



**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)  
Report No. 18-100**

**10 October 2018  
16 October 2018**

**Update to the Elementary Gifted Review**

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**PURPOSE:**

1. To report back to the Board on the status of the work done by staff and the Gifted Advisory Group on the Board motion regarding Gifted programming and to stand down the Gifted Advisory Group.

**CONTEXT:**

2. At the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of 20 September 2016, Report 16-113 Gifted Review was presented for discussion. The report provided a literature review and a jurisdictional scan, as well as qualitative and quantitative research including findings from focus group discussions with students, staff and parents. A follow-up staff report was presented in December 2016 and, at that time, the Board directed staff to work with Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and an advisory group to expand options to be presented to the public to improve the effectiveness of services for gifted students and to increase equity of access for under-represented groups. The motion also directed staff to undertake related work in a number of other areas related to giftedness (see Appendix A - Board Motion 20 December 2016 and summary of related reports on giftedness). Several reports have been presented to the Board in relation to the other parts of the motion.

A report on the work of the Gifted Advisory Group was presented in June 2017 and explained the advisory group's interest in pursuing the development of a pilot based on a Renzulli-type approach to supporting students with giftedness. Since the spring of 2017, considerable work has been done by the Gifted Advisory Group and staff to develop a model for a pilot project. It has been

challenging to develop a model which supports the objectives established by the Gifted Advisory Group and which can be operationalized within the boundaries of collective agreements, legislative responsibilities and financial resources. In June 2018, staff presented the *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* and the *OCDSB Interest Academy*, as possible resources for moving forward. Members of the Gifted Advisory Group have indicated that this approach does not adequately reflect the depth of ideas shared during the meetings of the Gifted Advisory Group and they do not endorse this approach.

Work related to the review of the gifted program and the subsequent work with the Gifted Advisory Group has been underway for over three years. A considerable amount has been learned in the process. As more students are being served in the regular classroom, efforts have been made to increase staff capacity and make materials available to support teachers in meeting the needs of all students, including those with giftedness. The two resource documents that have been developed could be very useful to supporting elementary gifted learners both in the regular classroom and in gifted specialized program classes. At this time, the focus of staff's work must shift from discussions at the Gifted Advisory Group level to implementation of the learning resources.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS:**

### **3. Gifted Advisory Group**

The Gifted Advisory Group is comprised of representatives from SEAC, the Association for Bright Children (ABC), school principals, and Learning Support Services (LSS) staff (i.e., superintendent, system vice-principal, and psychologists). In addition, two external advisors were hired to act as a resource to the advisory group. For meetings held during the 2017-2018 school year, the Chair of SEAC also attended.

Since the spring of 2017, the Gifted Advisory Group has met eight times. Considerable work was done by the advisory group members in between formal meetings. Regular updates were provided at SEAC.

In June 2017, a report was presented to Committee of the Whole by the Gifted Advisory Group recommending that a pilot project based on an interest academy model be initiated at a small number of schools. This recommendation did not eliminate the consideration of other options for gifted programming at a later time, but for a minimum of two years, it was felt that a pilot should be implemented and monitored for its impact on gifted learners.

Over the fall of 2017, the Gifted Advisory Group continued to meet to identify the desired characteristics, success indicators and monitoring of the pilot. The advisory group identified the following essential elements:

- Enrichment opportunities provided for all students in the school over the duration of several weeks, multiple times per year;
- Creation of a talent pool for students requiring additional enrichment opportunities, including those who are identified as gifted;

- Organization of students into small, flexible groupings based on student interest across grades;
- Cross-curricular links and connection to the OCDSB Exit Outcomes;
- Use of technology and online resources to enable rich learning experiences;
- Curriculum compacting, where appropriate;
- Creation of authentic learning experiences for students; and
- Connection to community resources.

The advisory group identified the following indicators of success:

- Student participation in enrichment activities;
- Quality of student tasks within and beyond the curriculum;
- Student and parent satisfaction, representing both gifted and non-gifted learners;
- Equity of access for non-represented groups; and
- Gains in cognitive and non-cognitive areas.

As the prevalence of gifted students is possible within any population of students, it was recommended that the Interest Academies should occur in all schools. Schools selected for the pilot should be sufficiently large as to allow for appropriate timetabling and grouping of students and for the monitoring of the impact of the pilot on a reasonably-sized gifted cohort. One of the participating schools should be a host to gifted specialized program classes.

The next step was the operationalization of the pilot project and related professional development. This was the focus of discussions over the 2017-2018 school year. The goal was for implementation of the pilot project in the fall of 2018.

