

The work of the Highly Capable Educational Advisory Committee - 2013-14

Bainbridge Island School District

Implications for the Future

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Bainbridge Island School District has the distinction of being one of the most forward-looking districts in the State of Washington. In August 2013, Bainbridge Island was recognized by Google with an eCity Award. This award recognizes the strongest online business community in each state.^[6] The Island attracts professionals who have high aspirations for their children. Families move here to take advantage of the programs of the School District and are active in a wide range of initiatives across the district. In addition, the Bainbridge Island School District's foundation is a shining example of the care the community has for the students of the district. The District, in turn, has confidence in the Foundation's ability to work collaboratively with the administration and with the support of parents. Many initiatives, including some of the work of the HCEAC (Highly Capable Education Advisory Committee) presented in this report were supported by the Foundation.

Bainbridge Island School District is also home to a variety of innovative programs and initiatives. For example, the current Science programs being explored provide the opportunity for exciting extensions for HC students. What is also impressive is the wide range of enrichment opportunities after school, including Math Club, Robotics, and Engineering, which are particularly suited to the needs of HC students. Two alternative schools, the Odyssey School and Eagle Harbor High School, experiment successfully with flexible grouping and multi-age classes garnering praise from participating families. The district is committed to providing ongoing training to support its excellent teachers, a few of whom served on the HCEAC Committee.

Our work:

The need to assess BISD's level of compliance with the new WAC's (Washington Administrative Code) was the impetus for creation of this committee. I was hired as a consultant to create a plan to ensure that the HC program is in compliance. The committee included administrators, teachers and parents of HC students who were invited to participate in a yearlong effort to understand the changes necessitated by the WACS and to consider options for the future.

The District is to be commended for convening this committee and being willing to engage in dialogue with parents and teachers. The regular attendance of District administrators, despite juggling portfolios, was pivotal to moving initiatives forward, especially during the last few meetings. There was genuine attention paid to the voices of administrators, parents, teachers, and the children. This positive working relationship that the District has with its community bodes well for the further development of HC programs.

My charges as the HC consultant were:

- Meet and work with district personnel
- Attend HCEAC (Highly Capable Educational Advisory Committee) meetings
- Keep a record of the work relating to the evaluation project
- Suggest recommended changes
- Write a report and provide a framework for a District handbook that would serve HC personnel.

Our work

In August 2014, meetings were held with Bill Mosiman, Director, Instructional Support Services, and Julie Goldsmith, Associate Superintendent, to establish the scope of work. District documents were reviewed, including reports to OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction,) to establish compliance with requirements for the highly capable program. The result was a brief report and table (gap-analysis) outlining the nature of the work that needed to be done in the upcoming academic year 2013-14.

A special thanks goes to Glen Robbins, District Differentiation Specialist. My work as a consultant was immeasurably enhanced by collaborating with Glen. His experience as a former HC teacher from 1985-89, a classroom teacher and a principal, enabled me to meet with, talk to, and learn from a number of people in the district. We worked side by side on this project preparing for meetings, conferring by phone and by e-mail on a regular basis.

How was information gathered?

- Review of existing HC documents in the District
- Regular meetings with Bill Mosiman, Julie Goldsmith and Glen Robbins
- Visits to schools and conversations with HC Teachers and principals noting how HC students were identified and how they were served in the regular classroom through ILP's (Individual Learning plans)
- Observation of classrooms where teachers used Individual Learning Plans (ILP's)
- Observation of and EPGY (Education programs for gifted youth) programs. EPGY Math program is a distance-learning accelerated mathematics program created by Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. This program is being used on a pilot basis in Bainbridge Island School District HCEAC meetings.

- Two meetings with BISD parents, including parents of HC students (results attached)
- Data from district administered parent surveys (results attached)
- WACS from OSPI
- NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) standards
- Research on Gifted education and work being done in other School districts locally and across the country.

Much of the work of the committee, including the minutes and useful resources, is included in the addendum. Further, the power point presentations made by Julie Goldsmith and Bill Mosiman summarize the action steps taken as a result of the work of committee. These include a revision of BISD's policies relating to the provision of HC programs and a proposal for identifying students and expanding HC services in the district for K-12 students.

