

## Overall Strengths

1. Administrative leadership at the central office and building level are commended for their efforts to increase challenges for bright and able students through recent curriculum differentiation initiatives, and for conducting a comprehensive review of programming for gifted students across all levels, one that involves a wide range of school and community stakeholders.
2. The Gifted Support Teachers are respected by other staff members and have established a friendly and open relationship with them, and also with students and parents
3. The Tulpehocken School District provides for grouping and acceleration of gifted students in different content areas and grade levels, based on their ability and achievement.
4. At the high school level, many students participate in a variety of Reading and Harrisburg Area Community Colleges' dual enrollment classes, which provide for both acceleration and academic challenge.
5. Teachers acknowledge the need for initial and ongoing staff development and in-service to support the learning needs of the gifted in their classrooms, and appear ready to learn how best to challenge these students.
6. Some teachers are providing differentiated learning for the gifted in their classrooms. They and others recognize the need for further and in-depth training in this area. This is a welcome first step.
7. The *Everyday Math* and *Guided Reading* Programs have provided teachers with new ways to challenge and accelerate gifted and able students. These two programs receive high praise from both teachers and parents.

## **1. In what way is the programming for gifted coordinated and integrated into the regular education program?**

### **Recommendations:**

1. An important first step towards improving and coordinating programming for the gifted with the regular education program will be to develop policies and procedures for curriculum integration. These need to be embedded in the to-be-developed gifted vision/purpose and overview statement or plan. This plan should include specific procedures to assure that regular classroom teachers will receive information about gifted student's present performance and achievement levels. It also needs to detail the regular education teacher's involvement in GIEP development and implementation, and to what extent they are responsible for differentiation of instruction.
2. In an effort to increase communication, collaboration and planning between regular education teachers and teachers of the gifted, consideration should be given to scheduling time where gifted support teachers can attend and participate regularly in grade level team and department meetings. This time is essential in order to facilitate integration of the curriculum, and will also allow for opportunities to examine individual GIEP goals, student progress toward these goals, and monitor student academic, social, and emotional development.
3. An ongoing concern for Tulpehocken School District parents and staff is the issue of gifted student underachievement and low academic expectations. Structure time for regular education teachers, particularly those teaching honors and AP/RACC courses, gifted support teachers, counselors and psychologist, to meet at full blown GIEP team meetings to discuss, plan and use their expertise to devise strategies for student interventions. These strategies should be both general and individualized in nature.
4. As the district takes steps to improve regular education integration for gifted students by connecting to district curriculum, and addressing standards at high levels, it will have to re-define the role and responsibilities for teachers of the gifted. If they are to act in an increased manner as a gifted support resource to regular education teachers, procedures and accountability guidelines need to be developed. Administrators and building leadership have to agree to these, make them known to faculty, and assure support and time for this framework or model to work across building and grade levels.

These Gifted Support Responsibilities may include:

- Providing enrichment and special seminars
- Monitoring the development and implementation of GIEPs, both in pull out programs and in regular education classrooms
- Collaborating with classroom teachers to develop tiered learning instruction and high level assessments or performances
- Arranging for mentoring opportunities and out of school trips or experiences that connect to course content and seminar exploration topics
- Arranging for and providing, when appropriate, staff development and in-service to teachers about Chapter 16 requirements, and how to differentiate instruction for the gifted
- Working with teachers to find challenging resources for the gifted
- Acting as a resource person for students to work on independent projects, compacted curriculum, and in-depth investigations
- Modeling exemplary teaching for the gifted through co-teaching and planning
- Developing and assisting with the design and implementation of differentiated curriculum, units of instruction and lessons
- Assisting teachers to establish classroom interest centers and develop student contracts
- Teaching *in lieu* of or special content-based courses at the junior and senior high grade levels

In order for gifted support teachers to fulfill these role responsibilities, it will be essential that these teachers themselves be provided with the necessary staff development, in-service, time, and resources. They will need the expertise and skills to describe and model exemplars and demonstrate use of best-practice gifted instruction, such as *Parallel Curriculum* and *Understanding by Design*. They will also need the skills and know-how to work with other adults in a collaborative manner. This means funds, time, and opportunities should be budgeted for and made available for these support persons.

