**GIFTED & TALENTED EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**  
Thursday, October 19th, 2023, 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM  
Virtual Zoom Meeting

**COUNCIL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Donna Potter Astion (Chair), Dr. Katharina Elbert, Isha Hassan, Dr. Albert Johnson-Mussad, Kari Morse, Tyrone Mowatt, Courtney Perdios, Magalie Pinney, Juan Rodriguez, Dr. MaryGrace Stewart, Dr. Heny Taraz, Darnell Williams

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT**

Annabel Holmes, Kenya Guerra

**GUESTS**

Takeru Nagayoshi, Komal Bhasin (DESE)

**DESE REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE**

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

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**Call to Order and Roll-call**

Quorum is reached, and Chair Astion calls the meeting to order at 4:02 pm.

Council members and Council liaison Zorich introduce themselves. Former council member Nagayoshi shares his goodbye and thank you to the council for their passion and commitment.

Co-Chair Elbert reviews the Council's Mission and Norms. A council member proposes to add a norm; this will be taken up at the next meeting.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Council members unanimously approved the minutes of the June 15th, 2023 council meeting, with the abstentions of two members who were not present at the June meeting.

**Presentation on Educational Vision**

DESE Chief of Schools Komal Bhasin presents slides on DESE’s Educational Vision, its goals, and aligned student learning experiences, as well as DESE’s three Strategic Objectives. All 400+ projects at DESE have been reviewed and are now organized in a Catalog of Supports, according to their connection to DESE’s strategic objectives. She is on a working group with liaison Zorich focused on deeper learning, where the Continuum of Services for Advanced Learning document is reviewed along with other MTSS documents.

Council members provide feedback on the vision:

* Appreciation for the Deeper Learning Initiative and for the “effective educators” objective as it speaks to the need for professional development on gifted education for teachers; grateful for the inclusion of the term “and beyond grade level” in the objectives.
* Glad to see “(or beyond)” added to “grade level” in the Educational Vision document. Suggests that the font size of “(or beyond)” is increased to equal the rest of the document’s font, and to lose the parentheses. Also suggests adding “and beyond” to the last sentence in the vision document to have it read “students who are learning English receive language instruction that enables access to grade-level content *and beyond”* since there is no reason that English learners cannot or should not achieve beyond grade level. The document also contains a few typos.
* Affirms the benefit of consolidating departmental silos under larger overarching goals, grateful that DESE is tackling this.
* Appreciates the goal of having “students feeling valued and known” since there is a lot of emphasis on bringing students up to grade level, but students at the top are often forgotten. They are considered to be fine without support but indeed, these students also should be afforded to learn and be valued.
* Appreciates the goals of interactive learning, of having students working together and looking forward to their learning. This will not only help engage gifted and talented students but also decrease chronic absenteeism.
* Need systemic rollout to bring this vision from theory to practice. Appreciates the notion of eliminating silos and more coordination with the department, and is glad that the framework addresses the whole child, along the spectrum.
* Asks for confirmation that the vision’s mention of individualized supports signifies a commitment to optimizing outcomes for all students, both academically and social-emotionally.
* Appreciates the vision’s goals, especially the inclusion of the concept of addressing the whole student and their academic and social-emotional needs. Likes that deeper learning will also benefit all learners and that the call for a diverse and effective workforce echoes the culturally responsive teaching and learning happening in districts.
* Very clear and accessible framework; likes the emphasis on individualized supports, the term “at grade level and beyond,” and the goal of valuing students. Suggest to add that ongoing growth and learning of adults, particularly around culturally responsive teaching and learning, is also needed to support students.
* Agrees with the points mentioned previously and would like to add that students also need interactions in groups with cognitive peers who can challenge them, in addition to deeper learning. Too often, advanced students are asked to lead a group rather than having the opportunity to take academic risks, to struggle and learn from mistakes.
* Agrees with everyone’s comments, appreciates the mention of underrepresented and underserved students as a focus of the vision.
* The framework is clear. Looking to see how it is executed so students can engage in it. Appreciates that students are at the center of the work.

Liaison Zorich shares that this year every advisory council is being asked to develop its own charge aligned with DESE’s educational vision, either for one year or for the next three years. It’s key that the Gifted and Talented Education Advisory Council’s work promotes the priorities and goals of the department as presented just now, with a focus on the particular realm of gifted students.

**DESE Update**

Liaison Zorich gives two department updates:

* *Continuum of Services Professional Learning*: The Center for Talent Development (CTD) is working on finalizing the document; it will be a living document incorporating feedback from the council and districts. DESE is planning to hold a webinar on November 14th to provide a better understanding of MTSS for advanced learning and the Continuum of Services professional development pilot. An announcement about this webinar will be distributed through the Commissioner's newsletter and directly to relevant organizations. This first session/webinar will be open to all, and DESE will reopen the applications for districts to join in the pilot.
* The position of *Manager for Advanced Learning* will be a full-time staff in a managerial role to lead the work that Thomas and others at DESE have been doing so far. This person will work on topics related to advanced and accelerated learning. Liaison Zorich hopes to have the position posted soon, timing is dependent on an opening in the department’s FTE count. Liaison Zorich is planning to bring at least one or two council members into the interview process and to allow all council members to submit potential interview questions. The council members could use some of their meeting time to formulate such questions, or council members and anyone else interested could individually email their suggestions to liaison Zorich.

A council member asks if this pilot PD will be paid professional development. Liaison Zorich clarifies that DESE is not providing funds, but the PD is free for any participating district, and it will take place during school hours. The pilot involves district leadership to get buy-in, starting with a train-the-leaders model, followed by longer-term plans to build the capacity from leadership down. Liaison Zorich recommends interested members attend the November 14th session to ask questions to him and CTD directly.

