

**COMMENTS ON THE  
OTTAWA CARLETON-DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD'S  
SPECIAL EDUCATION PLAN 2001-2002**

**MAY 2002**

**for receipt at the June 5, 2002 Meeting  
of the OCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee**

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**Association for  
Bright Children  
Of Ontario  
Ottawa Region Chapter**

**Société pour enfants  
doués et surdoués  
de l'Ontario  
Section régionale d'Ottawa**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Association for Bright Children (ABC), Ottawa Chapter has reviewed the draft Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) Special Education Plan 2001-2002 as submitted to the Ministry of Education in July 2001 and has identified several areas where it does not believe that the OCDSB is in compliance with the requirements of Regulation 181/98, *Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils*, Ministry guidelines, recent Special Education Tribunal decisions, and/or the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*<sup>1</sup>.

Specific areas where ABC believes that the OCDSB is not in compliance include:

- **Early identification procedures and intervention strategies.** The OCDSB uses different criteria up to grade 3 for gifted identification than it uses in grade 3 and beyond. This is inconsistent with the Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11, *Early Identification of Children's Learning Needs*. There is also no theoretical basis for the use of different criteria.
- **Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process.** The board's Primary Gifted Program Committee makes decisions on identification prior to the end of grade 3. Parents are neither informed nor invited to attend these meetings, thus depriving them of their right under Regulation 181/98, *Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils*, Subsection 5(1) to be present at and participate in all committee discussions about their child.  
  
Further, Principals will not hold IPRC's to place a child in a congregated gifted class until such time as they are advised that a spot is available and that the parents have already indicated that a congregated class is their preferred option. By following such a process, the formal IPRC meeting is no more than a "rubber stamp" exercise.
- **Special education placements provided by the Board.** The full range of placement options is not available to all students at the elementary level. Some of the placement options are rarely offered notwithstanding what is reported on the "October Reports", due to budgetary pressures. At the secondary level, no student receives a continuation of placement as they move on from elementary school, or depending on the school, as a student proceeds through his/her secondary school career.
- **Criteria for identification.** In the spring of 1999, the OCDSB harmonized the practices of the former Carleton and Ottawa Boards of Education. The new process is not consistent with the requirements of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* in several ways including:
  - The manner by which test results are disaggregated for interpretation;

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<sup>1</sup> *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999. The College of Psychologists of Ontario has formally adopted these standards.

- The very limited research upon which the new process was based was insufficient to validate the manner in which it is used;
- The process has been modified significantly since the original research was undertaken and ABC is unaware of any formal research that was undertaken to revalidate it.

Other areas of concern with the processes utilized for the identification of gifted students include:

- **Children not being identified based on a single criterion.** No single criterion is 100% accurate and thus a decision not to identify a child as gifted should not be based on a single test result. This is what is happening, however;
- **Cut off scores on psychological tests that are strictly applied** even though it is well known that there is a certain measurement error around any measure;
- The **use of the CAT/2 reading comprehension sub test** as the final evidence demonstrating a child's giftedness rather than simply as one of several potential screening mechanisms;
- **The lack of formal weight given to the parent's nomination.** There is an implicit assumption that teachers are more likely to be able to correctly identify a gifted child than a parent will be able to. ABC is unaware of any research that supports this perspective.
- **Inconsistent processes for identifying students with other exceptionalities and/or cultural and linguistic differences.** No guidance is provided to schools unless they formally seek it out, on how to take these factors into consideration when identifying a gifted child.

The OCDSB has developed a process that can be easily administered at the school level, yet as noted by the Ontario Special Education Tribunal in its decision issued September 24, 2001, the "identification of gifted children is not simple<sup>2</sup>." Further, as outlined in *The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "Adherence to professional standards governing test use in conducting special education assessments is important, in the face of pressures to use more expedient procedures<sup>3</sup>".

The number of gifted students within the OCDSB has dropped significantly since the changes in identification procedures were first implemented in the spring of 1999. At the elementary level, the drop has been 30% between 1998-99 and 2001-02 and at the secondary level, 25%<sup>4</sup> over the same period. From ABC's perspective, this dramatic drop is far too great to be attributed solely to a renorming in 1998 of the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT) as staff have been suggesting since ABC

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<sup>2</sup> In the Matter of the Education Act R.S.A.O. 1990, c.E.2, Section 57 and in the Matter of the Ontario Special Education (English) Tribunal at a hearing into the matter of the Identification and Placement of Cameron Bharath between Dr. Michele Alexis and Mr. Keppel Bharath, Appellants and Upper Canada District School Board, Respondent.

<sup>3</sup> Op cit, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, page 144.

<sup>4</sup> These percentages are based on the number of students identified as gifted in the October Reports submitted each year by the OCDSB to the Ministry of Education.

first identified the issue in the spring of 2001. It is interesting to note that there was a 15% year-over-year drop in the numbers identified when the former Carleton Board implemented a precursor to the process being currently utilized by the OCDSB in 1992-93<sup>5</sup>.