Some points of information:

While many districts have some programs in place, often starting services in 3rd or 4th grade, the new WACS requires districts to offer a K-12 with a continuum of service, a fairly dramatic change.

Here are some of the areas of change that are worthy of note since 2008.

- Districts are required to demonstrate that they are clearly meeting the unique learning needs of each student who qualifies as highly capable.
- A qualified HC student has the right to a continuum of services from K-12.
- The state requires a level of accountability, demonstrating how HCP programs are making a difference in student outcomes.
- Services for an HC student is his/her Basic Education.
- Districts have to demonstrate use of multiple identification tools. The new WACS place a greater emphasis on identifying students in populations where HC students can be over looked, such as "twice exceptional" students.

The **challenge** to meeting these requirements is that these laws do not come with additional funds commensurate with the cost of administering and implementing these HC programs. Districts have to rely on basic education funds to meet the requirements of the WACS. Washington State requires each district to submit a plan to meet these requirements in the 2014-15 school years. Making these changes for most districts will take time, create cultural shifts, and require ongoing training of teachers. At best, with limited funds available, these changes have to be made incrementally.

The **opportunity** is that there are a wide range of program options: teacher's training modules and resources available to assist teachers and administrators to meet these demands. NAGC (the National Association of Gifted Children) provides very clear standards for K-12 programs for Gifted Children.

In the State of Washington, the Hi-Cap Puget Sound network has provided a user-friendly guide to enable districts to implement various aspects of programming for highly capable students. WAETAG (Washington Association of Educators for the Talented and Gifted) is a rich resource for HC teachers to attend annual conferences and network with HC teachers across the state throughout the year.

Finally, now that there is a **specialty endorsement in gifted education** available through the State of Washington, colleges and universities are ready to offer relevant courses. Whitworth College in Spokane has a well-defined program for teachers interested in adding such an endorsement to their teaching credentials. Additionally, the office for Highly Capable students at OSPI (the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) is very responsive to queries relating to the new WACS, offering regular updates on their website, and webinars to address questions posed by districts.

The following comments are designed to leave the district **with a set of considerations that would assure thoughtful continuity of offerings for students K-12 in a clear tiered program that would match teachers training and district resources**. The gap analysis shared with the committee in September 13 highlighted the importance of needed changes in the identification, HC program goal setting, design of programs, teacher training, and evaluation of programs.

A description of the district's plan to identify students.

The committee and I agree that the district has been too dependent on the CoGAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) to identify students. As we look at the result of parent surveys and the comments shared at the two parent meetings, creating a clear and well-communicated plan for identification of students has to be a priority. The WACS require that the District use a wide variety of tests, creativity assessments, and behavioral scales to obtain a well-rounded profile of an HC student. Answers to the following questions could yield a more comprehensive and streamlined system for nomination, identification, and more holistic assessment of candidates for the HC program.

- Does the revised system for current identification of students utilize a variety of tools including nomination forms, achievement and ability data, and other relevant information that would serve to provide a clear picture of a students' eligibility for the HC program?
- Is the multi-disciplinary team trained to work with the data received? Are the systems well-outlined to provide for turnover of members?
- Are the nomination and identification processes and the timeline clear to parents and the BISD community?
- How is the identification system evaluated every year for effectiveness? In other words, how do HC students profit from differentiated HC programs?
- Is the appeal process clear to parents?

(3) A description of the services the highly capable program will offer:

While the overall caliber of BISD's educational program is very high, the committee acknowledges that the current ILP program at the 4th and 5th graders is not effective. Additionally, while 6th graders at the Middle School have choices in Math there is a great need, expressed in parent surveys, for differentiation and acceleration in Math at all levels. It is recommended that the Mathematics TOSA be utilized across all grades so that there is ready-made curriculum available and training for teachers to refine their approaches to differentiated curriculum in mathematics-acceleration and content enhancement (examples included in the addendum). Parents asked if the Humanities Block for HC students could be restored at Woodward Middle School. At the high school, Advanced Placement classes which are not exclusively for HC students start at 10th grade. There are no designated options for 9th grade HC students. In order for HC students to thrive, they must routinely experience opportunities for problem solving and deeper exploration of topics.

