

Advanced Learning Task Forces

Report & Recommendations

August 2014



The Advanced Learning Task Forces met for more than 50 hours during the 2013-14 school year to study identification and service delivery models for Highly Capable students. They found that many aspects of our Highly Capable/Accelerated Progress Program work well and do not require changes. The task forces believe the current delivery model should remain in place with the recommendations below providing additional opportunities and direction to enhance equity of access to Highly Capable services.

This task force was not asked to address Advanced Learning programs beyond those for Highly Capable students. The task force recognizes, however, that Spectrum and ALOs are a valued aspect of Advanced Learning, and the District should continue to address the opportunities for advanced learners beyond students identified as Highly Capable. Enhancing those opportunities will ultimately benefit all students.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Maintain existing delivery model.

The District should maintain the fundamental elements of the delivery model, which were affirmed by the task forces, including self-contained classrooms for Grades 1-5; self-contained LA/SS and science classrooms in Grades 6-8; guaranteed pathways to regional sites with a concentration of students to form minimum cohort sizes; guaranteed seats at designated high schools for those who are identified as Highly Capable by eighth grade; and significantly advanced and accelerated learning opportunities. Additionally, the District should maintain the APP/Highly Capable Advisory Council.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Define the Advanced Learning Office's role in services, programs and curricula.

The Advanced Learning office should provide guidance and oversight on: (1) consistent alignment of scope and sequence, curriculum and instructional materials for Highly Capable sites ; (2) specific mechanisms for evaluating AL programs and services, with metrics and checkpoints; and (3) programs and services that emphasize rigorous and fast-paced instruction that is deep and appropriately accelerated, providing differentiation without a ceiling. The District should provide adequate staffing and funding to allow AL to fulfill this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Enhance the Advanced Learning Office's role in professional development.

The Advanced Learning office should ensure that teachers and principals receive (1) professional development on the academic and social/emotional needs of Highly Capable learners, including twice-exceptional children, with appropriate recognition and validation for the training that staff receives; (2) regularly scheduled time for teacher collaboration across Highly Capable sites; and (3) professional development for secondary counselors on the academic and social/emotional needs of HC students.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve communication from the Advanced Learning office.

The Advanced Learning Office should review its communication strategies with SPS families, teachers and administrators. This could include: streamlining and clarifying existing communications; finding additional ways to reach out to the families of all students who demonstrate potential (especially those from under-represented groups); and giving increased emphasis to communicating the application, testing and appeals processes to ensure that all families understand all Advanced Learning opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Enhance equity in access to Highly Capable and Advanced Learning services and programs.

The District should provide additional pathways for identification of students who need Highly Capable services at all grade levels. In addition to teacher nomination and parent nomination, the District should investigate testing all kindergarten and/or second-grade students with an unbiased, non-verbal, cognitive screener (such as the CogAT screening form). In addition, the District should design and implement plans to support students who demonstrate potential for high achievement, especially those from under-represented groups (including special education and high-poverty students), through talent development initiatives. Details of administration and implementation would be developed jointly by the Advanced Learning office and the Equity and Race Relations department.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Expand Advanced Learning opportunities.

Elementary:

The District should ensure that all elementary schools have a Highly Capable plan, offering clear and consistent options and supporting teachers (through professional development and appropriate curriculum) in their implementation of these plans districtwide. Those services will be provided to those Highly Capable-identified students who elect to stay in their neighborhood schools. The District should ensure all HC-identified kindergartners receive services beginning mid-year in their neighborhood schools.

Middle school:

The District should investigate strategies for allowing students demonstrating advanced performance in a single subject area to be placed in advanced classes. Further, the Advanced Learning office will guide implementation of the aligned HC Humanities curriculum in HC middle schools.

High school:

The District should consider, in addition to the current high school programs: 1) developing and/or expanding college-level options, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Running Start, independent study, and early graduation at more neighborhood high schools. 2.) reviewing the IBX program at Ingraham with the potential to expand it to other IB schools; 3) examining additional internship or mentorship opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Rename the Accelerated Progress Program.

The District should change the name of the Accelerated Progress Program (APP) to Highly Capable Cohort (HCC), within Highly Capable Services. Students identified as eligible for Highly Capable Services should be designated as "Highly Capable" rather than the current "Academically Highly Gifted." This change would align with state language and eliminate the acronym confusion between APP and AP. The name change would also align with Superintendent Procedure #2200, which defines Service as "a supplementary support to basic education that is required by federal, state, or local law and/or regulations." It specifies, "Required services are Special Education, English Language Learners, and Highly Capable students, as defined by the state." Procedure #2200 specifically defines Program as an educational opportunity that is *not* mandated.

NOTE: Consider HCC to designate the self-contained Highly Capable Cohort. And HCC/APP for use in transitional documents (website, forms, etc.)

- *Report submitted by Stephen Martin, supervisor of Highly Capable Services, on behalf of the second Advanced Learning Task Force after the 16 attendees of the August 8, 2014, meeting reviewed and unanimously approved the document.*