

Evaluation Report
ACCELERATED PROGRESS PROGRAM

Seattle Public Schools
Seattle, WA

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Evaluation Report

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

CHARGE

Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, Dr. Catherine M. Brighton, and Dr. Holly Hertberg Davis from the University of Virginia (UVA), representing expertise in gifted education across the areas of identification, administration, curriculum, instruction and program evaluation, were contracted to evaluate the services offered through the Accelerated Progress Program (APP) to highly able students in the Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, WA. The charge presented to the team focused on gathering information related to the current offerings within APP and on comparing that program to the current state of the art in gifted education. *The Standards for Gifted Programs of the National Association for Gifted Children* of the National Association for Gifted Children. We have included the minimum standards as part of the introduction to the evaluation of each component of the program. The complete document can be found at http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PDF/Standards_PDFs/k12%20GT%20standards%20brochure.pdf and a set of specific evaluation questions proposed by the evaluation team (see Appendix A) guided the evaluation.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation was carried out in accord with the activities outlined in the proposal submitted to and approved by the administration of the Seattle Public Schools. Phone consultation and email correspondence during the spring of 2007 and input questionnaire responses from parents provided further focus for the evaluation as well as identification of target groups for interviews and observations and development of interview and observation protocols. The UVA evaluation team examined the program website, and reviewed a set of documents including historical documents, identification protocols, and school policy statements.

General guidelines for the interviews and classroom observation (see Appendix B) used in the evaluation were developed based on: (1) the program documents/website information (particularly stated goals and objectives), (2) the questions raised by the parents responding to the input survey, (3) *The Standards for Gifted Programs of the National Association for Gifted Children* (NAGC, 2001), and the evaluation questions.

During the visit to the Seattle Public School on June 18 and 19, 2007, Drs. Callahan, Brighton, and Hertberg Davis visited the APP program in the elementary and middle school and interviewed students at the high school level. During this window of time, we:

- visited 10 elementary level APP classrooms
- visited 7 middle school APP classrooms
- interviewed approximately 39 parents either individually or in focus groups plus 6 members of the APP advisory board (11 were parents of Spectrum students)
- interviewed 11 middle school APP students, 12 elementary APP students and approximately 20 high school APP students in focus groups
- interviewed 4 elementary APP teachers and 7 middle school APP teachers
- interviewed 6 building level administrators including the principals of the elementary and middle schools in which APP is housed
- interviewed 5 central office administrators including the Superintendent
- interviewed formally and informally the gifted resource teachers
- interviewed 4 middle school counselors and 1 elementary school counselor
- interviewed 2 members of the School Board
- observed 2 elementary and 1 middle school Spectrum class, interviewed 1 Spectrum student
- reviewed documents relating to curriculum and identification procedures

The evaluation process was open, with full discussion of issues. We were allowed access to any existing materials, and we were allowed to speak with any individuals and to visit any sites we requested.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The evaluators recorded notes during the interviews and meetings that included the general sense of interview responses and specific quotations. They also detailed the observed classroom activities using a classroom observation protocol adapted from Maker & Nielson (1996). At the end of each day we reviewed those notes to identify areas of emerging congruence and to find discrepancies to guide the next day's observations and interviews. At the conclusion of the visitation process, we reviewed notes to identify emerging themes that summarized the data collected.

Analyses of results from all sources (interviews, observations, and document analyses) were used to triangulate findings to assure similar patterns of results across sources of information and groups of respondents. In cases where discrepant findings do not allow for clear conclusions, those discrepancies are noted. Although we were not evaluating the Spectrum or ALO Programs, we visited several Spectrum and ALO classrooms for the purposes of providing contrast to APP classrooms. However, those visits were very limited in scope and data from those classrooms are used sparingly and with great caution and only in making comparative or contrasting statements.

As the themes were identified they were organized into the categories suggested by *The Standards for Gifted Programs of the National Association for Gifted Children* (to be referred to from here on out as "the Standards") and according to the evaluation questions. We then re-

examined our notes to confirm themes or re-examine them if conflicting evidence or themes were identified in the second review.

If we did not have sufficient data relevant to an aspect of the standard, it is not addressed in the report. Themes not included as part of the Standards, but considered important for consideration in program improvement, were also identified and are included in the report.

Within this evaluation report, conclusions and recommendations are presented at the program level. Because this was not a personnel evaluation, conclusions about individuals are not included.

THE CONTEXT

The purpose for the evaluation was to provide recommendations to the Seattle Public Schools (hereafter referred to as “SPS”) to be used for making program improvements within APP and to provide data for future decision-making. The evaluation components included identification of strengths and weaknesses in selecting students for the program, program organization and management, curricular scope and sequence and the instructional program. The foci included the areas of philosophy of the program and the definition of the students to be served, identification/screening procedures, conception and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment, staff development, communication, and leadership (both within and outside the program).

Any program and any evaluation of a program is influenced by the context in which the program exists and the issues surrounding the program’s inception and history. In this particular case we identified several factors which should be considered in interpretation of our findings and recommendations.

The APP offering represents a particular service along a continuum of services of the Advanced Learning Program in SPS. The intent is to offer this program for the most advanced learners in the school system.

The APP offering is situated in a school district with great racial and socio-economic diversity which results in many agendas among the constituent groups.

The continuum of services of the Advanced Learner Program includes APP, Spectrum and Advanced Learning Opportunities (ALOs). Not all students who are qualified for APP elect to attend the APP school. They may elect to attend Spectrum or to remain in their home schools where ALOs are offered. Not all schools offer Spectrum or ALOs. The International Baccalaureate Program and AP classes were not examined as part of this evaluation except as student comments from a focus group provided their perspective on those options.

Changes in leadership in SPS (the arrival of a new superintendent and the hiring of a new fulltime administrator for ALP) have led many stakeholders to question the future directions of ALP .

APP classes, which began as a pilot program in 1978, are offered in Lowell Elementary School, Washington Middle School and Garfield High School to “students who are academically

highly gifted (98th/99th percentile range in cognitive ability and the 95th percentile range or above in both reading and math achievement).” According to the website, APP’s primary goal is to use “a self-contained or cohort service model to provide a *significantly* [sic] differentiated, accelerated and rigorous standards-based curriculum that presents curriculum and instruction at a pace, depth, and complexity that meets students’ intellectual needs. Secondary goals include the development of communication, thinking and learning skills, as well as social skills.”

The SPS website states that the program is guided by four principles:

Provide a rigorous and significantly accelerated curriculum in reading and mathematics.

Support student social/emotional development as well as academic development.

Move students through the program as a cohort.

Provide instruction by teachers familiar with the needs of students who are academically highly gifted.

The program documents also include the following purposes:

- Providing a differentiated, challenging curriculum for highly capable students that meets their intellectual needs while being sensitive to their developmental level
- Combining acceleration and enrichment to promote learning at a pace, depth, and intensity appropriate to the capacity of academically gifted learners
- Developing critical and creative thinking and promoting broad application of those skills
- Fostering the development of self-understanding and interpersonal skills such as cooperation, complexity, team work, problem-solving, effective communication and appreciation for diversity, through the use of cooperative learning and class meetings
- Helping students acquire thoughtful habits of mind.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The report is organized around the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Standards mentioned above plus the general area of philosophy and definition. The NAGC Standards are organized around seven basic elements (or criteria) of quality services for gifted students.

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Program Administration and Management
- Program Design
- Program Evaluation
- Student Identification
- Professional Development
- Social and Emotional Guidance and Counseling

Each section of the report begins with an overall description of each of the elements and the minimum standards for each criterion. Following the explanation of the component, we

present the relevant evaluation questions and a summary of strengths and areas of APP that merit **Commendations**. Next, general **Problems, Issues and/or Concerns** that emerged from the analysis of the interview and observational data are presented. Finally, we make suggestions for addressing those problems and concerns in the sections labeled **Recommendations for Action**. We do not present every observation or interview response for several reasons. First, it would violate confidentiality of those observed and interviewed, and second, it would make this report too burdensome to interpret. Rather, we offer quotations (in italics) or specific examples from the observations to illustrate our conclusions as appropriate.

Program Philosophy and Definition

Although the Program Design Standard of the Standards includes philosophy and definition, in this report “philosophy and definition” is dealt with as a separate key feature of the evaluation because the issues surrounding philosophy and definition are so critical to the rest of this evaluation report. As such, they were singled out as the most appropriate point for beginning our discussion.

As with all educational programs, philosophy drives the programmatic and curricular decisions. Further, the conception of students to be served by APP that is accepted and publicly espoused by the school system must be used to guide the selection and curricular decisions.

Evaluation Questions

1. Is there consistent agreement in the school community around a definition of giftedness and a philosophy for serving gifted students?
2. Do the provisions for and operation of APP reflect and fit into the philosophy and definition of giftedness of the school division?
3. To what degree do the provision of APP and the other services offered within the scope of the Advanced Learning Program suffice to cover all the needs of gifted students in the school district?

Commendations

- The Seattle Public Schools and the Advanced Learner Program have articulated and published a clear description of the type of student to be served in APP and a philosophy to guide its programming and instruction. Any educator or citizen of the community is able to access the parameters of goals and objectives, student qualifications and expectations, and instructional parameters on the ALP and APP websites.
- Many of the administrators and teachers and the school board members interviewed were in accord that APP falls into the category of special education with gifted students in APP characterized as having special learning needs that can only be addressed in classes that cannot be provided in every home-base school building. There was general agreement that those students who are at the most advanced level of achievement need a program that provides an accelerated curriculum.
- Nearly all stakeholders identified the lack of racial and socio-economic diversity in the APP (and other ALP) programs. The administrators in the district are committed to seeking ways to address the issues of diversity, recognize the limitations of a definition that translates into a strictly test-based process of making identification and placement decisions, and have been actively seeking and implementing alternatives for increasing ethnic and racial diversity in the program.
- The school district recognizes differing “levels” of giftedness and has used a three-level continuum of services to address different populations of gifted students.
- There appears to be a high level of agreement among stakeholders involved in APP at the elementary and middle school level (administrators, APP teachers, APP parents,

counselors and APP students) that the APP should be reserved for students performing at the highest level of achievement. None of the stakeholders seems to question the importance of the program for serving highly gifted students, and all stakeholders believe that the existence of the APP is crucial to meeting the needs of highly gifted students. One administrator commented, *“APP students are so high on the charts, it is easy for them to get bored [in regular classes]. They need a good match between teacher and student or they act up. APP provides that for them. They are very challenged in these courses.”* An APP student noted, *“Before I was in APP, I was in the Spectrum program for one year. It was boring. I knew all the answers already, so I stopped doing the work. Then I moved to APP. The first year was tough, but I learned what you had to do and now it feels like a really good match for me.”* Another student similarly commented, *“I wasn’t in APP in first and second grade, and the teacher always had to give me different worksheets for math. I always felt weird. Now I am in APP and it’s good because I can work on math on my level in a classroom with students who are also on the same level.”*

- While most current APP elementary students and parents of current APP elementary level students seemed more comfortable with and supportive of the APP arrangements that currently exist in the elementary school (a school within a school), the middle school and high school students interviewed were very emphatic in their appreciation of being with a broader range of students in middle school and high school. *“Frankly, I was just tired of being with the same people.”* The students at the secondary level clearly appreciated the opportunity to be in settings that allowed for more interactions with age peers.

Problems, Issues, and Concerns

- While there seems to be a high level of agreement among stakeholders that the district’s definition of “highly gifted” is appropriate, there is less agreement on how “highly gifted” students should be identified (see identification section below). There is the perception among *some* APP teachers and parents at the middle school and elementary levels that recently the district has loosened the criteria for admission into APP resulting in “lowering the bar” and “watered down” services.
- Many building principals do not understand the need for gifted programming, do not support current efforts and will not provide options within their buildings. A small number of principals view the program as *“promoting institutional racism.”* Others view the program as responsible for *“taking away our top kids”* and leaving their buildings with poorer reputations than would be the case if the students remained in their neighborhood schools.
- Additionally, there is disagreement concerning the setting in which APP should function. While this is a program design issue, it is also a philosophical issue that reflects beliefs about the need or desirability of segregation of gifted students. This issue manifested itself in two levels of disagreement. The first was whether APP for grades 1-8 should be in one building. The second was whether the elementary program should be split into two (or more) buildings and the middle school program should be housed in two (or more) buildings. The perspectives provided by interviewed stakeholders reflect each individual’s underlying philosophy of how

gifted students should be served, positive or negative experiences with the program, or administrators' beliefs that seem best characterized as a result of pressure from parents. While administrators, counselors, some parents, and some students believe that the current APP elementary program would be best housed within two separate schools and that the current middle school program should also be split between two schools, all interviewed APP teachers, some APP parents, and some APP students believed that the program would best serve students if it remained housed in one school. A middle school administrator in support of the "split" commented: *"Because the program is now housed in one place, the APP curriculum is entirely dependent upon one teacher. When that teacher leaves, the curriculum leaves with them [sic]."* A teacher in support of keeping the program housed in one place commented, *"The strength of the program is having it in one location. We need a critical mass of kids in order to serve them best."* Another teacher commented, *"Having everyone together in one building fosters a level of professionalism you don't find anywhere else. The strength of the program is having other teachers you can go to and work with. It feels like a team. We interact all the time."* The most serious concern is that the parents, teachers and administrators are forming "camps" based on belief systems rather than concrete evidence of the effectiveness of the option defended or the open consideration of the positives and negatives of the possible options. Further, some of the claims are patronizing of and condescending toward other groups (e.g., *"the gifted students can take care of and look out for the kids in the special education program"*).

