

September 15, 2017

Dear PPS School Board members, Interim Superintendent Awwad, and Superintendent Guerrero,

The district has a legal obligation to provide TAG-identified students instruction at their rate and level of learning.¹ PPS declared itself out of compliance with the Oregon Department of Education's Division 22 regulations for TAG education last year. The expansion of ACCESS Academy, voted on unanimously by the School Board's Teaching and Learning committee on March 8, 2017², was part of a plan for bringing PPS into compliance.

We understand that there are limited building options in Portland Public Schools and that staff working on boundary enrollment scenarios are faced with difficult choices in the placing of ACCESS Academy. However, by placing ACCESS in a building that does not meet its growth plan, without clearly indicating how the growth plan or overall TAG obligations will be met, the district will again create a situation where it is disregarding both the law and the educational needs of TAG students across the district.

We suggest the following remedies:

1. TAKE STEPS TO MAKE ACCESS RELOCATION FEASIBLE.

Plans for relocating ACCESS to any building should include both immediate facility fixes and 5-year updates that allow fidelity with the growth plan and ACCESS' programmatic goals:

- a. Before the program is moved, plan and place portable classrooms, if necessary, to allow for program expansion and implementation of the district's middle grade instructional framework.
- b. Install a high-school level science lab to meet the pedagogical needs of ACCESS' accelerated science program, to be completed before students arrive.
- c. If common spaces are not large enough, create a short-term plan to support the students' need for lunchtime, assembly, elective, PE, and performance spaces. This could include, for instance, an agreement that allowed ACCESS to use a nearby school or community auditorium or athletic facility, as needed.
- d. Commit to a 5-year plan to revise facilities, including common spaces, to meet the needs of an expanded ACCESS program.
- e. Include ACCESS in any new plans for funding small schools to ensure equitable supports and programming, including electives, for its students.

¹ See the Oregon Administrative Rules on Talented and Gifted education at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/policy/state/rules/tagoar.pdf>

² See minutes for the 3/8/17 Teaching and Learning Committee here: <https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/219/03-08-17%20TandL%20Informal%20Minutes.pdf>

2. APPLY AN EQUITY LENS THAT INCLUDES GENDER, AS WELL AS SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, TO NEXT YEAR'S ACCESS ADMISSIONS PROCESS AND ADJUST THE PROCESS ACCORDINGLY.

The implementation of the new ACCESS admissions process must be evaluated and improved. There were empty seats, no waitlist, and a severe gender imbalance in incoming classes this year, despite years of sizeable waitlists. Steps must be taken to avoid systematically screening out candidates—or discouraging candidates from applying—in a way that conflicts with federal Title IX requirements. The admissions rubric should also be corrected to restore consistency with the school's mission to “provide a haven for highly capable students in the Portland metropolitan area,” as outlined in the [original ACCESS proposal](#) and [School Board resolution 2148](#).³ Nothing in that proposal or resolution says the school's purpose is to *exclusively* serve students with behavioral or attendance problems.

3. ADDRESS IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS IN ACCESS CLASSES ADMITTED IN THE 2017 LOTTERY AND TAKE STEPS TO AVOID SIMILAR ISSUES IN FUTURE YEARS.

Move to improve the gender imbalance that resulted from the 2017 lottery by offering open spaces to female applicants as soon as possible. Ensure the revised admissions process includes an automatic review of matriculation information each July to assess class size and demographics, in order to evaluate whether waitlist admissions should be adjusted to address gender imbalances or to offer new spots to students if no waitlist exists and classes are not filled.

4. APPROVE A THREE-YEAR PLAN FOR FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT TAG SERVICES.

ACCESS Academy is only one part of a coherent district TAG program that ensures appropriate services for all TAG students as required by Oregon law. Make [the TAG Department's draft proposal for a continuum of TAG services](#) (as presented to the Teaching and Learning Committee on 3/8/17⁴) a priority and finalize deadlines and measurable deliverables for rollout of services.

5. AS PART OF TAG SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION, LAUNCH SUMMA-STYLE MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS NO LATER THAN THE 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR.

Begin rollout of elements of the TAG Department's proposal for a continuum of TAG services starting with the establishment of Exceptional Scholar programs in no fewer than one middle school per high school cluster. Initial plans call for all TAG students with a 99 percentile identification score to receive automatic placement in these programs if they choose.

³ Read the original ACCESS proposal at http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/tag/program/access_draft5.pdf and School Board Resolution 2148 at http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/tag/program/access_board02.pdf.

⁴ See the TAG Department's draft proposal for a continuum of TAG services: https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/domain/171/board%20committees/teaching%20and%20learning/3_8_17%20TL%20Final%20Packet.pdf

We are confident that the School Board and our new Superintendent will take the necessary steps to ensure our district meets its legal obligations, as well of the goal of serving all students, including accelerated learners. These recommendations were approved by 10 of the 11 members (with 1 abstention) of the Talented and Gifted parent Advisory Council (TAGAC) on September 13, 2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Scholle Sawyer McFarland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "S".

Scholle Sawyer McFarland
TAGAC Chair