

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

A Renzulli inspired model was proposed to provide the framework for the pilot. The following objectives aim to organize and focus a variety of options to improve effectiveness of services for gifted students and to increase equity of access for under-represented groups that the Gifted Advisory Group has discussed over the last year.

Based on Renzulli's work, the pilot will look at three targeted groups within the regular classroom with varying levels of supports and programming. Traditional Specialized Program Classes (Congregated) will continue to be a key part of the continuum of services for gifted students.

The three groups in the regular classroom will be referred to as follows in this report:

Group 1 - Gifted learners

Group 2 - Students close to meeting the criteria for gifted identification

Group 3 - All students

The OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report literature review summary states "it is recommended that school districts strive to provide as full a range of program options as is feasible, with the following common elements: intellectual peer interaction; flexible grouping; differentiation of curriculum and instruction; continuous academic progress; continuity of support services; and teachers with specialized training in Gifted education." (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 page 59).

These themes are addressed by the following five objectives:

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
5. Provide all students with enrichment opportunities

Ideas for programming, delivery models, supports for students and staff, identification and improving access to appropriate programming either in the classroom or in congregated are explored within those objectives for consideration in the pilot. What follows under each objective's key activities is meant to be a list of possibilities not demands that must be all put in place on day one. The pilot schools along with senior staff will work to prioritize items to pilot at each site. Over time through trial and ongoing evaluation, a core of expertise, successful interventions and supports should emerge.

Objective 1: Ensure all gifted students have equal and equitable access to all gifted supports

The Gifted Review raised concerns about equity both in identification and access to interventions, supports and Specialized Program Classes (Congregated).

From the Gifted Review summary “research indicates that students from diverse and marginalized populations (e.g., cultural/linguistic, lower SES, twice exceptional, and Indigenous learners) continue to be disproportionately under-identified for participation in Gifted programs” (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 page 58). Although the OCDSB does not have data on most variables, there is data that shows that girls are under-identified and under-represented in the Specialized Program Classes (Congregated).

There are two pieces to this, the first is identification and the second is access to appropriate programming whether that is programming in a regular classroom or programming within a Specialize Program Class (Congregated).

Current challenges and barriers to address:

For the identification piece, Group 1 will continue to use the OCDSB criteria for gifted requiring traditional testing. Group 2 will be looser and allow students that have not met the requirements to also access gifted programming. This could be because they haven’t been through testing or because they were tested but didn’t meet the gifted criteria.

This aims to improve equity and expand access. Expanding to have a larger pool is more likely to catch more of the students who are gifted because they’ll (hopefully) end up with similar access to gifted supports by being in group 2. However, the factors that are influencing the current equity issues are not solely linked to testing (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 pages 16-17 mentions some possibilities). Care must be taken in the identification process design, communication and implementation to ensure equity is achieved in both groups. They both should be closely monitored for inequities and if any appear they need to be understood and addressed.

The access piece of this is complex. Most current gifted students require considerable advocacy from parents and teachers to access gifted programming in the classroom and accessing the Specialized Program Classes (Congregated). This advocacy is dependent on attitudes, expectations, knowledge, communication skills, time and values (among other things). Majority of underrepresented groups rely more on teachers to fulfill their advocacy needs because their parent(s) face challenges in advocating for them. To fully address equity issues, the pilot needs to look holistically at improving the system’s knowledge and advocacy for all gifted students and reduce barriers in access for the whole continuum of gifted supports. -

Given the dramatic drop in applications for Specialized Program Classes (Congregated) - including the eradication of lower grades - since the instigation of the new criteria and policy three years ago the parent experiences described at CoW and SEAC earlier in the review process should be given due consideration. It is important to understand the root cause of this decline based on facts. There is an urgent need to clearly define, and to communicate, the board's new gifted policy and procedures to parents, principals, LSTs and teachers, to fix any inequities in access to special education supports being caused by widespread misunderstandings of OCDSB policy. Given the nature of the kinds of barriers parents have reported, it is highly likely that already-marginalized students, including Indigenous students, English Language Learners, and low SES are the most affected by these barriers and they are also the least heard from.

