

OCDSB Response to the ABC Minority Report

5 February 2003

Overview

On Tuesday, January 21, 2003, a committee of OCDSB staff met to review the concerns expressed in the ABC minority report on the Special Education Plan 2001-2002 in order to prepare a response and to discuss issues raised in the report. The committee consisted of the Special Education Support Teacher and Psychologist for the Gifted Team, Special Education Program Support Teachers, principals, a member of Quality Assurance, the elementary ESL coordinator and the Acting Coordinator of Field Services. The issues raised were discussed at length and the following response was agreed upon.

Identification Procedures for Identifying Gifted Students

There was consensus that the criteria for gifted identification need to be examined to determine if it is accurately identifying gifted students. A committee will be struck to examine the criteria for identification as well as the criteria for admission and demission to gifted congregated classes as required in the standards for Special Education Plans.

2. Early Identification Procedures and Intervention - Early work at the OBE yielded a number of concerns at the primary level unless the bar was set a little higher, namely false positives which didn't hold up over time. Some children with an enriched home and pre-school experience had accelerated early learning but tended to flatten out as they aged. Also, measurement devices for very young were less reliable and remain so for identification purposes. It was felt by the committee members that there were very few students who they felt should have been identified despite not meeting the criteria. The Gifted Screening and Identification Manual indicates that for students who score above 95%ile on the CCAT, the school should provide differentiated programming where appropriate. It will be recommended for the next Special Education Plan that a more detailed description of the primary gifted screening process be included so that parents have a better understanding of the criteria.

4.2 Criteria for Identification - The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* were reviewed, however, the committee could not find any reference indicating that disaggregation of the WISC-III or CCAT is not supported. On the contrary, the Form K, Teacher's Handbook Instructional Resource (p.105-106) discourages the use of single scores, namely the composite score. Also, the committee agreed separating the scores provided opportunities for ESL students and students who may not be gifted in one area to still be identified. For example, it is not uncommon to see a lower Verbal score and a high Quantitative and Non-Verbal score on the CCAT when testing an ESL student. The points for gifted identification are applied to a range of scores thus allowing more room for margins of error.

When an assessment from a private psychologist is provided to school staff, staff has been directed to have the assessment reviewed by a member of psychological services. This directive is included in the *Gifted Screening and Identification Manual* and is also reinforced in communications between the Coordinator of Field Services and principals.

CAT/2 Reading Comprehension Sub Test and Parent Nomination Form – Since the minority report was written, the OCDSB has replaced the CAT/2 test with the CAT/3 Reading sub test as it contains more up-to-date norming and is more closely aligned to the new curriculum. The use of the CAT/2 test as part of the identification process was discussed during the Gifted Review of 2000-2001. ABC was invited to participate in the review process and was given opportunity to provide input. At the time the representatives from ABC supported the change in process. It should also be noted that the CAT/2 is never used as a solitary measure, but rather an additional measure where gifted identification is not clear. The removal of applying points to the Parent Nomination Form came from several complaints from the parent community. Some parents come from cultural backgrounds where it is inappropriate to boast about a child's

accomplishments. Similarly, parents with one child or with other gifted children tended to compare their child to other gifted children, rather than to average children. Current research indicates that teachers are just as likely to identify gifted students as parents when they are properly trained. In 2001 all grade 3 teachers received training on the identification of gifted students. In 2002 representatives from all elementary schools were trained on the gifted profile and gifted programming. In-service to individual schools is also available through the Special Education Support Teacher and the Special Education Program Support Teacher assigned to the school.

Multiple criteria – At both the primary and junior/intermediate/senior levels the OCDSB uses multiple criteria to determine which children should be identified gifted. Information from the teacher and the parent is always gathered. Parental input is used to assist the teacher in completing the teacher nomination form. While the assessment results do carry a heavier weight, it is never used in isolation.

