

TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GUIDE

Elementary District 102
Updated on May 27, 2015

“There is no more powerful engine for change than a group of educators who have collectively taken responsibility for their students’ success.”

Taken from Pyramid Response to Intervention by A. Buffum, M. Mattos, & C. Weber

***District 102 will review the program annually and make revisions as needed.

According to the National Association for Gifted Children, grouping high ability students is one of the foundations of exemplary education practice to meet their needs. The positive academic effect of grouping high ability students (for at least part of their academic experience) is seeded in research.

In general, the purpose of grouping all types of students for at least part of their school experience is four-fold:

1. To ease the delivery of appropriately differentiated curriculum to learners with similar educational needs
2. To facilitate the use of appropriately differentiated instructional strategies to learners with similar educational needs
3. To facilitate addressing the differential affective needs of these children in the most conducive manner
4. To allow for learners of similar abilities or performance levels to learn from each other

DISTRICT 102 TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM VISION

The Talent Development Program is embedded within the District 102 community of learners that strives for excellence in education through an emphasis on talent development for all. Because we strive for excellence in education, the opportunity to develop individual student strength, talent, or interest to the fullest extent, regardless of skill or ability, is provided.

DISTRICT 102 TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT

A key mission of Elementary School District 102 is to develop the academic abilities and personal attributes of all students. We believe that within our student population are high ability learners, those who possess either high levels of performance or high levels of potential in a variety of academic areas and/or expressions of talent. Because these high levels are found in children from all backgrounds and experiences, homes and schools must work together to discover

these students, meet their educational needs, and monitor their academic, social, and emotional growth.

The school district will strive to provide challenging, appropriate curriculum for all learners, including those who perform (or have the potential to perform) at high levels. This intent is best accomplished within the school district through a variety of services and settings targeting specific learner needs; some of which might not ordinarily be provided in the core curriculum. The school and the community will make it a priority to match services and settings inside and outside of the general classroom with the unique intellectual, social, and emotional needs of high ability students.

District 102 believes that by designing specialized programs intended to enhance district curriculum and develop talent, we will foster within high ability learners individual excellence through advanced understandings and skills. By nurturing and challenging all students to their fullest potential, we will prepare future leaders and lifelong learners for an ever-changing world.

DISTRICT 102 TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GOALS

- I. To provide appropriate complexity, pacing, curricular resources, and instruction commensurate with ability
- II. To promote learning with and from intellectual peers
- II. To foster social and emotional development unique among high ability learners

What is excellence in education?

Excellence and how to measure it is defined in many ways. Joyce VanTassel-Baska (1997) presents a definition that is appropriate for the school setting - "the process of working toward an ideal standard and attainment of a consistently high standard of performance in a socially valued endeavor".

What is the purpose of the Talent Development Program?

The purpose of District 102's Talent Development Program is to provide levels of intervention through three services that support the goal of promoting excellence in education through developing the strength and/or talent in all learners; including high ability students who are either performing at high levels or display the potential to perform at high levels in school (especially mathematics and language arts.) The intensity and duration of the intervention varies depending on a student's individual needs. The classroom teacher or a member of the Talent Development Program staff might deliver them within or outside of a student's grade level classroom by either.

In order to achieve academic excellence, a one-size-fits-all/lock-step educational system is neither possible nor equitable. Academic readiness differences exist among our students. It is not fair to students or effective instructional practice to disregard this fact and treat all students' educational needs in the same manner.

According to Joyce Van Tassel Baska (1997), "Excellence for all, if it means the same standards, same curriculum, same instructional emphases, becomes inequitable for all since it fails to recognize individual differences."

This is echoed in the philosophy of the Northwest Evaluation Association (2004), developer of Measures of Academic Progress. "Historically, school districts have used a student's age (grade level) as the primary criterion for selecting instructional materials and lessons. We believe that a student's current achievement level should be the dominant consideration when grouping for instruction, selecting materials, and providing instruction" (page 1-1).

Therefore, if all students are to learn something new every day, high ability students need a school system that provides alternative curriculum as part of their academic experience.

The alternative programming found in the acceleration services of the Talent Development Program in District 102 is accelerative in nature, and aims to allow exposure to challenging curriculum and instructional practices at an appropriate pace. According to Camilla Persson Benbow, acceleration is defined as the decision to regard academic competence, rather than age, as the key criterion to match a student with particular curricula or academic experiences. Simply defined, acceleration is the established match between level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum and a student's readiness and motivation. Acceleration respects individual differences and acknowledges the fact that some of these differences merit flexibility in educational programming.

