Talent Development Services Program (TDSP)  
“Discover, Nurture, & Celebrate Talent”

An In-Depth Look

**Continuum of Services**

The National Center for Research on Gifted Education believes that a continuum of services is best practice to meet the needs of high ability students. The Talent Development Services Program (TDSP) is organized in a manner that aligns with this belief while communicating a commitment to inclusiveness. The program services can be classified into three broad components: **Strength/Talent Exploration and Development**, **Acceleration**, and **Individual Student Planning**. Because of the interrelationship of the services, these components are depicted as concentric circles in our model.

Although there is no strict, rigid percentage that limits any of the service components, the largest number of students is found in the first component, Strength/Talent Exploration and Development. All identifications are considered fluid and not as a fixed, permanent placement. Individual learner progress is continually assessed and evaluated to maintain the priority on “learners as individuals”. The overarching goal of the TDSP is to match learners with specific service options based on their individual profiles.

Because students are expected to develop continuously over their time in school, District 102 reviews individual student profiles through screening instruments and collaboration among staff. In addition to being data-driven, the TDSP is committed to being as flexible and inclusive as possible.

**Strength/Talent Exploration and Development Service:**

**Strength/Talent Exploration and Development** is defined as affording experiences and content to allow students to investigate, realize, and develop their areas of strength/talent. This service component infers all students have strengths/talents that should be fostered and developed, and student choice is crucial. The Strength/Talent service also views the concept of "classroom" in a broad sense. We believe "classrooms" exist outside the school day. Experiences
before or after school and those found outside of District 102 would align with this service. These can be found within our local community, but sometimes they are found in more distant locations. This service encompasses any opportunity that allows our students to explore and develop strengths and/or talents. It is very important to emphasize that this service is intended to be made available to all of our students.

As part of this service, intentional implementation of curricular modifications by school staff extend and broaden the core by increasing its depth or breadth. The content (what is learned), the process (how it is learned), and/or the product (demonstration of learning) are typically altered in this service. Learners are typically identified for the classroom-based differentiation service through curriculum-based preassessments, formative assessment, and classroom performance. Regular formal and informal assessment is a key aspect in helping to identify strengths and talents as well as note growth in their development. Because high ability students receive limited information from grade level testing, D102 participates in the Academic Talent Search. The data received from above-level testing supply these students and their families a more accurate academic profile.

Depending on student need, curricular modifications might be short-term (lasting 1-3 days) or long-term (lasting the duration of a unit of study.) The former targets critical or creative thinking and are usually a component of the district’s adopted curriculum resources. The latter compacts the core curriculum and utilizes supplemental instructional materials. Although classroom teachers typically facilitate the exploration and development of strengths/talents in a core classroom, collaboration with grade level teams and school staff occurs. The TDSP staff along with Instructional Coaches will serve as key resources for the school district to support the Strength/Talent Exploration and Development service.

**Acceleration Service:**

The Acceleration Service is defined as the delivery on a daily basis of a curricular modification that is intensive in nature and subject-based. An above-level, rigorous alternative curriculum (in the areas of English language arts, French, mathematics, and Spanish) is primarily used. A Talent Development Program Services teacher implements this service in the elementary grades (K-6); and the World Language Department at Park Junior High provides instruction in French or Spanish. When compared to the core curriculum, the acceleration service significantly increases the curricular pacing and its complexity. Learners are identified for this service through multiple sources that includes standardized test scores, classroom performance, and teacher ratings.
The Accelerated Service is intended to replace the core curriculum for an entire academic year. Although there is an emphasis on higher level thinking skills, the importance and maintenance of a strong foundation of basic skills and understanding is addressed. This service is usually delivered to formally identified students in a self-contained setting.

**Individual Student Planning Service:**

**Individual Student Planning Service** is defined as any intervention that is deemed necessary based on an individual student’s profile. A comprehensive review of relevant performance data is used to help determine an appropriate plan. Because these learners’ needs are often times asynchronous compared to their grade level peers, a more individualized approach that extends beyond the acceleration service (or parallel to it) offered at a particular grade level could be deemed necessary. Examples of possible options include: early entrance to school, grade skipping, mentorships, distance/on-line learning, an independent research project, or accommodations based on medical and/or special education needs. The setting and facilitator of the individualized plan will be determined through its specific focus and goal(s). Learners are typically identified for this service through standardized test scores, classroom performance, teacher ratings, and student/family input.

Individual student planning typically is embedded in some form of acceleration. However, this service is committed to do all it can to address and meet any unique student need.