#### 4. **Operationalization of the Interest Academy Pilot Project**

In March 2018, based on discussions of the Gifted Advisory Group, staff presented a report to the advisory group to explore initiating a pilot project in the fall of 2018. As a result of concerns raised at that meeting, some community members of the Gifted Advisory Group were tasked with further expansion and description of the elements for a pilot. This proposal was shared with the advisory group on 2 April 2018 (See Appendix B - Gifted Advisory Group Submission re: Expanded Gifted Pilot).

The expanded proposal highlighted challenges and barriers to success and identified key activities across five themes:

1. Ensure all gifted students have equal and equitable access to all gifted supports;
2. Build daily interactions with peers who share similar learning needs;
3. Ensure children are learning every day;
4. Provide teachers with resources and supports to address special education needs; and
5. Provide all students with enrichment opportunities.

In addition, there was a recognition of the need to support gifted learners, students who are close to meeting the criteria for the identification of giftedness,

and all students. It also reiterated the District's commitment to provide a full range of special education programs and services, including regular classroom and specialized program class options.

Upon review of the community members' proposal, staff recognized that some elements could not be implemented as it would, in effect, create another program stream to the numerous and complex programs currently offered at the elementary level. Staff acknowledges that clear parameters for any work emerging from the Gifted Advisory Group should have been provided earlier in this process. However, careful consideration needs to be given to whether this is an appropriate format for structuring the work with such a complex and dynamic topic.

However, there were several elements of the expanded proposal that could not only be incorporated into current programs in the District, but could help enhance our work. Recognizing this, the Director tasked a multi-disciplinary staff team including Learning Support Services, Human Resources, Planning, and Curriculum Services to operationalize ideas discussed by the Gifted Advisory Group. This led to the creation of two deliverables:

- *The OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* (see Appendix C); and
- *The OCDSB Interest Academy* (see Appendix D).

Together, these documents address the essence of the Board motion and respond to two main concerns raised by parents during the gifted review:

1. Parents of children with giftedness in the regular classroom expressed confusion and/or dissatisfaction regarding the provision of programs and services for their children; and
2. Parents of children in the gifted specialized program classes expressed concern over the options for support in the regular program as well as concern regarding the possibility of a reduction of gifted specialized program classes.

The two documents provide a framework and resource materials for teachers to use in their classrooms as they make decisions on how best to support all learners, including those with giftedness.

These draft documents were shared in June 2018 with the Gifted Advisory Group.

## 5. **Overview of the Deliverables**

### ***OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom***

This document is intended to provide clarity with respect to the range of supports and services available to students with giftedness in the regular classroom. The guide encourages student, parent and teacher engagement in programming for gifted learners by raising awareness of strategies that support gifted learners.

The guide provides strategies and links to resources and research related to:

- Getting to Know your Learners (e.g., assessment for learning and Individual Education Plan (IEP) development);
- Instructional Supports (e.g., differentiation, creative and critical thinking);
- OCDSB Exit Outcomes (e.g., community of character, habits of mind);
- Student Well-Being (e.g., social-emotional supports, mindset);
- Other Supports (e.g., community resources, printed materials); and
- Equity (e.g., addressing equity, twice exceptional students).

In addition, an addendum was developed to provide a “year at a glance” with suggested guidelines for teachers, Learning Support Teachers (LSTs), and support staff as they plan to support students with giftedness. This addendum highlights key areas of work for principals, classroom teachers, LSTs, and the Learning Support Consultant (LSC) with responsibility for gifted learners. These responsibilities are further broken down by term, legislated requirements and best practices in supporting students with giftedness.

#### 6. ***OCDSB Interest Academy***

This document provides a framework/guide for educators that outlines an approach to accessing the curriculum through inquiry-based learning in support of all learners, including those with giftedness. Various interest-based inquiry learning opportunities have existed in our District for a number of years. As the concept of an Interest Academy emerged from the work of the Gifted Advisory Group, it provided staff with an opportunity to develop centrally an *OCDSB Guide for Educators - a vehicle for accessing the curriculum through inquiry-based learning*. The guide reflects the various project-based learning initiatives that are currently taking place in our District (e.g., Genius Hour, passion-based projects) and provides a tool for teachers, regardless of their previous experience with the concept, to implement this approach as a mechanism to differentiate the learning for their students. The guide allows for links to be made to the Ontario Curriculum, the OCDSB Exit Outcomes, Learning Skills and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The framework is based on a six-week cycle run in three phases of Project Planning, Project Work, and Project Sharing & Reflection. It incorporates a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach that is intended to meet the needs of all learners, including students with giftedness. The flexible design of the Interest Academy allows for individual teachers or groups of teachers to participate, as well as opportunities for cross-grade and cross-curricular learning.

