



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 5, 2015

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Andrew Johnson, Program Director
Melissa Goff, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Teaching and Learning

Subject: 2013 TAGAC Recommendations Response

This Memorandum provides the Board of Education a written response to the Talented and Gifted Advisory Council recommendations restated during our shared February Board presentation. Please see below the District response to each recommendation, including our work looking forward in these services.

1. Place elementary and middle school students in appropriate level math and reading classes.

RESPONSE: PPS works diligently and thoughtfully when considering appropriate placement for all students. Many factors should be considered when making such a determination. PPS may use a variety of assessment tools such as: Iowa Acceleration, DRA, DIBELS, STAMP, CAR, Grade level By-Pass, OAKS, Smarter Balanced, Woodcock-Johnson, WIAT, grade level assessments, end of term content assessments, performance tasks, work samples, grades, and or student portfolios. Each campus relies on the expertise of their staff and an understanding of each student to guide the decision making process in terms of best fit. Campuses are encouraged to dialogue in grade placement committees, using formal and informal data to make grouping decisions. When it is appropriate and necessary, the TAG and Instruction Curriculum and Assessment departments endeavor to support campuses and TAG students in the decision making process. We must be very careful about the social/emotional impact of segregating students into cohorts and the possible negative, unintended consequences of “accelerating” students beyond their proficiency level- namely conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and an ability to apply.

2. Reform Screening for Single Subject Advancement.

RESPONSE: Currently, the screening process relies on the accuracy of data collected at the campus level as well as TAG testing scores. The TAG and Math Departments have been meeting weekly/bi-weekly to collaborate around the single subject pathway. We have made substantial progress already. We are currently making decisions about the determination phase and have streamlined the process for identification. We want to be sure we are thoughtful about racial and ethnic considerations and have adapted parts of the Compacted Math Pathway to ensure our processes mirror one another since they are so closely related. We hope to finalize this process within the next two months.

3. Use flexible grouping to narrow the range of achievement levels per teacher.

RESPONSE: Each campus is responsible for the determination and success of grouping students. Building leaders and staff use formal and informal data to determine how to group students based on a variety of factors. This may include but is not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, achievement, social and emotional needs, academics, and peer relationships. PPS must be very thoughtful not to group students in homogeneous classrooms. The district values diversity within the learning environment and must ensure placing students while looking through the equity lens. We want to be sure EVERY student is successful, and though there is understandable debate on the positive and negative outcomes of grouping either heterogeneously or homogeneously, classroom grouping decisions are encouraged to maximize learning for all students. It is important and valuable to look at research based evaluations of such grouping rather than op-ed responses to such controversy.

4. Eliminate and repurpose School TAG budgets.

RESPONSE: PPS has recently centralized TAG budgets in an effort to appropriate funds for TAG students and resource allocation. The department will continue to work with senior staff and budget analysts to determine the best allocation of funds, work closely with campus staff to support TAG needs, and find equitable solutions to budgetary decisions.

5. Expand ACCESS academy.

RESPONSE: For the upcoming school year, 2015-2016, ACCESS will be adding a 3rd grade section. Enrollment will be 56 students at each grade level in grades 3-8 and 26 students in a blended 1/2. Expansion of ACCESS will be considered in the future.

6. Post additional TAG statistics on the PPS website.

RESPONSE: The TAG department is currently determining which data to post on the PPS website and is considering what additional data points may be useful for public consumption. In accordance with privacy laws specific to the public display of student data, the TAG department will be thoughtful and cautious. Only those TAG statistics which may provide overall data about student numbers, population, and other statistical information will be available for public use. The TAG department has recently been working with the Department of Research and Evaluation to collect a variety of data points, pattern distributions, and similar aggregated data based on race, gender, ethnicity, and the like to guide next steps for our work. By doing so, we hope to create transparency and to continue to develop trust with TAGAC and the community at large.