

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
 FROM: Highly Capable Program Review Committee
 DATE: March 4, 2014
 RE: Recommendation for Highly Capable Program

In November, 2013 a 17-member committee of parents and staff convened to evaluate and revise Bellingham Public Schools' Highly Capable Program. With great energy, passion and commitment, we quickly agreed that our work was not just about serving the immediate needs of our current students in order to align with the new legislation. We needed to focus on building a shared vision and program services to meet the needs of our highly capable students that would carry us into the future. We began our first meeting by writing down our individual visions of a highly capable program. Most of us had a specific student in mind as we wrote, and the visions were highly personal, generally centering on our hopes for that child. As we continued our journey of learning and dreaming together, those many voices began to merge toward one mission – *“We collectively commit to support a purposeful continuum of services for a diverse group of highly capable learners to develop each individual’s fullest potential”*. With that mission in mind, our attention turned toward designing a continuum of services that would develop each child’s fullest potential.

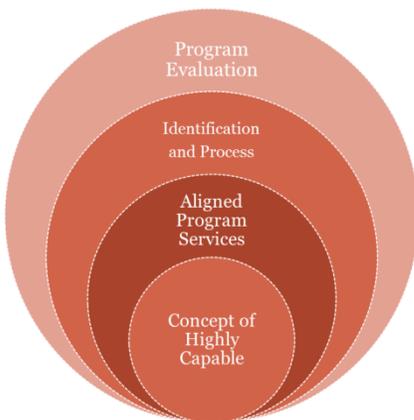


Figure 1

Following the Roadmap developed by Dr. Kathryn Picanco (Figure 1), the committee began by researching characteristics of highly capable and most highly capable students and developed a definition that brings together The Bellingham Promise, the definition in the Washington Administrative Code and research from the field. Each committee member was given the book, Helping Gifted Children Soar, a Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers, by Carol Strip Whitney, Ph.D. This book was an important source of information for the committee as well as excerpts from other books and articles from research journals such as the Gifted Child Quarterly. The committee invested a significant amount of time in reviewing research and learning about best practices in the field. In the fall of 2013, the Bellingham Public Schools' Highly Capable Program contracted with a consultant, Gail Hanninen, to conduct a thorough program review. The committee used the program review findings to help guide their understanding, knowledge, and work together throughout the entire process.

The committee studied the five domains of giftedness: *intellectual aptitudes, specific academic abilities, creative productivities, leadership, and artistic capacities*. After much discussion, the committee agreed

that while all domains were important, the immediate charge of our committee was to align our focus and support on the intellectual aptitude, specific advanced academic/s and creative productivity domains of giftedness. There are opportunities for all children in our district to develop their leadership and artistic capacities, but the intellectual aptitude, academic abilities and creative productivities were the particular work of our committee. In addition, the committee recognized that the needs of highly capable and most highly capable learners varied, and designing a program to meet their needs called for a major shift in thinking. The Bellingham Promise clearly spells out our commitment to meeting the needs of every child. Adopting that as our vision, the committee researched characteristics of highly capable and most highly capable students. Basing our definition on The Bellingham Promise, the definition in the Washington Administrative code and research in the field, we defined highly capable students as *“those who perform or show potential for performing at significantly advanced academic levels when compared with others of their age, experiences, or environments. Outstanding abilities are seen within students' general intellectual aptitudes, specific academic abilities, and/or creative productivities within a specific domain. Furthermore, these students are present not only in the general populace, but are present within all protected classes.”* The committee continued to research the differences in highly capable versus most highly capable and defined the highly capable students as generally being in the top 3-5% academically when compared with others of their age, experiences or environments, and most highly capable as students who show exceptionally high aptitude and achievement, generally in the 98-99% on standardized tests.

Once the committee defined the two subsets of students, highly capable and most highly capable, the next step was to design a program that would ensure their continual academic success. Because highly capable students demonstrate highly capable skills each and every day, it quickly became apparent that the program services must meet these students at their home school. The committee realized that we were accountable for providing services for every child, every day as part of basic education. The pull-out model that we had used for the last several years was not sufficiently meeting the individual needs of the highly and most highly capable students. Gifted needs should be met on a daily basis within the context of their school site and area of strength.

Thinking about a school-based program further coalesced when the committee listened to a podcast from Duke University: Project Bright Idea. This study looked at the impact of raising the rigor across all primary classrooms of at-risk students, and discovered that when students were taught with techniques usually reserved for highly capable students, the achievement of all students accelerated and the achievement gap decreased. Great teaching with strong support is at the heart of everything we do in Bellingham Public Schools. The committee explored many service models from successful highly capable programs across the country. They discovered that all of these model schools had one thing in common – a clearly defined tiered approach that recognized the differences between all students. Building on the Response to Intervention (RtI) model that is prevalent in many of our Bellingham schools, we began to explore a variety of strategies for ensuring that each highly capable student would be provided appropriate services and support. This model calls for more intensive levels of support based on the unique learning requirements of each child. Raising rigor and ensuring great teaching for all students is a Tier 1 strategy that is key to the success of all students, including our highly capable students.