According to *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004), decades of research have found acceleration as the intervention option to be the most effective in meeting the needs of students who are exceptional in terms of academic ability and readiness. There are eighteen different types of acceleration outlined in *A Nation Deceived*; twelve are directly related to a K-8 system.

Through an accelerative approach, District 102 responds to and meets the current academic, social, and emotional needs of high ability students, as well as prepares these learners to assume the role of academic leader in the high school setting. According to the National Association for Gifted Children's position paper on 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 impressive research base, feasible application to the school system, and its emphasis on excellence through talent development makes an accelerative approach defensible and practical for District 102.

What are the levels of intervention in the Talent Development Program?

Because there is academic diversity among all learners, including those identified as high ability, a differentiated core curriculum and multiple educational service options must be provided to best meet their educational needs. The Talent Development Program's foundation adheres to this belief and provides varying levels of intervention. The program consists of three broad service areas – CLASSROOM-BASED DIFFERENTIATION SERVICE, ACCELERATION SERVICE, & INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PLANNING SERVICE.

Classroom-based Differentiation Service is defined as a curricular modification implemented by a classroom teacher to extend and broaden the core curriculum by increasing its depth or breadth. The content (what is learned), the process (how it is learned), and/or the product (demonstration of learning) are altered in this service. Learners are typically identified for the classroom-based differentiation service by the classroom teacher using curriculum-based preassessments, formative assessment, and classroom performance.

Depending on student need, classroom-based differentiation modifications might be short-term (lasting 1-3 days) or long-term (lasting the duration of a specific unit of study). The former targets critical or creative thinking and are usually a component of the district's adopted curriculum resources. The latter compacts the core curriculum and utilizes supplemental instructional materials. Although classroom teachers typically provide this service in a core classroom, collaboration with grade level teams and school staff can occur.

Acceleration Service is defined as a curricular modification usually implemented by a member of the Talent Development Program staff that is intensive in nature. An out-of-level, rigorous alternative curriculum is primarily used. When compared to the core curriculum, the acceleration service significantly increases the curricular pacing and its complexity. Learners are typically identified for the accelerated service by meeting specified district criteria using standardized test scores, classroom performance, and teacher ratings.

The accelerated service is intended to replace or supplement the core curriculum. The philosophy of substituting core curriculum does not mean it is irrelevant for high ability students, but in its current form it is not sufficient to meet the needs of high ability students. In fact, many core curricular concepts are evident in the alternative curriculum. Although there is an emphasis on higher level thinking skills, the importance and maintenance of a strong foundation of basic skills and understanding is addressed. This service is usually delivered to formally identified students in a self-contained setting.

Individual Student Planning Service is defined as a curricular modification that is determined by the District 102 Talent Development Placement Review Committee after a comprehensive review of relevant performance data. Because these learners' needs are so asynchronous compared to their grade level peers, a more

individualized program that extends beyond the acceleration services offered at a particular grade level is deemed necessary. Examples of possible programming options include: grade skipping, mentorships, distance/on-line learning, or independent research project. The setting and facilitator of the individualized plan will be determined by its specific focus and goal. Learners are typically identified for this service through standardized test scores, classroom performance, teacher ratings, and student/family interviews.

Although learners are identified and matched with specific service options, the Talent Development Program is committed to being as flexible and as inclusive as possible. In order to account for the varied entry and exit points in terms of a learner's performance, all identifications are fluid and are not considered a fixed, permanent placement. Individual learner progress is continually assessed and evaluated to maintain the priority on "learners as individuals."

Why are there three service areas in the Talent Development Program?

Readiness levels and interests are varied among the student population, including our high ability students. A three-tiered service model approach that includes acceleration, classroom-based differentiation, and an individual student planning service better ensures that all students in District 102 will learn something new every day. From a curriculum and instruction perspective, District 102 believes that one size does not "fit" all our students.

Why acceleration?

The variability within any classroom makes teaching a very complex role, especially from an instructional standpoint. There are students who learn at a faster rate and can access more complex tasks when compared to their age mate peers. The acceleration service addresses meeting the needs of these students who research has found to be under-challenged in a core classroom if no intervention is defined and provided. In "A Nation Deceived" and its follow-up report, "A Nation Empowered", acceleration has been found to be the best intervention we have available for high ability students.

Who is the target population to be served through the acceleration service component of the Talent Development Program?