- **Special education staff.** The OCDSB requires teachers who spend more than 50% of their day teaching gifted special education students in self-contained classes to have Part One Special Education qualifications. Because of the way teachers are assigned to classes, there are many teachers teaching congregated gifted classes who may not have the required qualifications. Such teachers are less likely to be fully cognizant of the learning needs of their students.

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<sup>5</sup> *Evaluation of the Procedures for the Identification of Gifted Students*, Dr. David Ireland, Manager, Program Evaluation, Marjorie Clegg, Research Associate with Dr. Carol Lithwick, Manager of Special Services, September 1993.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education introduced a province-wide standard in 2000 that school boards must meet when developing their special education plans. As part of the required process, boards must take into consideration issues from members of the community. This consultation must be maintained on a continuous basis throughout the year.

The board's special education plan, according to the Standard, must describe the consultation process and must include a description of any majority or minority reports concerning the board's approved plan that have been received from any member of the board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). Further, the plan must include the board's response to these reports.

The Association for Bright Children (ABC), Ottawa Chapter is represented on the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) SEAC and has upon review of the draft Special Education Plan 2001-2002 as submitted to the Ministry of Education in July 2001 identified several areas where it does not believe that the OCDSB is in compliance with the requirements of Regulation 181/98, *Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils*, Ministry guidelines, recent Special Education Tribunal decisions<sup>6</sup> and/or the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*<sup>7</sup>. These areas are described in the balance of this report. We have followed the same order as that used in the Ministry of Education's *Standards for School Board's Special Education Plans*, 2000.

## 2. EARLY IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11, *Early Identification of Children's Learning Needs*, requires that boards must have in place "procedures to identify each child's level of development, learning abilities, and needs", and that they must "ensure that educational programs are designed to accommodate these needs and to facilitate each child's growth and development". The special education plan must include the statement that "these procedures are a part of a continuous assessment and program planning process which should be initiated when a child is first enrolled in

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<sup>6</sup> As noted by William Wyman, Senior Policy Advisor, Policy Development, Ministry of Education and Secretary to the Ontario Special Education Tribunal at the ABC Provincial Council meeting in Mississauga February 23, 2002, the Tribunal's decision only applies to the specific case which it has heard and the Ministry will not force its applicability elsewhere. He did point out, however, that it might very well be wise to extrapolate the principles at the local school board level for practical reasons. To ignore it, could increase the Board's costs later, when someone in the board starts down the appeal process utilizing the principles outlined in earlier Tribunal decisions.

<sup>7</sup> *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, developed jointly by American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), 1999. These standards have been formally adopted by the College of Psychologists of Ontario.

school or no later than the beginning of a program of studies immediately following Kindergarten and should continue throughout a child's school life".

ABC believes that this is not being applied appropriately to gifted children. Under the OCDSB's practices, more stringent criteria are applied in identifying gifted children in Senior Kindergarten through grade 2 than in grades 3 and beyond. In fact, information that is insufficient according to the OCDSB to identify a child as gifted in grade one, can be used by them as the sole basis to identify a child in grade 3. With the lack of proper identification and associated non-provision of appropriate programs to accommodate the child's needs and facilitate his/her growth and development, some gifted children have already learned to underachieve by grade three when the less stringent criteria become applicable.

There is no theoretical basis for using different criteria to identify a gifted child in grade one than is used in grade 3 or any other grade. A child does not all of a sudden become gifted in grade 3. If anything, they may by then have learned to hide their giftedness, rendering it all the more difficult to identify. The needs of each child who is identified gifted, however, must be looked at closely to determine the appropriate placement option. A review of the literature commissioned by the OCDSB in 2000 also suggests that high ability learners should be identified during the early elementary or preschool years<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. IDENTIFICATION, PLACEMENT, AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (IPRC) PROCESS**

The IPRC process as described in the draft Special Education Plan, 2001-2002 does not reflect the reality of how the committee meetings are actually conducted, in particular for gifted children. Nor does the practice reflect the requirements of Regulation 181/98 or the practice outlined in the sample Parents' Guide to Special Education contained in the *Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans, 2000*.

Regulation 181/98, Subsection 5(1), sets out the rights of a parent and the pupil, where the pupil is 16 years of age or older, to be present at and participate in all committee discussions about the pupil and to be present when the committee's identification and placement decisions are made. The OCDSB has a process whereby a series of decisions are made on the identification and placement of students that the parents are neither informed of nor invited to attend.