While this model cannot be mandated as an instructional requirement for teachers, it is endorsed by the District as a framework for supporting learners in all classrooms. As a result of the flexibility offered by the framework, teachers could use the model and adapt it over time based on student needs, collaboration with other teachers (either cross-curricular or cross-grade), and as their familiarity with the process grows.

As mentioned, there are several common elements in the proposal received by the Gifted Advisory Group and the documents created by staff. Some of these common elements are presented in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Some Common Elements in the Gifted Advisory Group's Work</b>	
<b>Elements from the Gifted Advisory Group Expanded Proposal</b>	<b><i>OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom and the OCDSB Interest Academy</i></b>
Recognition of the need to support three groups of students: those who meet criteria of Identification as Gifted, those who are close to meeting criteria, and providing enrichment opportunities for all students.	Using a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to learning allows educators to focus on providing opportunities for all learners based on their interests and to respond effectively to the strengths and needs of all students.
Recommends drawing on cross-curricular links and connection to the OCDSB Exit Outcomes.	Through the <i>OCDSB Interest Academy</i> model, students would have the opportunity to see/experience cross-curricular links to the Ontario curriculum, as well as connections to Learning Skills, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the OCDSB Exit Outcomes.
Provides opportunities to build daily interactions with peers who share similar learning needs.	The <i>OCDSB Interest Academy</i> encourages students to share their ideas with each other and to conference with one another with teacher support. One objective of this work is to connect students based on similar interests and/or learning strengths, with the option of flexible grouping.
Raise awareness of under-represented groups, inaccurate preconceptions of what giftedness looks like, the twice exceptional learner and other exceptionalities or challenges masking gifted abilities and addressing those barriers.	The <i>OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom</i> addresses these concerns by providing staff with information as well as links to further research articles that support these key themes. Within this guide one main pillar is Equity, considerations including addressing equity, twice exceptional students and common myths about gifted learners.
Ensure that children are learning every day using student-centred learning opportunities and to improve IEP development.	The year-at-a-glance addendum to the <i>OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom</i> was created to provide all LSTs with a range of activities/strategies to ensure high quality learning opportunities for students with giftedness. It helps to link the LST with the classroom teacher to ensure that the student is well supported throughout the year. It allows students to co-develop their IEP and for student voice to be at the forefront of their

	learning.
Provide teachers with resources and supports to address special education needs.	<i>OCDSB Guide for Supporting for Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom</i> has active links to reproducible lesson plans and hundreds of resources to support the instruction of the gifted learner. These resources offer varying levels of support for teachers who may be new to teaching students with giftedness and those who have more experience.

**7. Gifted Advisory Committee Response to the Deliverables**

At the conclusion of the Gifted Advisory Group meeting on 11 June 2018, the group was asked to consider whether they would be interested in the District piloting the two resources at three school sites in varied neighbourhoods across the city. It was suggested that the pilot run for two years with an evaluation including feedback from students, parents and educators.

Following the June 2018 meeting during which staff presented the *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* and the *OCDSB Interest Academy*, communication was received from some of the community members on the Gifted Advisory Group. These members clearly expressed dissatisfaction with the work completed by staff. They stated that the deliverables were not an adequate reflection of the depth of ideas shared during the meetings of the Gifted Advisory Group. They requested that it be clearly stated that they do not endorse this work.

At this time, the Gifted Advisory Group appears to have reached a point whereby it has completed as much work as can be done. While there is dissatisfaction among some of the community members, staff do believe that the discussions by the Gifted Advisory Group as a whole have led to the development of two important resources that will support elementary gifted learners both in the regular classroom and in gifted specialized program classes.

**8. Update on the Status of the Board Motions:**

The Board motion that established the Gifted Advisory Group included several other recommendations. The following summary is an update of the work done to date on all of the parts in the motion.

*A. THAT staff work with SEAC and an Advisory Group that would include SEAC representation to expand options to be presented to the public to improve the effectiveness of services for gifted students and to increase equity of access for under-represented groups.*

Report 17-053 in June 2017 provided a first update on the motion and detail on the work of the Gifted Advisory Group. Additional information regarding the work of the group is outlined in this report. While the challenges of the Gifted Advisory Group have been acknowledged above, the work of the Gifted

Advisory Group did lead to the creation of two resources that will improve the effectiveness of supports and services for gifted students and their teachers.

