



Date: August 4, 2009
To: Board of Education
From: Daniel A. Nerad, Superintendent of Schools
Lisa Wachtel, Executive Director, Teaching and Learning
Barbie Klawikowski, Interim Coordinator of Talented and Gifted
Re: Talented and Gifted Plan

Background

Wisconsin Administrative Rule 8.01(2)(t)2 states that each school district shall establish a plan and designate a person to coordinate the gifted and talented program. The previous Talented and Gifted (TAG) Plan approved by the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) Board was in 1991. 2008-09 highlighted several independent yet related events which served to underscore both the urgency of and District-wide benefit for an updated Plan. Among the events that converged to result in the need to update the Talented and Gifted Plan were:

- Superintendent Dr. Daniel Nerad was hired in July 2008. Dr. Nerad recognized the need for addressing the issues related to Talented and Gifted programming;
- The last TAG Plan (1991) approved by the District was found by the DPI to be out of compliance;
- An increase in open enrollment leaving the District spurred conversation regarding strategies to attract and retain students;
- Families leaving the District were surveyed to gather information regarding their reasons for leaving MMSD. A desire for improved Talented and Gifted programming was one of several emerging themes; and
- A new Strategic Plan was developed through extensive community involvement. The Strategic Plan clearly demands a rigorous and challenging education for all students.

Process

In response to the events described above, the Superintendent charged the Teaching & Learning TAG Division to develop a process to create an updated Plan. The TAG Division met on a regular basis to define major areas for improvement in alignment with the National Association for Gifted Children standards. A Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee comprised of 30 members was convened in early spring. This group met five times between February and June to provide input and critique the evolving draft. The Superintendent and TAG Coordinator hosted a community input session on March 26. Senior Management, Instructional Council and Principals reviewed drafts and provided input. In order to ensure a timely and high quality Plan, a subcommittee of the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee was invited to continue to work with TAG staff to complete the Plan during June and July.

There have been significant challenges in the process leading to the development of the enclosed plan. These challenges include communication, changes in leadership and an evolving level of District and community trust in MMSD's commitment to providing high quality education for all students. Overcoming these challenges is an on-going process, one captured in the language of the plan with respect to continual improvement. Although there are aspects of current MMSD talented and gifted programming that are sound and valued, the need for overall structural improvements and re-vitalization is recognized by all.

In addition to the TAG Division staff, we sincerely appreciate the members of the TAG Advisory Committee for their extraordinary gift of time and dedication toward creating this plan. Special recognition goes to TAG Advisory Subcommittee members Kerry Berns, Bettine Lipman, Laurie Frost, Chris Gomez Schmidt and Carole Trone for their continuing support and input through the final draft of this plan.

MMSD Strategic Planning

The enclosed TAG Plan aligns, supports and strengthens important aspects of the Strategic Plan. In particular, the TAG Plan undergirds District-wide efforts to: enhance assessments to guide appropriate levels of instruction; accelerate learning for all students; embed differentiation as core practice in all classrooms; and map and develop a comprehensive and articulated curriculum K-12 in order to increase curricular rigor for all students.

Executive Plan Summary

Based upon the framework set forth by the National Association for Gifted and Children standards and areas identified by MMSD for improvement, eight key goal areas addressed in this Plan are:

Goal 1. Comprehensive Identification Process. Develop and maintain an equitable and inclusive identification process for students who exhibit gifted characteristics in the 5 domains.

Action Steps – Expand repertoire of assessment tools and improve use and implementation of existing tools. Ensure identification process is non-biased and serves to equitably identify students from underserved populations

Goal 2. Programming Options for Identified Students. Design and implement a continuum of systematic and continuous K-12 curricula and programming options in the five domains of giftedness in order to meet individual student needs.

Action Steps – Increase curricular rigor in all classes and increase advanced course options at the secondary level. Develop District-wide consistent grouping practices.

Goal 3. Individualized Student Planning. Develop and maintain a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) for each identified student that systematically records assessments and plans.

Action Steps – Design a DEP with expanding capability for each TAG domain and corresponding program options.

Goal 4. Socio-emotional Support. Develop and maintain a system for meeting the socio-emotional needs of identified students.

Action Steps – Research, develop and collaboratively pilot non-academic supports to address the socio-emotional needs of identified students including underserved populations.

Goal 5. Professional Development. Facilitate the design and implement professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators and staff to support research-based best practices, expand the knowledge of current talented and gifted research and Wisconsin state laws and dispel misconceptions about talented and gifted education and students.

Action Steps – Facilitate collaborative professional development for target audiences including administrators and teacher leaders at all levels.

Goal 6. Use of Available Technology - Expand relevant technological capabilities to increase ease and efficiency of identification, creation and maintenance of DEP's and monitoring program accountability.

Action Steps – In collaboration with Research and Evaluation, design and implement an electronic DEP to interface with student data.

Goal 7. Consistent and Effective Communication Develop and maintain consistent and effective systems for communicating about talented and gifted education throughout the District and community.

Action Steps – Design Resource Guide, enhance web-based communications and provide regular updates to target audiences.

Goal 8. On-going Program Evaluation – Conduct an on-going evaluation to ensure program effectiveness and program alignment with the MMSD Strategic Plan, State of Wisconsin statutes and administrative rules and the National Association for Gifted Children standards.

Action Steps – Design an evaluation process to determine quality and effectiveness of TAG programming. Provide review and updates to target audiences at specified intervals.