Key activities:

Possibilities could include but are not limited to:

- Encouraging early identification and access to gifted programming
- Implement universal screening to catch students that will be missed by teacher based screening
- Identifying and addressing barriers to equitable identification. Possible barriers might include
 - Inaccurate preconceptions of what gifted looks like (could include English Language Learners)
 - Behaviour/achievement expectations
 - other exceptionalities or challenges masking gifted abilities
 - Testing requirements (and the 1 and 2-year limits on results) for students wishing to be IPRC'd and/or who are applying to the Specialized Program Classes in elementary, intermediate and secondary. If school based testing isn't available this depends on parents paying for costly private testing
- Identifying and addressing barriers to equitable access - especially those which create a burden of time, resources and/ or cultural-savviness on parents - must be supported by robust evidence. Possible barriers might include
 - Significant time and skills required for advocacy to access supports
 - Behaviour - The base need might be the same but a gifted child that quietly implodes will proceed through the tiered interventions differently than gifted child that vents their frustrations outward
 - Long commutes due to limited locations of Specialized Program Classes (Congregated), especially for the primary grades that are currently only offered in Kanata
 - Other exceptionalities or challenges masking gifted abilities
 - Inaccurate preconceptions of what gifted looks like (could include English Language Learners)
- Following up with schools that have zero (or extremely few) gifted students to increase awareness and actively seek to find gifted students that have been overlooked.

- Provide parents and all schools with transparent and clearly documented policy and procedures with explanatory guidance
- Make it possible for parents to apply for Specialized Program Classes (Congregated) without full approval from their home school (and/or some sort of appeal process for those told they can't apply).

Key participants:

- Groups 1 and 2
- Note: Similar resources barriers have been experienced in some other exceptionalities, notably LD; these efforts to improve transparency and accountability should be applicable across all exceptionalities

Key success measures:

- Having an understanding of who the under-represented groups are based on current statistics of students both in the regular classroom and in Specialized Program Classes (Congregated)
- If Universal Screening is not implemented, do detailed tracking of any testing of suspected gifted students (possible measures could include reasons for testing, test types, age at testing, wait times, outcomes, and factors related to suspected under-represented groups)
- Tracking the numbers of students who meet the board's gifted criteria but who are currently invisible because they have not been IPRC'd as well as those that have been IPRC'd. Collect detailed information so that progress can be measured and tracked with regards to equity focusing on the identified groups of interest.
- Tracking the numbers of children applying for and accepted into Specialized Program Classes (Congregated). Collect detailed information so that progress can be measured and tracked with regards to equity focusing on the identified groups of interest.
- Tracking the numbers of students who are identified to be part of group 2. Collect detailed information so that progress can be measured and tracked with regards to equity focusing on the identified groups of interest.
- Our identified, IEP-supported and group 2 populations are ~50% girls
- Our Specialized Program Class (Congregated) population is ~ 50% girls
- Evaluation at the board level shows consistent implementation of policy across schools
- Evaluation at the board level demonstrates that access to supports is based on student need and not contingent on parents investing major time, resources, research to persuade the school to initiate interventions
- Students and parents report consistent, fair and equitable application of rules.
- Parents report that parent-provided views and evidence of student need are taken seriously and not dismissed
- Processes to request and be considered for access to special education supports are demonstrably transparent, consistent, taking place on clear timelines and

documented (including access to: tiered supports and increasingly intensive tiered supports; IEPs; testing; identification; and applications to the Specialized Program Classes (Congregated))

- Similar policy, procedure and accountability changes are undertaken for other exceptionalities

Objective 2: Build daily interactions with peers who share similar learning needs

Pilot ways to increase opportunities for gifted learners to interact and work with their intellectual peers.

Current challenges and barriers to address:

The paragraph regarding peers from the summary in the OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report states “Gifted learners reported very different, largely positive perceptions of their experiences in special schools or specialized classes in comparison to students in typical schools or pull out programs. This is largely consistent with other findings of peer ability grouping: more favourable student attitude toward subject matter; greater development of students’ career interests; healthy social relationships; and high motivation.” (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 page 61)

Maximizing the amount of time students spend with peers who share similar learning needs and exploring flexibly groupings are thus key goals for the pilot.

