



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of Teaching and Learning

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Date: March 6, 2008

To: Jeffrey Strange, TAG Advisory Council Member

From: Judy Elliott, Chief 

RE: Strategic Plan Responses

Thank you for taking the time to review the Portland Public Schools' (PPS) draft TAG Strategic Plan. We appreciate your comments, especially at this time when our Superintendent is challenging us to focus our efforts and chart our plans. Superintendent Carole Smith has named three major goals for the next 18 months: Making our reconfigured K-8s work, developing a district-wide high school strategy, and articulating a coherent strategy to accelerate achievement for all students. We are viewing each of those goals with the lens of race and equity, ensuring that our schools truly serve all students.

Our TAG Strategic Plan is a key contributor to meeting that goal of accelerating achievement. Keeping that larger context in mind, we offer our response to your Action items. Below please find the TAG Strategic Plan, followed by the TAG Advisory Committee (TAGAC) request, and the PPS response.

TAG Strategic Plan: Schools will identify grouping options.

TAGAC: Require implementation of grouping in all schools.

PPS staff first needs to engage in a conversation about grouping options and benefits. If the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) and/or the Board legislates a certain practice or position, it is likely that there will be strong pushback by PPS staff. We need the time to enter into the conversation with staff, show the benefits of different grouping options, and allow schools the flexibility to choose what works best for them and for the students they serve. To this end, the TAG staff is working monthly with building TAG coordinators in a "Training the Trainers" model. The expectation is that those TAG coordinators go into the buildings to train their staff. Some of the topics to date have been: grouping options, compacting, tiered lessons, and questioning strategies. In addition, the TAG staff has contributed articles in the OTL newsletter, *THE LINK*: "Curriculum Compacting" (January 2008) and "Grouping Options that Benefit Talented Students" (March 2008). The TAG staff will continue to write proactive articles for this newsletter, which goes out to all PPS staff. Another layer or tier to the TAG staff leadership, is its work in creating the *Certificate of Differentiation: Educating Highly Capable Students*. Last year, the TAG staff co-sponsored a week-long Survey of Gifted Education. The staff will co-sponsor this workshop again in August 2008.

TAG Strategic Plan: Encourage schools to create a curriculum map/syllabus that identifies core content, extensions, and supports.

TAGAC: Require that teachers use the extensions and supports appropriately with gifted students.

Within the past year, the district has adopted new curriculum materials in 13 subject areas. We need to help teachers work with those new materials (which in many cases do include extensions for excelling students) before requiring curriculum maps and syllabi to identify the content, extensions, and supports. The next step is to have TOSAs work with teachers to identify a pacing guide, assessments, and exit examinations. When this is in place, we can better identify the additional extensions and supports necessary to more completely complete the curriculum.

TAG Strategic Plan: The school district has a plan and process for Early Entry, Early Graduation, and Whole-Grade acceleration. The draft TAG Strategic Plan does not mandate, but encourages single-subject acceleration.

TAGAC: The TAGAC position is that the TAG Strategic Plan should specify the infrastructure – including advancement criteria and student plans, placement and achievement testing, and scheduling options – that need to be in place to support advancement criteria, placement and achievement testing, and scheduling options to support single-subject acceleration.

The TAGAC request is a bit confusing. There already is policy and process for Early Entry, Early Graduation and Whole Grade Acceleration. In terms of single subject acceleration, there are many schools now that support this opportunity for students. If the request is to legislate single-subject acceleration in board policy, this is a larger conversation that needs to be considered in tandem with the curriculum mapping process and the greater district context.

Additional TAGAC requests:

Retain TAG Plans

Retain TAG Plans and modify them to include measurable learning outcomes and specify the accelerated learning pathways.

Again, the core curriculum mapping process needs to be completed before putting into place the measurable outcomes and methods for acceleration. TAG Plans are not a requirement under the state TAG mandate. The ideal is to have a curriculum map with measurable outcomes and a clear pathway for all students to demonstrate mastery through the curriculum.

Ensure that TAG Plans are written earlier in the year, one-third or more of the school year has passed before a plan is written.

Presently, students are assessed in September. At the same time, parents and students are asked to complete a survey to allow the teacher to tailor the Gifted Student Plan to the individual student. Draft plans are sent home no later than October or early November. Parents are then invited to comment on the plan, and finalize the plan at parent conferences. It should also be noted that the previous year's plan is in place until the new plan is written, so at no time is the student without a TAG Plan. TAG parent meetings are also held in schools in the fall with

parents invited to meet the building TAG coordinator and the district TAG staff who works with that school. At this meeting, the school describes what planning is taking place for the year, and parents ask questions and are invited to comment. The district TAG staff also has parent meetings during the year at the PPS District Office, and parents are invited to call or email the district TAG staff for assistance in working with teachers.

In closing, we do take your comments and concerns to heart, and have reflected a great deal on your feedback. The hard questions you ask, and your push for change, help us to become that school district for TAG students. Thank you for your commitment to continuing to make Portland schools a viable and rich opportunity for all our children.

cc: Carole Smith, Superintendent
Amy Welch, TAG Program Administrator