

PPS Talented and Gifted Advisory Council End-of-Year Report, June 2018

The District's TAG Advisory Council (TAGAC) is charged to make recommendations to the TAG Administrator, the Superintendent, and the School Board with respect to services for talented and gifted students in Portland Public Schools. This serves as our end-of-year report for the 2017-2018 school year.

Although we have seen improvements since the school district hired a dedicated TAG Director in 2015—including, notably, implementation of true universal TAG testing for cognitive ability in 2nd grade and streamlining of testing—many areas of concern with TAG services are unchanged since the Oregon Department of Education last worked through a corrective action process with Portland Public Schools between 2009-2011. Namely, the district continues to lack concrete and predictable services that meet all identified students at their accelerated rate and assessed level of learning as required by Oregon Administrative Rule 581-022-2500. PPS has self-reported its non-compliance with Division 22 TAG requirements for the past two years.

We assert that these issues cannot be tackled by the TAG department on its own, as they cross departmental, curricular, and budgetary boundaries. Truly addressing them requires not only a district champion in the shape of the TAG department, but also that TAG learning be included as a regular part of discussions across the system.

We believe this is a moment of great opportunity. As our new PPS leadership team brings online new assessment tools and creates scope and sequence plans, it can ensure that teachers finally have the structural and curricular tools they need to support all our district's learners, including the atypical ones.

While these changes are underway, we expect all of these best practices for accelerated learners to be maintained or improved:

- Universal 2nd grade testing for cognitive ability
- Early entry to kindergarten
- Whole grade acceleration
- Single subject acceleration in mathematics
- Compacted math (CY1 and CY2) at all K-8 and middle schools¹
- ACCESS Academy alternative school for highly gifted students

In addition, here are specific areas of focus we believe could improve accelerated learners' experience in PPS and help bring the district into compliance with state law.

¹ Until recently, the district routinely did not offer compacted math at most Title 1 schools. See "Portland Public Schools Shortchanges Low-income Students in Classes and Class Time," Oregonlive.com 1/2016: http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/01/portland_public_schools_shortc.html

TAG identification and Services for English Language Learners

“[R]equire that assessments for identification of academically gifted students are administered in the native language of ELL students when appropriate assessments are available in those languages.”

“[P]rovide for and carry out policies for the identification of ELL students who have the potential to perform at the 97th percentile for academic achievement when there are no standardized tests available in the students’ native language.”

Oregon Department of Education letter to PPS, 11/2009²

In the Oregon Department of Education’s letter to PPS in 11/2009, ODE specifically instructed PPS to work on increasing the representation of ELL students in TAG. Still, in the 2015-16 school year—the most recent year that TAGAC has comparative data for—ELL students were the least represented of all historically underserved groups in TAG with fewer than 1 percent of TAG students also classified as ELL, as opposed to 8 percent of all district students. It is unclear how many former ELL students are TAG identified. We anticipate a gap due to overwhelming trend of racial disparities in identification for gifted education³. Yet we encourage the district to track this metric to show progress in closing the achievement gap for highly-capable emergent bilinguals.

The TAG Department’s recent proposal to use the Culturally, Linguistically and/or Economically Diverse (CLEDE) Scales for identifying TAG Potential students may be a step toward fulfilling this promise. However, PPS also needs to acquire tests and proctor student testing in all 5 of PPS’ supported languages. As part of a systemic approach to TAG services, this testing could be discussed as part of “newcomer services,” now under development in order to match students with appropriate services before they become further at risk.

Although representative identification is important, ***TAG identification only matters if it is paired with targeted interventions that keep students engaged and growing academically; this is especially true for historically underserved populations***. For this reason, we request that PPS also implement services to serve TAG ELL students at their accelerated rate and assessed level of learning.