- The philosophy and definition of giftedness in Seattle do not reflect current developments in the field of gifted education. Further, decisions about program focus and direction have wandered over the past decade without a systematic re-examination of the vision for the program and its development with input from experts and multiple stake-holder perspectives. In many ways, the last two-to-three years seem to have been the first organized efforts in many years to bring a consistency to planning and organization. Varying stakeholders come to the discussion of these issues with very different agendas and belief systems which result in inconsistency and conflict in the system.
- Some of the belief structures and language used to describe the students and the program contribute to a perception of the program as elitist, exclusionary and even racist. The individuals who use that language do not seem to be aware of the ways in which their language is interpreted by children of color and their parents.
- The assertion that the private schools in the area lure the middle class, high achieving minorities into their schools through scholarship programs presents two issues. One is the seeming lack of recognition of potential in low socio-economic groups among many, and the second is a seeming acceptance that nothing can be done about the situation (such as creating a program with a reputation that will be so strong that parents of these children will want to keep their children in the public schools).
- While there is the clear description of a continuum of services for advanced learners in Seattle Public Schools, there seems to be a clear hierarchy of the quality of these services. Parents of students in Spectrum and ALOs feel as if these programs are of

- Elementary and middle school APP teachers expressed concern about central office decisions to relax the entrance guidelines for APP students resulting in more academically diverse APP classrooms than previously. Concerns were raised about the criteria, but more seriously about the lack of information they were provided about entry level skills of students identified using alternate instruments and decision-making criteria.
- The teachers also expressed frustration that the decision was made, without teacher input, to order math series materials two grade levels ahead without regard for the need to differentiate for the differing levels of reading and mathematics skills of newly identified students. *“They seem to think that gifted education is just grade skipping.”*
- Additionally, students with academic giftedness in a single content area (e.g., exceptionally mathematically precocious, but on-grade level in reading) are not a fit in APP or SPECTRUM, despite their ill-fit in the general education classroom. One parent of a student in ALO described his son as being well beyond even other APP students in math, but then noted that he was not offered appropriately challenging instruction because “he did not fit their mold” (the need to be an exceptional achiever in both mathematics and reading/language arts). One might wonder if APP would not be available to Einstein because he excelled in math and science and not reading/language arts.

Recommendations for Action

- The issue of program arrangement should be carefully scrutinized. We would NOT recommend a single (or two regional) self-contained 1-8 arrangement. It precludes integration of the APP students with other students who would enrich and extend APP student understandings of diversity. Such a move would also likely bolster the Spectrum and ALO parent perception that APP is the premier service option. Further discussion and elaboration on this recommendation is provided in a chart at the end of report in Appendix C..
- Because building level administrators’ perceptions of giftedness influence how they communicate about the programs, it is essential that they have accurate information about Seattle’s gifted programming options as well as access to information about best practices in gifted education. Administrators should have access to and be encouraged to participate in professional development that focuses on the needs of gifted students, as well as the importance of systematically developing talent in all students, identified as gifted or not.
- Form a cross-representational study group, comprised of ethnically diverse parents from APP, Spectrum, ALO, and general education; ethnically diverse teachers and administrators representing the different geographic areas of the city, from the various programming options and school levels; as well as a range of community workforce members who have an investment in the students upon graduation. This group should be charged with investigating more contemporary philosophies of giftedness that consider areas beyond traditional IQ and achievement scores as indicators of

exceptional potential. Of particular interest to this group may be the issues of subject-specific giftedness and twice-exceptional students, and the examination of urban school districts who have successfully negotiated racial and cultural barriers in their gifted programs. The work of this study group should precede a systematic re-examination of the ALP program vision and mission statements to ensure alignment with the actual services offered in the varied programs as well as to ensure that they reflect the latest thinking in the field of gifted education.

- Upon completion of the study group's work described above, the program staff should launch a marketing campaign for the ALP program services to articulate systematically how the programs share the same program vision, but accomplish the goals through a variety of ways—all at the highest levels of quality. Highlighting the common vision and goals, but emphasizing the unique features along the service option continuum will help to communicate to community stakeholders the range of services and debunk the community perception that APP is the only “real” gifted program. Of course, this action must be predicated on effective efforts to ensure that the offerings in SPECTRUM and ALO are of high quality and appropriately differentiated for the students who receive services through those programs.
- The perception exists that the under-representation issue is created or at least exacerbated by the heavy recruitment of the area's most talented minority students by elite private schools. The degree to which this belief reflects reality should be documented by private school enrollment data and follow-up interviews with students who withdraw from the public schools. Consider collecting data through survey methods (with possible telephone interviews as a follow up) to substantiate these perceptions with enrollment data and more thorough information about the factors influencing students' decisions to leave the public school system in favor of private school options. Armed with this information, the system can begin to create competitive program services to retain the talented students from all cultural and ethnic groups.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for all gifted education faculty and staff, including central office and building administrators who house gifted students in their building. As issues of subtle (and increasingly even overt racism) appear to be divisive factors in the program, it may be wise to address this issue head on, specifically as it directly relates to the students, parents, faculty, and staff in the gifted programs. Any and all concerns with remarks or behaviors that reflect cultural, ethnic or socio-economic bias should be dealt with swiftly and with emphatic concern by those in responsible positions.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Curriculum and Instruction

Overall Criterion Description: Gifted education services must include curricular and instructional opportunities directed to the unique needs of the gifted child.

Minimum Standards

- Differentiated curriculum (curricular and instructional adaptations that address the unique learning needs of gifted learners) for gifted learners must be integrated and articulated throughout the district.
- Instruction, objectives, and strategies provided to gifted learners must be systematically differentiated from those in the regular classroom.
- Teachers must differentiate, replace, supplement, or modify curricula to facilitate higher-level learning goals.
- Means for demonstrating proficiency in essential regular curriculum concepts and processes must be established to facilitate appropriate academic acceleration.
- Gifted learners must be assessed for proficiency in basic skills and knowledge and provided with alternative challenging educational opportunities when proficiency is demonstrated.
- A program of instruction must consist of advanced content and appropriately differentiated teaching strategies to reflect the accelerative learning pace and advanced intellectual processes of gifted learners.
- Decisions to proceed or limit the acceleration of content and grade acceleration must only be considered after a thorough assessment.
- Diverse and appropriate learning experiences must consist of a variety of curricular options, instructional strategies, and materials.
- Flexible instructional arrangements (e.g., special classes, seminars, resource rooms, mentorships, independent study, and research projects) must be available.

Evaluation Questions

1. Is the curriculum and instruction provided for the students in APP reflective of the needs of the students identified for the program?
2. Is the curriculum and instruction differentiated according to student needs within APP? (To what degree are the students working at a significantly accelerated learning pace (working typically two grade levels beyond age peers), at grade level expectations that are significantly above grade level (two grade levels), and with curriculum that is at a significantly advanced level of complexity and depth)? Concurrently, does the curriculum develop reflective reading skills of analytic and interpretive skills through the use of higher level reading materials?
3. Are there essential qualitative differences in the curriculum offered to the students selected for APP and the curriculum offered to students in the Spectrum and ALO?

4. Do the essential elements of the curriculum offered in APP reflect the standards of quality curriculum for gifted learners of the nature defined and identified for this program?
5. To what degree do the curriculum and instruction result in the desired goals for the APP component of the gifted program (reading and mathematics achievement that is significantly beyond grade level (two grade levels)?)
6. Does the curriculum reflect interdisciplinary concepts that promote the development of advanced/accelerated learning as well as depth of learning?
7. Does the curriculum reflect the mastery of basic skills as well as critical analysis, creative thinking, and a broad application of those skills?
8. Does the curriculum foster the development of self-understanding and interpersonal skills such as cooperation, flexibility, team work, problem-solving, effective communication, and appreciation for diversity through the use of cooperative learning, small-group projects and presentations, and class meetings?
9. Does the curriculum promote thoughtful habits of mind (applying old knowledge and experience to new situations, considering the implications of choices, imagining new possibilities, integrating new knowledge into old, inquiring into the sources and accuracy of information, adopting multiple perspectives for considering a problem or opportunity) and work (persistence, attention to detail, careful thinking, respect for others, and a focus on long-term goals)?
10. Does the adoption of grade level standards and benchmarks at grade level in writing, communication and science provide appropriate challenge?
11. Does the social studies curriculum build global awareness and provide for the integration of concepts from multiple disciplines?
12. To what degree is assessment aligned with APP goals?
13. Do school activities promote a sense of what it means to be an active involved citizen and promote acceptance of diversity (citizenship)?
14. Is Direct Writing Assessment appropriately used to assess and develop writing skills?
15. Do teachers recognize and adapt instruction to the varied readiness needs of the APP students?
16. What provisions, if any, are available for twice exceptional students, and underachieving students?

Commendations

- All stakeholders perceived that the curriculum and instruction within APP did provide accelerated curriculum, and as such, were reflective of the needs of the identified students. Stakeholders seemed to believe that the program was designed to serve the academic and cognitive needs of highly gifted students, and indicated that it did so. Many described the curriculum as challenging, moving at a faster pace than general classes, and exploring topics in greater depth than general classes. Stakeholders seemed to believe there was a clear distinction in the challenge level of APP courses

and Spectrum and other courses. Not all stakeholders held the same opinion. (See Problems, Issues and Concerns.)

- Over the past two years, there has been a concerted effort to begin curricular planning around common goals and objectives and with attention to curricular standards at the state and national level with clear recognition that these standards should be addressed at high levels of performance.
- Classroom observations indicated that students were working with complex concepts beyond grade level and that classroom discussion focused more on understanding than on memorization, encouraged students to figure things out for themselves, and required students to delve more deeply into content.
- At the middle school level, students seemed to be working at a significantly accelerated learning pace on content significantly advanced in depth and complexity beyond grade level. Because we only observed one non-APP class at the middle school level, we do not feel comfortable making comparisons with APP classes on this dimension, but compared to other middle school general education classrooms we have recently observed, the curriculum did appear significantly more advanced.
- Classroom observations did indicate a great deal of focus on the development of analytic and interpretive skills, not only through the use of higher level reading materials, but also through the high-level of student discussion of concepts. Students were repeatedly encouraged in all classes to develop an opinion about a reading or a topic and support it through solid evidence. Students in all classes evidenced a high level of reasoning. Discussions that the students called “philosophy talks” were noted by the elementary level students as requiring them to “look under the surface.”
- Classroom observations indicated that higher-level thinking skills were being utilized within the context of course content, not separately.
- Elementary classroom observations revealed classroom environments that were open and encouraged students’ ideas and contributions. The observed classrooms allowed for student mobility and incorporated flexible instructional groupings.
- In all elementary classes observed, there was an emphasis on reflective writing. For example, one teacher asked students to write a personal essay about their own evolution as writers; one teacher asked students to revisit a writing assignment they tackled early in the year to see how they changed as writers; a third teacher asked students to write weekly letters to their parents and the parents were invited to write back to their children in an interactive journal. The observed class featured the students writing their final letter of the year to the teacher summarizing their experience in that grade level and classroom.
- Students at the middle school level were often working in small groups to solve problems. Groups seemed to work smoothly and all students seemed engaged in the work—this was a rare situation to witness, as usually a few students do all the work. In the classes observed, however, all students were engaged in solving the problems. This may have been a result of the fact that the content students were asked to work on in their groups was high-level, challenging, and engaging for all in the group.
- In some of the middle school classes observed, the curriculum did appear to encourage and promote thoughtful habits of mind. This was a very strong aspect of

the curriculum. For example, in one language arts/social studies class, students were asked to consider a series of moral dilemmas (You find \$20 in the hall in school. What do you do?) from the varied perspectives of a Buddhist, a Taoist, a Confucian, and a Legalist. In small groups, students had to decide what course of action a follower of each philosophy would take and defend that statement with tenets from each philosophy. In a science class students were using the data tables they had created when they tested various forms of nose cones and tail fins for rockets. Based upon the varied data tables that each group had created, students had to determine which nose cone and tail fin design was most effective for a rocket. Each group had to puzzle this out on their own. Many data were missing and students were able to see the importance of keeping good notes during an experiment, as well as determine what data were extraneous. Based upon their findings, students were to design and create a water bottle rocket.

- High school students reported that the program was “good because we were not held back by the overall level of the other classes” and “it kept us from being worried about being a nerd.”
- Advanced Placement courses were deemed challenging by students in the focus group.
- High school students noted that the high point of middle school had been the opportunity to meet others outside the group with whom they had spent their elementary school years. There was near consensus on this by all the students in the focus group (~20).
- At the end of this school year, meetings between the elementary teachers and middle school teachers were scheduled to begin a scope and sequence dialogue.
- All elementary APP students interviewed agreed that their academic experiences at Lowell were significantly more challenging than their previous school settings. Students reported feeling bored, uninterested prior to attending Lowell Elementary; at Lowell, students felt like the work was more advanced (“In math we do above 2nd grade level work which makes me feel bigger and better.”)

Problems, Issues, and Concerns

- *Lack of instructional vision for APP:* There is no curricular framework guiding decision making. One teacher noted that “We are moving toward something, but I am not sure what that something is.” No curricular framework guides the development of either a scope of curriculum offerings or the sequence of offerings across grade levels.
- *Inconsistent challenge:* While the work at Lowell may be more challenging than students’ previous schools, the students did not agree that it was challenging enough. In a group of elementary students, only one student indicated that the curriculum was challenging more than 50% of the time and that they were learning something new more than 50% of the time. One second grade student remarked that the instructional pace at Lowell was rushed, and that teachers moved through topics quicker than she wished, and thus their learning lacked sufficient depth and breadth. The high school students described different classes and different teachers as providing varying levels of challenge. For example, one high school science class was described as “a joke.”

It was clear that there is great inconsistency in teachers' ability to provide challenge to the APP students. The perception of the high school students was that middle school teachers "teach whatever they want so we don't all come prepared in the same way. The teachers don't coordinate their curriculum. There is no set curriculum and even some things we were taught have turned out to be wrong." Another student noted, "We could have just skipped seventh grade." (But they still agreed that their classes were more interesting than those in the general program.)

