

# History of Gifted Programming in District 181

prepared by GECCO, most recent update January, 2012

District 181 is a high performing district with a long history of gifted and talented education. Recent advances have allowed the district to do a much better job in its mission of educating each child in an environment of excellence by significantly expanding the number of children educated at an appropriate level. The objective of this summary is to provide an overview of the history of gifted and talented programming in the district.

## **1994 - 1997**

FTEs: 3

### **Elementary Schools**

At this time there was an interdisciplinary gifted pull-out program, coordinated through the Gifted Resource Center and thus called GRC. For elementary students, this program was a project-oriented, enrichment program that pulled selected students from across the district beginning in 3rd grade for one day per week. There were between 13 and 18 students in these classes. (Remember that at that time the enrollment in the district was smaller than it is now so the percentage of students pulled was probably a little bit higher than it is today.) The elementary program was staffed by two teachers, who also provided resources to K-5 teachers and conducted push in brain stretching programs once a week for six weeks to second graders. Very few acceleration options were available within the elementary schools at this time: either whole-grade, early entrance or single subject, as the administration felt strongly that these were not good options for the children involved.

### **Middle School**

At the middle school (there was only one middle school at that time) selected students were allowed to attend seminars in place of their core classes once a week. These seminars were scheduled on a rotating basis, such that students never missed the same class repeatedly, much the way that band and orchestra sectionals are scheduled today. They, too, were provided an enrichment-oriented program. There was one gifted specialist assigned to the middle school. The middle school did offer an advanced math class to its students, so some acceleration was possible once students reached the middle school. There were no other advanced offerings.

## **1997-1999**

FTEs: 3

### **Elementary Schools**

There was a gifted taskforce formed in 1997, which recommended that the elementary GRC program become a five-day-a-week magnet classroom. Though cost neutral, this was roundly rejected by the board, whose emphasis was on neighborhood schools. The program outlined above was maintained for the elementary schools.

### **Middle School**

At the middle school the gifted seminars were phased out during this period. In their place an advance language arts class was phased in, taught by the former middle school gifted specialist. This was the only gifted-oriented offering at the middle school, though an advanced math class was still offered as well.

## **1999-2004**

FTEs: 4

In 1999 another gifted taskforce was formed. This one was led by Dr. Mary Ruth Coleman, professor of gifted education at the University of North Carolina. The taskforce met for 3 months, ran focus group sessions with parents, teachers, former students who were then in high school and other stakeholders. This taskforce recommended a few changes to the gifted program, and a three year time-line for implementation. It recommended that:

1. The middle school gifted program be re-vamped and reintroduced in 1 year.
2. Gifted specialists be assigned to each school on a part time basis and pull out gifted students for enrichment, K - 5th grade,
3. Two additional gifted specialists be hired, so that each specialist have responsibility for two schools,
4. The elementary GRC program continue to service third through fifth grades, but be revised to focus on math and language arts instead of being multi-subject investigations while retaining its social emotional component.

While the initial recommendations set forth by the taskforce were implemented, most of the year 2 or 3 items were never initiated, due to a significant change in leadership within the district.

### **Elementary Schools**

At the elementary grades there were 4 gifted specialists serving the seven schools and staffing the Gifted Resource Center. Approximately 4% of students in grades 3-5 attended GRC. Because there were a small number of students invited to participate in GRC, the selection process was always very contentious.

### **Middle School**

The middle school gifted specialist was reassigned to the elementary school program. This left the district with no middle school gifted programming and no middle school teacher gifted support. Accelerated offerings were still available, in both language arts

and math. At this time a handful of 8th graders were allowed to complete geometry at Hinsdale Central and a class-full completed high school level algebra at the middle school by the time they graduated from middle school.

## **2004-2005**

FTEs: 5

In 2004 a gifted audit was conducted by Joyce Van Tassel Baska, professor of gifted education at the College of William and Mary. Recommendations included creating a program for gifted students at the middle school level, offering opportunities for advancement in all subject areas, allowing more opportunities for acceleration before or in elementary school, and developing counseling and guidance policies for gifted learners. In addition, it was recommended that standard programs at the middle school be strengthened. Since we are an above average school district, the feeling was that we should have an above average curriculum. Also, this audit recommended implementing some sort of gifted education plan for the “severely” gifted to ensure that they would be challenged each day and that there was a short- and long-term plan for their education.

### **Elementary Schools**

The elementary school program was unchanged during this period.

