

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PRINCIPALS, PALM BEACH COUNTY SCHOOLS

August 30, 2009

Dear Principals:

Recently there have been questions and concerns regarding the gifted program in Palm Beach County. As it is with all matters regarding student achievement, it is imperative that a unified message is communicated and a consistent level of instruction is provided. This e-mail serves to clarify some important issues.

1. Each gifted student should be provided with differentiating instruction that matches his or her abilities and interests. The Florida Department of Education identified strategies for differentiating instruction for gifted students and state they generally fall into two categories: enrichment and acceleration.

- Enrichment refers to the presentation of curriculum content with more depth, breadth, complexity, or abstractness than the general curriculum.

- Acceleration refers to the practice of presenting curriculum content earlier or at a faster pace.

2. Methods of enrichment include tiered lessons, anchor activities, problem-based learning, service learning, and independent study. Enrichment instruction of grade-level standards is key to meeting the needs of gifted students. This should be the first method used by teachers to meet the individual needs of each gifted student.

3. The primary method of acceleration is Curriculum Compacting, which involves assessing what the student have already mastered and then only teaching the parts of the curriculum that the student has not fully mastered. To that end, it is of great importance that teachers assess each gifted student's ability to ensure mastery of the grade-level standards. The choice of how to compact the curriculum for a particular student must be based on the individual needs of the student.

- Gifted students do not all learn at the same rate. The DOE uses "individualized plan and instruction" to explain acceleration. If ALL students are using the 3rd grade text in grade 2, and receiving the same instruction, then this would not be the proper implementation of acceleration.

- In case studies of successfully accelerated students, subject matter was carefully planned and monitored, and it addressed the student's social and emotional maturity as well as academic achievement. (Gross, 1992.

4. Teachers of gifted students utilize the school district's grade-level curriculum frameworks when assessing whether a student has mastered a standard. Once it is determined that a standard has been mastered, there is no requirement to re-teach the skill. Rather, teachers should proceed with enrichment instruction of grade-level standards, and if necessary, provide the appropriate accelerated curriculum. The choice of how to best meet the needs of each student should be based on the individual needs of that student. Enrichment and acceleration should be based on individual needs of the student, and not structured or delivered as a whole group.

The textbook is only one resource that should be utilized to deliver instruction. Completing a textbook should not be the indicator that a student has mastered a standard/benchmark. Appropriate assessments should be administered and evaluated to determine mastery.

5. In all cases, the student's Educational Plan governs the degree to which a student is provided with enrichment and/or acceleration.

6. Please direct any questions you may have regarding the integration of the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards into your gifted classrooms to Laura Pincus, Director of Exceptional Student Education.