SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE   **9 December 2020**
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE   **21 January 2021**

Report No. 20-110

Updates on Supports for Students with Giftedness (Elementary) in the OCDSB

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PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update to the Board on the pilot projects for learners with giftedness at the elementary level.

CONTEXT:

2. At the Board meeting on 30 October 2018, Trustees passed a motion that included the following element:

> **THAT** staff be directed to implement a pilot program which utilizes both the OCSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom and the OCDSB Interest Academy: A vehicle for accessing the curriculum through inquiry-based learning. A Guide for Educator Teams as soon as may be practical.

The pilots commenced in Spring 2019 with initial orientation and training for staff from the three schools who were invited to participate. Each school received a copy of the *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom*. Included with the guide was specific information related to the second pilot, the *OCDSB Interest Academy*. As school teams reviewed the information in the guide and were familiarized with the scope of the two pilots, team members from Learning Support Services (LSS) received anecdotal feedback from school staff about both resources.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3.   The implementation of the two pilot projects proved challenging over the past year. Key challenges included: identifying sufficient learners with giftedness at the appropriate grade level (e.g., grade 4 to 6) and access to staff for ongoing training and program monitoring. While staff had identified classrooms to participate in the project in the Spring 2019, movement of students between schools resulted in the need to identify new classes and schools with an openness to participate in the work. These challenges were further impacted by teacher replacement shortages to offer professional development, labour action limiting staff involvement in professional learning and school closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During initial professional learning sessions, LSS received anecdotal feedback on the usefulness and effectiveness of the guide. The intention and purpose of the guide was to be a comprehensive resource allowing educators the flexibility to select appropriate strategies and resources to support their learners. It was clear in the initial sessions that school teams felt that the guide had some limitations as it related to content and format.

In addition, staff received feedback regarding the inquiry, project-based approach outlined in the *OCDSB Interest Academy*. Feedback included that school staff felt there were several connections to a variety of curriculum areas and they acknowledged potential opportunities for students to connect with peers across classes and/or grades as well as the larger community. This pilot was set to begin following March Break 2020 and was not completed due to the impact of the school closures due to Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the changes associated with the return to school in September 2020 (e.g., in person and virtual learning), LSS recommends changes to the structure of this pilot to capitalize on new opportunities and mitigate barriers with respect to student movement.

The learning conditions in September 2020 are vastly different than they were in the previous school year. These learning conditions have provided new ways to engage with learners and the types of learning experiences that are possible. Furthermore, the creation of the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) campuses have presented an opportunity to connect with a variety of learners from different in person schools in a virtual environment. This enables us to reframe the two pilot projects and explore opportunities to increase the equity of access and to recognize student talents amongst all learners.

LSS believes this opportunity to reframe the work related to the two pilots is timely and is linked to key work that is currently underway in the department. LSS is focusing on the development of quality programming indicators with the purpose to set a District standard of practice of high expectations for student programming, services, and instructional delivery for all special education learners in the OCDSB.

4. **OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom Pilot**

The *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* was developed as a comprehensive tool to assist educators with programming and planning for their identified students with giftedness. Anecdotal feedback from the pilot schools highlighted limitations with accessibility and usability. Furthermore, the format of the resource, which is a binder of resources, has limitations as it relates to the updating and release of the document more broadly in the current Covid-19 working conditions (i.e. use and distribution of paper and sharing resources amongst educators, etc.).

During the Learn at Home phase of the school closure in the Spring 2020, LSS continued the update of the Quality Program Indicators (QPI) document. The original QPI document, released in 2012, was designed to provide administrators, educators, and staff with a comprehensive overview of quality programming to meet the individual learning needs of special education students in a variety of specialized program classes.

Previous work and use of this document since 2012 has highlighted the need to expand the scope of this resource to include students with specialized education needs in the regular program as well as those in specialized program classes. The current revision and refinement process of the content of the QPI is pivotal. The update resource will set a standard of practice for the District in supporting all special education learners. The intention is to ensure school teams understand the high expectations for academic programming instructional strategies, learning environments, assessment and evaluation and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). These standards will enable school teams to hone their skills, improve instruction and differentiation for all learners. Furthermore, the document will assist educators in setting direction for their own areas of professional learning in order to meet the needs of students. It is anticipated that a consistent and shared understanding of the standards required for an effective IEP will help administrators and educators to ensure they are effectively implemented and monitored District-wide.

The format for this resource will be a Google site and selected components of this resource will be shared with the District beginning in early 2021. At this time, LSS recommends that moving forward, the *OCDSB Guide to Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom* pilot be discontinued and be replaced with the launch of the newly revised QPI. Currently a project management plan is begin developed to guide the phased in launch of this work.