Dual language immersion programs (DLI) are an obvious opportunity to reach ELL-TAG students⁴. Culturally relevant push in or pull out services for the DLI setting should be developed. Current scope and sequence, curricular materials, and professional development for DLI lag behind an already antiquated PPS system. Some PPS schools state that the mere existence of DLI⁵ or world language⁶ is a TAG service. This may be true in the early years for a native English speaker, but it is certainly not true for the accelerated language arts learner whose native language is the target language. TAGAC also fields questions about students—particularly in early elementary school—who are not provided instruction at their assessed rate and level for math in DLI because their grasp of mathematical terms in the target language is relatively weak. The rate and level of math instruction should match the mathematical ability, even if it requires language scaffolding in the DLI context. Finally, the

² See http://www.tagpdx.org/ODE_to_PPS_11_12_09.pdf

³ See “The “Invisible” Gifted and Talented Bilingual Students”

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0162353211432041?journalCode=jegb> and “Identifying English Language Learners for Gifted and Talented Programs” <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783193.2007.11869221>

⁴ See “Dual-Language Gifted Education and Its Evaluation” https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-6162-2_66

⁵ <https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/196/Building%20TAG%20Plans/Scott%20BuildingTAGPlan2016-2018.docx>

⁶ https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/196/Building%20TAG%20Plans/Chavez_TAG_Plan_2016_2018.doc

district should explore creating dual-language immersion/TAG focus option schools or strands—like those in Tucson, AZ⁷; Pinellas County, FL⁸; El Paso, TX⁹; and Salt Lake City, UT¹⁰.

TAG Identification and Services for Twice Exceptional Learners

“Both [SPED and TAG] have responsibility, and both should work in cooperation with students who are twice exceptional.”

“The legal requirements are the same as with a TAG student who is not twice exceptional. The student’s abilities will determine appropriate instruction.”

Oregon Department of Education TAG FAQ¹¹

Twice exceptional students—those who have advanced cognitive abilities or achievement in math or reading that coexist with specific learning disabilities like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, or dysgraphia—are a heterogeneous sub-population that is at high risk both academically and social-emotionally¹². In order to stay on track for high school graduation, these students may require interventions to manage frustration, socio-emotional wellbeing, and increasing academic demands.¹³

Twice exceptional students are a difficult subpopulation to identify as TAG because their cognitive ability may mask their disability—particularly in elementary school¹⁴. Twice-exceptional students may also be less likely to get supports through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) because they are more likely to be working at grade level than similarly disabled peers¹⁵ and may thus be steered towards, or only eligible for, 504 plans¹⁶—a sub-group PPS does not track. In the 2015-16 school year—the most recent year that TAGAC has comparative data for—5 percent of TAG students were also receiving special education service through an IEP, as opposed to 13 percent of all district students. Yet 11 to 14 percent of students at the district’s alternative school for highly gifted students, ACCESS, have an IEP. Understanding these identification trends—including 504 numbers and the distribution within TAG qualifying scores—will be critical to addressing issues of twice-exceptional learners in PPS.

We also request that PPS examine its special education (IEP and 504) and discipline processes to identify and implement practices that would increase coordination with TAG identification and services. A systematic approach to this issue would cross the boundaries between Special Education staff, classroom teachers, and the TAG department to include professional development around characteristics common to underachieving gifted students. It would also include triggers for one-on-one educational testing—such as the Wechsler Intelligence

⁷ <http://hollinger.tusd1.schooldesk.net/Home/ctl/view/itemid/144382?returnurl=http://hollinger.tusd1.schooldesk.net/>

⁸ <https://www.pcsb.org/Page/6792>

⁹ <https://www.episd.org/Page/667>

¹⁰ <https://emerson.slcschools.org/academics/programs-options/extended-learning-program-elp>

¹¹ <http://www.oregon.gov/ode/learning-options/TAG/Pages/TAG-FAQ.aspx>

¹² See “Twice Exceptional: Multiple Pathways to Success”. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-6162-2_23

¹³ See “Critical Issues in the Identification of Gifted Students with Co-existing Disabilities: The Twice Exceptional” in Sage Open: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244013505855>

¹⁴ See “The Identification of Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities: Challenges, Controversies, and Promising Practices.” https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-9116-4_3 and “Creating a Toolkit for Identifying Twice Exceptional Students” <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.4219/jeg-2007-513>

¹⁵ See “The Identification of Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities: Challenges, Controversies, and Promising Practices.” https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-9116-4_3

¹⁶ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that schools make accommodations for students with disabilities who do not require specialized instruction.

