



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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February 28, 2008

Carole Smith, Superintendent
Portland Public Schools
501 North Dixon Street
Portland, OR, 97227-1807

Dear Superintendent Smith:

Re: Additional Recommendations Resulting from Investigation of PPS TAG Program

By now you should have received the final report of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) investigation of the Portland Public Schools' Talented and Gifted Education program. The report reflects the findings and observations of the investigators at the time of the investigation. The report included Final Orders and a summary document of investigation survey data.

In addition to the findings and corrective action included in the Final Orders document, the State Superintendent makes the recommendations below for the district's consideration. **These recommendations are advisory and are not based on findings of noncompliance with legal requirements.**

1. The District should examine its identification process to assess whether there are efficiencies that might be implemented to accelerate the identification process and delivery of TAG services. Although the administrative rules do not prescribe a time to complete the identification process, many parents have expressed great concern to ODE staff about the time it takes the district to complete the identification process
2. In schools with high populations of ethnic minorities or students who are culturally different or economically disadvantaged, the District should develop strategies to ensure that teachers will refer potentially eligible TAG students for identification. The strategy should (i) require each school to make a record of the number of and source of referrals and (ii) include a system to monitor whether teachers and other staff are considering their students for referral and are making an adequate number of referrals.

3. The district should create clear descriptions of district-level TAG program staff positions identifying staff roles and duties for carrying out the larger purpose of the PPS TAG program. Clarification should be made as to which activities are appropriate for building staff and which are appropriate for district-level staff.
4. The district should continue the practice of using the cadre of retired teachers to conduct identification testing so that the Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) can provide professional development and instructional assistance to administrators and teachers. District TAG TOSAs spend a bulk of their time conducting TAG identification testing. This leaves little time for them to use their considerable skill and expertise working in buildings with teachers and students.
5. The district should help teachers overtly communicate the ways that instruction is being appropriately differentiated for TAG students in the regular classroom. Parents and students should be aware of the differences between what the TAG student is asked to do and what other students are assigned.
6. The district should include district-level content specialists (e.g. English/Language Arts, mathematics, social studies, and science) in the creation and implementation of curriculum appropriate for TAG students. Under current district structure, TAG TOSAs are isolated from other district-level instructional staff. Stronger connections to content professional development would provide additional opportunities to assist teachers in providing appropriate rate and level instruction in all subjects.
7. The district should use teachers knowledgeable about TAG curriculum development and instructional strategies to "coach" others in their buildings, provide assistance with differentiation, suggest enriching activities, and demonstrate classroom management techniques that allow students to work at different rates and levels of learning. Currently, there appears to be little effort to recognize and utilize teacher expertise. District staff distributes handouts to teachers about differentiating instruction, but it is not accompanied by regular and sustained professional development.

If you have questions or concerns about these recommendations, please contact:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Salam A. Noor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending to the left.

Salam A. Noor, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent
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and Innovation
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cc: Timothy L. Murphy
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