Administrative support, too, will be the key to the success of this model. Administrators must be good advocates, and emphasize the shared responsibility of all staff for challenging the gifted. They are the ones who need to note the importance of collaborative planning for GIEP implementation, and help find the time to do this.

5. The Gifted Program Review Team suggests that serious consideration be given by school district leadership to changing the elementary gifted delivery model. In order to increase regular education integration and connections, both the enrichment classes and gifted support person should be housed within each of the two elementary home schools. This

will allow for the delivery of GIEPs to take place through enrichment class opportunities, and through the increased integration strategies noted in the above recommendation. This best-practice arrangement may call for a different staffing arrangement – one full time gifted support person at the elementary level.

6. Consider assigning a full time teacher of the gifted at the junior and senior high school to provide gifted support services. These services may include, but not limited to:
  - Arranging for and monitoring mentorship opportunities
  - Conferencing with students to match student-assessed achievement levels to differentiated learning through acceleration or enrichment
  - Designing and conducting special topic seminars and forums
  - Consulting and co-teaching with classroom honors, AP, RACC & HACC teachers
  - Exploring and providing post-secondary transition opportunities, especially ones that show students how to set higher and wider learning and career goals
  - Arranging for independent projects based on assessed GIEP and student interest survey data
  - Monitoring academic progress and assisting students to set high level achievement and performance goals – and giving them the strategies for success
  - Teaching a scheduled core content offering, interdisciplinary humanities course, philosophy class, or a series of content-based seminars
7. Already, the district has taken measures to offer students opportunities for acceleration through its range of honor classes, through new curriculum initiatives such as *Guided Reading* and *Everyday Math* programs, and its partnerships with local community colleges. It is recommended that leadership, especially at the junior and senior high school levels, develop options and opportunities for students to accelerate through core content, specials, and elective courses.
8. Give serious consideration to implementing an inter-disciplinary, humanities, or other content based program, particularly at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels, that meets daily, and is *in lieu* of a reading or another subject area class. Such a program would allow for academic rigor, interdisciplinary learning and connections, be rooted in core curriculum and standards, provide for in-depth study, and allow for substantive instructional differentiation. A major component of such an offering also should be one that assures assessed student performance and achievement levels are used for individualization, when the GIEP notes

the need for “specially designed instruction”. Examine and observe models in other Pennsylvania school districts that presently use some form of this regrouping for gifted students.

Such a model is consistent with Principle #8 of the Guiding Principles from the 2004 PDE Gifted Guidelines: *Gifted students benefit from being grouped with their intellectual peers for a significant part of their instructional day.* Ellen Goldring’s meta-analysis of regrouping research studies confirms that: *Re-grouped classes produced significant gains in achievement, particularly when classes were offered in science and social studies.*” (Karen Rogers, *Re-Forming Gifted Education*, 2002)

9. Since some of the honors course teachers are the junior and senior high school believe that student placement in these classes is not based on appropriate or consistent criteria and procedures, the building and district curriculum leadership team needs to re-visit and review this process. Make sure to involve representative honors teachers and school counselors. Once specific procedures are agreed on, let parents and students know what these are, and detail the criteria for both placement and continued enrollment.

## 2. What is the mission of the gifted program – philosophy, plan, goals and objectives?

### Recommendations:

1. It is important for district leadership to facilitate the development and publication of a vision or overview framework that defines the purpose, and also provides both structure and expectations for what programming for the gifted will look like in Tulpehocken School District. This process, by the way, does not have to extend over months or years, and be an overly complicated one. To begin this important phase of program improvement, convene a committee of representative staff, including the teachers of the gifted, whose purpose is to identify a vision and underlying set of agreed upon goals and expectations.