- *Quality of instruction highly variable:* While some middle school classes encouraged the development of habits of mind through focusing on student analysis of data and attention to process, others relied entirely on teacher direction.
- *Little to no within-class differentiation:* Beyond the provision of multiple levels of math courses that APP students can take at the middle school level, there did not seem to be a great deal of flexibility in terms of what or how individual APP students learned. At no point during the classroom observations were teachers observed differentiating instruction either by readiness or learning profile for individual students within APP, although a few of the classes did allow students choices in products to complete. Students at the elementary level report that except in math they, too, "all do the same things at the same time." Some students raised the point in interviews that the learning experiences in APP were sometimes an ill-fit for them, wishing for some to have more time to become familiar with a concept, or at other times quickly grasping the material and wishing for a more rapid pace. Perhaps the commitment to keeping all students together in an advanced curriculum is a case of recognizing that these gifted students march to the beat of a different drummer, but that they must all march to the same beat of that different drummer.
- *Unclear distinctions between general and gifted education:* Instruction and instructional strategies in Washington Middle School did not seem to be significantly different from that observed in a typical middle school, with the exception of allowance of a greater degree of independence when working on tasks and an emphasis on in-depth discussion of student ideas. While content was more advanced, instructionally, there did not seem to be any significant difference in instructional practice between a typical MS classroom and the APP classrooms observed. In some middle school classes, the instruction was still largely teacher directed with the teacher asking a question and students giving responses until a correct answer was given. In those classes, little student to student conversation or student response to other students answers was encouraged.
- During classroom observations we did not see an emphasis on interdisciplinary concepts, although the critical reasoning skills developed in all classes could certainly be transferred across disciplines. Elementary classrooms seemed to organize the content around topics (e.g., Soil and liquids, China, Rainforest)
- Questions were raised by several school leaders about the degree to which the curriculum and instruction was at a level of excellence. The comment, "The issue is not whether the program is so great, but rather is it just that there are no slackers in the class?" Classroom projects appear to be enriching but do not reach the level of rigor appropriate for this type of setting. For example, a second grade student

- described a Mystery Book Bag Project where the students were asked to put objects into a brown shopping bag that showed facts about a book they read.
- No provisions for twice-exceptional students were observed. A parent of an APP student with special learning needs (he did not indicate what these were) indicated that there were no provisions for these students. Comments from students and parents alike affirmed this statement. Students and parents indicated that APP was pretty much a “*sink-or-swim*” environment, and purposely so. “The idea is that “*if you can’t cut it in APP, you don’t belong in APP.*” One student commented, “*I like APP because everyone is pretty much on the same level. If you should not be in APP, it’s pretty hard to keep up.*” Another student noted, “*Some teachers are more understanding than others, but basically the assumption is that APP students have a better work ethic, and that they will meet the rigid standards and expectations that come with APP.*”
 - Additionally, students with academic giftedness in a single content area (e.g., exceptionally mathematically precocious, but on-grade level in reading) are not a fit in APP, despite their ill-fit in the general education classroom. One parent of a student in ALO described his son as being well beyond even other APP students in math, but was not offered appropriately challenging instruction because he did not fit their mold.
 - Science instruction at the elementary level was deemed by the students to be “*fun, but we didn’t learn anything.*” Parents and students consistently noted the lack of rigor in science education across schools and grade levels. One elementary teacher noted that the 3 units taught in her grade level were provided by the district and were expected to be taught regardless of the fact that they were pitched at grade-level expectations and not adjusted for the APP students’ needs. A middle school Spectrum student described how he had Spectrum-level classes in math, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies, but science was taught to all students on-grade level. “*[In Science] we don’t go very fast, it is not designed for Spectrum [students]. I would love to go deeper, and I suspect my classmates all do, too. But I guess they think it is more important for all to learn the basics than for some to go farther.*”
 - From the parent and student perspective, no curriculum or program exists at the high school except in the sense that a peer group/cohort is brought together and Advanced Placement courses are offered to sophomores in one subject area and a variety of areas to juniors and seniors.
 - The math curriculum at the high school level was not considered challenging by a number of the high school students.
 - High school students noted the difficulties they encountered when trying to do unusual scheduling or trying to accelerate their learning by taking a course in a more compacted time period. It seemed ironic that a program built on an acceleration model put the brakes on the acceleration in high school unless the student made an extraordinary effort to individually accelerate work.
 - Analysis of data on student achievement on the WASL indicates that both students in APP and those eligible for APP, but choosing not to participate, is very high relative to overall SPS performance. However, an ANOVA comparing APP eligible but not attending versus APP eligible and also attending that compares the groups’ mean

scale scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning is discouraging. The ANOVA reveals APP eligible but not attending Lowell or Washington had significantly higher WASL reading scores than the APP group who attended Lowell and Washington. There was no significant difference between groups on the math scale scores. Reasons for this discrepancy are unknown but cause for concern. It would be expected that an advanced curriculum would result in higher scores. Perhaps the curriculum of the APP program fails to address the standards measured by WASL fully or at least as directly or fully as the general education curriculum. It is possible that the students at Lowell and Washington do not take the test as seriously. This difference, in any case, is cause for concern and suggestive of need to re-examine curriculum.

Recommendations for Action

- Develop an overall curricular vision for the APP based on ALP and APP program vision and goal statements (see Philosophy recommendations above). Armed with the overall curricular vision, ALP program staff can identify common outcome goals for each grade level and content area (and potentially each unit of study within the content areas) that align with, but exceed, Washington state standards. APP curriculum should exceed grade level standards, but teachers should be careful to ensure that all students have mastered those grade level standards at high levels of proficiency. The development of a high level scope and sequence of curriculum should be accompanied by the provision of the necessary resources that are essential for attaining those outcome goals for all APP teachers. Specifically note that we are NOT advocating for a scripted curriculum for the APP, but are recommending that a common vision, outcome goals, and curricular framework will be safeguards to ensure that all APP students are provided with equally rigorous curriculum. If Seattle decides at some point to create another self-contained APP setting beyond Lowell or Washington, it will be critically important that these foundational pieces are established and are functionally in place. In the absence of guiding documents and tools, the issue of highly-variable teachers will create exponentially larger issues for ensuring quality curriculum experiences for all APP students.
- The curriculum development process should attend the scope and sequence of learning assessed by WASL with the goal of using those standards as background for enriching and accelerating the curriculum.
- Within the process of re-examining and re-tooling the APP curriculum, particular attention should be given to developing more interdisciplinary, concept-based frameworks. The use of concept-based curriculum allows for study of varied disciplines in a more authentic manner and provides a context for extensive within-class differentiation.
- Within the curriculum framework provide options for differentiation of the curriculum for the variety of learners in APP. Students who score above a given percentile rank are not all the same. Some are just slightly above the point of cut-off while others far exceed that point and simply have not been assessed at the high end of their ability and achievement. Further, they vary in interests, learning style and experiences. As no observations revealed use of within-class differentiation, this may

additionally require professional development and coaching for teachers as they learn to design and manage these new approaches, as well as support for administrators as they provide instructional leadership within the building. (See professional development recommendations)

- Akin to the recommendation above for more aligned and consistent curriculum, program staff should develop a system for promoting consistent use of best instructional practices specifically for use with highly gifted students that align with the overall curricular vision for the ALP and APP in particular. Accomplishing this goal will also likely require considerable investment in staff development.
- The curricular framework should include provision for the development of appreciation of those of other cultural and ethnic backgrounds and heritages. The issues of racism and classism should be addressed head on through the instructional program.
- Develop and nurture a series of curricular mentorship relationships that begin to establish ties to prominent business and industry in the Seattle area. These mentorship relationships should initially be between the teachers and the business/arts/technological sectors in order to provide authenticity to the curricular planning process, but could be grown into individual student-professional mentorships. Particularly in the elementary APP, it is critically important that teachers have access to content specialists, as self-contained, elementary teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about many more content areas than is reasonable to expect. At the secondary level, the lack of mentorships for these advanced learners with the professionals that abound in the community is a tremendous waste of resources and opportunity for students.
- Develop a clearly-articulated, on-going staff development plan focused on training teachers in state-of-the art curriculum development for the gifted and differentiation of instruction. Built into the plan should be follow-up by central office personnel to ensure appropriate implementation of learned skills and strategies. (See (Professional Development Recommendations for Action.)

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Program Administration and Management

The full realization of the potential for services delivered to gifted students is very dependent on the leadership provided by the administration at the central office level in any school system, from the superintendent to the person who coordinates the program. In gifted programs where principals hold the supervisory responsibility for those teaching the gifted or where the program is directed at the school level, program success is nearly totally reliant on the principals' knowledge, competence and commitment.

Overall Criterion Description: Appropriate gifted education programming must include the establishment of a systematic means of developing, implementing, and managing services.

Minimum Standards

- The designated coordinator of gifted education programming must have completed coursework or staff development in gifted education and display leadership ability to be deemed appropriately qualified.
- The gifted education program must create linkages between general education and gifted education at all levels.
- Gifted programming staff must establish on-going parent communication.
- Gifted programs must establish and use an advisory committee that reflects the cultural and socio-economic diversity of the school or school district's total student population, and includes parents, community members, students, and school staff members.
- Gifted education programming staff must communicate with other on-site departments as well as other educational agencies vested in the education of gifted learners (e.g., other school districts, school board members, state departments of education, intermediate educational agencies, etc.).
- Resources must be provided to support program operations.
- Technological support must be provided for gifted education programming services.
- The library selections must reflect a range of materials including those appropriate for gifted learners.

Evaluation Questions

1. To what degree do parents of APP students feel well-informed of the program's goals and objectives and their children's progress in the program?
2. What is the quality of communication between and among administrators and teachers?
3. Are there differences in achievement patterns between qualified gifted students who elect to participate in APP and those qualified gifted students who elect not to participate in the programs? Between participating gifted students and general education students?
4. Does the APP progress report adequately communicate student achievement to parents?
5. Do the administrators responsible for APP have adequate qualifications to carry out the implementation of the program?

Commendations

- Parents felt they were adequately informed of student progress because of the on-line grading system that the district uses that allows parents to see every grade a child receives when they receive it. Teacher use of it is spotty, however, they indicated.
- The consulting teachers have background and training in gifted education and the current administrator (as of Spring, 07) is using special education principles, assessment principles and her own study of gifted education to begin the arduous process of making change in ways that represent current thinking in the field of gifted education.

- The district has several avenues for parents and other community stakeholders to remain active in the advisory capacity. For example, separate advisory boards exist for APP as well as the Spectrum and ALO programs. These advisory boards are managed by parents and have demonstrated passion and consistent interest in advocating for their children’s needs.
- SPS has made a commitment to a full-time Director/Manager of ALP.

Problems, Issues and Concerns

- On issues of program-wide change, parents perceived a lack of clear communication of changes in policy and procedures. Their claim was that most information that came to them was a result of communication from the APP advisory board rather than the officials in the schools.
- There appears to be vocal parent group and a second group that feels somewhat disenfranchised and unable to make their voices heard. The parents of APP middle school students interviewed, for example, clearly identified themselves as separate from the “vocal minority” that they believed constituted the APP Advisory Group parents. They indicated that the concerns of that group were not the concerns of parents in general.
- This disenfranchised group of parents believed that there was insufficient—indeed, nearly non-existent—communication between the ALP team and parents of APP students. They indicated that they learned about changes/proposed changes only through the parent grapevine—often from the APP Advisory group, and usually in skewed terms. They believed that parent/ALP team communication could be much more direct and positive if APP parents were kept informed of goings-on in the program regularly and systematically.
- The qualifications for the administration of the program are not clearly defined – particularly at the school building level.
- Teachers at the building level do not feel connected to central office leadership.
- There are very few genuine linkages between the elementary APP classrooms, teachers, and students and general education classrooms, teachers, and students. Due in large part to the program design and building configuration, elementary APP students have no integration with other students beyond the profoundly special education classes and students who are mainstreamed into their classrooms.
- There exists very little access to technological resources at both the elementary and middle school levels. Spectrum and ALO classes were observed to be integrating technology more systematically and authentically into the content than were APP teachers and classrooms.
- Lack of consistent and sustained management of the program by an expert in gifted education has resulted in failure to develop fully program options and to attend to the development of curriculum that reflects the latest developments in gifted education.

Recommendations for Action

- The new Director/Manager of ALP will need to be well-versed in the field's current thinking on philosophies of gifted education, definitions, identification methods, and best practices in curriculum and instruction.
- Develop and implement a systematic approach to communication among all stakeholders, both in predictable (e.g., end of quarter) intervals as well as on an "as needed" basis in the event of programmatic changes. In the absence of a functional communication system, well-intentioned parents and advisory board members usurp the power of the ALP program faculty, creating dysfunctional dynamics between the various groups.
- A clear distinction needs to be made between advocacy and advisory groups. While advocacy groups are helpful, they need to be regarded as independent of the SPS system. It was our opinion that on several issues the boundaries between advocacy, advice and interference had been blurred in ways that were not healthy for the program in the long run.
- An ALP advocacy group should be formed whose membership is representative of all factions of the stakeholder body with the widest commitment to the development of a quality continuum of services. Thus it should comprise administrators, teachers, and parents from APP, Spectrum, ALO schools and general education, as well as central office staff representatives of ALP and general education. The administration needs to carefully develop a charge that indicates the advisory nature of the group and must carefully select those that represent all points of view.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Program Design

The design of a gifted education program is related to the services that are provided to participating students, the location(s) for these services, the grouping arrangements for providing these services, and the staffing requirements needed to implement these services. The most defensible gifted education programs ensure that the school district's philosophy about giftedness and gifted education, the district's definition of giftedness, the identification process and the student goals are all closely aligned with the way in which the program is designed. Further, the design for delivering program services should maximize the opportunity for curricular differentiation appropriate for student needs.

Overall Criterion Description: The development of appropriate gifted education programming requires comprehensive services based on sound philosophical, theoretical, and empirical support.

Minimum Standards

- Gifted programming services must be accessible to all gifted learners.
- Gifted education funding should be equitable compared to the funding of other local programming.

- Gifted education programming must be submitted for outside review on a regular basis.
- A clearly articulated philosophy statement and accompanying goals and objectives must guide gifted programming.
- A continuum of services must be provided across grades pre-K–12.
- Gifted education programming should be articulated with the general education program.
- Appropriate educational opportunities must be provided in the regular classroom, resource classroom, separate, or optional voluntary environments.
- The use of flexible grouping of gifted learners must be an integral part of gifted education programming.
- Existing and future school policies must include provisions for the needs of gifted learners.

