

Neshaminy School District 10/13/15 AE Task-Force meeting Summary and Key Insights

The AE task force met as a group on the afternoon of October 13, 2015 to work in six action planning teams. This was our first session, and the time was spent reviewing the strengths and recommendations for the six focus areas. The groups summarized key insights and will come together again on November 16, 2015 to continue identifying the action consideration areas that will eventually become part of the action/implementation plan.

Agenda Items for Meeting

- Introductions and objective(s)
- Within each of the six action planning teams: Review PQR strengths and recommendations relevant for your team (larger groups break into subgroups of 3 or 4 people)
- Prioritize the recommendations—reach team consensus on the prioritization of the recommended improvement or action consideration areas (within your subgroup)
- Brainstorm and list key insights (topics to act upon first within your focus area) on poster board paper with post-it notes (entire team working together)
- Each group shares key points/insights and rationale with entire Task Force

Key Insights:

Area 1: Goals, Objectives, Philosophy & Vision

Gifted 24/7

Participation in acceleration and enrichment in the classroom

Socialization

Clear cut definition

Challenges individuals

Strength based

Unique needs

Not relying on classification--meeting the specific needs (math versus reading versus the arts etc.) of the gifted learner; Not grouping them all together in one learning band because they are "AE" but more like with an IEP under chapter 14 that is truly individualized.

Vision statement with real meaning and substance

This is the **current** statement on our website that will be updated to incorporate the key insights.

Neshaminy School District recognizes the unique abilities of intellectually gifted students and strives to meet their individual needs. Based on multiple criteria, students with outstanding intellectual ability and creativity and the need for a specialized educational experience are identified to participate in the AE program. AE classes provide opportunities to promote the growth of skills and knowledge necessary for gifted students to achieve their potential and to fulfill their future roles in our ever-changing global society.

To provide for the interests, abilities, and needs of our gifted students, the AE program offers enhancements of curriculum content, instructional methods, student assignments, and learning environments essential to differentiated instruction. The AE teachers are committed to their gifted students, but the responsibility for educating gifted students is shared by all the students' teachers, the students' parents and the students themselves.

Area 2: Screening, Identification & Placement

- Improve/streamline screening, ID, & placement for gifted students.
- Ensure compliance with Chapter 16 regulations.
- Identify valid & reliable measures.
- Identify best/valid/reliable multiple criteria.
- Document appropriate parental consents.
- Identify best means to obtain home/school perspectives.
- Provide professional development on process.
- Ensure identification/assessment process is user friendly for placement.
- Improve messaging to all stakeholders.

Additional Notes:

- We have achievement tests (K-2): DIBELS, CPAA, MAP, CDT 3-5: Math & Reading (Screening tools).
- Take top 2% of CDT scores.

Area 3: Communication

We prioritized some of the items found in the report with the goal of increasing communication between the District and parents, among parents within their schools, and among staff to ensure program continuity between different grade levels.

- Enhance AE presence on the District web site through the following means:
 - Update mission statements, program information
 - Enhance teacher/media specialist web pages
 - Build a bridge between District information and teacher/school AE information using consistent cross-links on teacher, school and District AE pages
- Initial communications with parents
 - Identify means of communications (email, web pages, in-person conferences, etc.)
 - Encourage active dialogue
- Sustained communication with parents
 - Monthly/quarterly/marketing period newsletter, maybe through report cards
 - Web updates by teacher/blog
 - Regular AE page updates with email blasts sent to identify significant changes
 - Identify and publish resources for parents (trips, apps, activities, reading)
- Meetings for teachers/PD
 - Regular meetings
 - Summer In-service for elementary to middle school teachers/media specialists
- Progress on goals/outcomes
 - Re-write GIEPS for end of year?

Area 4: Resources & Technology

General Notes:

- The team discussed the recommendations from the AE Report
- Consensus from the team was that the needs, as presented in the original AE report, were in reverse order of priority.

Below, the needs are listed in this team's suggested priority order. Our rationale for the order below is that technology and strategies are currently in-place and employed. Focus is needed to make the most effective use of what we have, and then we need to further develop skills for new technology as it becomes relevant. Each need is co-dependent on the other two.

1. **To provide ongoing support in the effective use of Instructional Technology** (Originally Need #3)
 - Ensure adequate and equitable access to current resources
 - Establish an Instructional Technology Specialist (ITS) position at the elementary and middle level to:
 - Provide training and ongoing support for current and new technology
 - Preview and recommend webinar content related to use of instructional technology
 - Investigate new instructional technologies
 - Serve as a liaison between classroom teachers and the IT department
 - Pair the ITS with designated IT staff member(s) who have specific responsibilities for instructional technology including planning future impact upon infrastructure and providing tech support.

2. **To effectively use technology to enhance differentiation and higher levels of learning for gifted students** (Originally Need #2)
 - Develop a technology objective or overarching philosophy regarding the purpose of technology in the instructional process to help clarify choices related to the types of technology to be used and what venues will not be pursued.
 - Provide adequate and equitable flexibility in resources
 - Hand-held technology (e.g. tablets, BYOD—Bring Your Own Device)
 - Laptop/Desktop computing
 - Smart Boards or similar technology

3. **To provide Regular Education teachers with tools and strategies for differentiating instruction in order to meet individual student needs** (Originally Need #1)
 - The team's consensus was that this recommendation was dependent upon the successful structuring of ongoing support for integrating technology into lesson design.

Area 5: Staff Development

- Develop ongoing PD for Chapter 16 and Chapter 4 for AE teachers, general education teachers, principals, administrators and support staff.
- Identification of trainer for general education teachers related to learning styles, differentiation, and implementation of GIEP in general education classrooms.
- Establish chapter 16 knowledgeable trainer to train AE and general education teachers regarding the identification and characteristic of gifted learners.
- AE teachers are encouraged to extend their skills by attending conferences and workshops about differentiated instruction and best practices.
- Establish a mentor program for new AE teachers.
- Examine PD district-wide for new and experienced teachers about needs of the gifted students.

- Provide PD district wide for AE teachers to collaborate and share lesson plan ideas.

Area 6: Curriculum/Integration

As a group we determined the following as strengths:

- Technology resources are available to support curriculum
- Students are enthusiastic
- Students enjoy:
 - Open-ended discussions/questions
 - Different projects than in general education
 - Collaborating with like peers
- Students take pride in work
- Parents are actively engaged in process

As a group we discussed various recommendations:

- Academic Enrichment (AE) Teachers need planning time and professional development (PD) to meet AE Goals
- General Education (GE) teachers need more time to meet with AE teachers to work on achieving AE goals, more planning time and PD on differentiation (possibly could occur in designated PD time or in professional learning communities)
- Work on improving academic rigor and performance in AE and GE classrooms
- AE and GE need to provide an appropriate amount of structure to students as necessary (differentiate)

Insights:

- Not enough enrichment activities in GE classrooms
- Not enough differentiation within AE and GE classrooms (emphasis more on GE)
- GE classrooms mostly “make-work” consisting of low-level worksheets and packets
- GIEPs do not reflect actual strengths of students