Key activities:

Possibilities could include but are not limited to:

- Cluster grouping within classes
- Cross-class cluster grouping
- Multi-grade cluster grouping
- Pull-out sessions with other children who are gifted (within a grade and/or spanning multiple grades); and
- Cross-school interactions - virtual or in person if possible - especially key for schools with smaller numbers of gifted students and/or profoundly gifted who statistically are unlikely to have intellectual peers even within larger schools

Key participants:

- Groups 1 and 2

Key success measures:

- Both Gifted and Group 2 students spend time every day working with their peers who share similar learning needs
- We have robust evidence from students and parents that students are working with peers who share similar learning needs
- These peer interactions are included as tiered interventions in the Individual Education Plan (IEP), with documented goals, intervention, timelines, success measures and outcomes
- Gifted children report feeling as safe as the student population overall to be themselves, and able to share their passions with fellow students

Objective 3: Ensure children are learning, every day

“All I want is for my kid to have to work for as long, and as hard, as all the other kids in their class.” (Parent)

Student well-being requires not just similar peers, but also appropriate work. The two recommendations from the Gifted Review summary that align with this objective are differentiation of curriculum and instruction and continuous academic progress.

Pilot ways to ensure each child is learning in our classrooms: adjusting curriculum for every child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Current challenges and barriers to address:

All children need material that is hard enough to require mistakes, perseverance and hard work but not so hard as to be overwhelming. As one example, the review stated 67.6% of parents with gifted children in the regular class responded that their child’s academic needs were not well met (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113, page 102, table 22).

It is important that necessary special education accommodations and modifications are not treated as a reward or something that needs to be earned. Well behaved children shouldn’t be denied appropriate work because “they are doing fine”. Poorly-behaved children shouldn’t be denied appropriate work because they are not compliant with inappropriate work. Twice exceptional students’ non-gifted exceptionality should not be used as an excuse to deny gifted programming.

It is also important that it isn’t more of the same or more on top of their normal work. The key is to replace work that is not appropriate with work that is. This is a constant, ongoing and everyday need.

Key activities:

Some considerations of importance:

- All students need to be taught in order to be learning. Children need to be taught new material and not just allowed to do more or harder work by themselves. Differentiated instruction and not simply differentiated output
- Grouping of students instructionally by subject area for advanced curriculum work that would be flexibly organized and implemented based on students; documented level of learning within subject areas (grouping and differentiated instruction);
- Compacting, using a range of strategies (as outlined by Renzulli and by Shore) from pre-testing to move quickly to greater complexity; to merging two years into one, or three years into two
- The use of advanced curricula in core areas of learning at an accelerated rate;
- Embedding multiple higher order level thinking models and skills within core subject area teaching to enhance learning (Critical thinking skills);
- The use of inquiry as a central strategy to promote gifted student learning in multiple modalities (inquiry-based learning);
- The use of student-centered learning opportunities that are issue or problem based and are relevant to the students' world;
- Increased teaching speed and pace; compacting
- Increased depth
- Decreased repetition; pre-testing to avoid
- Increased complexity
- Modified approach to curriculum, multi-sensory teaching
- Providing challenge and opportunities to fail
- Encouraging risk taking in a safe, encouraging environment
- Learning study skills and learning how to learn
- Social training and supports
- Acceleration - the Gifted Review details 18 forms of acceleration (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 page 38). Pages 39-41 of the Gifted Review supports acceleration including the following statements "A significant and consistent body of research supports the integration of accelerative practices for Gifted and talented learners." and "accelerated students equal or surpass their non-accelerated peers in self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, social relationships, participation in extracurricular activities, and life satisfaction." Dr. Renzulli's publications as well as many of Dr. Shore's comments made in Advisory Group meetings repeatedly stressed the importance of a wide variety of compacting, accelerative and dual-enrollment practices to ensure access to appropriate curriculum.

Key success measures:

- Gifted students spend at least an hour every day working on tasks in their zone of proximal development (ZPD), especially in their areas of strength/ passion
- All students with demonstrated need for different work spend time every day working on tasks in their zone of proximal development (ZPD)
- Assessment of student's ZPD is based on transparent and consistently-applied measures of student knowledge and readiness (not compliance or achievement in the absence of appropriate curriculum)
- We have robust evidence from students and parents that students are being provided with more appropriate curriculum
- These curriculum modifications are included as tiered interventions in the IEP, with documented goals, intervention, timelines, success measures and outcomes

Objective 4: Provide teachers with resources and supports to address special education needs

The summary of the OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report states “What is clear from the research is that many if not most educators are ill-equipped to support the needs of Gifted students, often due to a lack of training and/or experience. Ongoing training and support could strengthen teacher capacity and give educators the tools they need to personalize learning, enhance instructional practice to meet individual needs, and improve and increase the educational pathways for every student as per the OCDSB’s Learning Objective.” (OCDSB Gifted Program Review Final Report 16-113 page 60)

Pilot the development of supports and materials for teachers to make the items in objective 3 easier to implement especially in today’s classrooms with wide varieties of needs. This aligns with the recommendation that teachers of gifted students receive specialized training in Gifted education.