Listed below are some of the traits of HC students that have to be considered in designing programs.

Intellectual characteristics of Highly Capable students:

- (a) Capacity to learn with unusual depth of understanding, to retain what has been learned and to transfer to new situations
- (b) Capacity and willingness to deal with increasing levels of abstraction and complexity earlier than their chronological peers
- (c) Creative ability to make unusual connections among ideas and concepts
- (d) Ability to learn quickly in their area(s) of intellectual strength
- (e) Capacity for intense concentration and focus

Social-emotional characteristics:

Advanced intelligence also comes with special sensitivities and vulnerabilities.

- a) These include the tendency for children to be perfectionist, and hard on themselves.
- b) The speed with which they can sense discrepancies in information and events way beyond that of their chronological peers makes these children feel different. Having intellectual peers for some part of their school experience helps to normalize these feelings.
- c) A synchronous development or uneven distribution of strengths and weaknesses as highlighted in Dombrowski's work on overexcitabilities, or advanced recognition and understanding of how the world works (article attached).

Differentiated lessons for these students enable them to develop work habits and benchmarks that are relevant for them, and help them to set personal goals that are in keeping with their abilities and needed areas of growth. An added advantage of having

trained teachers is that, beyond intellectual challenge, these sensitivities in students can be anticipated, thereby preventing underachievement.

Here are some of the questions that were raised to spark discussion, keeping in mind the characteristics of highly capable students.

- Is there the willingness to consider a self-contained program for 3rd and 4th grade eventually in BISD? If so, at how many schools?
- Is a resource room model such as existed before (Acceleration & Enrichment program) a possibility in math and language arts?
- Is “walk to math” and “walk to reading” an option? How can such grouping work effectively?
- How can during- and after-school enrichment opportunities be evenly available to HC students across the district?
- How can teachers be trained to enable teachers to feel comfortable in “compacting the curriculum” so that HC students can test out of “common core” requirements after they show proficiency? Can the time opened up be used productively for “differentiated and enrichment lessons and deeper explorations into topics of interest?”
- How can the district ensure continuity of program offerings for students K-12?

In response to the discussions held in the HCEAC meetings and program models submitted to the group, Julie Goldsmith integrated these ideas with the following proposal (template included in the addendum).

- The 2014-15 school years will be a transitional year for all districts, including our own. By “transitional,” we mean that some initial revisions will be implemented in this next year to meet the newly adopted Washington State requirements. The district will continue over the next several years to refine the continuum of service options for K-12 students.
- By law, we will start to identify and serve highly capable students in grades K-12. To effectively accomplish this change, we will need to change the way we are currently serving students.
- We need to improve the consistency of support of our highly capable program for services offered during the school day in grades 4-8, and to develop strategies for supporting students in grades K-3 and 9-12.
- The nomination, screening, and assessment of highly capable K-12 students will be based on multiple measures.
- To support schools in these changes, we are recommending the addition of 2.0 staffing (1 staff member to support grades K-6 and one to support grades 7-

12). These staff members will provide support and training to teachers, some direct services to students, support the nomination, screening and identification process, and support the development and implementation of learning plans. If approved, these positions will be posted as new openings.

A description of how the highly capable program will be evaluated that includes information on how the district's highly capable program goals and student achievement will be measured.

The committee acknowledges that, beyond achievement scores, the HC program is in need of a system for gathering meaningful data to measure success of HC programs.

This plan has to be:

- Intentional in outlining differentiated teaching strategies and expected outcomes. This would require the ILP's to be revised.
- Administered every year and adapted as needed.
- Based on research-based best practices such as outlined on the NAGC and OSPI websites.
- Structured to allow teachers to be trained to evaluate and provided meaningful feedback to students and parents. Teachers need to be given the opportunity to collaborate to develop systems that are user friendly and helpful in building continuity of records for HC students.
- Clearly communicated across the districts and to parents.
- Designed to provide a continuum of services with increasing levels of interactive and meaningful communications between HC teachers and regular education teachers and support staff.