5. **OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot**

The OCDSB *Interest Academy* is an inquiry project-based approach that was well received in all of the pilot training sessions. Anecdotally, educators immediately connected with it and could see several curriculum connections to this project. The creation of the OCV campuses present a unique opportunity to pilot this Inquiry-Based Learning Project with a variety of students, who have joined the OCV campus from several different schools. Also, the mode of

learning in the OCV is conducive to student-led inquiry projects in areas of student interest.

In collaboration with Program and Learning (PAL), the pilot plan will be reviewed and/or updated to include the opportunity presented as a result of the creation of OCV. Moving forward, staff recommended that the OCV campuses pilot this rich cross-curricular project in a variety of its classes; both in the regular English or Early French Immersion program and expand the age range for students, to include grades 4 to grades 8.

Similar to the previous pilot evaluation plan, the evaluation will be exploratory in nature and will include mainly formative evaluation activities. Specifically, qualitative and quantitative data collection tools examining implementation issues from the perspective of staff, students and parents/guardians will be administered.

The cross-departmental collaborative team will work with the administrative teams at the OCV campuses to identify appropriate staff, classes, and/or students to participate in this pilot. Staff training sessions will be offered in January 2021. Throughout the pilot, both teams from PAL and LSS will be available to support staff at participating OCV campuses. In addition, the LSS Program Evaluator will be facilitating staff, student, and parent/guardian focus groups and/or feedback sessions to capture the effectiveness of this pilot in expanding options to improve effective programming for student talent development and students with giftedness.

6. **Universal Screening Tool Exploration**
   A screening tool is an assessment which provides information about the academic and/or cognitive profile of a student. A screening tool can be administered to a cohort of students, or administered on an individual basis. The use of a screening tool provides information that can inform decision-making about student learning. The District has offered universal screening in the past and currently makes a screening tool available based on teacher and/or parent nomination. While a universal screening tool may highlight students, who should be provided with a more in-depth assessment to fully understand their cognitive profile and potential enrichment needs, it is generally not used as a single tool for formal identification.

   In order to further explore the elimination of barriers of access for all students and support underrepresented populations, LSS has begun to investigate the possibility of the use of a universal screening tool.   The exploratory exercises currently include: literature reviews, an environmental scan of other school districts in the province, and, the review of possible screening tool options.

Exploration of Universal Screening Tool Review Activities

Timeline	Review Activity
30 November	• Complete literature reviews; and

2020	• Complete environmental scan within the province.
31 December 2020	• Meet with different researchers and publishers to review possible universal screening tools and technical manuals.
12 March 2021	• Provide an update and report to Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and Board of the findings and recommendations for discussion.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

7.   The work undertaken on the three initiatives will be substantive over the course of the 2020-2021 school year.

Quality Program Indicators Resource
LSS estimates approximately 40 days of work will be required to refine the content of the resource, build the Google site to house the content and to support field testing.

OCV Inquiry-based Learning Project Pilot
LSS estimates that approximately 20 days of work will be invested by LSS and PAL staff to support the implementation and evaluation of this pilot. In addition to staff time, release time will be required for the participating educators from the OCV. LSS anticipates that these costs for release time to engage in professional learning would be approximately $5000 which will be assumed under the existing LSS departmental budget.

Universal Screening Tool Exploratory Research
LSS estimates that approximately 25 days of work will be invested by LSS to complete the exploratory review activities and to develop plans for the next stage of work.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

8.   The three initiatives discussed will require differentiated communication and consultations within the District and the community. By January 2021, LSS will develop a project plan summarizing the targeted phases of content release for the OCDSB Quality Programming Indicators Resource. The phased approach of launching different sections will enable the team in LSS to field test different aspects of the resource and provide required changes which will be informed by feedback.

Inherent to the pilot evaluation plan, is a communication plan to share results and data from the pilot. As previously mentioned, this information is targeted to be shared in June 2021.

In February 2021, a report will be provided outlining research information, key considerations, and information related to the possible introduction of a universal screening tool to the OCDSB.

Regular updates will be shared with the SEAC and regular communication will be established with the Association for Bright Children (ABC) representative.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

9.   The initiatives discussed have several links to the District Strategic Plan with a focus on reducing barriers to learning and providing individualized personalized support and resources to meet the needs of every learner. All of these initiatives have at the core capacity building for all OCDSB staff in the areas of equity and inclusive practices as well as fostering student engagement in their learning.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What factors should be considered as part of a QPI online resource to foster a standard for instruction and differentiation for all learners with giftedness?
- How would an inquiry-based learning project amongst students from a variety of backgrounds and schools impact student and community connections?
- How might a universal screening tool ensure equity for racialized and minoritized students?

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Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of   Camille Williams-Taylor
Learning Support Services   Director of Education and
                                                   Secretary of the Board