Terms such as bright, gifted, high ability, talented, exceptional, advanced, and students of promise are often times used interchangeably by researchers and practitioners when referring to the most able students in a school population. It is usually these students who are considered likely candidates for services or interventions that replace the standard core curriculum with more advanced curriculum in terms of content and/or thinking process (e.g., curriculum compacting, subject-based acceleration). This approach to educational programming is viewed as a best practice in a field of education called gifted education.

The classification of gifted education is officially recognized at both the federal and state levels. As a result, students who are identified for gifted education services are often times labeled gifted. The term gifted children and trying to define it are points of contested debate by scholars, educators, and parents. "For over a century, researchers and theorists in gifted education have grappled with a clear concept of giftedness" (S. Moon, 2006).

The United States government first defined this special population of learners in 1970. Over a twenty-three year period, its view of these learners evolved to capture the changing conception of giftedness. It no longer is hinged solely on intelligence and better reflects the dynamic nature of students. The most recent 1993 federal declaration reflects current thinking about giftedness that includes the existence of multiple areas of giftedness, the potentiality of giftedness, and the issues related to underrepresented groups.

According to Illinois School Code Section 14A-20: "Gifted and talented children" means children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with other children and youth of their age, experience, and environment. A child shall be considered gifted and talented in any area of aptitude, and, specifically, in language arts and mathematics, by scoring in the top 5% locally in that area of aptitude.

The state definition is an example of an issue related to the terms gifted and talented presented by Francoys Gagne (2007). He sees the two as dichotomous in nature - gifted (a construct of potential) and talent (a construct of performance). Unlike many of his peers in the field, Gagne does not use the terms synonymously. District 102 recognizes the historic, federal, and state use of the terms gifted education and gifted students, and the existence of a population of our students who demonstrate actual or potential extraordinary talent.

Our only intent in using any "label" in reference to students is to put a "name" to the target group who require some type of intervention to best meet their educational needs. Aligning with current theory and research, District 102 does NOT embrace any connotation of giftedness that views the term as static, uni-dimensional, or exclusive in nature.

Because of the legitimate questions and concerns surrounding the labeling of students as gifted, District 102 refers to its target population for the acceleration service of the Talent Development Program as high ability students. We feel the label of high ability places the focus on current accomplishment rather than unintended implications. Based on Sidney Moon's suggestion, a definition of this target population should reflect the school context (or educational program) where it would be offered and implemented. Keeping this guiding principle in mind, the state of Illinois definition of gifted and talented children, and Gagne's thinking, District 102 defines high ability students as: Learners who demonstrate the aptitude (or possess the potential) for exceptional mastery of skills and knowledge in any

field when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. High ability is present in learners from all cultural groups and across all economic strata. Because of the educational needs and motivation of high ability students, the level, complexity, and pace of the language and/or mathematics curriculum is significantly increased when compared to the core curriculum. Discovering these students adheres to the district goal of identifying all students' needs and matching them with an appropriate curriculum.

In essence, identification for the accelerated service of the Talent Development Program is an on-going search for high ability students whose demonstrated competencies in language arts and/or mathematics would be best served and developed through an accelerative approach to programming. The readiness and motivation for accelerative experiences are indicated through accurate, useful, and available evidence (e.g., standardized testing, classroom performance, evidence of proficiency with the grade level Common Core standards, teacher observation, and family input). We believe that we are responsible for providing optimal educational experiences for talents to flourish, and doing so is of benefit to the individual and the community. As referenced in the district definition, District 102 believes that high ability cuts across all demographics and is committed to discovering all types of students through an on-going search for its acceleration service.

How are students identified for the accelerated service component of the Talent Development Program?

The purpose of identifying students for any educational programming is to match the goals and objectives of the program with the educational needs of a student. The intent of identification for the accelerated service is to discover and place those students whose needs in either language or mathematics are so significant that they wouldn't be best met in the core curriculum. The needs of individual students are best recognized through evaluating multiple sources of relevant information. The sources typically tapped are standardized testing, classroom performance, teacher input, and family input. By assessing the profile of a student based on multiple measures, the accuracy of a placement decision is increased.

Identification information and specific criteria related to the accelerated classes offered in District 102 is located in the IDENTIFICATION link.

Because of the dynamic nature of students, new evidence might arise that warrants a placement review. Administrators, teachers, or parents can initiate a placement review by contacting Randy Lange, Talent Development Coordinator. This establishment of a placement review process recognizes that no standard is perfect when placing students in educational settings, so the opportunity for special consideration needs to exist.

