



ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN OF ONTARIO  
SOCIÉTÉ POUR ENFANTS DOUÉS ET SURDOUÉS DE L'ONTARIO

Ottawa Region Chapter

Section régionale d'Ottawa

2001-03-01

**TO: All OCDSB Trustees; SEAC; Secretary of the Board**  
**FROM: Association for Bright Children (ABC) - Ottawa Chapter,**  
**Nancy Corbett, President**  
**SUBJECT: ABC's Full Response to the Gifted Review – For your information**

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**ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN (ABC)**  
**Response to**  
**Ottawa Carleton District School Board**  
**Review of Gifted Programs and Services**  
**January 2001**

**Highlights of the Report**

The Report focuses on a series of questions and answers around issues raised by various groups and individuals early in the review process. It also includes a literature review commissioned to look at Programming Options for Gifted Learners. The goal was to find out best practices, evaluate how we are doing, and make recommendations for change within the context of budget constraints.

The fundamental question for most readers has been whether or not the Congregated Gifted Program should continue. Although the report avoids drawing conclusions, it is important to note the strong support for the congregated delivery model found in the literature. On page 14 of Dianna Shaffer's research into the literature (and pages 23-24 in the main report), she states "many believe that inclusive classroom environments are **not** tailored to meet the individual needs of high ability learners". On the same page, she adds: "Research indicates that gifted and talented students need more than can be provided in full inclusion or traditional pullout gifted programs in general classrooms." There is little debate that congregating gifted students has merit. With regards to evidence to support the adoption of inclusion, "Decisions to modify or eliminate programs for gifted learners are often based upon trends in educational reform instead of research." Strong support for congregation among parents was also noted in the main report. In the January 2000 survey of parents of gifted students (page 49), 84.5% of respondents said they would choose a congregated placement, with at least 60% being willing to travel to do so.

Another area of strong support is around identification. Research supports broader definitions of giftedness and testing that would err on the side of identifying many more

children (p.6). With each definition advanced, the goal was to be less restrictive in who was identified. The literature review also indicated that high ability learners should be identified during the elementary and even preschool years (p.7). As well, the report cites a staff concern that we may miss identifying some students due to a lack of training in recognizing giftedness and / or cultural biases inherent in testing. Parents' concerns with the reliability of the CCAT are not addressed.

Although a complete survey of teachers was never done for gifted, in May 2000 a small number of Special Education Resource Teachers and regular classroom teachers responded to questions on the effectiveness of regular classroom placements with differentiated programming, including gifted (page 30-31). While the majority felt the placements to be "very" or "fairly" effective, we can only conclude that they were effective for those choosing that placement. It would be unsound to generalize regular classroom placements would be effective for students choosing congregated classes.

What is of great concern to ABC comes from the December 2000 staff focus group:  
"The workload of teachers in regular classes does not allow them the time for differentiation. Regular classroom teachers are overwhelmed trying to meet the unique needs of a wide variety of students. There are many well-qualified teachers in regular classes that have the approach necessary to teach gifted children; however, many do not have the most appropriate approach. Gifted students can be highly critical and challenging and it requires particular skills to work with them." (P.69)

Of equal concern, expressed by the same focus group, is their evaluation that in-service education is "far too basic...half day workshops are not sufficient..." (p.79) We can only conclude that any attempt to integrate large numbers of gifted students currently in congregated classes would result in chaos for all, and definitely not in the best interests of students.

Attempts to evaluate how we were doing succeeded in highlighting a number of areas where changes were desirable. Most involve the identification and placement process, and some changes are already slated for implementation. ABC believes the process and identification criteria overall remain confusing (p.8-12) and more transparency is needed. This should help alleviate current concerns among staff that lack of standardization is creating inequity (p.16). Better communications to all the partners will go a long way to improve the frustrations of misinformation and misunderstanding that exists.

