**GIFTED & TALENTED EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**  
Thursday, May 18th, 2023, 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM  
Virtual Zoom Meeting

**COUNCIL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Dr. Carol Cavanaugh, Dr. Katharina Elbert (Co-chair), Isha Hassan, Albert Johnson-Mussad, Tyrone Mowatt, Takeru Nagayoshi, Magalie Pinney, Donna Potter Astion (Chair), Juan Rodriguez, Dr. Heny Taraz

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT**

Kenya Guerra, Courtney Perdios, Dr. MaryGrace Stewart, Darnell Williams

**DESE REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE**

Thomas Zorich (Liaison), Dr. Darcy Fernandes, Dr. Regina Robinson

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Call to Order and Roll-call**

Chair Astion calls the meeting to order at 4:05pm.

**Public comment**

Marcela Krishnamurthi, Michelle Barmazel, Gerry Mroz, and Beth Jasinski provide public comment.

Comments by the public include:

Appreciation for the council’s work; concern about lack of evidence that an optional menu like Continuum of Services will be effective; the need for policy and educator training; districts are deleveling classes without having other paths for acceleration in place. Concern that because MTSS is not being universally implemented it will lead to uneven implementation of services , experience shows that without enforceable policy administrators refuse services to advanced students; concern how inflexible districts harm students by holding them back, harming their confidence and well-being.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Council members unanimously approve the minutes of the March 16th, 2023, council meeting with one abstention due to absence at the March meeting.

**DESE Update**

Liaison Zorich shares slide summarizing the three work goals DESE is considering their vendor Center for Talent Development (CTD) will perform in FY 2024, and asks for council members' thoughts.

* Refine Continuum of Services document.
* Provide technical assistance and training for DESE staff with focus on MTSS model for advanced learning, background on factors contributing to opportunity and excellence gaps, and key principles of talent development.
* Develop and facilitate a “train the leaders” professional learning program series for up to 15 district teams as well as quarterly learning sessions for district/school leaders and educators from any district to attend. Evaluate and refine local policies and resources developed through the professional learning program series and disseminate to districts statewide as potential models.

In summary, DESE is planning a pilot program that provides assistance to up to 15 districts to help them understand the Continuum of Services and works with them on developing local policies, programs and services. Potential learning and best practices coming out of that pilot would then be disseminated to other districts. DESE is considering providing a quarterly meeting or series as well that administrators and educators from all districts can join to learn more about the Continuum of Services.

Individual council members shared their thoughts regarding the goals for CTD:

* Training the Leaders professional development model makes sense, best if done with quarterly learning sessions in order to be constant about implementation and supporting the students.
* Seeing what training and initiatives other districts are engaging in is powerful, but the purely voluntary nature of participation in such professional development is concerning, may impact regional equity.
* Would like to see a narrative in the FY 2024 plan about what the expectation for an end result is, and about what the impact is expected to be for a family, child, teacher.
* Appreciates this model as the typical model DESE uses, finds that it’s an effective way to build trust with districts and effect change.
* Appreciates the model as a positive step for next year, going in the right direction, is happy to support it.
* Question about how districts will be chosen: would like to volunteer their own demographically, culturally, and economically diverse district. Question about how students’ needs for remediation and acceleration, twice-exceptionality would be identified and how they would move through the continuum of the MTSS structure. Question of how long the pilot would last and when would it be reassessed.
* Concern about distinction between talent development for all and meeting the needs of gifted and talented students, clarity on this needed before designing professional development. Districts will wonder what are the regulations around this, what is expectation vs. what is requirement.
* Concern about timelines: pilots may take several years, and roll-out for the rest of the state will only happen after the pilot, making it a very long timeline for students sitting in class rooms right now. DESE needs to communicate to districts, e.g. with an acceleration policy, that districts need to support these students now.
* Lots of professional development time available in the summer, no need to wait for a year to incentivize districts to make some professional development happen, many teachers are looking for solutions right now.

Liaison Zorich provides answers to council members questions:

* DESE is aiming for representation in terms of district size, demographics, region. The pilot for professional development will have to rely on districts volunteering for this pilot but may do targeted outreach to some districts to ensure different perspectives and representation as much as possible.
* The plan calls for a deep dive with selected districts that will result in direct services provided to students in these districts. What these services exactly will look like is still being developed.
* Can’t answer how long the pilot would last but definitely more than one year. Expectation is not for districts to build the full continuum of services in one year, but is looking for districts to build some major components based on their students’ needs and to capture best practices.