Scale for Children—by a school psychologist as part of both the TAG and the districts’ system of behavioral support systems¹⁷. Likewise, TAG personnel should also attend TAG identified students’ IEP meetings. This cooperation is particularly important for twice-exceptional students because instruction at the appropriate rate and level can be a critical intervention to increase their self-worth and reduce negative behaviors and alienation associated with school¹⁸.

Rate and Level Instruction in Elementary Schools

“[The district must show] evidence of use of TAG Lesson Planning Template with embedded TAG lesson.”

“Pre-assessment was in place in many lesson plans, but whole group instruction continued. Therefore, pre-assessment appeared not to drive instruction for TAG students.”

“The building TAG plan is not a substitute for clear communication with parents and students about accelerated learning opportunities.”

ODE corrective action letter to PPS, 5/2011¹⁹

The district has long claimed differentiation in heterogeneous classrooms as its main technique for delivering TAG services while failing to provide teachers with professional development in TAG best practices or standardized curricular materials for out-of-level learners. ***Our new leadership has an opportunity to make radical progress with these issues when designing scope and sequence and planning the new roll-out of district professional development.***

Mindful inclusion of TAG extensions in scope and sequence work, for example, would be a big step towards supporting teachers’ efforts to differentiate, especially if teachers also have access to adaptive assessment tools that can accurately test how far above grade level a student is working.

Additionally, the system-wide adoption of two proven best practices—clustering TAG students with similar strengths in groups of 3-5 in elementary classrooms²⁰ and using flexible ability grouping²¹ for instruction—could make differentiation much more effective. Both these techniques were included in the TAG Department’s proposal for a continuum of TAG services, presented to the School Board’s Teaching and Learning Committee on 3/8/17.²² Notably, these techniques are used successfully by neighboring districts that serve a higher percentage of historically underserved students, such as David Douglas.

Elementary school administrators usually point to the difficulty of aligning schedules as the biggest structural barrier they face when providing one of the most proven of TAG services, acceleration. This problem, however, is not present in middle school as students move to a 6 or 8 period day. Middle schools also provide economies of

¹⁷See “The Identification of Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities: Challenges, Controversies, and Promising Practices.” https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-9116-4_3

¹⁸See “Interventions work, but we need more!” https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-9116-4_11

¹⁹ See letter from Oregon Department of Education, 5/2001: <http://www.tagpdx.org/PPS%20ltr%20mailed%205-31-11.pdf>

²⁰ See Karen B. RFogers, Ph.D’s “Re-Forming Gifted Education: How Parents and Teachers Can Match the Program to the Child”: <http://www.greatpotentialpress.com/re-forming-gifted-education>

²¹ See James A Kulik and Chen-Lin C. Kulik’s “Effects of Ability Grouping on Student Achievement”: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1066568870230105?journalCode=ueee20>

²² See meeting materials for details: https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/domain/171/board%20committees/teaching%20and%20learning/3_8_17%20TL%20Final%20Packet.pdf

scales when dealing with accelerated learners, as students come together from multiple feeders. The TAG Department's proposal for a continuum of TAG services included middle school academies that offered cohort classes in humanities and science as well as ability placement in math, allowing students to accelerate beyond the present compacted math pathway. Beaverton offers a similar model with their SUMMA academies for middle school students who meet specific qualifications.²³

Access to Accelerated Learning Opportunities in Middle and High School

"Provide access for all TAG students to accelerated programs, including programs that may not be available in a student's own school."

"Fulfilling the Oregon TAG mandate must include 'proof of systemization of accelerated learning opportunities, especially postsecondary options available to TAG students at all PPS high schools.'"

*Corrective Action letter from Oregon Department of Education to PPS, May 31, 2011 and July 1, 2011.*²⁴

Acceleration is the most effective curriculum intervention for TAG students; a review of 380 studies revealed that almost all forms of acceleration result in growth in achievement²⁵. The Oregon TAG mandate should be most easily fulfilled in middle and high school, as students have more opportunity to access classes that fit their advanced level (if not their accelerated rate) of learning in different subjects. However, limited access to advanced coursework has been a frequent target of corrective action for PPS and has reemerged as an issue recently.