Comparisons with other Ontario school boards were also done as a way to evaluate our status. It is interesting to note (p.17) that there is no single one-size-fits-all model in any board. In fact, at least one board specifies the use of a different model in its rural areas. Itinerant teachers are used in two of the six boards surveyed, and another two are expanding their number of congregated classes.

The last goal of the review was to make recommendations that fit with our lower funding, however no costing was provided. Without the ability to establish the incremental costs

of any approach to special education, it is impossible to determine where savings might be found. Even in the area of transportation, we have no way of knowing how much more it costs to transport students to school/program A instead of school/program B where they might otherwise go. We can only guess – hardly an acceptable way for decision-making in a student-focused board of education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### STUDENT NEEDS: FISCAL REALITIES

An overriding concern for ABC continues to be staff's position that we are identifying students based on need, and then seeking out appropriate placement (p.17). This falsehood is clearly demonstrated in the Review Report and in practice. Gifted students awaiting placements in congregated classes are not IPRC'd until placements become available (Question 13, p.15). ABC understands the implications of holding IPRCs before budget decisions are finalized, but we also recognize that we must find a means to document the real needs of Special Education students if we are to prove we are under-funded to the provincial government. Continuing to allow funding to drive placements is unacceptable to ABC and for our students. ABC recommends that:

- The issue of rationed Special Education placements versus actual needed placements be addressed by trustees, staff and SEAC with a view to demonstrate the level of student need in the OCDSB and the impacts of funding changes on special needs students.

### BUDGET

As the current provincial funding model for school boards is conceptually based on an incremental approach, each student being entitled to a foundation grant plus access to further grants such as for special education, according to need, ABC recommends that:

- Any analysis of costing of Special Education programs and services for students use an incremental approach, and that this approach be used to calculate both revenues and expenses associated with such programs and services and
- That any reports of gifted transportation costs associated with congregated programs provide incremental costing information vis-à-vis other programs.

Whereas ABC supports the staff recommendations under (#2) Needs of Students in the Gifted Review, concern continues to be expressed in all reviews about the demand placed on resources required for IPRCs and IEPs. As these efforts are fundamental to obtaining provincial funding and to meeting student needs, ABC recommends that:

- Appropriate resources be allocated in the 2001-2002 budget to support carrying out thorough IPRCs and IEPs

- That the staffing allocation formula be adjusted to reflect the higher administrative component required for schools where larger numbers of IPRC'd students are served; i.e., pro-rating administrative support based on number of Special Education students served in a given school and
- That the staffing allocation formula be adjusted so as not to penalize Gifted Centre sites where congregated class sizes are limited by Regulation 298.

## COMMUNICATIONS

The need for transparency and to improve communications is evident in the reports and staff recommendations. In this age of electronic, even instant, messaging, and given the substantial monies spent on technology in this board, it is very difficult for ABC to comprehend why communication among the partners continues to be such a challenge. Therefore, in addition to, and in keeping with staff recommendations, ABC recommends that:

- New teachers be provided with a handbook summarizing, but not limited to, Special Education programs and services, Special Education regulations, policies and procedures, SEAC's role and Associations' support services, useful web-sites for more information, including the OCDSB's own Special Education web page and on-line opportunities, as well as external web-sites where teachers may initiate self-directed searches for information and professional development
- That the OCDSB promote its electronic Special Education conference area on BEAM to all teachers as a place to share Special Education information, exemplary practices, concerns, etc., and where central staff posts updates, new e-links, articles or research, etc.
- That the printed Parent brochure and fact sheets contain the address of the OCDSB's Special Education web page and electronic Parent Guide
- The e-Parent Guide provide links to the Ontario Ministry of Education's Special Education web page
- That the OCDSB's award winning web-site be used and promoted as the primary vehicle for broad and timely updates to parents on Special Education programs and service status, timelines for screening/testing, IPRCs, etc. Hard copies would continue to be made available as part of the general communications plan and
- That the changes around gifted student identification reported in the Review be communicated to parents and the public via the OCDSB web site.