Commendations

- During the past two years there has been an effort to ensure that the APP curriculum is more aligned with the general education program to ensure that students are proficient in achieving state standards. This alignment with standards is also reflected in the district’s guiding principles (*“to provide a significantly differentiated, accelerated and rigorous **standards-based** curriculum...”*)
- School leaders recognize the difficulties in expecting differentiation to occur in all general education classrooms. As one school board member indicated, *“We just don’t have the fundamental conditions to support differentiation in the regular classroom. We have 5 grade levels in one classroom plus ESL students and mainstreamed special education students. Teachers do not have the time, training or resources to make that work.”*
- School staff verbalize the importance of a program that incorporates a learning dimension and social dimension for gifted students.
- Internal staff have made every effort to provide development responsive to school requests.
- The commitment has been made to hire a full time Director/Manager whose sole responsibility will be to provide leadership for the Advanced Learning Program and the various components therein.

Problems, Issues and Concerns

- Staff development that utilized outside expertise was non-existent for nearly 20 years, leaving a staff under-prepared to deliver the most current and challenging curriculum to gifted students. This has resulted in inconsistent curricular offerings and very unequal challenge to students. The leadership in the past two years has endeavored to provide staff development training that reflects the stated program goals; however, these training opportunities are inconsistently delivered and little central office or building-level instructional support exists to ensure follow-up support occurs. For example, one elementary APP teacher indicated that she had the opportunity to attend

Confratute in a recent summer. However, she added that, “*without follow up and support, it all falls away. There was probably a requirement to come back and share this with other colleagues, but no time was given and they frankly forgot to check.*”

The administration has provided the opportunity for some teachers to attend an institute on differentiation. Unfortunately without the accompanying support for curriculum development they have tools but an inadequate base to which they can apply those tools and inadequate support in refining use of the tools.

- Students and parents call for a more rigorous plan for selecting, evaluating and helping teachers understand the needs of gifted students and to be better prepared to teach them.
- For too long the program has not been provided adequate leadership. Frequent turnover in the position and the more recent assignment of the position to the Special Education coordinator has resulted in insufficient attention to the needed decision making in the program. The Special Education director has done an admirable job beginning to focus attention on diversity issues and the need to create consistency in curricular offerings, to create a scope and sequence of curriculum, to coordinate elementary, middle and high school programs, and to bring a proper focus to integration of the state standards with accelerated and enriched curriculum. However, the scope of the responsibilities in special education and the scope of the job in gifted preclude the feasibility of one person effectively handling those responsibilities. The commitment has been made to hire a full time Director/Manager, which is a very positive sign. That individual should focus on creating a vision for the program across APP, Spectrum and ALOs, continue the efforts to expand program diversity through talent development, develop expertise in program development, enhancement and implementation, emphasize curriculum development and implementation, staff development and support, etc.
- No clear provisions are made to serve students who qualify for APP, but elect, for a variety of reasons, not to attend Lowell. The fall back option of SPECTRUM still requires, in many cases, that students leave their neighborhood school. It is not clear how SPECTRUM or the ALOs differentiate instruction for the highly able student who elects not to attend APP.
- One rationale offered for the segregated classroom for gifted students is to prevent “bullying” of these “different kids,” especially at the middle school level. While gifted students may, in fact, at times exhibit cognitive and social behaviors that single them out, school climates should be established which foster respect for all students and eradicate bullying of any student regardless of level of achievement or other distinguishing feature. While the commendations included staff recognition of the social and emotional development components of a program for gifted students, it appears that the social and emotional issues are dealt with through unjudged acceptance of aberrant behavior (of course, unless it physically threatens self or others) with little attempt to work with the gifted students on their role in gaining social acceptance in the diverse population of the world. The full segregation may, in fact, be promulgating a sense that differentness is expected and that these students are to be treated differently. One school official pointed out that the present arrangement, “*exacerbates the divide among students.*” It was also noted by the elementary

students that bullying still occurs at Lowell. “*They may not hit you, but with their words, they make you feel terrible.*” Unfortunately, sometimes that bullying was identified as racially motivated. And one high school student summarized the discussion of the issue by saying, “*It is not necessarily good for us to be in our own little world.*” They did not see the grouping with special education students or a very small number of minority students as the best arrangement, but rather saw the need to be in a more heterogeneous environment including persons of different colors, bilingual students, and students of a wide range of abilities.

- Further, the total isolation of APP at the elementary level diminishes the opportunity for the appropriate inclusion of some students who may have truly exceptional ability in one domain (e.g., math) but not others, and are therefore excluded from the instruction offered by APP. These students could be included for math instruction and then return to their general education classes in more heterogeneous school arrangements.
- No one has adequately dealt with the question of what an appropriate cohort size might be. The current assumption is that the numbers currently in the program are necessary for a critical mass to exist. A full discussion of the pluses and minuses of a given cohort size, the impact of distance on full enrollment of eligible students, impacts on other students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the students, etc. should be held. These discussions should not be isolated from other discussions of School Assignment Plans, location and goals for the SPECTRUM and ALO programs, recent Supreme Court decisions re: school assignment by race, and the new Superintendent’s goals and objectives for SPS.
- Given the program emphasis on developing a cohort, it is curious that beyond a weekly school wide assembly, all APP teachers, students, and parents interviewed spoke only of academic interactions with students within the same homeroom class, or in a few instances collaboration with students in other homeroom classes at the same grade level. Given the reality of nearly self-contained classes with little interaction beyond those walls, there is reason for reconsidering the program model beyond a self-contained school setting.
- It is curious that the health of the music program is associated with APP, but little attention is given to the possibility that many other highly gifted music students may be deprived of the opportunity to participate simply because they have not been identified as academically gifted and provided the opportunity to enroll in Washington and Garfield.
- The current APP arrangement at the elementary level promotes a sense of privilege in the sense that the public sees the gifted student instructed by the “best” teachers, furthering notions of elitism. Further, the middle school teachers teach only APP students.
- Parents and students seem to be choosing APP to get away from “*boring classes*” or “*mind-numbing classes.*”
- There appears to be a parent divide between a very vocal and involved parent advocacy group and a group of less noticed or noted parents who feel “*voiceless*” and “*disenfranchised.*” The strong parent advocacy group exerts considerable power, not always in directions that the other parents would support. In addition, several

administrators and teachers feel that the parents are able to use channels not open to them to make their voices heard.

Recommendations for Action

- Provide teachers in APP substantial time together and the needed leadership and background training to develop and articulate a curriculum framework, share learning activities, and communicate about students' needs across grade levels.
- Advanced Placement courses should be equally accessible across the district. If individual classes cannot be provided at each high school, the district should see ways to offer the course via video feeds. The base classes from which the courses are broadcast should not all be at Garfield, but should be equally spread across the high schools.
- Create environments in which the "expertise" and high quality instruction offered by APP teachers can benefit other students.
- Carefully consider the implicit and explicit discrimination in music opportunities created by the current programs at the APP schools and rectify those so that students with outstanding musical talent have the same opportunity to participate whether or not they happen to be academically gifted.
- Abandon assumptions about needed cohort sizes that are based on tradition rather than evidence. Consider examining other schools and models. (See additional pros/cons chart provided at the end of this report.)
- Whatever decisions are made about housing APP, close scrutiny of bullying issues and discrimination must be part of decision-making re school and classroom climate, the curriculum and individual behavior.
- Create a clear and well-funded staff development plan that will allow for the development of curriculum that reflects state of the art in gifted education, will provide administrators with the background to become advocates for services, will provide teachers with a broader repertoire of instructional strategies for differentiation, and will generally allow for full examination of philosophical and definitional positions as well as identification and programming. The SPS starts with a fundamentally sound concept of a continuum of services. The next step is to build on and refine that concept to reflect the highest quality of practice in identifying students for those services and refining the curricular and instructional practice with each component of the continuum.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Program Evaluation

Regular and systematic program evaluation is critical to the continued effort to make programs more effective and efficient. This effort to examine APP is to be commended for its openness and the goal of improving services to gifted students. While the focus of this section of the report is on this evaluation process, addressing the general data collection efforts in the

Seattle School District as they reflect efforts to judge APP hopefully will provide guidance to future efforts of this nature.

Overall Criterion Description: Program evaluation is the systematic study of the value and impact of services provided.

Minimum Standards

- Information collected must reflect the interests and needs of most of the constituency groups.
- School districts must provide sufficient resources for program evaluation.
- Persons conducting the evaluation must be competent and trustworthy.
- The program evaluation design must address whether or not services have reached intended goals.
- Instruments and procedures used for data collection must be valid and reliable for their intended use.
- Ongoing formative and summative evaluation strategies must be used for substantive program improvement and development.
- Individual data must be held confidential.
- Evaluation reports must present the evaluation results in a clear and cohesive format.

Commendations

- The administration of the District believes in the importance of evaluation and the collection of reliable and valid data for use in decision-making.
- The process of carrying out this evaluation can be characterized as open and responsive. At no time did we feel constrained in the data collection process, that data was knowingly withheld, or that we could not have access to any classroom or individual.

Problems, Issues, and Concerns

- There is no on-going strategy for continuous or even regularly scheduled periodic formative or summative evaluation of APP instruction or the success of APP students.
- There is no clear or comprehensive plan for using evaluation data to improve APP offerings.
- This evaluation can only provide a snapshot of APP. A careful plan for systematic data collection would enhance the program operation.

Recommendations for Action

- Identify an individual within the system with clear and continuing responsibility for evaluating the ALP programs or seeking outside evaluation.
- Create a long-term evaluation plan based on clearly articulated goals and objectives with a plan for data collection that provides formative and summative as well as quantitative and qualitative information to administrative decision-makers.

- Develop a database of comprehensive and longitudinal ALP student and program data in order to assist in future strategic planning, internal and external program evaluations, and decision-making about program and curricular resources.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Student Identification

Assessment is the process of identifying needs, strengths, and shortcomings in order to develop appropriate educational services. Thus, student identification and assessment is an important component of any gifted program. A lack of congruence between philosophy and definition, identification, and services calls into question the quality and effectiveness of services offered to gifted students. Just as important, inappropriate, narrow, and outdated identification measures seriously hinder the ability to recognize the potential of many students.

Description: Gifted learners must be assessed to determine appropriate educational services.

Minimum Standards

- Information regarding the characteristics of gifted students in areas served by the district must be annually disseminated to all appropriate staff members.
- All students must comprise the initial screening pool of potential recipients of gifted education services.
- Nominations for services must be accepted from any source (e.g., teachers, parents, community members, peers, etc.).
- Parents must be provided information regarding an understanding of giftedness and student characteristics.
- Assessment instruments must measure the capabilities of students with provisions for the language in which the student is most fluent, when available.
- Assessments must be culturally fair.
- The purpose(s) of student assessments must be consistently articulated across all grade levels.
- Student assessments must be sensitive to the current stage of talent development.
- An assessment profile must be developed for each child to evaluate eligibility for gifted education programming services.
- An assessment profile must reflect the unique learning characteristics and potential and performance levels.
- No single assessment instrument or its results must deny student eligibility for gifted programming services.
- All assessment instruments must provide evidence of reliability and validity for the intended purposes and target students.

- District gifted programming guidelines must contain specific procedures for student assessment at least once during the elementary, middle, and secondary levels.
- District guidelines must provide specific procedures for student retention and exiting, as well as guidelines for parent appeals.

Evaluation Questions

1. To what degree do the identification procedures reflect the definition of giftedness adopted by the school division?
2. Do all students have equal opportunity to be included in the screening and identification process?
3. To what degree does the information provided by the identification procedures inform placement decision?
4. To what degree does the information provided by the identification procedures inform instruction decisions?
5. Are the identification procedures applied systematically and fairly? Are the identification procedures free of racial/ethnic, socioeconomic and gender bias? Does the enrollment in APP reflect a fair distribution of students from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and both genders?
6. What provisions, if any, are available for twice exceptional students, and underachieving students?
7. Are there adequate provisions for the enrollment of students new to the community who qualify for APP?
8. Are members of the screening and placement committees qualified to interpret test score data and to make judgments on appropriate placement?
9. Are there appropriate review processes and supportive, flexible exit procedures in place for students? If so, under what conditions are these utilized?

Commendations

- The current administrator (Spring, 07) has taken very important first steps in seeking ways to address the concerns with the lack of diversity in APP. The introduction of new assessment tools and alternative ways of reviewing students represents a careful review of the state of the art at the times changes were made. The steps that have been taken and that should be preserved include:
 - Use of high quality measures of aptitude and achievement to gather information about the students' potential and achievement;
 - Viewing students' scores in light of the opportunities they have had;
 - Existence of an appeals process;
 - Yearly screening, and provisions for screening in the summer;
 - Use of non-verbal assessments for LEP students, in accordance with the state guidelines for testing non-native English speakers;

- Re-assessment/re-evaluation at transition times (e.g., 5th grade, 8th grade); and
- Provision for assessment by the school psychologist in border-line cases.
- Despite initial concerns about those who were identified using alternative strategies, the teachers noted that these students did “catch up.” At least some of the teachers and the building level administrators welcomed the diversity and felt that now that they knew what to expect they could better deal with the students. One administrator noted that some of the newer group of students had surpassed those in the 98th and 99th percentiles on writing assessments.
- It was apparent that test data was used to place students at the middle school level in different Math classes. While it was typical for APP students to be advanced two years beyond grade level in math, some students were working three or four years beyond grade level. These courses are all taught in self-contained classrooms.
- The current administration of the program has begun development of and serious attention to the implementation of an exit process. One administrator indicated that it had caused some parents to panic, but felt it was necessary in order to encourage the best fit between student and curriculum.
- The school system is using high quality ability and achievement instruments, which taken together as a profile, can paint an accurate picture of students’ developed abilities and current achievement levels (See Problems, Issues, Concerns, however, for concerns about the ways in which scores from these instruments are being used.)
- The tester manual, prepared by the district for use by district testing personnel is descriptive, includes sample scripts for contacting schools to arrange testing, anecdotal records of testing conditions, contact information, and other materials to standardize the testing experience across the large district.