Current challenges and barriers to address:

Gifted students are both infrequent and have a wide range of needs. Statistically, an elementary teacher will typically have a mildly gifted student in their class once every two years, and teach a profoundly gifted student perhaps once in their career. One student may need enrichment in math, another in history, the next in writing, while subsequent students might be focused on theoretical physics, military history, programming and other subjects outside the curriculum. It is therefore difficult for an individual teacher in the regular classroom to build up expertise in supporting gifted students. Instead, teachers must find new material for extension/depth/breadth/enrichment/etc. for each new student strength they encounter. If we want gifted students to be supported in the regular classroom, we need to make such support feasible. The literature review emphasized how difficult it is to provide Differentiated Instruction in practice, and the significant training and resources teachers needed if they are going to reach gifted students in their zone of

proximal development (ZPD) while also meeting the needs of the rest of their students in a regular classroom.

Key activities:

Possibilities could include but are not limited to:

- Defining expectations/ content for the “gifted program” in the regular classroom, including minimal and optimal levels of support
- Using Modified Expectations in the IEP as per Ontario Ministry document <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf> page 27
- Providing high quality samples of IEPs as guidelines and examples for parents, teachers and school staff
- Creating modules that define needs and goals, and provide guidance, curriculum, materials, resources and coaching, for supporting gifted students in the full range of (a) topics; (b) grades/ levels of work; and (c) depth/ complexity appropriate to a range of levels of giftedness in that topic area
- Dedicated staff to support and develop resources and materials for teachers to use
- Organizing toolkits that build on the Ontario Curriculum that contain enrichment ideas, activities and resources
- Increasing awareness of challenges common in the gifted population - intensity, perfectionism, sensory challenges, anxiety, twice exceptional, etc.
- Increasing awareness of the broad spectrum that gifted covers as well as an understanding of common twice exceptional profiles
- Developing and promoting an online discussion area for teachers to share resources and experiences
- Identifying any discrepancies between common teacher beliefs and research evidence regarding gifted identification, support, needs and challenges.
- Identifying barriers and challenges that teachers and staff feel they have in meeting the needs of all children in their class as well as gifted learners. What is required to better meet those needs? What can be done immediately to assist? What requires a longer term approach?

Key participants:

- Groups 1 and 2
- Note: Similar resources are equally needed and could be developed for all exceptionalities

Key success measures:

- We have robust evidence from teachers of the barriers to providing special education supports for gifted students in the regular classroom
- We have resources, including modules and coaching, that directly address those barriers
- We have robust evidence from teachers that the barriers are decreasing
- We have robust evidence from students and parents that gifted needs are being better met in the classroom
- Student and parent surveys find that IEPs are seen as a relevant and meaningful tool for special education support, and that IEPs are being followed
- IEP assessment shows that all gifted students have specific and appropriate interventions included in their IEP, with documented goals, intervention, timelines, success measures and outcomes. Successful interventions are maintained/ expanded, while unsuccessful interventions are replaced and scaled up in intensity
- Similar resources are developed and measured for other exceptionalities

Objective 5: Provide all students with enrichment opportunities

The Gifted Advisory Group also spent considerable time discussing school wide enrichment that all students would participate in.

Current challenges and barriers to address:

Reaching out, involving and coordinating experts in the community will likely be more challenging in some schools than others.

Key activities:

- Enrichment opportunities provided for all students in the school over the duration of several weeks, multiple times per year;
- 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.

Key participants:

- Groups 1, 2 and 3

Key success measures:

- 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.

PILOT LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

As the prevalence of gifted students is possible within any population of students, the pilot should occur in three types of schools:

- Low SES school;
- Middle SES school; and
- High SES school.

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.

Once the implementation of the pilot is approved, staff would undertake professional development for implementation of the pilot beginning in the Fall of 2018. The pilot would continue for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Monitoring activities would be undertaken throughout this time period.