Darcy Fernandes expressed appreciation about the council’s feedback and adds that they will think how to rework the goals accordingly, including how to bring services to students quickly.

**Opportunity for Council feedback on “Why MTSS” document**

CTD prepared the “Why MTSS” document in response to previous council feedback, to provide a more user-friendly summary as to why the Continuum of Services is tied to MTSS. Document is not specific to parent, student, or educator audiences but aims to be accessible to anyone with some understanding of education.

Council members spend 15 minutes to type their comments in a shared google doc. Comments include

* Appreciates that MTSS avoids a “one-size-fits-all” approach. District views each student as a unique individual and is flexible in providing services such as supports and rigor of curriculum as needed for the individual. Appreciates that a thoughtful implementation of MTSS is aimed at guiding differentiated instruction and providing appropriate services to support sustained growth for ALL students.
* Concerned that Continuum of Services as an optional menu of services based on the not universally implemented framework of MTSS will not be able to ensure equitable implementation. Asks for clarification on how DESE’s current growth measure captures growth of students achieving “proficient and beyond”, asks for clarification what the reporting requirements and auditing processes are for services provided under MTSS.
* Found document more digestible than others that were presented previously in explaining pros and cons of the MTSS model. Looking for clarification on how this information will be communicated to parents and students. Encourages that student perspectives are actively sought out and included in these conversations, through focus groups or data collection.
* Sees “talent development for all” as a purpose different from defining “talented and advanced learners” and the services to meet their needs. Encourages clarification about which model GTAC and DESE are advancing, and to avoid confusing them. Document would still likely leave non-educators uncertain about what “MTSS” and “multi-tiered” supports are.
* Concerned about document not being accessible to some stakeholders, like parents, teachers, and students; it seems intended for those versed in the subject matter and not for those impacted by the lack of services and policies. Document needs to be clearer on the intended audience. Concerned that gifted and advanced students as a special cohort will be lost if not called out more intentionally as the focus of this initiative.
* Recommends (1) using graphics, tables and other visual makers to help guide readers; (2) giving a clearer menu of options including specific to help with operationalization; (3) offering support options to help schools build tools, teams and infrastructure for implementation and monitoring of MTSS; (4) highlighting the language/framing of “benefit for all” to help push back against misconception of GT support being “elitist”.
* Highlights the need for education system to continuously provide opportunities for all learners to grow from whatever individual level they are at, to provide greater access to learning with supports based on the individual circumstance, that could mean remediation or access to acceleration. MTSS program need to be evaluated over time to monitor if students are indeed adequately served within its tiered level of supports.
* Recommends to include a graphic of the MTSS model with GT-specific information. Be more explicit that the document is for GT and advanced populations. Suggests to elevate pull-out programs as economical support that provides a peer group for students. Recommends adding language about utilizing a co-teaching model to provide acceleration; considering flexible ability grouping and pull-out programs; providing pros and cons of pull-out vs. acceleration models; and addressing myths of GT and biases.
* Appreciates the alignment of this model with the “growth-for-all” model, and that growth for talented students will be included as part of “growth-for-all”, and will be included in school accountability. Appreciates equity being the center of the work, this ensures that multilingual students, special education students, and twice exceptional students are identified so that they can participate in programming for talented students.
* Recommends that academic tiered support be aligned with social-emotional development unique to each child; supports that opportunities be provided to all students namely those who may be marginalized; stresses that charting of individual students’ growth is a must when considering meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students, and that the model must be equitable and all-inclusive, i.e. through universal access to front-loaded Tier I interventions that will help narrow excellence gaps.

**Document that summarizes council feedback given on Continuum of Services draft document during the council’s February and March meetings**

This document was composed by liaison Zorich with the help of three council members, it is intended to be offered to stakeholders along with the draft Continuum of Services document, as a way to bring the council’s comments into the ongoing stakeholder feedback process without incorporating them into the actual Continuum of Services document.

The summary document categorizes council’s feedback in terms of type of feedback, into Clarification, Need more information, and Rollout/Implementation.

Summary document is shared on the screen, council members agree with the summary as is, voice appreciation for the organization into categories, no revisions necessary.

**Stakeholder Engagement Documents**

Two stakeholders, MASS and MAGE, so far have completed the stakeholder feedback survey DESE has sent out, their responses were shared with the council. Council is not asked to provide feedback on stakeholder feedback, documents are simply shared for the council’s information of how stakeholders have responded to the Continuum of Services document.