**It is acknowledged that the extent to which the Gifted Advisory Group can do its work has been completed and should be stood down by the Board.**

*B. THAT the Congregated Gifted Program, transition to a specialized class location model using geographically defined catchment areas (Geographic Model).*

*C. THAT staff bring forward an interim report on the development of options by the end of May 2017 and a final report including a plan for the Geographic Model transition, including costing, no later than the end of December 2017.*

Report 17-092, presented in January 2018, addressed issues relating to the implementation of the geographic model in both elementary and secondary panels. In that report, staff recommended that the elementary gifted program not be shifted to the geographic model at this time. Shifts in enrolment patterns, decisions related to student learning and accommodation planning, implementation of a second International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and the complexities of minimizing transitions for students have all impacted the ability to shift to the geographic model for elementary gifted students.

Additional reports relating to the transition of the secondary gifted program to the geographic model were presented in April 2018 and June 2018. The second report explained that there would be a phase out of the gifted specialized program class at Merivale High School and program boundaries would be adjusted accordingly. This brought an end to the secondary gifted review.

**Transition to a specialized class location model for elementary and secondary gifted specialized program classes will not take place at this time, but may be considered in coordination with future accommodation reviews.**

*D. THAT staff bring forward a report with a plan, including costing, of implementing a universal screening tool, once the Ministry of Education has released the new Gifted definition, or no later than end of October 2017.*

A discussion report, Report No. 17-073, on the development of a universal screening tool was presented to Committee of the Whole in November 2017. That report identified the potential costs of implementing a universal screening tool and acknowledged that the implementation of such a tool might be premature given that a new Ministry definition of giftedness was expected. To date, the Ministry has not released the new definition for giftedness.

Current practice is that parents and/or teachers may refer students to their school's multidisciplinary team to discuss student needs, including cognitive assessment. The District is currently using the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT 7) for this initial screening. This initial assessment is usually



completed by trained school staff and the school psychologist is consulted to determine if further assessment is required.

**The current process for identification of gifted students will remain in place.**

*E. THAT staff bring forward a plan including costing for professional development/coaching support for school based staff working in the regular class with elementary Gifted students no later than March 2017.*

The *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* and the *OCDSB Interest Academy* are two comprehensive resource documents that provide teachers with the tools to support students with giftedness in their classrooms. Some schools have heard about this work and have already approached LSS and Curriculum Services interested in piloting the materials. Associated costs can be covered within existing operational budgets.

In addition, ongoing development of the “Gifted@OCDSB” Google+ community provides an online space for teachers to connect, share resources/materials, and learn about meeting the needs of students with giftedness.

**These draft resource materials will be used in a limited number of schools over the coming months in preparation for a broader release in the fall of 2019.**

## 9. **Conclusions**

Two years following the release of the Gifted Review, considerable additional work has been undertaken by staff and community members. This work is detailed in the five reports presented to Board over the past two years. Notwithstanding the work undertaken, the significant complexities of the issues has made it challenging to put forward recommendations for change.

Although the pilot proposed by the Gifted Advisory Group could not be operationalized as presented, their work has resulted in the creation of two documents which will support the ongoing learning of staff in our District as well as address some of the concerns raised by parents of children with giftedness. The OCDSB now has an endorsed framework for supporting all learners. These documents allow for precision and personalization of learning experiences to meet the needs of learners, including those with giftedness.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

10. All members of the Gifted Advisory Group have dedicated a significant amount of time to improve supports and services to students with giftedness. Associated costs for the work of the Gifted Advisory Group, including the fees for the external providers, were covered by departmental budgets.

Looking forward, associated costs with respect to the distribution of the two documents, as well as related staff training, will be covered within existing operational budgets.

## **COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION:**

11. As noted in the above report, the Gifted Advisory Group met eight times. Updates on the work of the Gifted Advisory Group and the Board motions were discussed at SEAC and presented to the Committee of the Whole and Board.

## **STRATEGIC LINKS:**

12. This report links to the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 priority of Learning: Promote and encourage the personalization of learning and enhance instructional practice to meet the individual needs of learners and Stewardship: Enhance operational practices to effectively and responsibly manage human and financial resources in support of students.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT the Gifted Advisory Group be acknowledged for their contributions and be formally stood down by the Board.

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Peter Symmonds, Superintendent  
of Learning Support Services

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Jennifer Adams  
Director of Education and  
Secretary of the Board

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix A Board Motion 20 December 2016 and summary of related reports on giftedness
- Appendix B Gifted Advisory Group Submission re: Expanded Gifted Pilot
- Appendix C OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom
- Appendix D OCDSB Interest Academy: A vehicle for accessing the curriculum through inquiry-based learning. A Guide for Educator Teams