Although School Board Policy 6.10.100-P²⁶ says that students should receive high school credit for equivalent course work taken prior to 9th grade, a proposal now under discussion²⁷ would limit which science classes count toward graduation requirements and specifically forbid students from taking one or more of the required science courses in middle school. The first of these courses to be implemented, freshman Patterns Physics, was designed specifically for students who have not completed Algebra. This creates a disconnect with PPS' only widely-used path to acceleration, Compacted Math, which is taken by students across the district.

While we appreciate efforts to create a clear pathway for science, we must note that ***to comply with state law, PPS must provide clear pathways for acceleration***. Recent actions remove an opportunity for acceleration rather than expanding it. Alternative paths to acceleration might include developing a standard middle school offering of Patterns Physics available to students who have science interest; allowing students to test out of Patterns science curricula; and adding lessons that cover NGSS standards into the AP and IB curriculum so that these courses can be used to cover this material at a more advanced level. As it may be easier, logistically, to support students who need radical acceleration in one PPS high school, the district could also revive the ACCESS Academy high school program²⁸

²³ For a description of Beaverton's SUMMA program, see https://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/depts/tchlrn/Pages/TAG_Summa-Information.aspx

²⁴ See Corrective Action letter May 31, 2011: <http://www.tagpdx.org/PPS%20ltr%20mailed%205-31-11.pdf> and also Corrective Action letter July 1, 2011: <http://www.tagpdx.org/PPS%20ltr%20mailed%207-1-11.pdf>

²⁵ Colangelo, Nicholas; Assouline, Susan G.; Gross, Miraca U. M. "A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students." Iowa City, IA. Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, 2004.

²⁶ Board Policy 6.10.100-P, High School Credit Earned Prior to Ninth Grade: <https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/4814/6.10.100-P.pdf>

²⁷ See minutes for 4/9/2018 Teaching and Learning Committee, https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/domain/171/board%20committees/teaching%20and%20learning/T_L%204_9%20Notes.pdf

²⁸ ACCESS was approved as a 1-12 program by School Board Resolution 2148. It is described in the original ACCESS charter: http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/tag/program/access_draft5.pdf

(currently located at Grant high school, but unsupported by PPS or Grant administration), open up admissions for the program at 9th grade, and develop an acceleration pathway at a single high school.

Predictable and Automatic TAG Services

“Institute a monitoring process to make TAG program policy implementation and practice consistent across the entire district. While the district may want to allow individual buildings a measure of autonomy as they serve communities with unique identities and populations, the district must demonstrate that it is upholding its responsibility to see that those buildings comply with the TAG statutes and administrative rules.”

ODE corrective action letter to PPS, 11/2009

No matter what TAG services PPS offers, students must also be able to access them automatically—without parent intervention or advocacy. The current Compacted Math pathway is a good example of a pathway that is relatively easy to access. We believe, for instance, that a 90th percentile score on a nationally-normed math achievement test—either during SBAC testing, as that continues, or Iowa testing—should *automatically* trigger an offer of Single Subject Acceleration (SSA) in Mathematics. Instead, a child that just demonstrated a high level of achievement compared to age-level peers is subjected to more tests in a deficit-based framework looking for knowledge “gaps.” The district must put uniform structural supports in place to get students the instruction they need. The current policy of requiring parents to transport their 5th or 8th grade students daily to the nearest middle or high school for instruction if they pursue single subject acceleration is a shameless inequity that could be prevented by system-wide thinking and support structures.

A Dedicated TAG Administrator

As a final note, we want to acknowledge the departure of the current TAG director, Andrew Johnson, to take a principal position in southwest Portland. Although efforts to institute true TAG services across the district require inter-departmental efforts, we expect the district to fill this important role as the point person for TAG services. In the recent past, when the head of the Teaching and Learning department was charged with TAG among many other duties, the result was no district focus on TAG learning at all. The person who fills this position should have a background in TAG education and must be included in critical discussions taking place now about scope and sequence and professional development. We look forward to collaborating with Mr. Johnson’s successor at monthly TAGAC meetings to ensure that our district meets the needs of all its learners.

This report was approved by a unanimous vote of the TAGAC membership on June 11, 2018.

Sincerely,



Scholle McFarland
TAGAC Chair