

November 11, 2015

TO: District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee (DBRAC)
Judy Brennan, Portland Public Schools Director of Enrollment and Transfer
Portland Public Schools Board of Education

FROM: The Talented and Gifted Advisory Council (TAGAC)
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TAGAC is an eight-person parent advisory committee tasked with making recommendations for improving Talented and Gifted education in Portland Public Schools. Part of its purview is ACCESS Academy, an alternative education program currently located at Rose City Park in Northeast Portland. This memo serves as background to DBRAC and the School Board in light of the district boundary review and provides TAGAC recommendations for next steps and considerations.

Background

ACCESS Academy serves a unique and vulnerable population. While many in the district think of it as the “TAG focus option school,” ACCESS is mandated to provide an alternative education for highly talented or gifted students whose needs are not being met in neighborhood schools. These students are often at risk of experiencing difficulties because of a substantial asynchrony between age and cognitive or academic development. They may be isolated in neighborhood schools and are at risk for depression in normal school settings.¹

Oregon law requires school districts to provide routine instruction to TAG students at their “rate and level” (OAR 581-022-1330(4)). ACCESS serves as a safety valve for students who cannot have their rate and level met in a traditional classroom via differentiation because they are often working more than one grade level above the norm in one or more subjects. The alternative program has been successful in meeting the needs of those who attend. In a 2012 survey done by Portland Public Schools, eighty-nine percent of ACCESS parents said their child received appropriate learning opportunities and challenges, compared to twenty percent of TAG families district wide.²

Entrance into ACCESS requires a 99th percentile score on a nationally-normed test in one or more of three areas: cognitive ability, reading achievement, or math achievement. Applications also require additional documentation that shows the student’s need for an alternative program—including social-emotional factors, at-risk behaviors, twice-exceptionality (highly gifted and supported by Special Education services or a 504 plan), and achievement in his or her current school setting. Families must submit recommendations from teachers, counselors, and principals.

¹ For a discussion of the emotional issues faced by gifted students, see the ACCESS proposal approved by the School Board when establishing ACCESS Academy: http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/tag/program/access_draft5.pdf. These issues are discussed in further detail in Maureen Neihart, Sally Reis, Nancy Robinson, and Sidney Moon’s “The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?” Prufrock Press, January 1, 2002.

² For a summary of the 2012 TAG survey, see http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/tag/TAG_Survey_Letter_2012.13.pdf. For complete data, go to <http://www.ppstag.org/Bh2393ndt/showthread.php?tid=30>.

ACCESS' current 2015-2016 enrollment is 351, serving a combined Grade 1/Grade 2 classroom and 2 classrooms each of grade 3 through 8. While ACCESS has grown sixty percent since moving to Rose City Park, the current wait list of 170 students shows that the need for alternative education for high-ability students is not being fully met.

Location history of ACCESS

- Original charter adopted in 2001 for a 1-12 program.
- Opened in 2002 and placed on the Sabin campus in Northeast Portland.
- ACCESS Academy (1-8) moved to Rose City Park in 2013 with a promise that this would be a home for at least 3 years. As a part of this move, ACCESS was allowed to expand by 2 classrooms a year for 3 years: an additional 3rd grade class captures students identified during universal 2nd grade TAG testing, and an additional 6th grade class captures students who may need extra support during the middle grades.
- In 2013-14, Beverly Cleary School overflow joined ACCESS at Rose City Park.

Current proposed scenarios impact ACCESS as follows:

- **Scenario 1:** ACCESS would stay at Rose City Park. If there are no other co-located programs, this could allow for growth.
- **Scenario 2:** ACCESS would be relocated to Kellogg Middle School in the South Tabor neighborhood as Rose City Park reopens as a neighborhood school. ACCESS @ Kellogg would be co-located with Creative Science School (current enrollment approximately 450). Given Kellogg has 37 classrooms, co-location signals a low-growth or no-growth enrollment pattern for ACCESS.
- **Other Options:** Judy Brennan, Director of Enrollment and Transfer, presented Tubman Middle School as another possible location for ACCESS under Scenario 2. (A Tubman placement would not be possible under Scenario 1 as Tubman would become a neighborhood middle school.) Tubman is a central location and, barring co-location of another program, could provide for additional growth.