### **Middle School**

In 2005, the Middle School Profoundly Gifted Pilot Program was set up with the program beginning in the fall of 2005. One gifted specialist was hired across both middle schools to coordinate the program, serve as a gifted resource to middle school teachers, teach the students within the program and coordinate and facilitate their overall education. The gifted clusters were pulled by grade from an advanced language arts class.

An initial screening of students was performed, and those who passed were given the Stanford Binet V (SB-V), which was individually administered. In order to qualify, students needed to be in the 99th percentile on either verbal or nonverbal or the composite. The entire community was astounded by the number of students who qualified, and some cast dispersions on the program for this reason alone. As a pilot, the plan was to review the program in 2006 and determine what should be done in the middle school on an ongoing basis.

## **2006-2009**

FTEs: 9

In early 2006 another gifted taskforce was formed, led by the newly hired Assistant Superintendent for Learning, Warren Shillingburg. This taskforce recommended several changes, which were approved by the board.

## **Elementary School**

At the elementary schools, the following changes were implemented:

1. The elementary GRC program was revamped from math and language arts back to a multi-disciplinary focus and the program was renamed ACE (Affective and Cognitive Enrichment). The admission criteria were tightened and the ability to move into the program after 3rd grade was eliminated.
2. A tiered acceleration program was implemented for math and reading beginning with 3rd grade. The program was phased in over the course of three years. Based upon achievement, students who were ready and able were accelerated one full year in math, reading, or both. These children were designated as Tier 1 in the subject in which they were accelerated. Children who were even more advanced were additionally pulled out once or twice a week and provided additional challenges. These students were designated as Tier 2.
3. Each elementary building received a dedicated gifted specialist to facilitate the accelerated program, handle pull outs for Tier 2, help with differentiation at all grade levels, and pull out kindergarten, first, and second graders as needed. The specialists in the smaller buildings also handled teaching the ACE programs. Thus there were 7 elementary gifted specialists needed at this time, so the district hired 3 additional specialists.
4. The MAP test was instituted as a vehicle for measuring out of level development of these subject accelerated students. The goal of this out-of-level test was to be able to measure if all students were demonstrating a year's worth of growth in a year's worth of time.

As had been the case in the middle school, once the process of identifying third graders who were in need of acceleration, people were amazed at how many students qualified. Based on 2009 data, 30% of our students in grades 3-5 are accelerated in math and 42% of 3-5 graders are in tier 1 or 2 for Language Arts. These changes were rolled out over the course of the next three years with the first class of accelerated third graders reaching the middle school in the fall of 2009.

## **Middle School**

1. The Middle School Profoundly Gifted Program was renamed ACE and adopted more or less as piloted, though the admission criteria was changed to eliminate the SB-V. The gifted student cluster was moved from language arts to social studies for 7th and 8th grades. An additional teacher was hired, so there could be a dedicated teacher at each school.
2. The middle school looked more seriously at subject acceleration options for high achievers. The advanced language arts class was changed to an enriched language

arts class and a gifted approach was adopted. In math three different paths were designed for students to follow based upon demonstrated achievement:

- a. A standard middle school math program, the same one that was being used.
- b. An advanced program, which would have students completing algebra by the end of middle school and
- c. An accelerated program, which would have students completing geometry by the end of middle school. Enough students were identified for this route, that a geometry class was added at the middle school, eliminating the need to bus students to Hinsdale Central for this class.

While these options had existed before, there was a clearer path for students to take and a more rigorous identification of those students who were ready for this challenge. In 2008-2009, 79% of our middle school students were in advanced or accelerated math, and 27% in tier 1 or 2 language arts.

## **2009 -2010**

FTEs: 10

In 2009 a gifted taskforce was established, to review the results of the three-year rollout of the 2006 plan and recommend any tweaks or changes. As a result, a gifted coordinator was added to teach elementary ACE part-time and to coordinate the program, which includes improving communication, increasing consistency across schools, assisting in testing, and identifying additional ways to better serve students. The number of students receiving an appropriate education that challenges them at their level increased significantly in recent years.

## **2010-2011**

FTEs: 9

Due to budgetary issues, the gifted coordinator position was dropped and the person hired for that position filled a vacancy at one of the middle schools to teach ACE.

## **2011-2012**

FTEs: 9

A Gifted Program Review is commissioned with Dr. Tonya Moon and colleagues from the University of Virginia. The preliminary report was presented to the school board on Monday, January 23, 2012. Discussion of this report and follow up actions are ongoing.