During a placement review, all pertinent data will be gathered, discussed, and evaluated by District 102's Talent Development Program Placement Review Committee, so a final placement decision can be rendered. This committee is

typically comprised of members of the Talent Development Program staff, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, the Data & Assessment Coordinator, and the classroom teacher.

Only the Talent Development Program Placement Review Committee has the authority to place students into the accelerated classes.

Why are local norms used in the identification of students for the accelerated service component of the Talent Development Program?

Illinois School Code states that school districts are to identify students for gifted and talented programs based on local norms - not national norms.

The rationale for using local norms is to provide a school district with a snapshot of the performance level within the district. This information provides relevant data in establishing an appropriate pacing and level of complexity for the core curriculum in District 102. The pacing and complexity might be different than what is suggested at the state or national level.

Local norms are also an effective meter for discovering those high ability students whose educational needs are so intense that they require alternative curriculum. School districts vary greatly within the United States, so comparing student aptitude with those "who are in the seats next to them" is a sound approach to best determine the need for an accelerative component in their education.

What measure is in place to foster an inclusive search for high ability students?

How does a school system discover a relatively small percentage of students, whose educational needs are so significant that accelerative services are required, from a large number of students at a grade level? James Borland endorses the development and utilization of a talent pool as an initial phase in an identification process. At this beginning step, District 102 considers the entire student population (at a grade level) with the intent of narrowing its focus from 100% of the students to a more manageable number.

Screening or narrowing the student population into a talent pool makes the task of moving from 100% to the eventual targeted population for the accelerated service less daunting. Using existing relevant information (a combination of standardized data and teacher judgment), the talent pool targets approximately 20-25% of a given student population (grade level) in grades 2-8 in the area of language arts and mathematics. The talent pool is comprised of those students who are plausible candidates for placement in the acceleration service. Beginning the discovery at 20-25% aligns with Borland's suggestion of erring on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion at the initial phases of trying to best place students.

This screening process is not the time for assessing fine distinctions among students or making placement decisions. Instead, the concern is to include any students who

possess evidence that he/she should be considered for accelerative services. This half-way step (or talent pool step) allows educators to concentrate on a reasonably realistic goal of further assessing a group of possible candidates and eliminate those students whose educational needs obviously don't match the goals and objectives of the accelerated program.

What accelerated classes are presently offered in District 102?

Language Arts

Grade 5 - Language Investigation I

Grade 6 - Language Investigation II

Grade 7 - Humanities Connections I

Grade 8 - Humanities Connections II

Mathematics

Grade 3 - Mathematics 301

Grade 4 - Mathematics 401

Grade 5 - Mathematics 501

Grade 6 - Mathematics 601

Grade 7 - Accelerated Common Core

Grade 7 - Algebra I Accelerated (This is the same class as the one offered at Lyons Township High School.)

Grade 8 - Algebra I Accelerated (This is the same class as the one offered at Lyons Township High School.)

Grade 8 - Geometry Honors (This is the same class as the one offered at Lyons Township High School. Students are placed in accordance with criteria established by the high school. Students MUST go to the high school for this class.)

Distance Learning (through Brigham Young University)

Grade 8 - These high school level classes are offered to Northwestern University Midwest Talent Search students who receive a qualifying score. These classes require outside of school commitment to complete.

How are families notified of placement in the accelerated service?

At the elementary level, families of identified students are mailed placement letters by the first week of August. Identified students will remain in the respective accelerated strand through grade 6 (language arts or mathematics) unless he/she is exited because the goals no longer meet his/her educational needs. All elementary students are reevaluated for placement into the Park Junior High accelerated classes during the spring of 6th grade.

Park Junior High students in the accelerated language arts class will receive a letter and summer reading assignment in June. Junior High students who were in a mathematics acceleration class the previous year will remain in the mathematics acceleration strand. There are no placement letters sent for the mathematics strand in grades 7 or 8. Park students who are exited from the mathematics strand will be notified by either their grade 6 or 7 mathematics teacher. Identified students will

remain in the respective accelerated strand through grade 8 (language arts or mathematics) unless he/she is exited because the goals no longer meet his/her educational needs.

How does the accelerated service of the Talent Develop Program align with students' social and emotional needs?

Research has found that when the academic needs are met of high ability students their social and emotional needs are more likely to be met as well. The recent report, "A Nation Empowered", cites two important findings related to this question.

1. Acceleration results in both long-term and short-term beneficial effects, academically, psychologically, and socially."
2. High ability students tend to be socially and emotionally more mature than their age-mates; therefore, for many bright students, acceleration provides a better personal maturity match.

