

A Look at Gifted Education Across Ontario

February 2011

The Association for Bright Children of Ontario applied for and received a Parents Reaching Out grant from the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2008-2009 to fund a survey of Ontario School Boards in order to determine the range of testing practices, program options and policies pertaining to gifted students across the province.

It is apparent from the data that there is a wide variation in finding and supporting gifted students in Ontario. As this report will demonstrate, services, policies and support are fractionated and inconsistent across the Province. **Five School Boards, out of the 62 Boards contacted, reported that they had no programming options specific to their gifted population.** In addition, 35% of the reporting School Boards do not actively search for gifted students in their school population. ABC Ontario hopes that this report will begin a dialogue amongst parents, educators and legislature towards a consistent and applied policy for all gifted students in Ontario.

Five focus areas were used for the survey:

- School Board Contact Information
- Gifted Identification Practice
- Gifted Identification Data
- Acceleration and Dual Credits
- Programming Options

ABC Ontario hopes that this data will not only benefit parents interested in reviewing and comparing information about specific School Boards and the programming they offer gifted student, but will also be of use to parents who find themselves relocating in Ontario. As well, ABC Ontario, and other organizations and educators, we hope, can utilize the data to guide their efforts in examining, planning and supporting gifted education in Ontario.

Funded through Parents Reaching Out, Ministry of Education



A Project of the
Association for Bright Children
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The Survey

A total of 80 School Boards and Authorities were included in the Survey. We received responses from 62 Boards including thirteen French speaking School Boards who were contacted by French speaking researchers. Please note, 5 English speaking Boards were not contacted within the time parameters of project.

Method

Researchers were given designated School Boards to contact. Vocal contact was made by the researchers with their designated Boards. The resulting data was generated as a result of these personal contacts.

Global Data

Focal Point	Data Complete	Data Partially Complete	No Data Provided
	From Individual School Board	From Individual School Board	From Individual School Board
Individual Board Contact Information	36	6	20
Identification Practice	30	4	28
Identification Data	14	6	42
Acceleration and Dual Credits	31	0	31
Programming Options	32	0	30

Specific Data:

Identification Practice

Routine Screening Conducted as part of the Identification Process

- Boards reporting YES – 22
- Boards reporting NO – 12

Identification Processes that were reported suggest that there are a variety of pathways with a number of variations on a theme.

The collective average Gifted Identification Rate (based on a percentage of School Board populations) were as follows:

- Elementary - .70 % of the Elementary student population
- Secondary - 1.30 % of the Secondary student population

Acceleration and Dual Credits

Acceleration Policy

- Boards reporting a Policy on Acceleration - 5
- Boards reporting that they have no Policy on Acceleration - 25

Dual Credits

- Boards reporting support for Dual Credits - 5

Program Options

Elementary

- Pull-out Program was the most frequent Programming Option with 16 Boards reporting
- Partial or full time congregated classroom was the next most frequent Programming Option with 13 Boards reporting

Secondary

- Advanced Placement was the most frequent Programming Option with 15 Boards reporting
- International Baccalaureate courses were the next most frequent Programming Option with 10 Boards reporting
- Pull-out and Enrichment were tied as the next most frequent Programming Option with 7 Boards reporting
- Partial or full-time congregated classroom was the next most frequent Programming Option with 5 Boards reporting

Note: Five of the reporting Boards listed zero programming options of those listed on the survey for their Gifted population.

Analysis

ABC Ontario is concerned that 35% of the reporting Boards do not actively search for gifted students in their school population. A policy of not actively searching for gifted students could create a vacuum of leadership within a School Board for this group of exceptional students. This mindset of invisibility on the part of the Board would then require parents and teachers to become the advocates in a system where there is limited Board guidance.

ABC Ontario is concerned that significant aspects of the survey were not completed by individual School Boards. This lack of reported data reinforces the mindset of fractionated services, policies and support across the Province for gifted students.

ABC Ontario is concerned with the low numbers of identified gifted students by the reporting School Boards. Subsequently, the comparative numbers between Elementary and Secondary students reveal a negative trend in that there are more identified Secondary than Elementary Gifted Students. This trend suggests that there has been an erosion in the identification of Gifted Students at the Elementary level.

ABC Ontario is very concerned that there are some School Boards that appear to have zero Programming options specific for gifted students.

ABC Ontario is pleased that 5 School Boards have specific policies on Acceleration. The fact that 25 Boards do not have a policy suggests that there is a significant lack of understanding of Gifted students at the Board level.

ABC Ontario is pleased that 5 Boards support dual credits. Dual credits in this case indicate that an individual student would be registered in a Secondary Program and concurrently a post - Secondary Program.

ABC Ontario is pleased with the support of *all students* with the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs that are made available to interested learners. It is interesting to note that these Programming options are a form of Acceleration.

It was most interesting that there were commonalities in the identification process for gifted students in the reporting Boards.

Summary and Actions

ABC Ontario would like to thank the Ministry of Education for the Parents Reaching Out grant to support the gathering of data on the gifted learner in Ontario. In addition, ABC Ontario greatly appreciates the time and effort of individual School Boards in supporting the gathering of data and their efforts in meeting the needs of gifted students. The outcome of this data and project is to advance best practices for gifted students. In order to move “ahead”, you have to understand where we “are”.

Equal Access

As demonstrated above, it is apparent from the data that there is a wide variation in identifying and supporting gifted students in Ontario. Services, policies and support are fractionated and inconsistent across the Province.

ABC Ontario would suggest that equal access should be a guiding principle to strive towards. The following two suggestions in the areas of Acceleration and Identification would further this guiding principle:

1) Acceleration

Educational acceleration is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with more research supporting this intervention than any other in the literature on gifted individuals. The practice of educational acceleration has long been used to match high level student general ability and specific talent with optimal learning opportunities. (National Association for the Gifted 2010 – United States)

ABC Ontario suggests that the Ministry of Education require that Boards of Education establish a specific Policy on Acceleration. This Policy would formalize efforts with Dual Credits and efforts with the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs at the Secondary level. Potentially such a Policy would address an Elementary student being concurrently registered in both an Elementary and Secondary school. In this case a grade 8 student, who is also taking grade 9 mathematics at the local Secondary School, would register under dual credits.

2) Identification Procedure for Gifted Students

ABC Ontario suggests that all School Boards develop an active Identification Procedure that reflects best practices. Identification should be a fundamental element of any Program to support the needs of gifted learners. A subcommittee will be spearheaded by ABC Ontario to generate a framework for the Identification of gifted learners. This framework will be shared when completed.

ABC Ontario suggests that training for educators should continue to be a priority for all exceptional students and at all levels within the educational system. We look forward to the implementation of the Additional Qualification Courses for teachers specific to gifted learners.

Follow-up

ABC Ontario suggests that this survey be repeated in three years (2013) to allow for a gap analysis and to identify trends within education for gifted students in Ontario

The **Association for Bright Children of Ontario** is an all-volunteer, provincially incorporated support and advocacy group, with many chapters across Ontario. It is dedicated to providing information and support to parents of bright and gifted children and adolescents through newsletters, networking, an annual conference and local workshops. It offers the parents' voice to local school boards, educators, professional groups and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

For more information visit www.abcontario.ca