As we shifted our focus from a pull-out based program to school-based programs, we began to realize that we would also need school-based identification procedures to support these program services and support the teachers who serve these students. With our new, school-based focus, we knew that using national norms would not help us provide services to the historically under-represented populations. The committee turned their attention to the results of the program evaluation conducted by Gail Hanninen. The report highlighted the immediate need to focus on an identification process that identified the potential of

our under-represented populations. The evaluation found that our nomination process, which depended solely on parent and teacher nomination, was a gatekeeper to identifying our under served populations. Further, over reliance on a single assessment resulted in over representation of some populations and under representation of others.

Giving all students a chance to show their potential is a key component of increasing access and equity. A key strategy of The Bellingham Promise is a One Schoolhouse approach. The committee researched best practices for identifying highly capable students across all populations, paying close attention to our identification gap. In the winter of 2013, the committee co-chairs attended the National Association for Gifted Children's Annual Convention, as well as two state conferences on gifted education. They learned of other districts around the state of Washington, as well as other schools across the country, that were implementing local norms and multiple measures in order to identify the potential for giftedness in their disadvantaged students, and have made the recommendation that Bellingham do the same.

However, we did not feel that simply using local norms was sufficient. Implementing a universal screener for all second grade students in Bellingham Public Schools is a further recommendation of the committee. The universal screening assessment will help the district provide equity and access for all students. This screening process would allow the highly capable team to capture the potential highly capable students in all elementary buildings.

But great teaching doesn't happen without strong support, and a school based model will only be as strong as the teachers implementing it on a daily basis. There is a need for systematic, supported, and on-going professional development for teachers and administrators. With the structure of the Department of Teaching and Learning's Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs), and the focus on our 5D instructional framework connected to the Common Core State Standards, we are confident that the learning needs of all of our students, highly capable and most capable, will be met. We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham's children. We will empower every child to discover and develop a passion, contribute to their community, and achieve fulfilling and productive lives. The committee has outlined priorities for the 2014-15 school year, and a plan for program evaluation that assists the district with assessing, monitoring, and adjusting the program recommendations as necessary. This continuing evaluation process will help us refine and adjust the program to meet the needs of the students we serve.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Nomination and Referral

A universal aptitude screener, administered to all second grade students in the district, will offer the opportunity for each child to show their potential. The Screening Form and the full battery assessment are highly correlated. However, in order to ensure that all children have the opportunity to demonstrate their full potential, students who score in the approximately top 10% will be further assessed. This will increase equity and access for under-represented populations.

Additionally, any student may be referred by a parent, staff member, or community member. The notification of the referral process will be advertised in a variety of ways, including the local newspaper, the school district website and at each school site. The referral forms will be available as a fillable PDF on the district website or as a paper document at each school site. Assessment and identification will take place at least twice yearly (fall and spring).

Identification

Going forward, we recommend the use of multiple measures to accurately identify and place students in the Highly Capable Program. Students who have been referred by a parent, teacher or community member or who scored in the approximately top 10% of their school on the universal screen administered to all second graders will be further assessed. The multidisciplinary team will look for a preponderance of evidence on multiple assessments, including an aptitude assessment, measures of academic achievement, and a teacher checklist. The team will recommend the best tiered level of service for each child, and communicate their decision to the teacher(s) and parents.

Program Services

Programming services are dependent on the specific identified need of the individual student. The parents, teacher(s), Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs), and where appropriate, the child, will work together to develop an Individual Learning Plan for each identified student, K-12. This plan will begin with Tier 1 interventions such as differentiation, and may increase in intensity to support the academic needs of the student as necessary. Student performance data will be used to monitor the progress of students and periodically update and refine the plan.

When researching tiered levels of service, the committee relied heavily on the effect size for highly capable and most highly capable students. Effect size represents the amount of grade-equivalent months of additional achievement. For example, an effect size of .49 for early entrance to kindergarten suggests that kindergarten students in the study who received this intervention showed academic growth equivalent to just under 5 months more than their peers who did not receive this intervention.

Tiered levels of service

- **Tier 1 - Differentiated Instruction:** *Elementary, Middle School and High School* Teachers adapt instruction on the basis of specific needs of advanced learners. Materials and resources are varied according to a student's readiness, interests, and learning preferences. The pace and depth of instruction should increase and decrease with response to a student's interactions with the curriculum.
- **Tier 1 - Enrichment:** *Elementary, Middle School and High School*
The goal of enrichment is to extend the curriculum with activities that are deeper, broader, richer and more varied. It extends, supplements, or otherwise goes beyond the regular curriculum. Enrichment should occur during the school day, especially in the elementary years, and may also occur after school. Examples of enrichment may include Future Problem Solvers or Math Olympiad.
- **Tier 2 - Cluster Grouping: (Effect size = .62)** *Elementary and Middle School*
Identified highly capable students are grouped together based on their identified need of services. Teachers of cluster group students will receive specialized training and support. Cluster groups range from 6-8 students.
- **Tier 2 - Advanced Placement Courses/College in the High School:**
(Effect size = .29) *High School*
Offer college level curriculum and examinations to high school students.
- **Tier 3 - Early Entrance to Kindergarten: (Effect size = .49)** *Elementary*
A student enters schooling earlier than his same age peers.