The OCDSB's *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, Revised 2001 states:

**Primary Gifted Program Committee.** The mandate of this committee is to review the applications of the nominated students and decide whether the student would/would not be an appropriate candidate for the program. The

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<sup>8</sup> Dianna Shaffer, *Programming Options for Gifted Learners*, August, 2000, for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

committee's recommendation will be sent to the school principal as to whether or not to hold an IPRC meeting for gifted identification and placement.<sup>9</sup>

Schools will not identify a child as gifted prior to the end of grade 3 unless the Primary Gifted Program Committee has advised the Principal that it is appropriate to do so. Only with this recommendation in hand is the IPRC then held.

At grades 3 and above, schools follow the procedures described in the OCDSB's *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, revised February 2001. Any deviations from the processes must be approved by the Special Education Support Teacher for gifted programming within Special Education/Student Services.

Furthermore, placements in congregated classes are not offered to students until after parents are asked in February to make their preferences known and staff has determined if there is space available in the spring. Principals will not hold IPRCs with parents until they have been advised that there is a spot available in a congregated class if the parents have indicated that is their preferred placement. By following this process, the effective identification and placement decisions are not being made at the formal IPRC meeting. Rather, the IPRC is held simply as a "rubber stamp" exercise.

It is also not uncommon for a parent to be advised in advance of the annual review IPRC that the recommended placement will be "no change" with the subtle suggestion that it is really not necessary for them to attend. IPRCs are scheduled ten minutes apart, leaving no time to discuss in any meaningful way the student's strengths and weaknesses. This practice is not consistent with the Ministry provided exemplar in the *Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans*.

## 4. SPECIAL EDUCATION PLACEMENTS PROVIDED BY THE BOARD

### 4.1 Placements

The Education Act requires that "every board shall provide or enter into an agreement with another board to provide in accordance with the regulations special education programs and special education services for its exceptional pupils".<sup>10</sup> The Ministry expects that a range of options will be available for pupils whose needs cannot be met within the regular classroom<sup>11</sup>. *Special Education: A Guide for Educators*<sup>12</sup>, 2001 describes a range of potential placement options. These are:

- **A regular class with indirect support.** (The student is placed in a regular class for the entire day, and the teacher receives specialized consultative services);

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<sup>9</sup> Page 5, Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures, SK-Grade 2

<sup>10</sup> Education Act, Section 170(1), paragraph 7

<sup>11</sup> Outlined in a memorandum from the Ministry of Education and Training dated June 9, 1994, to directors of education, superintendents of special education, and principals.

<sup>12</sup> Issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education to replace the *Special Education Information Handbook*, 1984.

- **A regular class with resource assistance.** (The student is placed in the regular class for most or all of the day and receives specialized instruction, individually or in a small group, within the regular classroom from a qualified special education teacher);
- **A regular class with withdrawal assistance.** (The student is placed in the regular class and receives instruction outside of the classroom for less than 50 per cent of the school day, from a qualified special education teacher);
- **A special education class with partial integration.** (The student is placed by the IPRC in a special education class where the student-teacher ratio conforms to Regulation 298, section 31, for at least 50 per cent of the school day, but is integrated with a regular class for at least one instructional period daily); and
- **A special education class full time.** (The student is placed by the IPRC in a special education class, where the student-teacher ration conforms to Regulation 298, section 31, for the entire school day).

These placement options are consistent with what must be provided to the Ministry of Education each year in the “October Reports”.

The OCDSB’s Special Education Plan suggests that this continuum of placements is provided for gifted children. A review of School Profiles available on the Board’s web site found that there are schools describing all of these placements at the elementary level for gifted students except for the partial integration option which according to the data submitted by the OCDSB in its October Report, is available.

Based on the experience of ABC members, the full range of options, however, is not available to all students. Two of the options (regular class with resource assistance and regular class with withdrawal assistance) are rarely offered notwithstanding what is reported on the October Reports, due to significant budgetary pressures faced by the OCDSB, especially within the special education services envelop. Rather, these students are in an indirect support placement, notwithstanding the fact that according to the 2001-2002 October Report, there are no OCDSB students in this placement.

Budgetary pressures have also contributed to the creation of waiting lists for placements into congregated gifted classes. These are most prevalent in the primary grades where services are only provided at one school and at the intermediate level. Based on the experience of ABC Ottawa’s members, the quality of service provided outside a self-contained or partially integrated class is highly dependent on the individual school principal and classroom teacher. It can range from nonexistent service to highly effective service. As staff in a December 2000 focus group noted, “gifted students who are not in congregated classes are, in many cases, not receiving the differentiation they require”<sup>13</sup>.

At the secondary level, ABC is unaware of any available programming for gifted students unless they attended classes at one of the Board’s six designated gifted sites.

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<sup>13</sup> OCDSB, *Review of Programs/Services for Gifted Students*, January 2001, page 16.

Each of the sites offers a slightly different range of course options for gifted students.<sup>14</sup> The range offered at any one site has evolved over time in part due to budgetary pressures<sup>15</sup>.