A council member expressed appreciation for stakeholder feedback submitted by MAGE co-president Michelle Barmazel, and shared concern that there are stakeholders and voices DESE may not have reached yet such as immigrant families and teenagers. A council member asked about which other stakeholder groups are being asked for feedback and to what degree public school educators will have a voice in this.

Liaison Zorich explained that DESE’s stakeholder engagement is ongoing, its purpose is to collect different perspectives on the Continuum of Services document, and to make others, such as this council, aware of it. DESE reached out to several large organizations representing different perspectives.

* Some stakeholders have also provided feedback on which other stakeholders DESE could contact.
* Recently another communication was sent out to engage educators, curriculum directors, superintendents and assistant superintendents.
* Stakeholder engagement meetings are held as round table discussions, one has been completed, one more to come in June.
* DESE invites council members to suggest stakeholders that DESE should reach out to.

Darcy Fernandes added that this document will be a working document for a while, it will continue to be refined and evolve over the next years based on feedback from educators, administrators, parents until it meets the needs of the majority of the schools in Massachusetts. Stakeholder feedback will be shared with the council as it comes in. DESE is engaging with the student advisory council to collect feedback from students, particularly from marginalized populations, and DESE’s family engagement office has brought in marginalized families to a family event to get feedback on multiple issues, another such family event is planned for the fall.

**Review of Draft Annual Council Report**

Chair Astion summarizes the report’s framework: the council was given two charges this year, and the council’s feedback given over the course of multiple meetings on these charges was distilled and formatted into two tables to organize and make the feedback easy to understand.

Council members added comments and discussed:

* Clarity still needed on the council’s perspective on how to define gifted and talented students vs. talent development for all, clarity of the different terms used such as high-ability, high-potential, academically advanced, gifted and talented students. As a solution, the council could propose a research-based definition.
* Recommends that student profile to be better defined before taking action, concerned that process of determining the need for services such as acceleration is not well-enough defined, also not enough information given about what acceleration means, e.g. subject vs. whole grade acceleration vs. in-grade curriculum differentiation.
* Massachusetts can lean on known best practices and policies in effect in other states, no need to reinvent the wheel, acceleration policies describing different ways of acceleration and curriculum compacting along with processes to determine the appropriate service are already in place elsewhere, and known to CTD. Professional development is needed to inform administrators and educators of what’s already known and learned elsewhere on how to serve GT and advanced students.
* Council started work on definition earlier on, then handed work over to CTD to further develop.
  + Council can discuss with liaison if council wants to re-engage with this topic.
* Chairs can try to propose a generalized language definition to potentially be included in the report.
* Council members discuss the advantages and downsides of having a definition of giftedness to identify/label students accordingly students vs. finding a way to give them access to curriculum and social-emotional supports as needed without an established definition or label. A consequence of not having a definition could be continued exclusion, but a lack of a definition could also allow for greater inclusion.
* CTD could propose various definitions for the council to analyze and adapt.
* No need to let definitions or lack thereof prohibit the work going forward to provide for the needs of these students, to provide access. Could try to define learning needs rather than define students.
* Council subcommittee worked on a conceptual and an operational definition earlier; the thinking behind the operational definition was to define the student’s needs and match them with services aligned to address these needs.
* Council members could revisit the earlier work of the council subcommittees on “Definition of Giftedness” and “Gifted Information session”, and review NAGC’s broad definition.
* Suggestion made that council could try to include a general working definition into the report at the June meeting (however, more meetings may be needed to find consensus, pushing this work into next year) and then work with CTD on developing conceptual and/or operational definitions over the next year.

**Next steps**

The council’s June 15th meeting time will be extended to two hours, dedicated to review and finalization of the annual report draft. Council members are asked to bring their comments to the meeting to be incorporated during the meeting. Darcy Fernandes offers to check with DESE’s legal department on whether Open Meeting Law allows for a way for liaison Zorich to collect and share council members’ feedback before the meeting to streamline the feedback process.

**Adjournment**

Meeting is adjourned at 6:03pm.

**Documents Referenced During Meeting**

* Slide on CTD goals for FY 2023-24
* “Why MTSS” Document prepared by CTD
* Google doc used to collect council member feedback on “Why MTSS” document during the meeting
* Summary document of GTAC Feedback on Draft Continuum of Services Document
* Stakeholder feedback collected by DESE from MASS and MAGE
* Draft Annual Council Report