



MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 18-129

TO: Trustees
Student Trustees

FROM: Jennifer Adams, Director of Education
Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services

DATE: 26 October 2018

RE: **Response to Notice of Motion re: Tiered Interventions for Elementary Students with Giftedness**

A number of questions relating to tiered intervention, elementary gifted programming and resource allocation were raised at the 16 October 2018 Committee of the Whole meeting. The Committee passed a motion, but asked staff to provide clarification prior to the motion being considered at the Board meeting of 30 October 2018. A summary of the specific questions and answers is detailed below. Over the past two weeks, staff has reflected on the concerns and questions raised by the community and trustees. Staff is very concerned about a motion which privileges one exceptionality over all others. However, staff also recognizes the concerns raised and believe there are three things that could be done to address these issues:

1. Primary Gifted Specialized Program Classes

The Primary Gifted Specialized Program Class is currently located at one site - Roch Carrier Elementary School. Roch Carrier is a K-6 school which currently offers a Primary Gifted Program Class and a Gifted Program Junior Class. As the number of students in the primary program has declined, there has been confusion about how to operationalize the program with a small number of students in grades one and two. Operational changes could be implemented to reduce the confusion and frustration and ensure access to grade one and two students should this level of support be required. Going forward, staff will clarify that the program at Roch Carrier includes:

- Gifted Specialized Program Classes for students in grades 1-6 (Primary/Junior)

This ensures the program offering for students at all grade levels (1-6); the actual number of classes and class configurations will be determined by the students enrolled in the program. For example, one year the primary program could be one class of students in grades 1-3 and one class of students in grades 4-6;

another year it could be three classes (1/2; 3/4; 5/6); another year it could be one class of grades 1-4 and one class of grades 5/6. This approach ensures the program availability but allows for operational flexibility based on students enrolled in each grade. The program criteria would remain the same.

2. Improved messaging within the District

In the course of the discussions on this topic, it has become clear that there is a need for improved messaging to staff throughout the District. This includes more clarification about the use of tiered interventions; the process for placement of students in a specialized program class; and our commitment to the Gifted program. The feedback received indicates that the decline in enrolment in the elementary gifted program classes may in part be affected by a lack of clarity by staff about the availability of gifted specialized program class offerings, specifically for students in grades one and two, and the viability of these classes. As a system we need to ensure that all staff are aware of the full range of supports for gifted students and that our schools are equipped to support gifted learners in the regular classroom and in specialized program classes.

3. Improved messaging to parents

The need for improved messaging to parents is twofold; there is a need for improved messaging about tiered intervention and programming for gifted students generally so that all parents are aware of the supports and resources available for gifted learners. In addition, the need for improved communication with parents of students who are being supported through tiered intervention and/or specialized class placement. This is an area that will require some work centrally and work at the school level to ensure parents are getting timely feedback.

The motion approved at Committee presents three concerns; it treats one exceptionality differently from all others; the language in the first clause is unclear in terms of how the program access is to be managed; and it directs a broad based policy review which may not be warranted and will require considerable time which could otherwise be spent on improving program delivery.

Staff does not recommend treating one exceptionality differently than others. The tiered approach to intervention, universal design for learning, and differentiated instruction are evidence-based approaches to supporting all learners, including those with giftedness. Staff believe that Tier 3 supports and the specialized program class model should be available to serve students requiring the highest level of support and whose needs cannot be met in the regular classrooms with accommodations and modifications.

The first clause of the motion incorporates language which is based on an older version of the criteria sheet and is not current practice. It seeks to suspend the use of tiered intervention, suggests that students be granted access to the program based on “wanting access” plus criteria, but also maintains the need for an IPRC. Staff is concerned that this is unclear and creates expectations in the community that cannot be

achieved operationally. Additionally, psychology staff in Learning Support Services has expressed concern that the implementation of the motion as currently worded may put them in conflict with the professional obligations of their college.

The motion also directs a review of the Board's Special Education Policy. The undertaking of a comprehensive policy review has significant workload implications and pedagogically, tiered interventions are a recognized standard of practice. Staff is of the opinion that the concerns raised about tiered intervention, learning supports and program access for gifted students can be addressed through the strategies noted above. The undertaking of a comprehensive policy review may actually impede progress.

Summary of Detailed Questions Raised by Committee and Parents

The following information is provided to the Board in response to the questions raised:

1. What can be done to correct the mixed messaging parents are receiving regarding tiered interventions?

In the course of the Gifted discussion, it has become clear that there is confusion about tiered intervention and a need for additional communication and clarification within the District and with the parent community. This includes more information about the tiered approach to intervention, information about access to specialized program classes, and there is also a need to address the delays some families are experiencing in ensuring suitable supports are in place for their children. For families receiving supports, there is a need for consistent communication with parents that clearly articulate both the interventions in place and their child's performance as a result of those interventions.

Clarification regarding messaging is noted as an action item above.

In addition, enhancements to the parent portal of the District website will also allow parents direct access to resource information that will help to explain the kinds of supports that might be expected to support their child in the regular classroom (see Question #8).

