

October 23, 2007

Stephanie Karl, President
Upper Saddle River Board of Education
395 West Saddle River Road
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

Dear Mrs. Karl,

On behalf of the parents that attended last week's Board meeting in support of programming for gifted and talented students, I want to thank you and the entire Board of Education for your time and consideration.

We were pleased that the Board acknowledged that the Upper Saddle River School District's current policy on gifted and talented programming (Policy No. 2464), does not comply with the requirements of N.J.C.A. 6A:8 and that the Board intends to address this noncompliance during the 2007 -2008 school year, with the goal of having a draft of the revised policy by June 2008.

We also want to inform the Board that we have decided to re-form a parent advocacy group to address the needs of gifted and talented students in the Upper Saddle River School District. Parents Advocating Gifted Education — PAGE — had worked several years ago with this goal, and we believe that it is again the best vehicle for parents to effectively and efficiently communicate our concerns to the Board. I am pleased to be the contact person for PAGE should you or any other Board member wish to contact us.

There remain several areas that we wanted to address with the Board that we felt would be best raised via letter. The following points address the actions we believe the Board of Education can and should undertake in the immediate future as they work to bring our district into compliance with state law:

The Board should obtain, in writing, from Dr. Snider the current practices and programming in our District that she asserts fulfill the requirements of N.J.C.A. 6A:8-3.1(a). At last Monday's meeting, Dr. Snider stated repeatedly that the current identification methodology and programs in our school district meet the statutory requirements. We disagree. Much time was spent at the meeting as both Board members and parents struggled to obtain a firm grasp as to the current programs and identification methodology. As it was obvious that Dr. Snider had prepared a statement to respond to my address to the Board, preparing a document based on that statement should be neither cumbersome nor time consuming. Without this current information available in a concrete form, efforts to develop compliance with statutory requirements will be severely impeded.

We request that the Board immediately instruct the enrichment coordinators in each of the schools to contact the parents in their schools whose children have been identified as eligible for enrichment. We ask that such notification include the basis for the identification and the educational opportunities that the child will be offered.

We request that the Board invite the Gifted Child Society to present at a Board meeting or other venue. The Gifted Child Society offers free training and education programs that would be beneficial in educating members of our school district about the special needs of gifted and talented students and the difference between an enrichment program and a gifted and talented program. These education programs are available to and would be applicable for the Board of Education, Guidance Counselors, Administrators and Teachers. The dialogue at last week's Board meeting evidenced a clear lack of understanding of gifted students and their special needs. I enclose some reading for you with regard to same.

We ask that the Board seek and obtain the methodology utilized with the identification criteria for gifted and talented students by Allendale, Ho-Ho-Kus and Saddle River, the other members of the quad-district. While we understand that Dr. Snider has stated that we use the same criteria, it is our understanding that the criteria are applied using a different methodology that varies within the quad-district.

We ask that the curriculum subcommittee of the Board examine the issue of appropriate differentiated education in the classroom. Although differentiation is one way in which some of the needs of academically gifted students may be addressed if done correctly, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards recommend the use of clustering, curriculum compacting, adapting instructional learning, acceleration, and enrichment that encompasses higher order thinking skills. The NAGC Standards that the Board must consider in adopting its policy regarded gifted and talented education address these curriculum adaptations, and it is the responsibility of the Board to determine which will be implemented in our District.

We request that the Board adopt a policy setting forth the criteria for gifted identification in such a manner that all parents may understand which children are eligible for a gifted and talented program. We request that the Board accept independent testing results provided by parents that indicate giftedness for the purposes of screening and identification of academically gifted children by the District.

PAGE would be pleased to offer any support that we can to help the Board to address any or all the above-cited items. For ease of addressing these issues, attached please find PAGE Points, an outline of actions we believe the Board must take before drafting a new policy regarding gifted and talented education.

We understand that the task we ask of the Board is significant, but it is an *important one that warrants* much time and attention. We hope to continue an open dialogue with the Board as it addresses the issue of gifted and talented education in our District. I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miriam R. Bakal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Miriam R. Bakal

cc w/ enclosures:

Mr. Peter Koski
Mrs. Celia Galimi
Mr. Dante Ferrarie
Dr. Jill Stoller
Mrs. Angela Sacco Torres
Mr. Robert Wei

PAGE Points

1. (a) Invite the Gifted Child Society to meet with the Board regarding gifted children, their special needs and what we can do as a district to comply with the letter and spirit of N.J.C.A. 6A:8-3.1(a).
 - Education for Board members, administrators, teachers, guidance counselors and parents is provided free of charge by the Gifted Child Society.
 - Such education is a prerequisite to meaningful dialogue between the Board and parents of gifted students (see additional informative material, attached).(b) Arrange for, and strongly encourage, teachers to participate in the educational opportunities offered by the Gifted Child Society, as teachers are viewed as primarily responsible for identifying students as gifted/eligible for enrichment.
(c) Arrange for parent/community education by the Gifted Child Society.
2. Obtain from Dr. Snider, in writing, the current program and specific practices in our district with regard to gifted education, addressing point by point, how they meet current legal requirements.
 - Dr. Snider need only to expand upon her prepared statement of October 15, 2007 in answer to my address to the Board.
 - Parents and Board members need concrete (documented) information to gain a firm grasp on the issues and to assess compliance with N.J.C.A. 6A:8-3.1(a).
3. Together with the other “quad district” schools:
 - (a) Review and revise the criteria used to identify gifted children based on recommendations from the Gifted Child Society and other qualified school personnel (i.e., those with formal training in gifted education).
 - (b) Identify, review and consider adopting:
 - (i) Different methodologies used by other quad district schools together with our quad-district identification criteria; and
 - (ii) Any additional gifted program modalities used by the other quad district schools to service gifted students.
4. (a) Document, and make available to parents, the criteria for identification of students as gifted/eligible for enrichment; and

(b) Clarify in writing whether identification of students for enrichment is congruent with identification of students for giftedness and why or why not.

5. Immediately instruct enrichment coordinators and teachers that independent test results provided by parents indicating giftedness (i.e., I.Q. score above 130, Terra Nova cumulative score of 97th percentile or above) should be prima facie evidence of eligibility for enrichment/gifted programming (no further identification criteria need be identified).
6. Immediately instruct each enrichment coordinator to notify those parents whose children have been identified as eligible for enrichment.
 - Include the basis for the identification.
 - Describe educational opportunities (type, frequency and duration) to be offered.
7. Instruct the Curriculum Committee of the Board of Education to examine the issue of appropriate differentiation for the gifted within the classroom, considering the New Jersey Core Curriculum Frameworks and the National Association for Gifted Children's standards for programming, as required by N.J.C.A. 6A:8-3, including but not limited to:
 - Clustering;
 - Curriculum compacting;
 - Adapting instructional learning;
 - Acceleration (by subject as well as by grade); and
 - Enrichment encompassing higher order thinking skills.
8. Commit to a policy of "transparency," keeping parents informed of our current and developing policy, practices and programming, as an individual district and as compared with the other quad district schools.