemented. While most parents agree in theory with the new curriculum and approach to instruction, in practice parents are not seeing elements of the new approach they thought would benefit their students.

At the elementary level specifically, parents are reporting less perceived influence and/or instruction from gifted coaches at the elementary level. They are also not seeing evidence of multiple assessment opportunities and the resulting differentiation in instruction that would benefit gifted learners through extension, enrichment, curriculum compacting and/or acceleration with demonstrated mastery of concepts. They are experiencing frustrated students who seem to be losing their interest in and excitement for the previously stimulating subject area of Mathematics because of a slowed pace and unnecessary repetition of learned concepts. Parents are concerned that the demands being placed on

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educators to assemble their own lesson plans and materials are unfair and unreasonable, and not the best use of teachers' time and talents.

At the middle school level, parents are concerned about appropriate placement and the lack of written processes/procedures delineating the gifted services structure at RMS. In some courses where no text for the course is being utilized, parents are sympathetic to the demands being placed on their students' instructors to compile course material and concerned that their students' learning needs are being best served by the "create as you go" approach to course materials.

The mantra that CANDO has encouraged parents to adopt in all of this transition is to "be patient and vigilant". CANDO has consistently encouraged parents to discuss their concerns and questions with their students, their classroom teacher, and their building administrators.

The final attachment to this position paper will discuss CANDO's recommendations to address the concerns outlined in this portion of the document.