Problems, Issues, and Concerns

- The use of threshold numbers (cut scores) without the consideration of the standard error of measurement (SEM), may result in the misidentification of students. For example, on the CogAT, a student achieving a percentile rank of 98 at the Kindergarten level on the verbal subtest has a true score ranging from the 94th to the 99th percentile. Students achieving a percentile rank of 87 at the Kindergarten level would have a true score ranging from 74th-94th percentiles. By not taking into account the SEM and using the flowchart process described in the district testing notebook, there are students who will not be given the opportunity to move forward with additional academic achievement testing, and depending on their “factors” may be deemed not eligible to receive services, despite the fact that their true score would render them eligible.
- The use of the term “threshold” implies a cut score which would be inappropriate practice without following the appropriate standard setting procedures for determining these numbers. Further, to state that the threshold is neither a qualifier nor a disqualifier (“87th is the threshold; it is not considered a cut score. Thresholds are general break points and not an absolute qualifier/disqualifier”) is in conflict with other documentation on the Seattle Schools website, and in the official documentation of testing and identification procedures.

- Kindergarten assessment in October unfairly penalizes students without extensive parent support or prior school experience. As students have only had a short time in school to reap school benefits, this practice likely results in over-representation of students from middle-to-high SES and high parent involvement, and under-representation of students from more impoverished backgrounds, language minorities, and other diverse students.
- Nearly all interviewed stakeholders indicated that they believe that all students do NOT have equal opportunity to be included in the screening and ID process. Numerous parents and an administrator commented that the identification process is difficult to navigate. Numerous parents indicated that communication from central office regarding the APP was confusing and sparse. Many indicated that they had to go to great lengths to obtain information regarding the process they needed to go through to gain admission to the APP. One parent, echoing the concerns of many parents, commented, *“It was a very confusing process, even for me, and I am a pretty savvy parent—what about those parents who aren’t savvy, who don’t know how to go about getting information from the school, who don’t speak English? I think this would be a pretty much impossible process for them.”*
- There is too much reliance on test scores derived from one testing. Agreeing with experts in the field, one high school student noted the issues of *“good days and bad days”* and the potential for a student to be missed because of screening that is too rigorous. Likewise, interviewed middle school parents believed that a single test score was not adequate to identify students for the program.
- An administrator commented that there are two ways to get into the APP—through the front door (traditional identification methods), and through the back door (through the appeals process and having your child tested by an independent tester). *“If you have the resources, you can get your child into APP. It’s unfair to those families that don’t have the resources.”* The use of scores from private testers is a questionable practice; particularly since parents intimated that there were “ways” to be sure children would receive qualifying scores from the outside testers (*the “go-to guys”*). (The concern that families might not have resources was not well-founded since all students on free and reduced lunch are provided additional testing by the school division psychologists. However, “in the know” parents may have access to private testers who will provide needed scores.)
- Some of the teachers in APP and some parents of APP students perceive that the modifications that have been made in the identification process to increase minority and low-income representation results in dilution of the program while not actually resulting in greater diversity. However, review of the current process would indicate that for APP, the range of accepted students would not appreciably alter the population. The standard error of measurement for the tools used would place all students currently placed in APP (and many others) in the same category.
- While some grade level placement occurred based on test scores, teachers did not appear to use identification or other assessment data for modifying instruction. We did not observe teachers in the classrooms differentiating instruction for gifted students. While the instruction did at times seem challenging and at times engaging, the APP classrooms were characterized by one-size-fits-all instruction. One reason

that teachers are not able to use identification information effectively is that the division uses only on-grade level testing, which makes it impossible to truly differentiate student levels of achievement. (The ceilings of the test are too low for students to exhibit their upper bounds of achievement differentially.) The students in interviews reported that they were frequently assessed, but that they always all worked on the same tasks and assignments, read the same books, and took the same tests.

- There do not appear to be clear procedures for identifying or planning for twice-exceptional students. A parent of an APP student with special learning needs (he did not indicate what these were) indicated that there were no provisions for these students. Comments from students and parents alike affirmed this statement—students and parents indicated that APP was pretty much a “*sink-or-swim*” environment, and purposely so—the idea is that if you can’t cut it in APP, you don’t belong in APP. One student commented, “*I like APP because everyone is pretty much on the same level. If you should not be in APP, it’s pretty hard to keep up.*” Another student noted, “*Some teachers are more understanding than others, but basically the assumption is that APP students have a better work ethic, and that they will meet the rigid standards and expectations that come with APP.*”

Recommendations for Action

- The school district should continue efforts to ensure that the issues of racial and socio-economic diversity issues are addressed in the identification process. In the realm of screening and identification, consider the new work by David Lohman (*Lohman, D. F. An Aptitude Perspective on Talent: Implications for Identification of Academically Gifted Minority Students. Journal for the Education of the Gifted v. 28 no. 3/4 (Spring 2005) p. 333-60*) on using local norms as a basis for further modifications. Take care not to allow pressures that result in a public private school that is class or racially segregated to overly influence decision-making.
- The efforts to increase diversity in the program cannot be based on changes in the identification system that are test-based only. The district should invest in the creation of a “talent development” program that will address grades K-2 in low income schools. The program, which might be modeled on one such as that offered in Virginia Beach, VA, should be oriented toward the presentation of high level, challenging curriculum that will develop the content knowledge, skills, and attitudes that characterize gifted learners.
- Because the teachers in the program have not been adequately prepared to deal with the implications of changing the identification process, they see changes as resulting in a need for them to “water down” or dilute the program. The district must provide staff development that demonstrates how scaffolding can be used to provide the more diverse population with the background and skills necessary for success in the APP curriculum. (Several teachers have used such strategies successfully and only regretted that they had not had adequate information on performance levels to help them prepare before the students arrived in their classrooms.)
- Seattle Public Schools should obtain for each screened student—regardless of the thresholds—the abilities and achievement testing data before drawing conclusions

about gifted education eligibility. The current system is designed such that students must scale multiple hurdles or meet multiple milestones in order to be eligible. Best practices in the field of identification of gifted students dictates the collection of multiple sources of data prior to making a decision. In essence, best practice suggests the collection of data to form a profile for each screened student so that multiple lenses into their academic abilities can be considered. The current system penalizes students who fail to meet thresholds but who, given the opportunity, may excel in academic achievement testing.

- Care should be taken when interpreting the results of the non-verbal subtest of the CogAT as it is stated by test authors to be a measure of a student's ability to work with spatial symbols which is not a stated or implied goal of the APP, Spectrum, or ALO programs. In addition it should be noted that the test authors say nothing about the benefits of using the non-verbal subtest to widen the pool of underrepresented students from low SES environments, however they do state specifically the benefits for the use of this instrument "*for the accurate assessment of the cognitive development of students from whom testing in English would not be appropriate.*" (CogAT technical manual, summary 1, page 49).
- Consider the use of off-grade level testing to gain a more accurate picture of students' ability and achievement levels.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Professional Development

Comprehensive and on-going staff development is critical to personnel preparation. The selection, assignment, and training of teachers and administrators directly responsible for APP is critical to the development and delivery of appropriately challenging curriculum and instruction and for the continued focus of APP curriculum. Equally important is the in-service training necessary for the teachers and administrators, counselors, and other support staff involved in APP. At the very least, all educators must have access to information that adequately prepares them for active and effective participation in the development and delivery of differentiated services for gifted learners. Few of the recommendations made in this report will have meaningful impact unless there is considerable attention paid to the selection, assignment and training of APP staff.

Overall Criterion Description: Gifted learners are entitled to be served by professionals who have specialized preparation in gifted education, expertise in appropriate differentiated content and instructional methods, involvement in ongoing professional development, and who possess exemplary personal and professional traits.

Minimum Standards

- All school staff must be made aware of the nature and needs of gifted students.
- Teachers of gifted students must attend at least one professional development activity a year designed specifically for teaching gifted learners.

- All personnel working with gifted learners must be certified to teach in the area to which they are assigned, and must be aware of the unique learning differences and needs of gifted learners at the grade level at which they are teaching.
- All specialist teachers in gifted education must hold or be actively working toward a certification (or the equivalent) in gifted education in the state in which they teach.
- Any teacher whose primary responsibility for teaching includes gifted learners, must have extensive expertise in gifted education.
- School personnel must be released from their professional duties to participate in staff development efforts in gifted education.
- School personnel must be allotted planning time to prepare for the differentiated education of gifted learners.

Evaluation Questions

1. Is staff for the APP component of the gifted program selected on the basis of understanding of the needs of the identified students?
2. Is staff for the APP component of the gifted program selected on the basis of their knowledge of appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies to address the needs of the students identified for the program?
3. Do the teachers have the skills to address the range of differences in the students in APP?
4. Is adequate staff development provided to ensure that the teachers in APP are apprised of and competent in the application of the most understandings and developments in the field of gifted education?
5. Are there adequate procedures in place for the evaluation and feedback to teachers in APP and are these strategies reflective of the behaviors considered reflective of quality instruction and support for gifted students? Are those responsible for evaluating the teachers of the gifted knowledgeable about the characteristics and needs of gifted students?

Commendations

- The current administrator has recognized the negative impact of more than 20 years without a systematic plan for staff development.
- The elementary and middle school APP staff that have identified conferences or workshops they desired to attend have received support for attendance.
- The parent support group and the school PTAs have been generous in providing funds to support staff development for the APP staff.

Problems, Issues, and Concerns

- APP students and some APP parents noted that there were great levels of variation in effectiveness of APP teachers at the middle school-- not in terms of the challenge level of the courses (students and parents agreed that all APP teachers were challenging), but in their understanding of the distinction between being advanced academically and advanced socially and emotionally. Parents and students both

- indicated that some teachers are able to be flexible while still maintaining rigorous expectations—these were the teachers that students and parents felt were the best fit for APP students. They indicated that other APP teachers were less able to be flexible, and maintained very rigid standards for such things as homework completion. Parents and students at the elementary level expressed the opinion that the level of challenge varied greatly from classroom to classroom and that teachers' skills and attitudes varied from open and responsive to rigid and unprepared.
- There are no system-wide criteria for the hiring of teachers for APP. Hiring is at the discretion of the principal. Additionally, providing evaluative feedback to APP teachers falls on the shoulders of building-level principals, many of whom are under-prepared in their knowledge of gifted learners and their instructional and affective/socio-emotional needs.
 - The responses of parents and students seemed to indicate that the APP teachers expected APP students to be all of one type, rather than representing a range of learning needs. This suggests that the teachers do not have a sound background in understanding gifted students and their learning needs—particularly how a group of gifted students scoring at the high end of an on-grade level test may differ significantly from one another.
 - Until very recently, teachers, administrators and counselors have not received any staff development at all. During the past two years, there has been an effort to provide workshops in areas identified as needing attention and a group of teachers attended a summer institute on academic diversity, some attended a week of training on curriculum compacting and enrichment, and an outside consultant was brought in to train teachers about teaching writing. Despite these few opportunities, there is no fully developed vision for staff development and no allocated budget to ensure that new teachers are provided specific training or that more experienced staff are up to date on the developments in the field. Little follow-up coaching and support was provided after the conclusion of these training experiences, resulting in teachers filing away the information, but not systematically implementing the key ideas.
 - The principal indicated that no staff development was provided by the district specifically for middle school APP teachers on the needs and nature of gifted students in the middle school setting.
 - The principal indicated that, by law, APP teachers were observed and evaluated using the same evaluation form as all other teachers. He indicated that there was no special evaluation process for APP teachers. One student and several parents noted that teachers needed to be evaluated more stringently, and that there were some APP teachers who needed to be given more feedback and support. One parent said, *“That is a big problem, teacher evaluation. There are some teachers teaching APP who should not be, and there is just nothing you can do about it.”* One student noted that *“The unions are the problem. You can’t do anything about a bad teacher.”* The sense of resignation to accepting bad teaching was disturbing.
 - Administrators have not been provided guidance in helping their teaching staff develop the curricular development skills or instructional strategies appropriate for meeting the needs of gifted students.
 - A sound staff development plan should not be dependent on parent fund raising.

- While the elementary school program makes extensive use of parent volunteers and community resources for workshops, and some middle school teachers have brought in parent community resources, the high school program has failed to develop internships, mentorship programs, or other relationships with the many industries and professionals in the community who could provide advanced and valuable experiences for these advanced learners.

Recommendations for Action

- A plan for staff development must be developed that is comprehensive and continuous. Further, the related activities must be consistent with the nature of the APP once the vision of the program and the APP are revised and agreed upon.
- More specific recommendations for personnel preparation, including staff development, teacher selection, and personnel support are included below.
 - The APP staff need highly specialized training in current curricular innovations and instructional strategies used in gifted education, interdisciplinary study and international study.
 - The APP staff need specialized training regarding differentiation for gifted students within the APP program. Additionally, follow-up support should be in place for teachers as they learn to implement these methods as well as program accountability to ensure that this actually occurs in practice.
- The staff development plan for teachers must be planned to occur concurrently and consistently in terms of content with administrator training to provide both the coaching and evaluative feedback and reinforcement necessary to ensure that the staff development results in changed practice in the classroom.
- Develop a mentorship program for students who are in need of these experiences.
- Develop a set of criteria and process for hiring teachers based on the NAGC standards for teacher competencies.
- Develop supplemental evaluation protocols that will provide feedback to teachers on their success in adapting curriculum and instruction to the needs of the students.
- Include social and emotional development of gifted students in the staff development plans to ensure that the teachers learn to distinguish between appropriate acceptance of uniqueness and enabling of inappropriate behavior.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion: Social–Emotional Guidance and Counseling

While the cognitive development of gifted students is critically important, the social and emotional development of these students must not be ignored. The appropriate academic interventions go a long way in supporting the healthy adjustment of gifted learners; however, additional interventions regarding guidance and counseling are required. Differentiated services for gifted learners must include specific interventions for the development and support of the unique social and emotional needs of gifted learners. For example, the increased sensitivities of

most gifted learners may create vulnerability that must be considered when setting realistic expectations for student performance.

In addition to the appropriate provision of services in the areas of socio-emotional guidance and counseling, specific interventions are required to dispel popular myths and typical misunderstandings prevalent in the area of socio-emotional development in gifted learners. For example, concerns that isolation in the APP puts gifted learners at risk for greater social or emotional issues are raised. No evidence was found to document these concerns, yet they are very strong among a few school administrators.