The importance of ongoing professional development

The District acknowledges that, at the moment, there are no examples of ongoing professional development for HC teachers. To quote the WACS, **“A special teacher is a teacher who has training, experience, advanced skills, and knowledge in the education of highly capable students.” Areas of competence include knowledge of the following: Identification procedures, academic, social and emotional characteristics, program design and delivery, instructional practices, student assessment and program evaluation.**

In order to have incrementally stronger programs, it has to be accompanied by a concerted effort to have a well-articulated professional development plan to not only HC teachers, but district wide annual training for co-ordination and continuity of services for students. In addition, all district initiatives such as the most recent science curriculum revision could clearly articulate elements of differentiation and acceleration for HC students.

In line with the proposal shared by Julie Goldsmith, teachers need to be adept at talent development and acceleration models which work best for the culture and resources of BISD. Teachers who work with HC students have to demonstrate their skills and growth

in working with HC students and given the opportunity to learn from experts and their peers. Developing comfort in taking “common core concepts”, and knowing how to accelerate and enhance lessons for students with measurable outcomes, will ease the pressure of creating new programs. As mentioned earlier, organizations such as WAETAG and NAGC provide opportunities for discussion groups and exchange of curriculum ideas.

A description of how the highly capable programs will be evaluated that includes information on how the district’s highly capable program goals and student achievement outcomes will be measured.

The Committee is aware that the ILP program at the elementary program is not evaluated, and acknowledges that clear goals for students and the program need to be outlined and measured. For now, the district’s achievement test data is the primary way that student progress in the HC program is measured. Once clear goals and evaluation methods are established, well-developed student profiles and records will enhance continuity of the program and inform teachers receiving HC students in subsequent grades. While test data is very helpful, consider other information which could complement a student’s file. Samples of student work which are often part of a student’s portfolio will allow BISD’s schools to identify students who may otherwise not test consistently well.

Key considerations for the future of the HC program in Bainbridge Island School District.

- Administrative and teacher leadership is critical. There is a district level administrator who oversees the program and ensures that the program complies with State guidelines. The District has plans to hire two HC teachers who can provide leadership and services to students. Giving these teachers the opportunity to plan as early as possible before the fall is critical.
- A nomination and identification cycle that is designed to find talent early, especially in populations that are underserved. A well-communicated and clear appeals procedure, and entrance and exit guidelines, will do much to create good will and interest in the district.
- BISD has a high percentage of professionals among its families with a greater than average concentration of high achieving students. Since the district is small and the number of HC students in any one grade would make it difficult to have full classes, consider subject area differentiation to include some of these students who could work at the level of HC students and need the challenge as well.
- Julie Goldsmith’s proposal is a strong incremental plan. Developing specifics to program offerings mirroring research-based best practices for the elementary grades would be important.
- Continue to build on enrichment options. Connect them to the work that is being done in the classroom to avoid unevenness of program delivery.

- Ongoing training will ensure that there is continuity of leadership, and development of a core of leaders in the district.
- Parents need to see that each year brings new elements to the programs and that there is assured continuity of offerings for their children.
- Evidence-based assessment and evaluation would inform growth and build on the credibility of the HC program offerings.
- Provision for parents to have a forum or an advisory group to work in partnership with the district on HC program initiatives and support of their HC children. Many districts have found that creating a parent SENG (Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted) provides a healthy forum to discuss the needs of HC children.
- Well-articulated and planned professional development activities for all teachers, including teachers and administrators working with HC students, need to be part of the larger professional development plan for BISD.

HC teachers profit from regular networking with each other and similar colleagues in other districts. Access to the wealth of resources on-line and in publications that would support the work of teachers and administrators would be beneficial.

A well-conceived and well-implemented HC program will be an asset to Bainbridge Island School District, and will further enhance the credibility and reputation of a district that is committed to serving all students well.