

### *What are GATEway's concerns about a redesign of the Elementary Gifted Services Program?*

While the current pull-out program is not optimal, a poorly planned or implemented replacement could be a step down from the services currently received. A differential model would be considered a quality and comprehensive program as long as key points were addressed.

### *How will a redesigned Elementary Gifted Services Program be structured?*

#### *How will students receive Gifted Services?*

Students should receive curriculum specifically designed for gifted learners in core academic areas on a daily basis. The curriculum could be delivered through dedicated instruction or differentiated lesson plans.

#### *Which grade levels will be served?*

Students should begin receiving gifted services in Kindergarten or 1st grade.

#### *How will students be grouped?*

Gifted students need to be grouped for a significant portion of each school day to address social and emotional needs as well as to facilitate efficient academic instruction. Effective grouping practices can vary based on student population and building preferences, including cluster groups, flexible groups, readiness groups, or a combination thereof. Whole-grade cluster grouping (Gentry model) benefits not only the gifted students, but all students, especially under-represented populations. The flexible grouping method currently being used at Bamber Valley also has benefits for all populations and should be considered.

#### *Will sites be given the flexibility to choose?*

All sites must provide Gifted Services at a defined minimal level. As long as the gifted curriculum is available, the grouping model itself should not largely affect the delivery of the content. Sites should be able to choose based on student demographics, teacher preference, and so on. Sites should also be allowed to enhance services as their resources allow.

#### *Will classroom placement be intentional and systematic?*

Students should be placed in classrooms based on objective assessment data. A critical mass of at least 4 to 8 gifted students is essential. For efficiency, classrooms could be structured so that the classroom contained a reduced number of stanine levels of achievement within it. In essence, a classroom could still have students performing below, at, and above grade level, but students at similar achievement levels could be grouped together so that the teacher isn't working with students in such a large range.

#### *Will pull-outs and flexibly grouped classes continue to be offered during the transition period?*

The current program should be maintained until the new program is ready. Students should not go without gifted services in the interim.

#### *What if parents are upset that the elementary gifted program is being changed or if they perceive that services are being removed?*

The details of the program should be well defined and clearly articulated so that Elementary Gifted Services are recognizable as a comprehensive and quality program. It must be clear to parents and the public in general that Rochester Public Schools offers a high-quality education to students whose advanced academic abilities are not addressed by the standard curriculum. Parents should be included in all stages of the redesign and implementation.

### *What will the gifted students be learning?*

#### *Are the gifted students going to receive enrichment or will they be taught advanced academic content?*

Students should receive regular lessons that contain challenging, advanced curriculum as a direct extension of each core academic area. The term "enrichment" is often interpreted by parents as simply meaning material that is "more interesting" to students. Terminology should be used to clarify that the students will be taught advanced academic content.

#### *What curriculum will be used?*

Specific gifted curriculum is available that can be aligned with state standards and the district's scope and sequence. Whenever possible, existing curriculum specifically designed for gifted learners should be modified and aligned. Examples: William & Mary, Project M<sup>3</sup>.

#### *How will curriculum be adapted for gifted students?*

Pre-assessment, compacting, and telescoping are examples of methods that are useful in adapting curriculum for gifted students. Learning should be fast-paced, with greater depth and complexity, and should eliminate excess drill and practice.

#### *When will Elementary Gifted Services begin? In which subject areas will gifted curriculum be taught?*

Students should receive gifted lessons beginning in 2nd grade at the latest. Gifted curriculum should be provided for Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies. However, subjects could be implemented gradually. For example, Reading could begin in Kindergarten, Math in 1st grade, and Science and Social Studies in 2nd grade.

#### *Will my student have more homework as a result of receiving Gifted Services?*

Students should receive an amount of homework roughly equivalent to that received by age-peers. Homework should remain developmentally appropriate for the age group.

#### *If differentiated lesson plans are being used, how often will they be presented? How much time will students spend learning specifically adapted curriculum?*

Ideally, students would receive differentiated lesson plans containing gifted curriculum on a daily basis. Students identified for gifted services should receive a proportionate amount of the teacher's time when compared to other students in the classroom.

#### *Will there be a social and emotional component?*

Ideally, social and emotional content would be included.

#### *Will grade and subject advancement continue to be available?*

Subject and grade advancement should continue to be offered and encouraged. Early Kindergarten admission should be considered.

### *How will students be identified to receive Gifted Services?*

*Will students still be identified for Gifted Services? How will identification differ from current processes? What identification tools will be used? Will tests be standardized and objective? Will the district use multiple criteria for identification? Will portfolios continue to be used?*

Students should continue to be identified for Gifted Services using standardized assessments. The use of multiple criteria for identification is best practice according to NAGC standards. Assessments chosen must provide evidence of reliability and validity. Teacher and parent nomination is a valuable source; however, assessments should not be based wholly or even largely on recommendation because of the large number of gifted students who "hide" or are misunderstood.

*Which students will the program serve? Will students currently identified for Gifted Services continue to receive services under the new model?*

Students who test in the top 5% on nationally normed tests have academic needs that typically cannot be met in the traditional classroom with grade-level curriculum. These students should receive curriculum that has been adapted to address his or her academic needs. If a student has been identified as qualifying for gifted services under the current model, then that student should continue to receive gifted instruction in some form.