Today, not one of the six gifted centers offers a special education class full time notwithstanding what has been indicated on the OCDSB's October Reports, which means that no student receives a continuation of placement as they move from elementary school to secondary school or, depending on the school, as a student proceeds through his/her secondary school career. Even students enrolled in a gifted French immersion program at the secondary level will not necessarily be able to take their French class in a self contained gifted class (see Annex A for a listing of all congregated gifted classes listed in the *OCDSB 2002-2003 Secondary School Courses* catalogue<sup>16</sup>). Furthermore, ABC is aware of classes designated for gifted students at one of the six gifted centres in which a significant number of non-IPRC'd students have been placed in order to bring the class numbers up to a level that allows the class to be offered. This program is presented to parents as being the same placement as what is available at the other five centers, yet it cannot be, since all students in the class have not been placed in it through the IPRC process.

## 4.2 Criteria for Identification

The OCDSB's draft 2001-2002 Special Education Plan does not fully describe the criteria that may be used to identify a child as gifted. At the elementary level it outlines a process based on the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT), Canadian Achievement Test 2 (CAT/2), a parent information form to provide background, and a teacher nomination form. There is an indication of some kind of criteria for grades 4 to 12 but they are not specified.

A more detailed set of criteria are provided in the *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, Revised February 2001. This document indicates that other tests may be used such as:

- the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Third Edition<sup>17</sup> (WISC III); and
- the Stanford-Binet.

We believe that it is quite appropriate that other tests such as these be utilized whenever possible as one-on-one assessments with a psychologist or psychological assistant will generally be more reliable than a group administered test such as the CCAT.

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<sup>14</sup> As noted in the 5 June 2002 SEAC meeting agenda package, folio 133, "The programs are relatively consistent in Grades 9 and 10 across the centers but differ in Grades 11 to OA."

<sup>15</sup> As noted in the 5 June 2002 SEAC meeting agenda package, folio 133, "the decision to use the core subjects for the "Gifted package" was based on past practice which was rooted in the belief that combining the Gifted subjects with mandatory credits ensured a critical mass in Gifted courses and therefore proved less costly in terms of internal staffing".

<sup>16</sup> The fact that a course has been listed in the catalogue is no guarantee that it will be offered.

<sup>17</sup> While the procedures make reference to the WISC III, in reality the OCDSB will only use the WISC III based on Canadian norms.

We are quite concerned, however, with the way the OCDSB takes the results from the CCAT, WISC III or Stanford-Binet, disaggregates them into subtests as outlined in Annex B, and assigns points to the subtests. None of these tests were designed to be interpreted through this type of disaggregation. The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* does not support the use of the test results in this way. Further, the British Columbia College of Psychologists in their *Guidelines for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1994, 1996), identified all three as Level C tests. A Level C test is defined as being one that requires advanced (graduate level) training for interpretation in the specific professional field to which the tests apply (e.g., clinic psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, Industrial/organizational psychology). By having staff at the school level simply follow the procedures as set out in the OCDSB's *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, revised February 2001, these test results are not being subject to interpretation by someone who is properly trained to interpret the results. Care in particular, needs to be exercised in interpreting the results when a student has an uneven learning profile.

ABC has several other specific concerns with the criteria being used to identify gifted children. These include:

- ***theoretical basis for process.*** The process being utilized for identification is based on research carried out by the Program Evaluation Division of the former Carleton Board of Education (CBE) that was published in 1993<sup>18</sup>. The process was based on a two-year research initiative whereby information from seven key indicators (parents, teachers, peers, self, and three CCAT sub-test scores) were correlated in the first year of the study with scores on the WISC-III. In the second year of the study, data on the identification and placement of students, extent of compliance/implementation within schools, and parent and staff satisfaction surveys was collected. The study was validated by looking at the results for 58 students who had participated in WISC-III testing. Information from these students was also used to make predictions about WISC-III scores of the rest of the Grade 3 students. A multiple linear regression analysis using the seven key indicators produced an equation that accounted for about 70% of the variance.

In moving to these new procedures away from the use of the individual WISC III, the former CBE had a year over year drop of approximately 15% in the number of students identified as gifted. Over time the process has been further modified by dropping the parent, peer and self checklist and introducing the use of the reading subcomponent of an achievement test, yet the minimum number of required profile points for gifted identification has remained the same.

ABC believes that while the research is interesting, the sample size is far too small to draw definitive conclusions. The process is based on the results of students in grade three yet is utilized for other grades. Furthermore, we are unaware of any

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<sup>18</sup> Evaluation of the Procedures for the Identification of Gifted Students, Dr. David Ireland, Manager; Program Evaluation, Marjorie Clegg, Research Associate with Dr. Carol Lithwick, Manager of Special Services, September 1993.

formal research that was undertaken to revalidate the process every time one of the key indicators was dropped or the achievement test was added. All three of these issues need to be adequately addressed before this process could be considered consistent with the requirements of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*<sup>19</sup>.