Processes for Identifying students with other exceptionalities and/or cultural and linguistic differences – The OCDSB agrees that the Gifted Screening and Identification Process will not necessarily identify all gifted students and that other issues in the student's profile such as a learning disability or a cultural/linguistic difference should be taken into account. Staff is directed to contact Special Education/Student Services in such cases. All documentation is sent to the SEST for gifted who takes the documentation to a central committee which is comprised of a member of psychological services, three principals, and other staff members when appropriate. The committee looks at all supporting documentation to determine if identification should be recommended. In some cases the committee may request additional testing be carried out either by the SERT or the school psychologist/psychological associate. The committee determined that this process should be made clearer in both the Special Education Plan and in the Gifted Screening and Identification Manual.

IPRC Process

3. Adherence to Regulation 181/98, Subsection 5(1) – The experience of all members of the committee was that schools are adhering to the regulation by inviting parents to participate in the IPRC. It is common practice at schools with Gifted Congregated classes to ask parents in advance if they would like to attend the IPRC. By the time the IPRC takes place, the school staff has been in contact with the parents through a variety of channels, such as communication books, report cards, parent-teacher interviews, phone calls and other meetings where appropriate. It would be unfair to invite a parent to an IPRC without first discussing the available options and presenting issues. For the majority of gifted students the IPRC will confirm what has already been discussed. All parents are invited to attend and may attend if they wish. Principals have an idea in advance how much time will be needed and will timetable the IPRC accordingly. So that all options can be discussed principals will wait until they know if a placement in a gifted congregated class is available. Similarly, parents like to have time to research their options before the IPRC. Information nights and open houses give parents time to make an informed decision.

Placements

4.1 Range of options – Discussions with the Ministry of Education have provided more clarity on how secondary gifted programs should be coded on the October Report at the secondary level. Secondary Gifted Congregated students will no longer be coded as special education class with partial integration unless they are taking more than 50% of their course load at the gifted level. Secondary students select their courses and are not required to take all of their academic courses at the gifted level. As they move into Grade 11 and 12., the University and College level courses are sufficient to meet their needs, and they tend to select these courses rather than the gifted level courses. Course offerings are driven by student choice. It would not be appropriate for students in secondary school to take all of their courses in a gifted congregated class as this would limit their course choice in terms of options and it is not necessary to provide differentiation in all subject areas, e.g., gym, keyboarding, etc. It should also be noted that gifted students often

choose to attend alternate programs such as the Canterbury Arts program or the International Baccalaureate Program because it meets their needs.

It should be noted that historically, when a program such as gifted congregated is introduced to a school, it will take time for enrolment to rise. At Ridgemont, a decision was made by the principal in consultation with senior staff to include capable students in gifted classes, where possible. The courses being offered are Ministry of Education courses which are being differentiated in depth, breadth and pace. This practice has occurred historically in other gifted centres. The number of identified gifted students attending Ridgemont is increasing. It is not unusual for numbers to be low in a new program and to gradually increase as the program becomes more established. A similar trend occurred when the gifted program was opened at Merivale High School.

At the elementary level, school based gifted programming is dependent upon a variety of factors such as number of identified gifted students, other special education students, distribution of students in classrooms. Principals may choose to cluster gifted students or provide withdrawal programming. In all cases, an Individual Education Plan will be developed to outline how the student's needs as an exceptional student will be met. The options available will vary from school to school. Staff in-service has been offered both during the school day with release time, and after school to assist staff in providing in-class differentiated programming. The Gifted Program Teachers' manual is also available in every school.

The OCDSB is one of the few boards which offers a variety of available options for its gifted students.

Special Education Staff

The OCDSB requires teachers who teach gifted students more than fifty percent of the day to hold their Special Education Part 1 qualifications. The committee agreed that for special subject teachers at the intermediate and the secondary it is more beneficial to have a teacher who is qualified in the subject area being taught so that the depth of material can be covered appropriately. It is part of the Special Education Resource Teacher's role to assist in providing teachers strategies for working with special education students, including gifted students.

Conclusion

The committee, which reviewed the ABC minority report on the OCDSB Special Education Plan, has outlined some areas which need to be clarified in the Special Education Plan and in the Gifted Screening and Identification Manual. These issues will be discussed as part of the work plan for revising the Special Education Plan. The Gifted Support Team will also work on revisions to the Gifted Screening and Identification Manual.