

Humanities (Gifted) Program Review

The Council Rock Humanities (gifted) program was reviewed in the spring of 2013. The district felt that an outside review would be beneficial and a committee, assembled by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), was formed. The review revealed many areas of program success as well as suggestions for improvement. The review can be found on the District's website: www.crsd.org=>Administration=>Special Services=>Gifted Program Review.

There is currently no set "model" for gifted programs. It largely depends on the culture of the district, how schedules are organized and the structure of the classes. The overarching feature is to allow gifted students the opportunity to spend time with peers of similar abilities. In Council Rock, the program is delivered through the Social Studies classes. At the elementary level it is more exploratory, while the secondary level is more research based.

Following the BCIU review, the Director of Special Services, Dr. Charles Lambert, determined next steps to looking deeper into and improving the program. The first step was to meet with representative stakeholders (district staff, parents, etc.) to develop an implementation plan and to prioritize the steps. Sub-committees were assembled to look into three key areas that the District was looking to implement quickly:

- Developing a mission and vision statement
- Infusing math into the elementary gifted program
- Increasing the rigor of the gifted program at the middle level

To that end:

- Mission and vision statements have been developed and are on the website.
- Math is being infused in the 2nd and 3rd grade humanities program with a focus on problem solving; tying the Common Core standards with math practices. 2nd and 3rd grade were chosen as they are precursors to the Math Enrichment at the 4th grade level. This is an ongoing process with the Math Specialists and Humanities teachers working together. Math enrichment in 3rd grade is being looked at, but at this time the additional staffing requirements are not maintainable in the budget.
- The middle schools now have a dedicated Humanities teacher for each grade level, instead of a social studies teacher doing double duty in Humanities classes. The social studies curriculum is being compacted, allowing gifted learners to move through the curriculum faster. As a result, opportunities for in-depth, small group and independent learning of an interdisciplinary fashion can occur. Looking toward the future, the district would like to bring experts from the community into the classrooms - in a seminar approach - a few times per year to lead discussions of an advanced nature.

Perhaps the biggest change that is being considered is moving the Humanities program under the English Language Arts (ELA) umbrella, instead of Social Studies. Many gifted students are talented readers. It is thought that by offering gifted support through ELA, teachers will be able to do curriculum compacting to open up time for additional study across content areas. This idea is being piloted in Newtown Elementary in 5th grade this year with students remaining with their classmates for Social Studies and having their ELA classes delivered by the Humanities teacher. This pilot will be monitored and evaluated. If successful, other grades and other schools will be added in future years with an eye to this being implemented in grades 4-6 across the District within a few years.

As changes are implemented, other key areas of focus include:

- Communication – ensuring the Humanities student understands why they are in the program and allowing parents a better understanding of the results of the initial placement testing and the components of each specific test
- Staff Development – training all teaching staff to understand the needs of gifted learners (including those with two or more exceptionalities – such as gifted with ADHD; gifted with learning disabilities) and how to meet those needs (through enrichment and/or acceleration) in regular education classrooms and across subject areas
- GIEP Improvement – adding more content to the Gifted IEP including goals based on interest and learning types
- Differentiation – increasing the use of standardized assessment data to improve differentiation for Gifted students in regular education classes

Council Rock currently has approximately 900 students in the gifted program. This represents about 8% of the student body. Pennsylvania mandates gifted education but does not fund these programs. This differs from Special Education that is mandated at the federal level and a portion of funding comes from the federal and state governments. Gifted programs require a higher staffing level than regular education programs, though not as much staff as Special Education.

Citizens For Education thanks Dr. Charles Lambert for filling us in on improvements to date and goals for the future in the District Humanities program. CFE is happy to see this program acquiring more depth and a cross-curricular component.