- **Children are not identified based on a single criterion.** The OCDSB uses the following criteria to screen for gifted children in Senior Kindergarten through to grade 2<sup>20</sup>:
  - Scores at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on 2 of the 3 scales of the CCAT and at least at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on the third scale, and has a Student Profile Form with the majority of ratings in the Advanced and Unusually Advanced categories; or
  - A verbal or full-scale score at or above the 99.6<sup>th</sup> percentile on the WISC-III (Canadian norms) or equivalent, and a strong Student Profile Form completed by the school.

As noted in the Ontario Special Education Tribunal's decision dated September 24, 2001<sup>21</sup>, there are several problems with these criteria. In that decision, the Tribunal indicated that a single factor should not be used to identify a child. Similarly, one factor alone is insufficient to rule out giftedness in a child, and yet this is what is effectively happening with the criteria utilized by the OCDSB.

- **Cut-off scores on psychological tests are strictly applied.** Dr. Janice Leroux, a part time Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa who conducts graduate studies in the field of gifted exceptionalities, was quoted by the Ontario Special Education Tribunal when it outlined the reasons for its September 24, 2001, decision as follows: "*though it is a widespread practice to rely on a cut-off score, this practice is utterly and thoroughly unacceptable. Every test has some degree of measurement error. In essence, such error indicates that a score several points above and below a particular cut off are conceptually, and from a technical standpoint, indistinguishable*". In our experience the OCDSB, however, rigorously applies a cut-off score.
- **Use of the CAT/2 reading comprehension sub test.** In its most recent changes to its processes for the identification of gifted students in early 2001, the OCDSB staff chose to introduce the use of the reading comprehension sub test of the Canadian Achievement Test, version 2. Staff was motivated to do this because of perceived problems with the parent checklist then in use and through a desire for a more standardized and objective process<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, American Psychological Association, Inc., 1999

<sup>20</sup> Page 2, OCDSB *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, revised February 2001.

<sup>21</sup> In the Matter of the Education Act R.S.O. 1990, c.E.2, Section 57 and In the Matter of the Ontario Special Education (English) Tribunal at a hearing into the matter of The Identification and Placement of Cameron Bharath between Dr. Michele Alexis and Mr. Keppel Bharath, Appellants and Upper Canada District School Board, Respondent.

<sup>22</sup> Telephone message from a staff member within the OCDSB Special Education/Student Services Division, to the ABC SEAC representative, January 18, 2002.

ABC has found examples where achievement tests are used in gifted identification. However, in each example that we found, achievement tests are one of several potential screening mechanisms employed to identify children who may be gifted, followed by the use of additional assessment instruments before a final determination is made.

In the OCDSB, however, the achievement test is used as the final evidence for those children where there is some degree of doubt before a formal identification of giftedness is made. While there may be a high correlation between giftedness and achievement, those with learning disabilities or who are underachieving will not necessarily be identified through such a test. Furthermore, the use of a reading comprehension test disadvantages those students who:

- are in an early French immersion program and who have only received one hour a day of English instruction since the beginning of grade 2;
- have English as a Second Language; or
- come from disadvantaged homes where reading is not encouraged.

ABC believes quite strongly that the OCDSB is utilizing the CAT/2 test inappropriately in its identification procedures.

- ***Lack of formal weight given to the parent's nomination.*** As noted above, staff implemented changes in early 2001 that reduced the importance of the parent checklist in the gifted identification process. Teachers are instructed on the *Teacher Nomination Form for Gifted Identification*<sup>23</sup> to refer to the Parent Information Forms before completing the teacher form. On the *Grade 3 Parent Information Form*, and the *Grade 4-12 Parent Information Form*, parents are asked to indicate for twenty-six attributes whether their child lacks this characteristic, has this characteristic less than the typical child, compares with a typical child, has this characteristic more than the typical child, has this characteristic to a high degree. There is no process in place to reconcile differences between parent and teacher perceptions of a child.

In implementing this change, OCDSB staff have implicitly assumed that teachers are more likely to be able to correctly identify a gifted child than a parent will be able to. As noted in *The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids*, “teachers have been known to identify those who achieve well, dress neatly, and do what is expected of them. It’s easy for a busy teacher to overlook the highly creative, messy, unambiguous, divergent thinker.”<sup>24</sup> The book also quotes results of one study that showed “that parents correctly nominated gifted kids at a rate of 67 percent, whereas the rate for teachers (without training) was only 22 percent”.

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<sup>23</sup> Page 5, page 26, and page 46, OCDSB *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, revised February 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Sally Yahnke Walker, *The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids*, Free Spirit Publishing, 1991, page 20.