Overall Criterion Description: Gifted education programming must establish a plan to recognize and nurture the unique socio-emotional development of gifted learners.

Minimum Standards

- Gifted learners, because of their unique socio-emotional development, must be provided with guidance and counseling services by a counselor who is familiar with the characteristics and socio-emotional needs of gifted learners.
- Gifted learners must be provided with career guidance consistent with their unique strengths.
- Gifted learners who are placed at-risk must have special attention, counseling, and support to help them realize their full potential.
- Gifted learners must be provided with affective curriculum as part of differentiated curriculum and instructional services.
- Gifted students who are underachieving must not be exited from gifted programs because of related problems.

Evaluation Questions

1. What systems exist to support the social/emotional needs of gifted students and are these systems adequate?
2. Do students develop a supportive peer group?

Commendations

- Staff and administration seem to be very concerned with the social and emotional health of the students. All stakeholders noted that one benefit of APP was attention to the social and emotional needs of the students it serves, and gave no indication that they believe that this occurs to the detriment of students not in the program. Stakeholders seem to believe that this program is perfectly suited for developing the confidence and self-acceptance of the students it serves.
- APP seems to develop a close knit cadre of students who work and grow together as scholars, particularly at the elementary level. APP seems to provide students with a support network of like peers who share intellectual interests and who are accepting of each other.

- Students are maintained in APP even when they struggle academically; dismissal from the program does not result from short-term or periodic underachievement issues. Counselors and teachers see their role as supporters, not judges.
- Students, counselors, parents, administrators, and teachers were unanimous in indicating that the supportive peer group that developed as a result of APP was a primary benefit of participation in the program. One student noted, *“It is great because we’ve known each other since first, second grade and we help each other. We know what each other is going through.”* Another student noted, *“We’re all competitive, and we kind of push each other to be the best. We aren’t really competing against each other, but we push each other. You don’t want to be the worst one in your class.”* Most parents indicated that the peer group was a positive element of the program, although a few felt that the pressure to be the best, when surrounded by such talented students, caused a great deal of stress.
- Elementary and middle school teachers recognized the unique socio/emotional needs of gifted students and expressed confidence in their ability to serve these students’ needs.

Problems, Issues and Concerns

- Elementary and middle school counselors indicated that there are no specific systems in place to support the social/emotional needs of gifted students, although they did make up a significant portion of the students they see. Middle school counselors noted that the stress and pressure of the program leads students to exhibit behaviors unique to the gifted population—“self-harming”—cutting and eating disorders primary among them. Counselors indicated that they got numerous cases of self-harm each year, and it was always APP students. None had received specific training in counseling the gifted, and they felt they needed to refer these cases outside of the school as the school was not equipped to handle these counseling needs. Unfortunately, the counselors did not feel that they needed any additional training or support to work with gifted students, as they believed that these students received, at home, all of the support that they needed, a stereotype belied by their own observations of student behavior and assumptions about home environments. Elementary counseling services emphasized social skills groups and friendship groups, particularly in the younger grades. By upper elementary, fewer students are referred for these types of needs, and other services focused on preparation for middle school, study skills, and organization are substituted.
- While confident of their ability to manage issues such as competition, perfectionism, and anxiety within their own classrooms, the elementary teachers with whom we spoke did not have any training or skills in these areas. Further, they did not express an interest in seeking additional support from the school counselor or other community agencies.
- At the high school level, the students perceived the counselor case load as too great for the attention to their unique career and counseling needs.
- Little support is given to creating innovative scheduling or credit options. Advanced Placement has become the default option rather than a carefully planned alternative

- and other alternatives are not explored or suggested by counselors (dual enrollment, internships, mentorships, etc.).
- Counselors have not been provided staff development on the unique social and emotional needs of gifted students or their unique career and college counseling needs. A few students who joined APP later (in late elementary school or early middle school) indicated that it took about a year to break into the APP clique that had formed.
 - As noted above, students and counselors do not report any specific strategies for developing social skills among gifted students that would enhance their functioning in diverse settings. Teachers and counselors are criticized at the elementary level by the students as *“favoring some students more than others...letting them get away everything, giving them more chances and more choices, spoiling them. They need to deal with the hot heads and how some of them act socially.”*
 - Most distressing of all our interview comments were those that revealed racism in the program. Students and adults reported that African-American students in the program have been bullied (verbally and *“under the radar screen”*) and isolated by peers. Students reported racist comments from teachers and other adults in the buildings. In addition, they reported that *“You have to be like them or they won’t give you the time of day.”* Another African-American student was told by another student in the school, *“Stop coming here. This is a white school.”* One student summarized this issue as, *“The teachers have a range. Some are nice, some are tough, and some are just evil.”* Counselors and other adults were not perceived as trustworthy individuals to go to with these issues. Issues of abuse of confidentiality were cited as the reasons for reluctance to approach adults in the school. Additionally, the counselors and teachers did not consistently recognize cultural isolation as a substantial problem in their classrooms, despite the candid comments from some APP students of color and their families.
 - There is a mixed blessing in the perception of some APP teachers that the program is a “haven.” On the one hand it suggests support and tolerance; on the other, it may signal a reluctance to help the student who is having difficulty find ways to cope.

Recommendations for Action

- Assign APP students to one counselor if all are to remain located in Garfield or assign all APP students to one counselor in each school if the decision is made to split the program. Select counselors who have the appropriate mind-set toward the increased responsibility and need for creative alternatives for scheduling.
- Provide appropriate staff development activities for counselors serving APP students.
- Provide a program for parents that allows them the opportunity to see the many options that exist both within and outside-of-school.
- Provide counselors with training in developing alternative options for APP students that respond to individual needs.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for all educators involved with the APP, including counselors and administrators. In addition, safeguards should be set into place to ensure that APP students and parents have a safe method to communicate their

concerns regarding the cultural climate. Any and all concerns with remarks or behaviors that reflect cultural, ethnic, or socio-economic bias should be dealt with swiftly and with emphatic concern by those in responsible positions.

APPENDIX A
EVALUATION QUESTIONS

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Philosophy and Definition

1. Is there consistent agreement in the school community around a definition of giftedness and a philosophy for serving gifted students?
2. Do the provisions for and operation of the APP program fit reflect and fit into the philosophy and definition of giftedness of the school division?
3. To what degree do the provision of the APP program and the other services offered within the scope of the Advanced Learning Program suffice to cover all the needs of gifted students in the school district?

Identification

1. To what degree do the identification procedures reflect the definition of giftedness adopted by the school division?
2. Do all students have equal opportunity to be included in the screening and identification process?
3. To what degree does the information provided by the identification procedures inform placement decision?
4. To what degree does the information provided by the identification procedures inform instruction decisions?
5. Are the identification procedures applied systematically and fairly? Are the identification procedures free of racial/ethnic, socioeconomic and gender bias? Does the enrollment in APP reflect a fair distribution of students from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and both genders?
6. What provisions, if any, are available for twice exceptional students, and underachieving students?
7. Are there adequate provisions for the enrollment of students new to the community who qualify for the APP program?
8. Are members of the screening and placement committees qualified to interpret test score data and to make judgments on appropriate placement?

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Is the curriculum and instruction provided for the students in the APP program reflective of the needs of the students identified for the program?
2. Is the curriculum and instruction differentiated according to student needs within the APP program? (To what degree are the students working at a significantly accelerated learning pace (working typically two grade levels beyond age peers), at grade level expectations that are significantly above grade level (two grade levels), and with curriculum that is significantly advanced level of complexity and depth)? Concurrently, does the curriculum

- develop reflective reading skills of analytic and interpretive skills through the use of higher level reading materials?
3. Are there essential qualitative differences in the curriculum offered to the students selected for the APP program and the curriculum offered to students in the Spectrum and ALO?
 4. Do the essential elements of the curriculum offered in APP reflect the standards of quality curriculum for gifted learners of the nature defined and identified for this program?
 5. To what degree do the curriculum and instruction result in the desired goals for the APP component of the gifted program (reading and mathematics achievement that is significantly beyond grade level (two grade levels)?)
 6. Does the curriculum reflect interdisciplinary concepts that promote the development of advanced/accelerated learning as well as depth of learning?
 7. Does the curriculum reflect the mastery of basic skills as well as critical analysis, creative thinking, and a broad application of the those skill?
 8. Does the curriculum foster the development of self-understanding and interpersonal skills such as cooperation, flexibility, team work, problem-solving, effective communication, and appreciation for diversity through the use of cooperative learning, small-group projects and presentations, and class meetings?
 9. Does the curriculum promote thoughtful habits of mind (applying old knowledge and experience to new situations, considering the implications of choices, imagining new possibilities, integrating new knowledge into old, inquiring into the sources and accuracy of information, adopting multiple perspectives for considering a problem or opportunity) and work (persistence, attention to detail, careful thinking, respect for others, and a focus on long-term goals)?
 10. Does the adoption of grade level standards and benchmarks at grade level in writing, communication and science provide appropriate challenge?
 11. Does the social studies curriculum build global awareness and provide for the integration of concepts from multiple disciplines?
 12. To what degree is assessment aligned with APP program goals?
 13. Do school activities promote a sense of what it means to be an active involved citizen and promote acceptance of diversity (citizenship)?
 14. Is Direct Writing Assessment appropriately used to assess and develop writing skills?
 15. Do teachers recognize and adapt instruction to the varied readiness needs of the APP students?
 16. What provisions, if any, are available for twice exceptional students, and underachieving students?

Staff and Staff Development

1. Is staff for the APP component of the gifted program selected on the basis of understanding of the needs of the identified students?
2. Is staff for the APP component of the gifted program selected on the basis of their knowledge of appropriated curriculum and instructional strategies to address the needs of the students identified for the program?
3. Do the teachers have the skills to address the range of differences in the students in the APP program?
4. Is adequate staff development provided to ensure that the teachers in the APP program are apprised of and competent in the application of the most understandings and developments in the field of gifted education?
5. Are there adequate procedures in place for the evaluation and feedback to teachers in the APP program and are these strategies reflective of the behaviors considered reflective of quality instruction and support for gifted students? Are those responsible for evaluating the teachers of the gifted knowledgeable about the characteristics and needs of gifted students?

Support for the Social Development and Emotional Adjustment of APP Students

1. What systems exist to support the social/emotional needs of gifted students and are these systems adequate?
2. Do students develop a supportive peer group?

Communication

1. To what degree do parents of APP students feel well-informed of the program's goals and objectives and their children's progress in the program?
2. What is the quality of communication between and among administrators and teachers?
3. Are there differences in achievement patterns between qualified gifted students who elect to participate in the APP program and those qualified gifted students who elect not to participate in the programs? Between participating gifted students and general education students?
4. Does the APP progress report adequately communicate student achievement to parents?

Other

1. Are there appropriate review processes and supportive, flexible exit procedures in place for students? If so, under what conditions are these utilized?
2. Do the administrators responsible for the APP program have adequate qualifications to carry out the implementation of the program?

3. What are parents/students/admin/general educators/program teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs?

File name: APP Evaluation Questions
May 6, 2007

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocols and Observation Protocol¹

¹ These protocols were used as general guidelines. At times the interviewee answered the question as part of responses to other questions. At times a question might have been inappropriate given prior answers and at times, the follow-up to early questions was deemed more important than asking all questions in the protocol. Further, some groups were not available for interview. A summary of all interviews and observations is included in the report.

Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. The questions I will be asking are structured to help evaluate the quality of the Accelerated Progress Program and to give feedback for improving the program and the education provided to the students served by this program. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather is a means of examining the program in light of the standards of quality educational programming for gifted students and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence and any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Philosophy and Program Goals

How do you define giftedness?

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

How would you explain the mission/goals of APP program to others?

What modifications would you make to the APP program to fit your ideal gifted program? Does the APP fail to identify any students who would benefit from this type of program?

How would you describe the program model of the APP program? What are the most positive components? What additional services would you like to see in place?

How effective are the current arrangements for serving students as a program within a more general education school? Why?

Support

How would you describe the administrative organization for running the APP program Is it effective? Why or why not?

What kinds of support do you receive in order to better meet the needs of gifted students (consider the full range of possibilities from supplies or classroom support to staff development opportunities)? What else would be appropriate?

How frequently do you receive feedback and what types of feedback do you receive regarding your effectiveness in teaching the students in the APP program?

Are there other staff development opportunities you like to have to support your teaching efforts?

What are the obstacles to appropriate services to gifted students in the APP program?

How do you and the program provide for flexibility in sequencing and scheduling for students?

Curriculum

How does the curriculum offered to students in the APP program differ from a standard curriculum and from the other options offered to gifted students served in the Seattle schools?

How is the curriculum offered to the students in the APP program something that other children – non-identified children – could do, would do, and should do?

In what ways do you make provisions for differences among the gifted students in the APP program? What do you feel is your responsibility in addressing these differences?

How do the units you create get implemented into the classroom? Describe one of the units and how it is appropriate for gifted learners in the APP program? And how does it reflect the goals of the APP program?

How do you align the assessment strategies in your classroom with the APP goals?

Identification

What is your current involvement in the identification of gifted students for the APP program?

How does the current identification model address issues of racial and ethnic diversity?

What suggestions do you have for modifications in the current identification model?

Special Populations

To what degree is the current APP program meeting the needs of gifted LEP students? gifted underachievers? gifted students with special learning difficulties?

Support

What strategies and support options are in place for students who experience academic, social or emotional difficulties in the APP program?

Under what conditions would a child be asked to leave the program? What supports are in place to make that transition as smooth as possible?

Communication

How are parents involved in any decision-making regarding the APP program or your classroom?

In what way do you inform parents about the learning goals of your classroom?

In what ways do you inform parents about the achievements and learning progress of their children?

What coordination is there between class levels, between the elementary and middle school and between the middle school and high school to ensure an integrated, sequential curriculum and continuous learning progress on program goals?