2. Why would we treat the gifted exceptionalities differently from other exceptionalities and what are the resource implications?

Staff does not recommend treating one exceptionalities differently than others. The tiered approach to intervention, universal design for learning, and differentiated instruction are evidence-based approaches to supporting all learners, including those with giftedness. Staff believe that Tier 3 supports and the specialized program class model should be available to serve students requiring the highest level of support and whose needs cannot be met in the regular classrooms with accommodations and modifications.

In terms of resource implications, the most significant implication is for transportation costs. Caution should be exercised in interpreting these estimates due to the variability

of the assumptions on which they are made (e.g., number of students requiring transportation, length of trips, etc.). The estimates for transportation implications are presented in Appendix A. Based on the assumption of approximately 700 students placed in specialized program classes for giftedness, the District would have to reallocate approximately \$800,000 from other programs to accommodate an increased expenditure for transportation.

In addition, OSTA has determined that 80% of elementary gifted students are transported on small vehicles - vans and cars. Due to the current driver shortage, OSTA has indicated that they would not have the capacity to accommodate a significant increase in the number of elementary students requiring small vehicle transportation.

3. What is the total number of elementary gifted specialized program classes and how has that number changed over time?

There are currently 20 specialized program classes (2018-2019) for students with giftedness in grades 1 to 8. This represents a reduction of 10 classes since 2013-2014. Additional information is provided in Appendix B.

4. How many students in grades 1-4 meet the cognitive criteria for giftedness?

Currently, 52 students are identified with giftedness through the IPRC process between grades 1 and 4 across the District. It should be noted that not all of these students would meet the profoundly gifted (99.6th percentile) criteria for placement into a specialized program class.

5. What is the total number of elementary students identified with giftedness and where are they being served?

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Identified Gifted	1,096	1,070	985	850	675
Specialized Program Class	692	677	633	543	416
Regular Program	404	393	352	307	259

6. What are the regulatory requirements for Identification, Placement, and Review Committees and is the motion in compliance with the legislation?

Identification, Placement and Review Committees (IPRC) are set out through Ontario Regulation 181/98. The role of the IPRC is to:

- determine whether the student is, or is not, exceptional;
- identify a specific exceptionality, or exceptionalities, if applicable;
- identify the areas of strength and areas of need of the student;
- recommend an appropriate placement in a program designed to meet the identified needs of the student; or
- serve as an annual review for students with special education needs

The regulation stipulates that the committee must consider all information it considers relevant (e.g., education assessment, with consent a psychological assessment or medical information, parent input, etc.). This would also include an indication of how the child is performing in the regular classroom to assist in determining strengths and needs and whether a specialized program class would better meet the needs of the student. This information is also reviewed by the school's multi-disciplinary team when considering a referral to a specialized program class.

It is the opinion of staff that in the absence of an understanding of the supports implemented in the regular class placement, it is inappropriate to determine a student's strengths and needs. Moreover, it would be impossible to determine without these details, if a regular class placement would or can meet their needs or if the student's needs could better be met in a specialized class placement.

7. What is the criteria for admission into the gifted specialized program class?

The criteria for the gifted specialized program class is attached in Appendix C.

8. Why was the criteria for admission into the gifted specialized program class changed?

Criteria for all specialized program class placements are reviewed and amended annually. Report No, 15-029 *Specialized Programs Criteria Sheet Update (Revised)* provides some background information. Please note that the criteria sheets in that report have subsequently been amended and updated to reflect best practice and current understanding of supports for students. Prior to 2014, the criteria sheets for each exceptionality had been reviewed separately and, as a result, the criteria sheets varied considerably with several inconsistencies across the exceptionalities. In addition, significant changes to the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the release of Learning for All (2013), and updates to the assessment materials (i.e., release of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V) further necessitated changes to the criteria sheets.

9. Where can parents find information regarding supports for gifted students?

The resource “Special Education Service Delivery Model in the OCDSB: A Guide for Parents Of Students With Giftedness” can be found at:

<https://ocdsb.ca/cms/One.aspx?portalId=55478&pageId=213809>

Further, with the addition of the OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom and the OCDSB Interest Guide, parents and educators would have additional resources to enhance their understanding of and ability to meet the needs of all learners, including those with giftedness.

10. Staff comment regarding the request to produce an annual report, beginning no later than the end of May 2019, detailing the number of applications and the number of children receiving placements in all congregated programs at both the elementary and secondary level. The report shall also include the details on any waitlist for all congregated programs, by Geographic Zone.

It would be exceptionally challenging to present accurate data prior to the end of the school year. Offers for placements occur on an ongoing basis and often right to the end of June each year. The most accurate snapshot of data regarding the outcomes of the spring referral and placement process would be the following October.

The special education policy and elementary program framework, which speaks to the use of tiered intervention has been included as Appendix D and E, respectively.

Please contact Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services at 613-596-8211 ext. 8254 if you should have any questions.

Attach.

cc Senior Staff
Manager Board Services
Corporate Records