Other options should have been considered to address the perceived problems with the parent checklist rather than simply relegating it to the status of an input document to the teacher's checklist. ABC has heard from its members, the problems parents had in completing this checklist. Many parents ended up scoring their child quite low because they thought that their child was quite typical when in fact the child was quite gifted. Factors that contributed to this included:

- The parents themselves were gifted so the child's behaviour was consistent with what they remembered;
  - The parents being gifted themselves had a streak of perfectionism and assumed that their child couldn't be at the top of the scale all of the time and rated the child accordingly; or
  - The child being rated was the first child or an only child so that the parents had no strong basis for comparison.
- ***Inconsistent processes for identifying students with other exceptionalities and/or cultural and linguistic differences.*** The OCDSB *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures* indicates that:

“A student may not meet the criteria for gifted identification due to one or more of the following: a) cultural and/or linguistic differences, b) social-emotional factors, c) communication disorders, d) physical and/or sensory differences, and e) other factors. Furthermore, an uneven learning profile (which, upon further examination, may be indicative of a learning disability) may also contribute to a student's inability to meet the criteria for gifted identification. After analyzing its own student population for these possibilities, the School Gifted Identification Management Committee may wish to consider making a referral to Special Education/Student Services.”<sup>25</sup>

No guidance is provided to schools as to how these factors should be taken into account nor are criteria provided to schools to decide when further information should be obtained. Rather it is left solely to the discretion of the individual principal. Based on ABC's experience, there appears to be no alternate way to identify gifted students, other than the stated criteria in the *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, notwithstanding the suggestion in the procedures that other factors do exist that should be taken into account. It is also ABC's experience that there is a great reluctance on the part of OCDSB Special Education/Student Services staff to consider potential accommodations for gifted students with other exceptionalities, when guidance is provided to schools on identification and placement issues.

It must be noted that the OCDSB generally does not have one of its psychologists or psychological assistants administer one-on-one assessments to potentially gifted students and that if a parent wishes this type of testing, they must arrange for it privately and pay for it themselves. During much of 2001-2002, OCDSB staff were preoccupied with carrying out assessments necessary to support Intensive Support Amount (ISA)

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<sup>25</sup> Page 24, OCDSB *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, revised February 2001.

funding applications and unless a child was likely to meet the requirements for ISA funding, he/she was likely to be well down on the priority list for assessments and is not likely to be seen by OCDSB psychological services staff in the foreseeable future.

In our estimation, the net impact of the process followed by the OCDSB is that a significant number of students within the OCDSB who would be identified as gifted if generally accepted criteria were utilized, are being left behind. The OCDSB, has developed a process that can be easily administered at the school level. However, it has not explicitly built into its process a provision for the application of judgment where there is not overwhelming evidence that a child probably is gifted. The OCDSB's process thus probably minimizes the number of false positives but is likely creating a significant number of false negatives. As noted by the Ontario Special Education Tribunal in its decision issued September 24, 2001, the "identification of gifted children is not simple"<sup>26</sup>, yet, that is exactly what the OCDSB is trying to make it.

It would appear that the OCDSB has succumbed to the kind of pressures that the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* caution against. In guidance provided in the *Standards*, it is noted:

"Occasionally, administrators might be inclined to use less expensive, less time-consuming, or more readily available testing procedures than a professional evaluator believes are warranted. An example would be the inappropriate use of available, but less adequately trained, staff to evaluate students. There also might be pressures to minimize or overlook problems that require expensive services. These conditions are likely to adversely affect the validity of the interpretation of test results. Adherence to professional standards governing test use in conducting special education assessments is important, in the face of pressures to use more expedient procedures. The responsible use of tests by school personnel can improve the opportunities for promoting the development and learning of all children."<sup>27</sup>

It is not surprising that the number of gifted students within the OCDSB has dropped significantly since the changes in identification procedures were first implemented in the spring of 1999. An analysis of special education enrollment and placement data provided in the October Reports to the Ministry of Education (see Annex C) shows that the number of gifted students within the OCDSB has dropped approximately 30% in the elementary panel between 1998-99 and 2001-2002<sup>28</sup> and 25% in the secondary panel.

When asked about the falling numbers on several occasions at Board and Education Committee meetings over the past year, Special Education/Student Services staff attributed the drop in numbers of gifted children being identified to a renorming of the

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<sup>26</sup> Page 30 of the Decision.

<sup>27</sup> *Op cit*, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, page 144.

<sup>28</sup> Information by school board from the 1998-1999 to 2000-2001 "October Reports" was obtained from the Education Simcoe website ([http://www.educationsimcoe.org/special\\_education.htm](http://www.educationsimcoe.org/special_education.htm)). The OCDSB data for 2001-2002 was obtained from folios 44 and 45 of the SEAC agenda package of 6 March 2002.

CCAT instrument that occurred in 1998<sup>29</sup>. From ABC's perspective, the drop in numbers identified is too great to be attributed solely to the renorming. Rather, it is most likely attributable to the limitations in the identification procedures that have been implemented since the amalgamation of the former Carleton and Ottawa Boards of Education.

