

**School Board Meeting:**

April 14, 2014

**Subject:**

High Potential Services Report

**Presenter:**

Ed Cox and Pam Miller

**SUGGESTED SCHOOL BOARD ACTION:**

Report only.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Quest is a district program that has been in place since the 2010-2011 school year. The focus of Quest is to serve the needs of students who have been identified as highly gifted. Traditionally, we have strived to identify students in the top 2-3% of the peers both in terms of ability and achievement. The purpose of this identification is to place students in a classroom of their academic peers. This approach is consistent with years of research about what is best practice in the area of gifted education. By placing students in a setting of their academic peers, teachers are able to more effectively meet their academic needs, along with the social and emotional needs that come with being highly gifted. Many of these students experience traits of asynchronous development that can be challenging for students and teachers to cope with in the traditional classroom.

In the past, BHM Schools have worked to serve the needs of gifted students by a variety of practices; a pullout model with identified students going to an enrichment teacher was the primary vehicle for serving students. Unfortunately, these practices can be very costly and in some instances have been shown to be less effective than the school-within-a-school model that Quest employs. During budget reductions, the gifted education program was reduced down to the point where there was less than 1.0 FTE dedicated to serving gifted students. As a result, a new model was created that focuses on the most challenging student to serve in the regular classroom. These students were convened from around the district so they could be partnered with a highly trained teacher in a staffing ratio similar to district averages. The result has been a school-within-a-school model that serves approximately 180 students from BHM Schools and 20 out-of-district students whose added revenue helps offset the cost of the High Potential Services coordinator assigned to lead the Quest program and any additional staff needed for this specialized program.

**Identification:**

Students identified for Quest are done so using multiple measures that rely on nationally normalized referenced measures of student achievement (Performance Series) and measures of ability (Cognitive Abilities Test). Also, teachers and parents are able to recommend students for placement, which increases the overall reliability of our identification system. Students are placed in a customized setting that depends on student need and the number of students we have identified at each grade level.

**Program Demographics:**

Currently, we have three classroom sections at PES in grade 2-5. They are organized in a grade 2-3 combination, a grade 3-4 combination, and a grade 4-5 combination. At BCMS, students participate in math, science, social studies, and English in their grade level cohorts. Some students are placed in just math and science or just social studies and English depending on their unique passions and abilities. Students generally participate in either 2 out of 6 classes or 4 out of 6 classes in the Quest cohort. During the 2013-14 school year our first group of Quest students started at the BHS. To support this transition the 8th grade Quest English teacher looped with these students to 9th grade as their Quest English 9 teacher.

There are about 200 students that are placed in Quest, with roughly 75 students at PES and the remainder involved at BCMS and BHS. Of those students, we have identified over 20 students from outside the district over the course of the program. Many of these students were in-district students that attended other schools and now are in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools system. Others open-enroll from out of the district and we have instances of families moving their entire family into the district after their child has been placed.

**Program Outcomes:**

The challenge with assessing the progress of gifted students is that prior to instruction, many of these students already know the content or they can gain the skill with very little instruction or practice. This means that in a traditional setting, our most able learners often make the smallest amount of growth. Many times it is assumed that it is hard for these students to grow because they are so high, when in reality these students have not been given access to a rigorous curriculum that is at their level or is not instructed in a way that keeps the needs of gifted learners in mind. Students in Quest are continuously pre-tested to ensure that their instruction is challenging and teachers have engaged in extensive

professional development to learn and utilize instructional strategies that are tailored to gifted learners.

As a result of this instruction, Quest students have shown growth at or above district averages throughout the program. For example, in 2012-13, Quest students at BCMS averaged an MMR growth score of 0.368 in Math and 0.441 in Reading, whereas all BHM students average about 0.000 for MMR growth, which indicates that these students were almost identical to the state's average growth in reading and math. Additionally, elementary Quest students met their growth targets in MAP at a rate of 76% in math and 71% in reading, compared to the district total of 71% and 63% in math and reading, respectively.

In addition to student achievement data, we also review parent feedback. A parent survey was done this spring. Parents were asked to give responses and comments in regard to the appropriateness and challenge of the classroom environment, the level of communication, and how well we are supporting their child's developmental needs. The results of the survey were positive, but only about 30% of parents responded. Of those that responded, over 75% said they were satisfied or highly satisfied with Quest. Critical feedback usually came in the form of needing more communication for both students and parents, and needing to do a better job making sure the work is challenging, but developmentally appropriate. There are plans to do a student survey at BCMS yet this spring to get feedback from students as well.

### **Challenges:**

Like any program, Quest has some specific challenges that we have been working to overcome. The biggest change occurred from last school year to this year when the elementary portion of Quest was moved from Tatanka to Parkside due to space constraints. This transition has gone amazingly well for both students and teachers. Quest has grown into a valuable member of the PES community, we have enjoyed the more downtown location, and look to continue to be a partner with the PES and DES buildings.

Building transitions continue to be an area of challenge. We are currently looking at reviewing student placements as they move from 5th grade to 6th grade. We are collaborating with parents to see if any adjustments need to be made before the student settles in at BCMS. This process has been well received and will benefit students. The transition to BHS has been smooth, with math being the biggest concern. In response to this challenge, BHS is piloting a compacted Algebra 2 course for 9th grade

Quest students that can be taken in conjunction with Trigonometry. This combination will hopefully be more suited to students' learning needs and give them an opportunity to explore more math, without adding class time. The last transition for Quest is students leaving 9th grade and beginning to take advantage of the awesome CIS and AP course offerings. This challenge is ongoing because students are too young in some instances to be eligible for certain courses. We are working with the partnering colleges to make this work better for our students when possible. We are also working to improve communication with families about the overall scheduling process and what being a part of Quest does and does not mean for students.

One of the most difficult aspects of any gifted and talented program is the nature of student identification. For Quest, we follow what is dictated by best practice in terms of using multiple measures. One area that we are lacking is the use of a broad screener. At this point, an adult (teacher or parent) needs to step forward and indicate a student may have high ability. Some students will be noticed if they demonstrate continued success of standardized measures of achievement, like the Performance Series test. Unfortunately, this means we may be more likely to miss students from culturally or economically diverse settings, student who do not "play" school well, or just general differences in teacher opinion about what it means to be gifted. Also, we may be missing students who are currently underachieving in their performance, but have great academic talent. One possible solution to this would be to utilize the CogAT as a broad screener for all students at one or more grade levels. This is standard practice in many districts with similar programming and should be considered at this time. The proper identification of students is a cornerstone of a fair and equitable gifted and talented program.