## PARTNERSHIPS

ABC is not convinced that there is a sufficiently serious commitment to partnerships that would benefit students. The OCDSB has recently withdrawn its involvement in the Futures Conference, and may do the same for the Mini Enrichment Courses. Suggestions from ABC for a partnership to bring a keynote speaker on giftedness to Ottawa have received no follow up. Therefore, ABC recommends that:

- A lead person is named to whom partnership ideas and initiatives can be brought, and who will be accountable for reporting on progress in this area.

### DELIVERY MODELS:

In the Gifted Review, in keeping with our guiding principles, ABC welcomes staff's recommendation that the OCDSB continue to offer a full range of placement options. We further support exploring the use of itinerant teachers, especially as a means of addressing the geographical challenges of this diverse board. It must be noted that the final recommendation in section #3 appears to have undergone a transformation from the original discussion of needing to examine the impact of critical mass on the ability to offer viable gifted programming to one of the impact of enrollment on regular classes. Clarification is required before making any further comment on this recommendation. Comments on other recommendations in this section follow.

#### 1. ACCELERATION

While ABC supports the staff recommendation that the OCDSB develop criteria for acceleration, we believe the recommendation is incomplete. ABC further recommends that:

- Development of acceleration criteria include consideration of the various ways acceleration may be done, and not just "skipping" a grade
- That criteria for acceleration be brought to SEAC for comment on the impact to special education students and
- That, as part of the communication plan, approved criteria or policy be noted in the OCDSB's Special Education Comprehensive Plan.

#### 2. SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A NEW VISION

With regards to gifted programming, this document is a discussion paper based only on the opinions of a small number of staff members. Nothing in it warrants or substantiates the proposal that the congregated gifted program be eliminated at the Secondary level. ABC strongly objects to staff's recommendation in the review that we examine gifted options based on this document. ABC recommends that:

- Any examination of gifted program options at the Secondary level be based on the new standards for gifted education expected in December 2001, and on research-based educational considerations appropriate to gifted students, including social and emotional needs.

ABC will address this item more fully as part of its response to the New Vision due in March.

## FACILITIES and SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING

A major flaw in staff's recommendation to "review and rationalize" the location of congregated gifted classes is its failure to acknowledge that there is a need for more sites and classes, particularly in the far east and far south sectors of the board. As long as the standard of school-based gifted programming continues to be inconsistent, the demand for congregated placements will continue to increase. Until such time as parents perceive school-based programming options to be on par with congregated programming, this board will be called upon to meet the bulk of student need in congregated settings.

Therefore, ABC recommends that:

- Discussions begin immediately on the projected supply and demand for congregated gifted placements for 2001-2002 and
- That should the number of congregated gifted spaces be limited or fixed by budget decisions, and should eligibility and preference continue to exceed the number of congregated gifted placements available, a plan to determine additional eligibility criteria for congregated gifted placements or other similar proposals be brought forward to SEAC and the Board of Trustees as soon as possible for consideration.

At the same time, it is also important to work to ensure consistency and quality of school-based gifted programming. For instance, gifted programs in home schools may vary in terms of the amount of time for, or even existence of, withdrawal programs; the nature and quality, or even opportunity, for differentiation within the classroom. As well, principals are given little or no guidance as to standards of these Program options that must be met. They may decide to offer none at all to the gifted children within their school, and use their SERT time for other tasks. This is not right. Every gifted child should have equal access to the full range of options offered by the board in the home-school setting (quality should not vary by geographical location) and the board should ensure "quality control" of the programs at each site. ABC recommends that:

- The board work to eliminate the wide discrepancies and variations in school-based gifted programming, which is now "site-dependant"
- That efforts to develop and strengthen school-based gifted programming be increased
- That consideration be given to technologically-based opportunities such as on-line programs and
- That more accountability measures for special education programs and services be built into the OCDSB Site Based Management Model.