What if a student is not appropriately placed in an accelerated classroom? Can he/she be exited?

In order to be successful in an accelerated, rigorous curriculum, students need to be engaged, motivated, and responsible in regard to their learning. Because this type of curriculum is intended to stretch skills and understandings, students in the accelerated program should experience difficulty as part of the learning process. Similar to the core curriculum, students in these classes who might need help with class content or learning experiences can expect support from his/her teacher. It is important to note that any learner will inevitably be faced with a certain degree of struggle during his/her journey of talent development.

Being identified for the accelerated service is based solely on the educational needs of an individual. Current data sources are used to assess performance and determine appropriate educational placements at a particular moment in time. It is a reality at school that students' educational needs change or placements aren't appropriate. If future relevant evidence refutes a student's educational placement, reviewing, and possibly changing it, might become necessary.

All students are evaluated annually in regard to their appropriate placement for the following school year, including students in the accelerated service.

Can a student be placed into an accelerated class once the school year has begun?

Yes. The decision to place a student into an accelerated class during the course of the school year is preceded by a placement review conducted by the district Talent Development Program Placement Review Committee. Once a student is recommended for placement in an accelerated class, an appropriate entry date is determined in collaboration with the receiving teacher.

Because of the nature of the curriculum, it is preferable to make placement changes in mathematics at the beginning of a school year. District 102 will offer bridging on-line mathematics classes for students to complete. Students who successfully

complete the summer class would be placed into the accelerated mathematics strand the following school year.

A student has the option of remaining in his/her current placement, thus deferring the new placement to the following school year.

Will talent or strength in other subject areas besides language arts and mathematics be addressed?

At the present time, the district focus is to develop program strands in language arts and mathematics in grades 3-8.

District 102 believes that students can express talent and/or strength in a variety of academic areas or endeavors that are valued by society. Areas outside of language and mathematics are currently being addressed through the classroom-based differentiation service of the program, extra-curricular experiences, communicating enrichment opportunities offered within the community, distance learning, and District 102 summer school classes. As district curricular areas are reviewed, avenues to provide enrichment within that subject will be explored.

What is offered through the Talent Development Program for primary students?

At the present time, the district focus is to develop program strands in language arts and mathematics in grades 3-8.

However, District 102 recognizes that students in grades K-2 can express talent and/or strength in a variety of academic areas or endeavors that are valued by society. The classroom-based differentiation service of the program is applicable to the primary classrooms. Grouping based on academic readiness, higher level thinking tasks, and the use of varying texts are three common forms of meeting primary students' needs utilized by the classroom teachers. District 102 will communicate enrichment opportunities offered within the community and is developing summer school enrichment options for the primary grades.

References

- Borland, J. (1989). *Planning and Implementing Programs for the Gifted*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Baldwin, A. Y. (1991). Ethnic and cultural issues. In Colangelo, N. & Davis, G. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of Gifted Education*. (pp. 416-427). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Clark, B. (2002). *Growing Up Gifted*. Columbus: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Colangelo, N., Assouline, S., & Gross, M. (2004). *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*.
- Gagne, F. (2009). The differentiated model of giftedness and talent. In Renzulli, J. S., Gubbins, E. J., McMillen, K. S., Eckert, R. D., & Little, C. A. (Eds.), *Systems and Models for Developing Programs for the Gifted & Talented*. (pp. 165-192). Creative Learning Press.

Illinois Public Act 094-0410 § 5.

Lohman, D. F. & Korb K. (2006). Gifted today but not tomorrow? Longitudinal changes in ITBS and CogAT scores during elementary school. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 29, 451-484.

Lohman, D. F. & Renzulli, J. (2007). A simple procedure for combining ability test scores, and teacher ratings to identify academically talented children. An unpublished paper.

Moon, S. J. (2006). Developing a definition of giftedness. In Purcell, J. H. & Eckert, R. D. (Eds.), *Designing Services and Programs for High Ability Learners: A Guidebook for Gifted Education*. (pp. 23-31). Corwin Press.

National Association for Gifted Children. (2009). Grouping. NAGC Position Paper adopted March 2009.

National Association for Gifted Children. (2004). Acceleration. NAGC Position Paper adopted September 2004.

Northwest Evaluation Association. (2004). *Des Cartes: A Continuum of Learning*.

U.S. Department of Education. (1993). *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

VanTassel-Baska, J. (1997). Excellence as a standard for all in education. *Roeper Review*, 20(1), 9-12.