This perspective is supported by research conducted in the United States<sup>30</sup> where students ranging in age from 7 to 12 took a battery of four tests over a six-week period. The tests included the Stanford-Binet (LM), the Stanford-Binet (Fourth Edition), the Otis-Lennon School Abilities Test (OLSAT), and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). (It is worth noting that the CCAT is the Canadian version of the Cognitive Abilities Test<sup>31</sup>.) The study found significant differences on the four various measures of cognitive ability. Significantly more children meet criteria for gifted identification through the individual tests as opposed to the group tests. Scores on the OLSAT did not differ significantly from scores on the various subtests of the CogAT.

OCDSB staff in a focus group in December 2000, indicated that "the selection process needs to incorporate the latest research and expertise. The selection process needs to address those students whose first language is not English<sup>32</sup>." ABC wholeheartedly supports this perspective.

## 5. SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF

The OCDSB requires teachers who spend more than 50% of their day teaching gifted special education students in self-contained classes to have Part One Special Education qualifications<sup>33</sup>. Because of the way teachers are assigned to classes, this will generally only occur at the elementary level. Even at the elementary level, depending on how a principal has chosen to organize the school, not all the teachers will have the required special education qualifications to teach gifted students (e.g., if a teacher comes in to teach one class in just mathematics or just science, the OCDSB does not require special education qualifications, because less than 50% of the day is spent teaching special education students.)

This is even more likely to occur at the secondary level because of the limited number of self-contained gifted classes in a particular subject area at each gifted centre and the way in which teachers are assigned to classes. Unfortunately, the teachers are not

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<sup>29</sup> OCDSB, *Review of Programs/Services for Gifted Students*, January 2001, page 14.

<sup>30</sup> Tandra Tyler-Wood and Louis Carri, *Identification of Gifted Children: The Effectiveness of Various Measures of Cognitive Ability*, Roeper Review, Volume 14, No. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Mental Measurements Yearbook, Buros Institute.

<sup>32</sup> OCDSB, *Review of Programs/Services for Gifted Students*, January 2001, page 16.

<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that the OCDSB Special Education Plan 2001-2002 requires teachers of most other special education programs to have both Part One and Part Two special education qualifications. The exceptions to this are the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Program where teachers must have Specialist qualifications as a Teacher of the Deaf, the programs for students with Developmental Disabilities where the teachers require Part One with the Developmental Disability option, and the itinerant teachers for the Hearing Impaired require Specialist qualifications as a Teacher of the Deaf.

always cognizant of the learning needs of their students as identified by IPRCs and IEPs and do not provide the differentiated programming that is expected in a special education class for gifted students.

Our members are telling us of situations where secondary school teachers are presenting the material to gifted classes at the same speed as they would for any other class and that there is no apparent differentiation in the presentation of course material. At one secondary school gifted centre, for example, the gifted students have been combined with English as Second Language (ESL) students, for the delivery of the required courses in career studies and civics. The gifted students are finding the pace of the class to be extremely slow.

While the reports to the Board and to the Ministry of Education suggest that the OCDSB is meeting its obligation to provide special education services the only need it is meeting for these students is to: “interact with students of similar interests and abilities”.

The other statements of needs<sup>34</sup> that are typically identified on a gifted student are often not being addressed because the classroom teacher is not trained to provide them. These needs include:

- To participate in academic activities at an advanced level;
- To acquire research and thinking skills;
- To be challenged in a particular subject area or other areas of strength;
- To work in an open-ended curriculum which provides many opportunities for creative exploration and expression;
- To develop creative thinking skills;
- To become fluent in the generation and recall of ideas;
- To display originality through the development of unusual and unique ideas.

Through these administrative practices, the OCDSB is failing to meet the identified needs of gifted students.

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<sup>34</sup> Taken from a list of suggested statements of need provided on the OCDSB website ([http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/General\\_Info/Spec\\_Ed/Special\\_Education.htm](http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/General_Info/Spec_Ed/Special_Education.htm))

**ANNEX A: SECONDARY SCHOOL GIFTED LEVEL COURSES OFFERED TO IPRC'D GIFTED STUDENTS, 2002-2003<sup>35</sup>**

	Grade	Bell High School	Glebe Collegiate	Gloucester High School	Lisgar Collegiate	Merivale	Ridgemont High School
English	9	x	x	x	x	x	x
	10	x	x	x	x	x	x
	11	x	x	x		x	x
	12	x	x			x	
French	9			x (I)			x (C)
	10			x(I)			x (C)
	11			x(I)			x (C)
Geography	9	F & x	F	F & x	x	F & x	x
	11						x
History	10	F & x	F	F & x	x	F & x	x
	11		F				x
Env. & Resource Mgt.	12	x					
Math	9	x	F	x	x	F & x	x
	10	x	F	x	x	F & x	x
	11	x	F	x	x	x	x
	12 (Functions)	x	F			x	
	12 (Geometry)		F				
Science	9	F & x	x	F & x	x	F & x	x
	10	x	x	F & x	x	F & x	x
Biology				x			
Chemistry	11	x		x	x	x	x
	12					x	
Physics	11	x		x	x	x	x
	12	x				x	
Anthr., Psych & Socio.	11	x					
Computer & Info Sc	11	x					
	12	x					

Legend:

- C: core French
- F: course offered in French
- I: French immersion class

<sup>35</sup> Taken from the OCDSB 2002-2003 Secondary School Courses calendar.