This new framework should be connected to the general goals of the District's Strategic Plan and to ongoing curriculum and staff development initiatives. Important, also, is that this vision and purpose overview relate in many specific ways to the intent and requirements of Chapter 16. It will be useful for the committee developing this philosophy and goals document to be aware and familiar with the Pennsylvania Department of Education Gifted Guidelines (2004). This is an excellent, nationally recognized resource, rooted in defensible gifted education research, and is easy to use. A beginning point might be to take a close look at the Guideline's eight underlying principles, and see to what extent they may or should match the district's own vision for programming for the gifted.

2. Specifically, attention should be paid by this committee to the following tasks:
  - To develop a clear definition or description of the instructional program for gifted students and its relationship to district curriculum, standards-based instruction (making sure to establish high level expectations for the gifted), and to what research says is best practice for the gifted.
  - To state and make clear the roles and responsibilities of both general and special educators in delivering challenge for the gifted, and for actual implementation of the GIEP. These may be stated in the most general manner, and based on Chapter 16 requirements.
  - Develop goals that:
    - √ reflect the goals of the district's Strategic Plan;
    - √ provide for a range of program options;
    - √ allow for acceleration and enrichment in both the gifted support and regular education classrooms;

- √ establish differentiation of curriculum and instruction at all grade levels
  - Consideration should also be given to including in this purpose/overview statement the district's procedures for screening and identification of those thought to be gifted, brief descriptions of the gifted support program for each grade level, and local and state contact information for program, student and technical assistance.
3. Once a gifted program vision, purpose and overall structure plan is developed, agreed on, and made public, use this to establish services for gifted students. These services may cross all formats for differentiating programming for the gifted (e.g., consulting teacher, resource room, grouping for honors and acceleration classes, special seminars, independent study, or inter-disciplinary courses) but are not limited to a sole program design.
  4. Gifted program assessment and evaluation should be included as part of the district's ongoing curriculum and instructional improvement review cycle.

### **3. What staff development options are provided to maintain gifted programming which is appropriate to the needs of students and staff?**

#### **Recommendations:**

1. If the Gifted Support teachers are called on to provide increased support to regular classroom teachers, and align their differentiated instructional activities to district standards-based curriculum and content, they will need to know about and have additional strategies and skills to act as a resource person to many teachers, and manage a variety of student needs, assume a role very different from the present one of the Gifted Support Enrichment teachers – and assume a commitment from the district for the time, resources, and ongoing training. This staff development should contain components that address:
  - How to work with and collaborate with regular education teachers as consultants.
  - The skills needed to develop, model and demonstrate differentiated instruction.
  - Expertise and knowledge about best practice curriculum and instructional models for challenging the gifted, such as *Parallel Curriculum*, *Understanding by Design*, *The Touchstones Discussion Project*, *Compacting*, *Creative Problem Solving*, and *ASCD's Strategies for Tiered Learning*.
  - Use of student assessment and profile data to develop GIEPs for both enrichment and regular classroom implementation, and how to assess achievement through high-level performances.
2. An overview workshop about the needs of the gifted, who they are, why they need differentiation and challenge the basics of Chapter 16 GIEP requirements needs to be offered to all district teachers, beginning as soon as possible.
3. Also, include the above workshop module into the New Teacher Induction Program. Take steps to make sure all new regular education teachers know about the district's vision and purpose vis-à-vis gifted education, and what role they are expected to play in a student's GIEPs to help implement specially designed instruction.
4. Teachers of the gifted, both new and experienced, should be up-to-date about current curriculum and instructional models that research and best practice suggest are eminently suited for the gifted. These are models that allow for substantive challenge of the gifted and move curriculum enrichment beyond isolated 'fun' or mainly student interest based activities. They contain

academically rigorous curriculum unit development approaches and everyday high-level teaching strategies. These are also ones gifted support teachers should use when collaborating with regular education staff. Such models include:

- *Understanding by Design*
- *Parallel Curriculum and Ascending Levels of Intellectual Demand*
- *Multidisciplinary Curriculum* ( Roger Taylor and Heidi Jacobs )
- *The Paiedia Proposal* – University of Chicago
- *The Touchstones Project* and Junior Great Books Seminars

5. The Tulpehocken School District Strategic Plan contains an excellent instructional goal for addressing instruction and learning opportunities. It says: " *Expand and enhance learning experiences and opportunities to challenge **all** students.*" To reach this goal, the Strategic Plan lists three specific action steps. They are:

- a. Differentiate instruction in all classrooms to meet the needs of **all** learners
- b. Expand the definition of learning opportunities for our students
- c. Investigate schedules and structures "outside the box" to match instruction

These are practical and worthwhile principles for district leadership and the Act 48 Professional Development Committee to re-visit and consider when planning short and long term staff development and in-service, especially for increasing differentiation of instruction. They can also be used to frame and drive staff development that addresses gifted education best practices, such as:

- Emphasis on analytic and critical thinking
- Integrated and inter-disciplinary learning
- Using student assessment data to modify curricula and instruction
- Concept and Essential Questions based curriculum and units of instruction
- Use of performance and alternative instructional assessments
- Use of rubrics based on high standards and rigorous criteria
- Inquiry and problem solving models to increase creative and critical thinking
- Flexible grouping and tiered learning assignments
- Investigation of real problems in an authentic context
- Design and use of units of study based on key concepts and essential questions
- Strategies to increase student engagement and motivation

It is important to recognize that staff development offerings for the gifted not simply be a one or half day offering, or a once and done workshop. In-service and professional development has to be ongoing. One resource that the district has already used for assistance in reviewing their programs for the gifted is the Berks County Intermediate Unit. Through consultation with the Intermediate Unit's curriculum and instruction specialists, a long-range plan should be jointly worked out for program and instructional improvement.

Reference: *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom: Strategies and Techniques Every Teacher Can Use to Meet the Academic Needs of the gifted and Talented*, Susan Wine Brenner, Free Spirit Publisher, 2001.

#### **4. To what extent does instruction and programming meet the identified/assessed needs of each gifted student?**

##### **Recommendations:**

1. Student data is gathered about gifted students from a range of sources, including initial screening and identification instruments, standardized test scores, teacher and parent inventories, and other information to include in GIEP present educational levels. However, this important individualized information is seldom shared with regular education teachers, nor does it translate into modified specially designed instruction, when it may be clear that a student assessment profile calls for this. The District's gifted support and regular education teachers, administrative leadership, including principals, must review the process for both gathering and using assessment data, the extent to which it is the responsibility of the gifted support teacher and regular classroom teacher to pay attention to this profile, and design specific actions to move from the "one size fits all GIEP". These changes will move students towards increased challenge, and place the district in compliance with Chapter 16.
2. As noted elsewhere in this report, the District needs to explore scheduling, budgeting and hiring arrangements that would allow for one gifted support teacher to be assigned full time at the elementary level and another at the junior-senior high school. Such key steps in staffing would help to provide regular classroom teachers with the support, time and resources they need to design differentiated activities for gifted students. This move would also allow gifted support teachers to increase curricular connections, and actually use up-to-date profile information to develop GIEPS based on student needs.
3. Parents raise concerns about whether the GIEP for their child is individualized to the extent it should be, based on ability and performance. They are concerned about the degree of challenge taking place in the regular classrooms, some of the high school honors classes, and even the junior-senior high gifted seminar program. Once a structure is put in place that attends to using student assessment data to increase regular education connections, disseminate this information about new policies and practices to parents in a variety of formats.
4. In order to increase program continuity at and between each grade and building level, the person designated with gifted program leadership, will have to work closely with building principals, the district curriculum director, and the gifted support staff. This designated leadership will need

to make sure all aspects of programming for the gifted meet district goals, and are in compliance with Chapter 16.