Parent Interview Protocol

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. We have been asked to examine the APP program by the administration of the school system. The questions I will be asking are structured to help the administrators and teachers evaluate the quality of the APP program and to give them feedback for improving the program and your child's education. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather it is a means of holding the school up to the standards of quality programming for gifted students and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence and any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only. There will be no way that you or child will be identified.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Grade Level of Child: _____

To what degree do you feel the APP meets your child's educational needs? Can you give me specific examples that will illustrate ways in which the APP does meet those needs? In what ways does it not?

What do you feel are the strengths of the present program?

To what degree do you believe your child challenged in the classroom?

Is this level of challenge consistent over time? Over subject matter areas of reading, math, social studies, science?

What do you perceive are the special provisions made to meet the specific needs of *your* child in the classroom? (If special provisions are noted, follow with: Do you perceive your child is benefiting from the special provisions made? In what ways?)

What types of communications do you receive regarding the curriculum (what your child is to be learning), your child's achievements and progress? What are the messages that you get from those communications?

How informative are these communications?

How does involvement in this school affect your child's overall response to school and learning? What effects has it had on your child?

What support services do you feel are needed by your child? counseling? What is your access to these services? Were these services effective?

What is your definition of gifted education? To what extent does this school reflect that definition?

What has your involvement in the identification process? What information were you provided? Was it useful to you in making decisions about placing your child in APP? Why or why not?

What other information can you provide us regarding the school's response to your child's needs?

What modifications would you make to improve the APP? What outcomes would you like to see for your child?

What do you perceive are the current goals of the school? If you had to help decide these goals, what would you decide?

There are many goals that are listed in the literature of the APP program. I have a list of those here. I would like for you to look at this list and identify those areas in which you perceive that your child has demonstrated growth and areas where you have not seen much growth. Examples of ways you have seen growth would be useful. (Show the list.)

- Advanced learning in reading
- Advanced learning in math
- Critical analysis
- Creative thinking
- Self-understanding
- Cooperation
- Flexibility
- Team work
- Problem-solving
- Effective communication
- Appreciation for Diversity
- Applying knowledge to new situations
- Integrating new knowledge into old
- Considering implications of choices
- Inquiring into sources and adequacy of information
- Adopting multiple perspectives
- Persistence
- Attention to detail
- Careful thinking
- Respect for others
- Focus on long-term goals
- Global awareness

Student Interview Protocol

Introduction

We have been asked to gather some information about the APP program and your experiences in school. The questions I will be asking are structured to help evaluate the quality of the program and to give feedback to the administration for improving the program and the education provided to you. This is not an evaluation of your teachers, but it will help us tell teachers and the principal ways to make the school a better place to learn.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence; I mean that no one will know what you said. I will not tell who said what to me. Any information you give us will be reported as part of group information.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

What do you like about your classes in the APP program?
What don't you like?

In what ways does the APP program challenge you?

Do you find your classes interesting?

How much of each day do you spend learning something new to you? All day? Half the day?
About an hour or two? Hardly ever?

What has been the most exciting thing you have done in school?

What changes would you make to the school to better meet your needs as a learner? To make school more interesting?

What type of information is provided to you to show how much you have learned? How much you grown in your understandings of topics and concepts?

Where would you go or who would you talk to if you needed help because you were having trouble making friends or in feeling good about yourself or school?

Is there anything else I should know that would help the administrators improve the educational experience for students at this school?

Guidance Counselor Interview

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. The questions I will be asking are structured to help evaluate the quality of the Accelerated Progress Program and to give feedback for improving the program and the education provided to the students served by this program. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather it is a means of examining the program in light of the standards of quality educational programming for gifted students and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence and any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Philosophy and Goals

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

How would you interpret the mission/goals of the APP program?

What are the advantages/disadvantages of the APP program, especially in the area of counseling the students in the program (meeting their academic, social and emotional needs)?

What modifications would you make to the APP program to fit your ideal of services to these gifted students?

Does the APP fail to identify or serve any students who would benefit from this type of school?

How does the APP program address the special needs of the identified gifted students?

How would you describe the administrative organization for running the APP program? Is it effective? Why or why not?

How would you describe the program model for the APP program? What are the most positive components? What additional services would you like to see in place?

Support

What kinds of special support do you receive as a guidance counselor in order to better meet the needs of gifted students such as those identified for the APP program?

What training/staff development have you been provided?

What types of feedback do you receive regarding your effectiveness in counseling students?

How does the APP program provide for flexibility in sequencing and scheduling its students in light of differences among the students?

Curriculum

What do you feel are the special social/emotional needs of gifted and talented students?

How do you as a counselor work to meet the needs of these students?

Are there special programs or activities offered that are designed for specific needs of highly gifted students?

What are the obstacles to appropriate services to gifted students in this program?

What do you feel is your responsibility in working with high ability students?

Identification

What is your current involvement in the identification and of gifted students for the APP program?

What suggestions do you have for modifications in the current identification model?

To what degree is the current program meeting the needs of gifted LEP students? gifted underachievers? Gifted students with special learning difficulties?

Communications

How are parents involved in any decision-making regarding the APP program?

What avenues are available for teacher/counselor communication? Are they effective?

Administrative Team Interview

(G/T Program Director and Principals in Building Where APP IS Offered)

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. The questions I will be asking are structured to help evaluate the quality of the Accelerated Progress Program and to give feedback for improving the program and the education provided to the students served by this program. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather is a means of examining the program in light of the standards of quality educational programming for gifted students and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence and any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Philosophy and Program Goals

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

What is your view of the current mission of the APP program?

What do you believe should be the mission/goals of the APP program?

What are the advantages/disadvantages of the APP program? What modifications would you make to fit your ideal method for serving highly gifted children?

How would you describe the gifted program model the APP program has adopted? What are the most positive components?

Staff Selection and Staff Development

What do you think are the qualities of a teacher of the highly gifted child such as one in the APP program?

How are teachers and the counselors selected for the APP program?

How are these individuals evaluated? What criteria are used? What specific skills do you look for? What do you expect to see different happening in the APP classroom that you would not see in other classes or other options offered to gifted students in Seattle?

What kinds of special support is provided to the teaching and counseling staff? How is the staff development program developed and delivered?

What kind of staff development would you like to see to support your teachers?

What changes would you make in staffing in order to better deliver an appropriate APP program?

What is your background and training in gifted education?

Administrative Impact

How would you describe the administrative organization for running the APP program? Is it effective? Why or why not?

How effective are the current arrangements for serving students as a program within a more general education school? Why?

Identification

What is your involvement in the current process for identifying and placing students in the APP program?

To what degree do the current identification procedures identify all the children who can benefit from a gifted school?

What suggestions do you have for modifications in the current identification model?

To what degree are parents and community members made aware of the identification process and curricular modifications the APP program adopts?

Delivery of Services

Curriculum

In what ways does your teaching staff make provisions for its highly capable student body?

How does curriculum offered to your students differ from a regular curriculum that may experience elsewhere?

How is the curriculum offered something that other children--non-identified children-- could do, would do, and should do?

What do you feel teachers are doing best in addressing the needs of high ability students?

What improvements could be made in this area?

What do you see as appropriate differentiation in the classroom and what principles of differentiation would you see?

How does the APP program provide for flexibility in sequencing and scheduling for its students?

How do you judge the quality of curriculum offered to the APP students? What is the mechanism used to ensure quality? Is this efficient? How would it be more efficient?

Special Populations

What efforts have been made to make the APP program more inclusive? What were the effects?

To what degree is the current enrollment in the school reflective of the diverse community of the Seattle schools? Should it be?

To what degree does the APP program meet the needs of gifted LEP students? gifted underachievers? gifted students with special learning difficulties?

What evidence exists to show that services provided to your students are equitable across racial, ethnic, SES groups?

Would you say that you meet the needs of all gifted --regardless of the gifts? Should the APP program?

Parents

How are parents involved in any decision-making regarding the APP program?

Administrative Team Interview

*(Central Office Staff and Principals in Building
Where APP is NOT Offered)*

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. The questions I will be asking are structured to help evaluate the quality of the Accelerated Progress Program and to give feedback for improving the program and the education provided to the students served by this program. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather is a means of examining the program in light of the standards of quality educational programming for gifted students and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence and any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Philosophy and Program Goals

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

What is your view of the current mission of the APP program?

What do you believe should be the mission/goals of the APP program?

What are the advantages/disadvantages of the APP program? What modifications would you make to fit your ideal method for serving highly gifted children?

How would you describe the gifted program model the APP program has adopted? What are the most positive components?

Staff Selection and Staff Development

What do you think are the qualities of a teacher of the highly gifted child such as one in the APP program?

Administrative Impact

How would you describe the administrative organization for running the APP program? Is it effective? Why or why not?

How effective are the current arrangements for serving students as a program within a more general education school? Why?

Identification

What is your involvement in the current process for identifying and placing students in the APP program?

To what degree do the current identification procedures identify all the children who can benefit from a gifted school?

To what degree do the current identification processes for APP reflect the gender, ethnic, racial make-up of the Seattle schools? To what degree should it?

What suggestions do you have for modifications in the current identification model?

To what degree are parents and community members made aware of the identification process and curricular modifications the APP program adopts?

Delivery of Services

Curriculum

How does curriculum offered to APP students differ from a regular curriculum that may experience elsewhere?

How is the curriculum offered something that other children--non-identified children-- could do, would do, and should do?

What do you feel teachers are doing best in addressing the needs of high ability students?

What improvements could be made in this area?

How does the APP program provide for flexibility in sequencing and scheduling for its students?

How do you judge the quality of curriculum offered to the APP students? What is the mechanism used to ensure quality? Is this efficient? How would it be more efficient?

Special Populations

What efforts have been made to make the APP program more inclusive? What were the effects?

To what degree is the current enrollment in the school reflective of the diverse community of the Seattle schools? Should it be?

To what degree does the APP program meet the needs of gifted LEP students? gifted underachievers? gifted students with special learning difficulties?

What evidence exists to show that services provided to APP students are equitable across racial, ethnic, SES groups?

Would you say that you meet the needs of all gifted --regardless of the gifts? Should the APP program?

Parents

How are parents involved in any decision-making regarding the APP program?

Advisory Board Interview

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. We have been asked by the administration of this school system to examine the APP program and provide an assessment of the degree to which the APP program measures up to national standards of quality for gifted programming. The questions I will be asking are structured to elicit your perceptions of and experiences with the current APP program. This information will help provide the program administration with information to improve program services. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather an outside interpretation of the APP program at large.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence; any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Background Experiences with APP

Tell me about your personal experiences with the APP program.

What involvement have you had with the APP program processes (e.g., participating in identification, delivery of services, providing information to parents and other stakeholders)

What types of direct communication have you had with the APP program staff and how frequently does this communication occur?

What are your thoughts about the current APP program?

Philosophy and Program Goals

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

What is your view of the current mission of the APP program?

What do you believe *should be* the mission/goals of the APP program?

What do you believe should be the ideal relationship between the services for gifted students and the larger educational goals of the school district?

To what degree do you believe this relationship exists currently between APP and the larger school system?

Identification

What is your level of awareness of/involvement in the current process for identifying and placing students in the APP program?

To what degree do you believe the current identification procedures identify all of the students who can benefit from gifted services?

To what degree do the current identification processes for APP reflect the gender, ethnicity, racial make-up, different languages spoken, and varied SES groups represented in the larger Seattle Schools?

What suggestions do you have for modifications or improvements to the current identification system?

Delivery of Services

From your perspective, how do the services offered in the APP program differ from those offered in the regular educational program and other services offered to gifted students in the school system?

In your view, how do the services provided through the APP program differ from those that other non-identified children could do, would do, and should do? From those offered in the Spectrum program or to gifted students in the regular classroom?

In your view, what are the current aspects of the APP program services that best meet the needs of high ability students?

What improvements or modifications could you offer to improve the services for high ability students in the APP program?

Stakeholders

To what degree does the current APP program adequately communicate with the various stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, general educators)?

To what degree are parents involved in decision-making regarding the APP program?

In your position, you hear from a variety of stakeholders about their concerns and compliments regarding various school programs and services. From this position of “data collector” what are these varied perceptions of the APP program you hear reported most frequently?

- (a) What program compliments, strengths, assets, or benefits do you hear about most frequently?
- (b) What program concerns, weaknesses, liabilities or drawbacks do you hear about most frequently?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students in the APP program, for other students who are eligible but choose another educational option, or for those who may be eligible but are not identified?

Student Interview Opt Outs

Introduction

We have been asked to gather some information about the APP program and your experiences in school. As I understand, you were eligible for the APP program but chose not to participate. The questions I will be asking you are structured to better understand why some students, like you, made the choices that you did. This is not an evaluation of you, or your teachers, but it will give us information about ways we can make the Seattle Public Schools, including the APP program a better place for students to learn.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence. I mean that no one will know what you said. I will not tell who said what to me. Any information you give us will be reported as part of the total group information.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Why did you (or you and your family) choose not to participate in the APP program?

Have you ever regretted that decision or wished you had chosen to go to the APP program?
Why?

Describe what your current school is like, What are the classes like?

The teacher(s)?

The other students?

What are the good parts of your current school program?
What are the parts that are not a fit for you?

What changes would you suggest to make school a better fit for you?

What has been the most exciting thing you have ever done in school?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students who are like you in school?

Parent Interview APP Drop Outs

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. We have been asked to examine the APP program by the administration of this school system. As I understand, your child/children were eligible and participated in the APP program but later chose not to participate. The questions I will be asking you are structured to better understand why some students and their families made the choice to opt out of this program. This information will help provide the program administration with information that will improve the learning experiences for all students. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather it is a means of holding the school up to the national standards of quality for gifted programming and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met currently.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence; any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only. There will be no way that you or your child will be identified.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Grade level of your child: _____

Tell me about your experience with the APP program? I understand that your child/children were eligible to participate. Did they completely opt out or did they ever attend the APP program? If so, when was that attendance? What grade level(s) were your child/children?

(What was the APP experience like for your child/ren? What was your perception of the classes? The teacher(s)? The other students? The available resources?

In your experience, what were the strengths of the APP program as you experienced them? What parts were not a fit for your child/ren?