TAGAC has the following concerns and recommendations³:

- **Growth:** TAGAC has long endorsed continued expansion of ACCESS (see attached Recommendation from 2014) due to its success in meeting the legal requirements and the unique needs of an at-risk population. As evidenced by the wait list of 170 students who have proven educational needs not being met by their neighborhood schools, there is sufficient need for this level of alternative education to justify continued growth. We feel growth would (a) better serve students (b) provide for a more equitable admissions process. Scenario 1 and 2 leave ACCESS' potential for growth unclear.

TAGAC recommends continued ACCESS growth to accept all qualified students and requests that DBRAC choose a location that will accommodate this growth.

- **Centralized location to minimize travel time:** ACCESS, as an alternative program, serves at-risk students. PPS is legally required to meet their instructional rate and level on a daily basis. This is akin to Special Education services for the TAG population. ACCESS students reside all over the district. TAGAC is particularly concerned that an increase in travel times to the school may undermine current efforts to increase enrollment of underrepresented students at ACCESS.

³ TAGAC voted (7 yes, 0 no, 1 member absent) to adopt these recommendations at the 11/10/2015 meeting.

A central location will help make ACCESS a desirable and feasible choice for highly capable students of color.

TAGAC urges DBRAC and the School Board to prioritize a central location for ACCESS to ensure equitable access to the school from the different quadrants of the city.

- **Procedural:** As of November 11, 2015, TAGAC has not been approached by DBRAC or any other Portland Public Schools representative for their opinion about siting the alternative ACCESS program in relation to the boundary review work.

TAGAC recommends a presentation of ACCESS considerations be provided to DBRAC.

ADDENDUM:

From TAGAC's 2014 Recommended Framework for Improved TAG Services in PPS⁴

Measure 5. Expand ACCESS Academy

Exceptionally talented or gifted students are often at risk of experiencing difficulties because of a substantial asynchrony between age and cognitive or academic development. They may be isolated in neighborhood schools and are at risk for depression in normal school settings. This measure advocates expanding ACCESS enough that all qualified K-8 PPS students should be granted admission to ACCESS Academy, if they choose to attend. This further supports the general goal of narrowing the range of achievement levels in classrooms, since students qualifying for ACCESS Academy would typically require a significant amount of differentiation to meet their rate and level of learning. It may also help improve ACCESS Academy's racial and socioeconomic equity profile by attracting students in families who might otherwise be discouraged and not bother to apply. Measures 1E and 2C also help to improve equity by automatically triggering an evaluation for qualification into ACCESS Academy without requiring parent advocacy.

A. Give the ACCESS Academy a permanent school location that allows it to expand to accommodate all students who qualify. Preferably, establish an additional west side ACCESS Academy, to minimize busing and avoid long bus rides for young students.

B. Review the ACCESS Academy application process to ensure socioeconomic and racial equity as well as transparency of the admissions criteria.

C. Research the impacts of a change in admission criteria such that the only qualification for admission is a 99th percentile TAG identification test score; engage TAGAC members, ACCESS staff and administration, parents of current and wait-listed ACCESS students, parents of PPS students potentially qualifying for ACCESS, and district administration.

D. Continue to test all PPS students for TAG status in 2nd grade, but allow 5th grade TAG students to request retesting to see if they qualify for ACCESS Academy.

E. Reclassify ACCESS Academy as an Alternative School (instead of an Alternative Program) so that it has equal standing for funding (e.g. from the Portland Arts Tax) and can retain Administrators by offering compensation comparable to Principals.

⁴ To see TAGAC's full set of recommendations for 2013-2014, go to http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/tag/TAGAC_2013-14_report_and_recommendations.pdf