- **Tier 3 - Single Subject Acceleration: (Effect size = .59) Elementary, Middle School and High School**

Allows a student who has advanced curricular knowledge and skill in a particular domain to access a curriculum at least one year in advance. This can be achieved by having a student physically attend the course at a higher grade level while remaining in their own grade level designation (ex: walk to math) or by working on the advanced subject content within their regular classroom.

The committee recognizes that these service models mentioned above will take time to implement. In order to ensure that these service models are meeting the needs of all identified students; careful planning, support, educating, and monitoring will be required. Based on the success of these models, the committee strongly recommends further research and consideration be taken in account as part of the 2014-15 program review on investigating the following service models for future consideration:

- **Grade Telescoping:** Involves allowing a student to complete the school's curriculum of several years in less time. This would require a careful review of the curriculum in order to eliminate repetition of already mastered concepts.
- **Self-Contained Highly Capable Classrooms (3-5):** Classrooms where students share similar academic requirements.
- **School Based Push-in/Pull-out (K-12):** Enrichment or acceleration would be delivered at the school site by a highly capable learning specialist. This is different from our previous, district-based pull-out program because it is responsive to students' individual needs and delivered within the school as a replacement to content in students' area(s) of strength.
- **Multi-age classrooms:** Students are grouped in some way other than by age or actual grade level. Students work in small groups or alone at a pace needed to master information.

Program Evaluation

The committee will meet again in the spring of 2015 to evaluate progress on implementing the recommended strategies and to look at student data to evaluate our overall success in meeting the following program outcomes:

Each highly capable student will be provided appropriate services and support

- To assure his/her academic growth commensurate with his/her aptitude.
- To maintain a high level of engagement in educational programming K-12.
- To develop personal competence leading to exceptional academic achievement; social competence manifested in positive peer relationships; and social responsibility and leadership skills.
- To demonstrate advanced and complex learning in their area(s) of talent (i.e., critical thinking, problem solving, divergent thinking).

Professional Development

For the 2014-15 year, we are recommending professional development to support principals and teachers in understanding the cognitive and affective needs of highly capable students. Additionally, teacher development needs to support effective teaching strategies for implementing a differentiated curriculum with high rigor, and also address strategies for effectively implementing cluster grouping within

classrooms. Support from our Department of Teaching and Learning's Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) will be provided for teachers and students where single subject acceleration or early entrance are the targeted strategies. The TOSAs will be providing content embedded professional development for all teachers tied to the Common Core State Standards and the 5D Instructional Framework throughout the school year. Using existing mechanisms such as Professional Learning Communities and Student Growth Collaboration Conferences, the TOSAs will provide support to teachers in increasing the rigor in classrooms and utilizing techniques that foster problem solving skills as well as critical and creative thinking. These strategies are especially important for highly capable students, but will also benefit the robustness of core instruction for all children. The HCP TOSAs will also focus energy on the math curriculum adoption, ensuring that teachers understand how to differentiate and adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the highly capable students in their classrooms. Additional gifted education courses will be offered to elementary and middle school teachers and principals supported by Whitworth University and the TOSAs.

Budget

The total budget for the Highly Capable Program is \$300,732.00. The state allocation is \$105,032.00. The District allocation is \$195,700.00. The committee is seeking an above baseline of \$43,530 to properly fund and support the recommendation made in this document. If approved, that would bring the total overall budget for the Highly Capable Program to \$344,262.00.

Closing

The committee recognizes that meeting the needs of all the highly and most highly capable students in the district will be a multi-year process and will require a concerted effort by teachers, administrators, parents and district staff. We are deeply committed to creating a program that serves a diverse group of highly capable and most highly capable students, which will provide a continuum of tiered services based on individualized needs in order to support and develop each learner's fullest potential. Our committee mantra is "Many voices, one mission." This has truly been a process with many voices and many needs, but the mission is clear – to empower every child to discover and develop a passion, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life. We are committed to making that a reality for every child.

Respectfully submitted by the Highly Capable Review Committee,
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Michelle Abernathy, Kulshan Middle School Assistant Principal
Kate Baehr, Larrabee Elementary Principal
Kris Carpenter, elementary school teacher
Mike Copland, Deputy Superintendent
Haley Davis, parent of middle school students
Veronica Douglas, parent of elementary/high school students
Michael Finley, middle school teacher
Jeff Jacobs, elementary school teacher
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Keith Schacht, Squaticum High School Principal
Rebekah Sharf, parent of elementary/middle school students
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Rachel Smith, elementary teacher