Why did you (and your child) choose to continue to participate in the APP program?

What involvement have you had with the APP program? What communication have you had with the APP program staff? To what degree did your involvement and this communication influence your decision to opt out of the APP program?

Describe what your child's *current* school setting. Describe the learning environment. What are the classes like? The teacher(s)? The other students? The available resources? The level of challenge? The provision for meeting a variety of learners' needs including your child/ren?

What are the good parts of your child's/ren's *current* school program?

What are the parts that are not a fit for them? How does this compare to the APP program experience(s) you had? If it is a better fit than the APP program, describe how it is a better match.

What changes would you suggest to make school (and the APP program) a better fit for you and your child/ren?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students in the APP program and others who are eligible but choose another educational option?

Parent Interview Opt Outs

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. We have been asked to examine the APP program by the administration of this school system. As I understand, your child/children were eligible for the APP program but chose not to participate. The questions I will be asking you are structured to better understand why some students and their families made the choice to opt out of this program. This information will help provide the program administration with information that will improve the learning experiences for all students. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather it is a means of holding the school up to the national standards of quality for gifted programming and providing an assessment of the degree to which those standards are met currently.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence; any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only. There will be no way that you or your child will be identified.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Grade level of your child: _____

In your experience, what are the strengths of the APP program as you experienced them? What parts were not a fit for your child/ren?

Why did you (and your child) choose not to participate in the APP program?

What involvement have you had with the APP program? What communication have you had with the APP program staff? To what degree did your involvement and this communication influence your decision to opt out of the APP program?

Describe what your child's *current* school setting. Describe the learning environment. What are the classes like? The teacher(s)? The other students? The available resources? The level of challenge? The provision for meeting a variety of learners' needs including your child/ren?

What are the good parts of your child's/ren's *current* school program?

What are the parts that are not a fit for them? How does this compare to the APP program experience(s) you perceive your child would have had in the APP program? If it is a better fit than the APP program, describe how it is a better match.

What changes would you suggest to make school a better fit for you and your child/ren?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students in the APP program and others who are eligible but choose another educational option?

School Board Interview

Introduction

Before we begin, let me give you a brief context for this interview. We have been asked by the administration of this school system to examine the APP program and provide an assessment of the degree to which the APP program measures up to national standards of quality for gifted programming. The questions I will be asking are structured to elicit your perceptions of and experiences with the current APP program. This information will help provide the program administration with information to improve program services. This is not a personnel evaluation, but rather an outside interpretation of the APP program at large.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence; any information you give us will be reported in aggregate form only.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Background Experiences with APP

Tell me about your personal experiences with the APP program, if any?

What involvement have you had with the APP program processes? What communication have you had with the APP program staff?

What are your thoughts about the current APP program?

Philosophy and Program Goals

What is your personal philosophy regarding the education of the gifted?

What is your view of the current mission of the APP program?

What do you believe should be the mission/goals of the APP program?

What do you believe should be the ideal relationship between the services for gifted students and the larger educational goals of the school district?

To what degree do you believe this relationship exists currently between APP and the larger school system?

Identification

What is your level of awareness of/involvement in the current process for identifying and placing students in the APP program?

(If applicable) To what degree do you believe the current identification procedures identify all of the students who can benefit from gifted services?

(If applicable) To what degree do the current identification processes for APP reflect the gender, ethnicity, racial make-up, different languages spoken, and varied SES groups represented in the larger Seattle Schools?

What suggestions do you have for modifications or improvements to the current identification system?

Services

From your perspective, how do the services offered in the APP program differ from those offered in the regular educational program?

In your view, how do the services provided through the APP program differ from those that other non-identified children could do, would do, and should do?

In your view, what are the greatest assets of the current APP program?

What are the greatest areas for improvement or modification?

What changes to services would you suggest to improve the quality of the APP program?

Stakeholders

In your position, you hear from a variety of stakeholders about their concerns and compliments regarding various school programs and services. From this position of “data collector” what are these varied perceptions of the APP program you hear reported most frequently?

- (a) What program compliments, strengths, assets, or benefits do you hear about most frequently?
- (b) What program concerns, weaknesses, liabilities or drawbacks do you hear about most frequently?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students in the APP program, for other students who are eligible but choose another educational option, or for those who may be eligible but are not identified?

Student Interview APP Drop Outs

Introduction

We have been asked to gather some information about the APP program and your experiences in school. As I understand, you once attended the APP program, but later chose not to participate. The questions I will be asking you are structured to better understand why some students, like you, made the choices that you did. This is not an evaluation of you, or your teachers, but it will give us information about ways we can make the Seattle Public Schools, including the APP program a better place for students to learn.

We will hold all of your responses in complete confidence. I mean that no one will know what you said. I will not tell who said what to me. Any information you give us will be reported as part of the total group information.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Tell me about your experience with the APP program? I understand that you were eligible to participate. Did you ever attend the APP program? If so, when was that? What grade level(s) were you in? (IF THE STUDENT DOES NOT REMEMBER BEING IN THE APP PROGRAM – GO TO THE OPT OUT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL)

What was the APP experience like for you?

What were the classes like?

The teacher(s)?

The other students?

What were the good parts of the APP program as you experienced them?

What were the parts that were not a fit for you?

Why did you (or you and your family) choose not to continue to participate in the APP program?

What changes would you suggest to make the APP program a better fit for you?

Describe what your current school is like, What are the classes like? The teacher(s)? The other students?

What are the good parts of your current school program?

What are the parts that are not a fit for you? How does this compare to the APP program experience(s) you had?

What changes would you suggest to make school a better fit for you?

What has been the most exciting thing you have ever done in school?

Is there anything you would like to share with me that could help the administrators improve the educational experiences for students in the APP program?

Classroom Observation Protocol

(adapted from Maker & Nielson, 1996)

Use the following scale for rating your observation:

N/O= No opportunity to observe 0= no evidence of behavior 1= evidence of behavior noted

Learning Environment:

- ___ The classroom is more learner-centered than teacher-centered
(arrangement of desks, placement of teacher, resources, etc; student work is displayed)
- ___ The classroom environment is one in which student ideas/contributions are encouraged, sought, and valued (student voices are as common as the teacher's)
- ___ A variety of grouping options, rather than one grouping option, is used
- ___ The classroom seems to be more flexible than rigidly structured
- ___ High mobility, more than low mobility, is permitted and encouraged
- ___ The teacher establishes a safe, comfortable learning environment
- ___ All students seem to be engaged
- ___ All students seem to be equally valued by teacher and other students

General Comments on Learning Environment:

Content:

- ___ is organized conceptually
- ___ provides opportunities for students to work with abstract concepts and ideas
- ___ is at appropriate levels of complexity for the gifted students in the classroom
- ___ focuses on important ideas in a discipline
- ___ is varied – students are not working on the same thing during the entire observation
- ___ includes instruction on methods of inquiry true to the field
- ___ encourages rich connection-making
- ___ is interdisciplinary
- ___ is engaging to students
- ___ seems relevant to students’ lives and interests
- ___ employs advanced readings
- ___ is differentiated according to student readiness levels
- ___ content in reading and math is significantly beyond grade level expectations (two or more grade levels depending on student level of achievement)
- ___ provide opportunity for critical and creative thinking
- ___ foster the development of self-understanding
- ___ foster cooperation and team work
- ___ foster flexibility
- ___ foster problem solving
- ___ foster development of effective communication
- ___ (for social studies) foster global awareness

General Comments on Content:

Process:

- ___ Higher-level thinking is emphasized
- ___ The teacher poses open-ended questions/ students work with open-ended ideas (right/wrong is less important than the thinking involved)
- ___ There is an emphasis on discovery/inquiry, rather than on students directly being “told” or given facts by the teacher
- ___ The teacher asks students to give evidence of their reasoning when arriving at an answer/solution
- ___ The teacher encourages metacognition
- ___ Students have attractive choices that seem aligned with their interests or preferences
- ___ Group interaction is encouraged
- ___ Provisions are made for students to work at varied paces
- ___ A variety of types of learning procedures are used (multiple strategies, approaches that appeal to different types of learning preferences, etc.)
- ___ Appropriate support is given to students as needed
- ___ Appropriate extra challenge is given to students as needed
- ___ Promotion of thoughtful habits of mind is incorporated (applying old knowledge to new situations, considering the implications of choices, inquiring into sources an accuracy of information, adopting multiple perspectives)
- ___ Promotion of important work habits is incorporated (persistence, attention to detail, careful thinking, respect for others, and focus on long term goals)

General Comments on Process:

Products:

- ___ Products address real-world problems or concerns
- ___ Products have a real, rather than a contrived, purpose
- ___ Students have choices of which products to undertake
- ___ Students have an opportunity to share their products with each other
- ___ Students have an opportunity to share their products with a real-world audience
- ___ The product is a transformation or synthesis, rather than a recapitulation or summary of existing information
- ___ The product will be evaluated by someone, other than the teacher, using criteria appropriate to the field
- ___ The format has been selected by the producer as appropriate to the proposed audience and to the talents of its creator

General Comments on Products:

Other:

- ___ Appropriate adjustments are made for twice-exceptional learners
- ___ Direct Writing Assessment appropriately used to assess and develop writing skills

APPENDIX C

Analysis of APP Program Design Options

Analysis of APP Program Design Options

Discussion of program options was prevalent in nearly all meetings. We examined three possible options and present our summary of the pros and cons of each option below.

<i>Design</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
<p><i>Combine elementary and middle level APP programs into 1-8 building</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for greater “ceiling” for upper elementary students, including the provision for elementary students to take Algebra and Geometry within their school building, without losing valuable instructional time by taking buses or private transportation to other middle school settings; • Provides structure for vertical teaming in curriculum planning which has the potential to align more closely the 1-8 curricular continuum; • Middle school teachers can lend content expertise for elementary teachers who have expected lack of content specialization in all areas in which they are assigned to teach; • Provides a forum for centralized physical and human resources. Teaching, administrative, and counseling staff can have specialized training for the unique needs of this population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precludes opportunities for APP students to interact with non-APP students. This intellectual (and in current SPS reality, socio-economic and cultural/ethnic) homogeneity sends powerful messages to students about the district’s valuation of all types of learners. By insulating APP students in one setting, APP students are denied opportunities to develop skills necessary for negotiating in an increasingly diverse world. The students were very vocal in noting the advantages to them of not being so isolated in the middle and high school. • Without extensive communication and marketing to community stakeholders (particularly those NOT involved in APP), this model has the potential to continue the conception that APP is the only authentic, and most desirable and favorable, gifted program in SPS. • Without dividing the school into two parts (which would defeat the benefits of combining 1-8 into one school), this model may not meet the developmental

<i>Design</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
		<p>needs of young children and adolescents simultaneously. School structure may cause concern for parents of very young children in the same building as adolescents; Adolescents may feel the setting is more “elementary” than the typical middle school setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As APP students we interviewed were unanimous in their support for the opportunity to meet and interact with other students not in the APP cohort, this model negates one of the student-perceived benefits of the APP at Washington. • While benefits are more evident for elementary students and teachers, it is unclear what, if any, benefit this model may offer to the middle school APP. • By centralizing services, other provisions for eligible students who choose not to attend this school are eliminated. • This model would further perpetuate notions of elitism of the gifted program.
<p><i>Co-house APP program with Spectrum, ALO or other ALP programs (in two or more buildings)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for more seamless service delivery for the full continuum of gifted and talented students (including those students who currently fall through the cracks such as twice-exceptional students, and students with subject- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sends the powerful tacit message that talent development is only the work of educators within designated ALP building(s) and not the responsibility of all educators to seek talent potential and systematically

<i>Design</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
	<p>specific giftedness);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still provides critical mass of classes and teacher devoted to the education of gifted students. • Having all ALP programs within one building provides a forum for centralized physical and human resources related to the full spectrum of gifted learners. Teaching, administrative, and counseling staff can have specialized training for the unique needs of this population; • If implemented in an ideal way, the potential to blur the lines between the programs is increased with subsequent focus of energy on having appropriate services match individual students' diverse needs. • Can have positive effects on the community and parent perception of the value of Spectrum and ALO programs. 	<p>develop and nurture it;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By centralizing services, other provisions for eligible students who choose not to attend these schools are eliminated. • This model requires extensive professional development for all teachers and administrators involved, in order to avoid the possibility of becoming a two-or more-tiered system where one tier has more evident status than the other; • This model limits the interaction of ALP students with non-ALP students, consequently limiting ALP students' opportunities to develop skills necessary for negotiating in an increasingly diverse world.
<p><i>Configure APP program as self-contained classrooms (or at middle school, self-contained teams) within general education schools</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the potential to increase access to APP programming for more students, particularly those students who may have nearly missed APP identification, or those who may have a subject-specific area of giftedness; • Can be situated in representative geographic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As this model is so different than the current model, it would require extensive communication with parent and community stakeholders to assure them that the needs of APP students would continue to be served and to avoid parental backlash from what could be erroneously perceived as decreased services for their

<i>Design</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
	<p>areas of the city to provide access more equitably to ALP services;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can serve as a talent incubator for general education teachers, as well as the full range of students within the building, which could, over time, serve to reduce the socio-economic and cultural divide in gifted identification in SPS • Can still maintain critical mass by having Spectrum and/or AOL options in the school as well. • General educators who have talented students needing additional challenges can borrow resources and gain expertise about how to appropriately challenge these students. For example, APP teachers who need materials for identified gifted students with skill deficits can borrow materials and learn strategies from general educators; 	<p>children;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would require extensive professional development for APP teachers as well as general education teachers in the building in order to maximize the benefits of this model. It is advised to situate this program in ALO settings where talent development of all learners has been identified as a priority among educators in the building; it is ill-advised to situate this in a low-performing or other divisive school setting as this only stands to further the divide between the APP students and parents and general education students and families. • In order to maximize the benefits of this model, it may be wise to hire a gifted liaison to negotiate between the two groups of teachers. This individual would be charged with co-planning with teacher teams (comprising both APP and general educators at the grade level) who can facilitate the genuine sharing of resources and expertise between the general education and APP faculties.