**Framework**

**Our Foundation:**

The aim of the Talent Development Services Program (TDSP) is to “**Discover, Nurture, & Celebrate Talent**” among the District 102 student population. Its foundation is rooted in core grade level understandings and skills, research-based defensibility, and a set of established district tenets.
All standards (including the Common Core State Standards) serve as benchmarks for what all students should know. By including them in the foundation, the TDSP intends to use them as a place of departure as to not to limit curriculum for high ability students.

The field of gifted education has a solid research base to tap, especially related to the benefits of acceleration. Decisions based on research are much more apt to result in positive outcomes for student learning and achievement.

District 102 has drafted five tenets that detail the belief system related to supporting student gifts, talents, and interests, including our most capable students. This set of beliefs demonstrates that we recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to education is not effective.

In summation, the foundation is intended to communicate alignment with grade level curriculum, and the belief in an engaging school experience for all.

Our Cognitive Supports:

Because of the importance of developing as a thinker through formal schooling, the two broad categories of creative thinking and critical thinking serve as necessary cognitive supports of all services offered through the TDSP. The development of an individual’s aptitude to think is the main purpose of formal education. This goal is cited in the District 102 mission of “actively engaging the children to develop creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.” Along with reasoning skills, these are particularly important to build within the minds of our most capable students for the good of society.

While it is our desire to provide all students with a skill set to be successful in life; historically, it has been our country’s most capable students who have been looked toward to solve our most challenging problems or change the world. Without the “weight-bearing” pillars of creative thinking and critical thinking, any TDSP efforts to discover, nurture, and celebrate talent would be for naught.

Our Critical Features:

The Talent Development Services Program (TDSP) recognizes all the aspects of students’ lives that influence their performance at school. Because each student is unique with individual experiences, these features are important and
must be considered. In the TDSP, sense of community, contextual factors, emotional adjustment, engagement, enrichment, and social competence are identified as critical features that support and enhance students in their school “journey”. These six features are perceived as serving as an interwoven backdrop that reinforces the three service areas provided through the Talent Development Services Program.

- **Sense of community** refers to the feeling that each person belongs, matters to one another and to the group, and will have his/her needs met. The concept of community is viewed in broad, inclusive terms to encompass the classroom, school, and the local, outside community.

- **Contextual factors** is a multi-faceted feature that envelope a myriad of environmental and student factors are enveloped in the feature. Each student comes to school with a profile that is embedded in a variety of traits, values, beliefs, and experiences. These result in differences and similarities among us worthy of celebration. Contextual features result in an interesting fabric within our school community.

- **Engagement** is vital for success at school. It is defined as the level of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion students feel and display toward curriculum and instruction. Research has repeatedly found the strong correlation between student engagement and his/her achievement. Knowing this, the school experience must offer a variety of learning experiences that motivate and stretch students. Engagement is a key criterion when judging the value of said learning experiences.

- **Enrichment** by definition aims to “improve and enhance”. In the school context, enrichment must be intentional and should be afforded to all students. D102 is considered a high performing school district, so our curriculum should be modified to extend beyond the grade level state standards. Enrichment is best utilized by differentiating content, process, or product to accommodate for variations in readiness and/or interest. The goal of enrichment is to “cognitively push” students as they acquire new, in-depth learning.

- **Social competence** and **emotional adjustment** of its students has been a longtime priority within D102. Social competence and emotional adjustment are complex, multi-dimensional constructs. Although they are addressed together in this document, they have separate important qualities. The former refers to interaction with other people and is a broad term that describes social effectiveness. Social competence includes several factors including social skills, social awareness, and self-confidence.
Emotional adjustment is integral to social competence, but it is very important as its own entity. It typically refers to positive mental health and our ability to self-regulate. It is defined as an adaptive nature that manages feelings to preserve emotional balance. Although these serve as key underpinnings of the TDSP, research has found students’ social competence and emotional adjustment grow as a result of being challenged in school. For high ability students, this usually is best accomplished through some form of acceleration.

**Final Thoughts**

District 102 defines high ability students as, “those learners who demonstrate the aptitude (or possess the potential) for exceptional mastery of skills and knowledge in any field when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.” We also believe that high ability is present in learners from all cultural groups and across all economic strata. In addition to recognizing this population of students, D102 offers a talent development program that offers learning experiences for them beyond the core grade level curriculum. The Talent Development Services Program (TDSP) is research-based and provides a continuum of services for our students.

The three service components of the TDSP align with the district’s mission to “foster a passion for learning in all students.” Passion toward learning is best fostered when the school experience matches readiness and interest. By having a continuum of services aligned with talent/strength exploration and development, acceleration, and individual student planning, D102 is much more likely to meet our student needs and ensure all students learn something new each day, including our most capable students. By structuring the TDSP in a continuum of services approach, D102 is aligning with its commitment to “Discover, Nurture, & Celebrate Talent.”