**ANNEX B: PROFILE POINTS AWARDED FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS OF ABILITY/INTELLIGENCE<sup>36</sup>**

If the test administered was the CCAT, the following point system is applied:

	<b>Age Percentile</b>	<b>Profile Points</b>
CCAT Verbal PR	98-99	4
	95-97	3
	82-94	2
	50-81	1
	1-49	0
CCAT Quantitative PR	98-99	4
	95-97	3
	82-94	2
	50-81	1
	1-49	0
CCAT Nonverbal PR	98-99	4
	95-97	3
	82-94	2
	50-81	1
	1-49	0

If the test administered was the WISC-III, the following point system is applied:

<b>Range</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Verbal</b>	<b>Performance</b>	<b>Full Scale</b>
Very Superior	98-99	4	4	4
Superior (upper end)	95-97	3	3	3
Superior (lower end)	91-94	2	2	2
High Average (upper end)	85-90	1	1	1
Average to High Average (lower end)	Less than 85	0	0	0

If the test administered was the Stanford-Binet, the following point system is applied:

<b>Range</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Verbal</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Abstract/Visual</b>
Very Superior	98-99	4	4	4
Superior (upper end)	95-97	3	3	3
Superior (lower end)	91-94	2	2	2
High Average (upper end)	85-90	1	1	1
Average to High Average (lower end)	Less than 85	0	0	0

<sup>36</sup> taken from the OCDSB *Gifted Screening and Identification Procedures*, Revised February 2001, pages 35-36.

**ANNEX C: NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITHIN THE OCDSB IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED,  
1998-1999 THROUGH 2001-2002<sup>37</sup>**

***Elementary Panel***

	IEP	Self Contained	Partially Integrated	Withdrawal Assistance	Resource Assistance	Indirect Service	Total Special Ed.
<b>OCDSB</b>							
98-99	1880	565	0	916	365	34	1880
99-00	1656	715	0	857	84	0	1656
00-01	1474	714	22	644	94	0	1474
01-02	1317	699	48	466	104	0	1317
<b>Province Wide</b>							
98-99	14072	4309	1562	4349	2115	1737	14072
99-00	13867	4823	1697	4082	1875	1385	13862
00-01	12877	4584	1661	3775	1425	1500	12945
<b>Percentage of Students in Each Delivery Option Within the OCDSB</b>							
98-99		30.1%	0.0%	48.7%	19.4%	1.8%	100.0%
99-00		43.2%	0.0%	51.8%	5.1%	0.0%	100.0%
00-01		48.4%	1.5%	43.7%	6.4%	0.0%	100.0%
01-02		53.1%	3.6%	35.4%	7.9%	0.0%	100.0%

<sup>37</sup> Data for 1988-1999 to 2000-2001 obtained from an electronic summary of the "October Reports" that is available on the Education Simcoe website ([http://www.educationsimcoe.org/special\\_education.htm](http://www.educationsimcoe.org/special_education.htm)). Each school board in the province must provide the reports to the Ministry of Education. The OCDSB data for 2001-2002 was obtained from folios 44 and 45 of the SEAC agenda package of 6 March 2002.

## Secondary Panel<sup>38</sup>

	IEP	Self Contained	Partially Integrated	Withdrawal Assistance	Resource Assistance	Indirect Service	Total Special Ed.
<b>OCDSB</b>							
98-99	1520	0	1520	0	0	0	1520
99-00	1356	62	1303	77	0	0	1442
00-01	1230	450	669	163	5	0	1287
01-02	1144	337	484	323	0	0	1144
<b>Province Wide</b>							
98-99	16225	591	4522	2434	3768	4910	16225
99-00	15533	545	3567	3349	3640	4826	15927
00-01	14840	639	3064	2437	3746	4991	14877
<b>Percentage of Students in Each Delivery Option Within the OCDSB</b>							
98-99		0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
99-00		4.3%	90.4%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
00-01		35.0%	52.0%	12.7%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%

<sup>38</sup> While not confirmed, ABC strongly suspects that there have been changes in the reporting practices over time. Based on our understanding of how classes were arranged for example during 2000-2001, we do not believe that any student IPRC'd gifted would have been in a special education class for the entire school day. A detailed breakdown of the OCDSB's special education budget for 2000-01 that was provided by OCDSB staff to SEAC and the Board during the 2002-2003 budget process, did not reflect that there were gifted students in special education classes on a full-time basis.