



## **Update on System Reviews: Accelerated Progress Program (APP) Review**

**Highlights – December 3, 2007**

### **Background and Goals**

- At Seattle Public Schools, we are committed to creating success for every student. We know and believe that all students can achieve.
- We continue to review what is working and what needs to be improved. As part of that process, the district commissioned a series of external reviews. Several were initiated in spring 2007 by Chief Academic Officer, Carla Santorno. These include reviews of the Accelerated Progress Program (APP), Academic Safety Net programs, bilingual programs and special education programs. Superintendent Goodloe-Johnson initiated additional reviews.
- The Accelerated Progress Program (APP) review is complete. The charge to the review team was to compare the offerings of the APP program in relation to current state-of-the-art in gifted education as reflected by the “Standards for Gifted Programs of the National Association for Gifted Children” (NAGC). The review was conducted by three experts in the area of gifted education: Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan; Dr. Catherine M. Brighton; and Dr. Holly Hertberg Davis, all from the University of Virginia. The APP program serves the mostly highly capable of learners, within a continuum of services for highly capable students. Other programs include Spectrum and Advanced Learning Opportunities.
- The review team conducted stakeholder interviews with students, teachers and principals, central office staff and parents; observed classrooms; and studied an array of district documents.
- The review focused on seven areas, and provided commendations, concerns, and recommendations for each, based on national best practices. Areas include: program philosophy, administration and management, curriculum and instruction, program design, program evaluation, identification, professional development and socio-emotional guidance and counseling.
- While the review focused specifically on the APP program, the general findings are also considered relevant to the Spectrum and Advanced Learning Opportunity (ALO) programs.

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**APP Review Highlights**

- **Program Philosophy:** While SPS provides a continuum of services for gifted students, the philosophy and vision is somewhat out-dated; lacks racial and socio-economic diversity; and does not provide for single-subject giftedness. The recommendation is to convene a broadly representative group to develop a clear vision based on current best practice.
- **Program Administration and Management:** Parents feel informed about student progress and have avenues for providing advice and advocacy; but expressed a lack of clarity about policy and procedures. Consulting teachers have appropriate background and training in gifted education, and the program manager has initiated important changes. Recommendations include: develop a systematic approach to communication among stakeholders; select an expert full-time manager (done – Dr. Robert Vaughn joined Seattle Public Schools as Manager of Advanced Learning programs in July 2007); and focus on developing a broadly representative advisory group.
- **Curriculum and Instruction:** Students were observed at Lowell Elementary and at Washington Middle School working on complex concepts above grade level and parents perceive that students are appropriately challenged. However, there is no curricular framework guiding decision making; and challenge is inconsistent across classrooms, grade levels and schools. The recommendation is to develop an overall curricular vision and a high-level scope and sequence as well as resources to implement. The review team also recommends a delay in expansion of APP until these foundational pieces are in place.
- **Program Design:** While recent work has been done to ensure the APP curriculum is more aligned with the general education program, a long history of little or no staff development has led to staff under-prepared to deliver the most current, challenging curriculum to gifted students. Recommendations include: Provide APP teachers with substantial time together and the leadership and training needed to develop a curriculum framework, share learning activities, and communicate about student needs across grade levels.
- **Program Evaluation:** The recommendation is to create a long-term evaluation plan based on clearly articulated goals and objectives.
- **Identification:** High quality measures of aptitude are used to assess student readiness for services, and non-verbal methods are used to assess ESL students; but the process should be augmented to increase the racial and socio-economic diversity of the program. Recommended options include the use of an expanded “student profile,” a “talent development” strategy, and use of off-grade-level testing to more accurately assess achievement levels.
- **Professional Development:** There is no systematic plan for staff development, no criteria for hiring APP teachers, and no guidance for administrators on assisting teachers with curricular development. The recommendation is to create a comprehensive and continuous staff development plan for teachers and administrators and to develop criteria for hiring teachers based on NAGC standards.

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- **Socio-Emotional Guidance and Counseling:** Stakeholder groups interviewed were unanimous in their belief that students are supported in this area by their peer group. However, there are no specific systems in place among counselors to support socio-emotional needs of gifted students. In addition, evaluators heard comments that revealed racism in the program and a perception among students that there was no safe place to go with these issues. Recommendations include assigning all APP students to one counselor per school site and providing counselors with appropriate staff development; providing cultural sensitivity training for all educators involved with APP; and establishing a safe method for families and students to communicate concerns about the cultural climate.

**Next Steps and Timeline**

- The next step is to further analyze the findings in the report and to begin work on developing an updated program philosophy and vision. Dr. Robert Vaughan, Manager of Advanced Learning, will lead this work. Dr. Vaughan will establish an ad-hoc committee to advise during this process.
- A key point to note is that the findings of the accelerated progress program (APP) review, along with all other reviews, will be considered as the Superintendent leads development of a long-range strategic plan for Seattle Public Schools. All strategies and improvements will be aligned, and actions phased to result in successful outcomes for all students. The goal for development of the Strategic Plan is spring 2008.

**For more information**

The report prepared by the external review team will be available on the district's Website by 12:00 noon on Monday, December 3. It will be posted at <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/advlearning/index.dxml>, along with a copy of this highlights summary.

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