*What will the identification criteria be? Who will make the decision about criteria?*

Decisions about identification criteria should be made by the gifted advisory committee or a specially nominated group containing parents, community members, and district staff.

*Will identification recognize high ability students who are not necessarily high achievers?*

It is important that identification be based on ability or aptitude scores. Many gifted children are under-achieving and need targeted services to help them reach their potential.

*Will identification allow for twice-exceptional students? Under-represented populations?*

Identification methods should be developed that will find students who do not test well on standardized tests, but who have high potential. The district should investigate the use of alternate assessments for smaller groups of students, including non-verbal and reasoning tests, as well as the utilization of other funding, such as integration and special education dollars, for these specialized assessments.

*Will there be an appeals process?*

There should be a well-defined appeals process in place for identification issues.

*Could some individual schools choose to use assessments that are unique to their school?*

There should be at least one tool that is common to all schools, but sites should have the flexibility to use all data available to them in decisions regarding placement of students for services.

*Has the district considered the use of an RTI model for additional identification methods?*

Some districts around the country have used methods of identification in which students are given an exposure to gifted curriculum, and their degree of success is used as additional data in decisions of program placement.

### *What support will teachers receive?*

#### *How will the teachers of the clustered or flexibly grouped classroom be chosen?*

When determining which teachers will have responsibility for the clustered and/or grouped classrooms, preference should be given to teachers who are most highly qualified and motivated teachers, rather than being based on seniority or rotation.

#### *What staff development will be provided to teachers? What about principals and other staff?*

Teachers with primary responsibility for a clustered or flexibly grouped classroom should receive 3-4 hours of initial training on the needs and characteristics of gifted students. Ideally, all building staff and principal would also receive this training. Teachers should be given time initially to become familiar with the gifted lesson plans and should be provided ongoing training on advanced differentiation techniques. Teachers should be given additional prep time throughout the year to prepare the gifted lesson plans.

#### *How will district staff perceive the new design? Will the teachers accept it and implement it enthusiastically? What will the district do to assure teacher and administrator buy-in?*

Teachers and administrators should be involved in all steps of the design and development of a new model. Ideally, enough flexibility should be given to sites so that they will be able to adapt a new program to fit the unique characteristics of their building and demographics.

#### *How will staffing levels change?*

A qualified Gifted Services Coordinator must remain in place to oversee the program and continue to provide other services such as grade and subject advancements. At least 3.0 FTEs would be needed to serve as "Gifted Resource Specialists". We advise not using a term such as "Differentiation Coach", to distinguish Gifted Services from other district initiatives. These specialists would be available to align and monitor gifted curriculum, to be a resource for teachers, to provide initial and ongoing staff development, to facilitate testing required for identification, to work with Individual Learning Plans for certain gifted students who need additional customization (such as twice-exceptional students or highly gifted students not participating in the highly gifted program), and so on. Possibly, after initial implementation, the FTE requirement could be reduced. A Certificate in Gifted Education would be strongly encouraged for this position, with a Masters in Gifted Education preferred.

*How will the new Elementary Gifted Services program be designed, reviewed, implemented and monitored?*

*How and when should the Elementary Gifted Services redesign be reviewed?*

Program redesign should receive input and review from all stakeholders before implementation. This should include parents, staff, administration, and special areas that could be affected. Review should take place prior to implementation, after one year, and every three years thereafter. A consultant with an advanced degree in gifted education should be contracted to do an external review of the program design prior to implementation.

*Will criteria and implementation be standard across the district?*

Implementation and services must be consistent and coordinated to provide equity, but flexibility should be given to sites that choose to exceed minimally required services. Accommodations should be made for schools with unique features such as multi-age classrooms or alternative curricula.

*Who will oversee the program to ensure that each student is receiving at least the minimally required amount of gifted services?*

The Gifted Services Coordinator should work with building principals and Gifted Services staff to ensure the fidelity of implementation and delivery of any new model. Data about participation and outcome should be collected at student, classroom, and building levels.

*How will gifted curriculum content be monitored and reported to parents and to the district? What information will teachers be required to record? How and when will that information be received?*

Parents should receive information as a part of the student report card and at conferences. If differentiated lesson plans are being used, parents should receive a report listing how often and in what subject areas specific lessons were given.

*How and how often will the academic and process outcomes of the program be reported?*

Administrative reporting, including information on process and outcome, should be done annually to district administration, School Board, parents and community, building staff and leadership, the Gifted Services Advisory Committee, and Gifted Services staff.

*What investigation has been done regarding research studies and best practices for any particular model the district is considering? Will the program be data-driven and continually monitored?*

While innovation and creativity are to be encouraged, caution should be used in implementing an untested model without consultation from an expert in gifted education. Pilot programs could be established to investigate the pros and cons of different models under consideration. If a particular model proves to be more effective, it should be considered to be rolled out at all sites, or if one is not working well, it should be discontinued.

*What is the timeline for implementation of a new elementary gifted services program, given the complexity of the task at hand?*