5. Procedures should be developed to monitor student progress with regards to the GIEP goals, both within the gifted enrichment classes and in the regular education classroom. Teachers should continue to complete a quarterly progress report that is mailed home with the student's report card. Parent-teacher conferences and emails are other sources of sharing student progress.

## 5. To what extent are social/emotional needs of the gifted students being addressed?

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Once the gifted program is restructured and aligned to a vision and purpose, take steps to provide gifted learners with affective curriculum as part of differentiated curriculum and instructional services. This should include:
  - Counseling that specifically helps gifted learners understand and accept their developmental differences.
  - Programming that allows gifted learners to participate in activities that help them understand themselves as gifted persons.
  - Instruction focusing on self-advocacy and solving problems with academic and socio-emotional issues.
  - In-Service training and staff development support for teachers and counselors to work specifically with at-risk gifted learners in order to address their strengths and weaknesses, and to use differentiated counseling and instructional strategies.
  - Procedures to target, monitor, and provide intervention strategies for improving achievement and performance for underachieving and unmotivated gifted students.

Designing and making decisions about implementation and role responsibilities of this framework should include school counselors, principals, teachers of the gifted, school psychologists, or others as appropriate.

2. Gifted students will benefit from participating in activities that provide them with academic and career exploration activities that go beyond school and district boundaries. To open a range of new doors and set higher expectations the district should provide for:
  - Career guidance activities consistent with student's learning strengths. For example gifted learners should have the opportunity to meet professionals in the fields that appeal to them and to "shadow" them on the job. Students with a specific career focus would benefit from partnering with a mentor for an extended period of time.
  - Ways to include gifted and other motivated students in a greater range of academic competitions, such as the *Pennsylvania Mock Trial*, *Odyssey of the Mind*, *Science Olympiad*, *Math Counts* and *Academic Challenge*. Coordinating and connecting these activities

to core content and higher order skills could be a key responsibility of the gifted program support teacher.

- Involvement of students in experiences and opportunities where they can meet and interact with other high achieving and motivated students, such as attending World Affairs Council presentations, meeting with students from local universities who are enrolled in special honors and academic programs, and using the internet to engage in virtual learning forums, geared to specific topics and issues.

**Reference:**

Karen Rogers, *Re-Forming Gifted Education*, Great Potential Press, 2002, contains almost one hundred out of school competitions and contests for gifted and talented students. Participation in many of these does not involve great expense or busing students to another place. For example, the *Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest* simply calls for the submission of original poetry at different grade levels. There are similar competitions for cash and awards in the areas of science, math, engineering, arts, politics, and even map reading and cartoons.

3. The school district should ask the gifted support teacher and school counselors to develop a framework or structure for college planning for gifted students, and build into this ways of getting students to set high goals for post-secondary education.

This should include:

- Research and data about a variety of college options
- Visitations to college campuses, especially ones beyond the Reading and Harrisburg area
- Panel discussions with Tulpehocken graduates and others who are attending college at present, and are enrolled in special academic or honors programs
- Assistance with SAT preparation, college applications and essays, and how to negotiate the complex funding and scholarship offerings
- Arranging for speakers from college admission offices, based on actual student survey data, and through a forum that allows for interaction and questioning.
- Organizing a series of parent workshops that address such issues: as raising expectations for your child; setting goals early; how to fund a college education and where to go for help; helping your child to apply for college; and exploring

other career and training options for students who choose to not attend a college or university

4. Explore offering a greater range of clubs or electives, such as literary magazine, photography, writers' workshops, debate, or those dealing topics and issues such as environment, politics, social justice, medical changes and ethics, etc.
5. Investigate funding for and implementation of artist, poet, writer, architect or similar specialists-in-residency programs. Connect these experts to what students are learning in their classrooms or topics they are investigating in the Gifted Support Enrichment Seminar. These can be opportunities for students to meet with successful practitioners, practice their own skills, and to explore creative and new possibilities.