**Council Discussion and Development of Charge**

Chair Astion introduces the council discussion on choosing a charge and recalls relevant topics from prior discussions for consideration: best practices, differentiated instruction, educator effectiveness, accountability, actionable items, a roadmap, and suggests using the conceptual umbrella of “Who, What, and How.”

Council members share their ideas and suggestions for a charge:

* Dive into the specifics of a model. Alternatively, work on how to roll out and pilot ideas, and how to measure their impact.
* How specific should suggestions be? At the last meeting, a motion was seconded and in the process of voting to request BESE/DESE to consider only adaptive MCAS proposals for the new MCAS contract. This would give us more insight into the whole child, and provide them with deeper learning and individualized instruction while also empowering the teachers.
* Top of the list is to research and find a culturally responsive and equitable assessment or identification tool that doesn’t come with a cost barrier.
* Commissioner Riley mentioned universal screening a few days ago to find gifted students. The assessment also needs to include local norms. Need to check whether MCAS is culturally responsive, and make sure it's in an adaptive form, and that local norms are used to find advanced students.
* Implement accountability measures and a way to measure student growth beyond grade levels as well as talent development, so we can monitor success.
* Member’s district uses universal testing and has a program because of it, but assessment is not always culturally responsive. The challenge is to find other tools to discern if, for example, a disability masks high cognitive ability, without doing a full neuropsychological evaluation.
* Suggests teasing out pieces of the school-wide enrichment model (SEM) as specific best practices, making sure teachers know how to use flexible ability grouping, compacting, tiered learning, and project-based learning.
* Universal Design for Learning (UDL) could be a tool, and more student-centered approaches. Maybe a workshop model where teachers can interact with individual students or small groups for more individualized support at their particular readiness levels.
* Meet educators where they are, and use what they have in their toolbox. Curriculum compacting has been successful. Instead of providing the same opportunity for all students, engage students who have already met standards in a different learning experience (differentiation). SEM type I activities can help teachers provide differentiation without having to learn something new first.
* Continuum of Services is aligned with SEM, and with the objective that the system impacts all students. Also: start with using what you have in new ways, make resources like books accessible across the district without age restrictions. The key is that students develop persistence, learn how to fail, and understand that education means growth, and that easy does not equal smart.
* Build in choice for students, use surveys to understand students’ interests.

Chair Astion summarizes that a council charge should consider how the council can have the most impact, and that “What, Who, and How” could be a straightforward way of categorizing the ideas, with an overlay of SEM concepts and other best practices along with a working definition of who these students are and how teachers can be supported.

A council member adds that it’s important to commit to completing the unfinished business of finding a definition and that doing so will inevitably respond to DESE’s vision priorities. Asks if a subcommittee would be useful to bring back a draft definition.

Chair Astion and a council member discourage subcommittee work due to concerns over open meeting law and the additional time needed for such meetings.

A council member points out that prior years’ council and subcommittee material, collaborations, presentations, etc. are available on the GTAC shared drive as a resource to tap into.

Next steps: Chair Astion will provide a digest of council members' suggestions and bring a few potential charge paths for council discussion at the next council meeting.

**New Leadership Structure: Vice-Chair Nomination and Vote**

Liaison Zorich gives an overview of the changes in the Council and leadership structure: To give the council more agency and decision-making, the council can choose its own charge this year/term. Instead of DESE choosing both chair and co-chair, in this term, DESE is only selecting the chair and allows council members to elect a vice-chair. Other councils still have co-chairs or only one chair, but DESE is going with the vice-chair process for this council to ensure more council agency.

Co-Chair Elbert shares that she is honored to have served as council co-chair for the last three years and is grateful for the experience and council members' support. She is ready to give the opportunity to someone else and is nominating member Johnson-Mussad to the role of vice-chair.

Chair, Council members, and Liaison Zorich express their gratitude and appreciation for Co-chair Elbert’s leadership and tireless work over the last three years. Liaison Zorich explains that the vice-chair role will be revisited every year, while the Chair’s appointment will end after the current three-year term.

Chair Astion acknowledges the nomination of member Johnson-Mussad and is asking for any further nominations. Several members join in nominating member Johnson-Mussad. After member Johnson-Mussad accepts the nomination and gives an overview of his background, members unanimously vote him in as vice-chair, with one abstention due to being new to the council. Vice-chair Johnson-Mussad expresses his appreciation for the vote of confidence and for Co-chair Elbert’s work, particularly in formulating meeting minutes and shaping the vision for what this council accomplishes.

**Public Comment**

After Chair Astion explains the norms and logistics, members of the public Marcela Krishnamurthi, Janis Baron, and Gerry Mroz provide public comments.

Public comments include asking the council to be more assertive in bringing services to the state’s gifted students who are still lacking challenge after three years of the council’s work. The Council should revisit asking the state to move to an adaptive MCAS. Other comments mention that empowering the council to choose the charge is a positive step, but the biggest concern is that after discussion and debate, eventually, a decision has to be made and also be followed through on. Recommends implicit bias training, and to look to what other states have tried and are trying to do now. Differentiation is too much to ask from every teacher. Most advanced students need acceleration instead of MTSS Tier 1 services; Texas is providing automatic acceleration into advanced math for any 5th-grade student scoring in the top 40 percentile in state assessment after a pilot showed that this achieves equitable representation. Recommends that the council make similar practical recommendations.

**Adjournment**

Meeting is unanimously adjourned at 6:01pm.

**Documents Referenced During Meeting**

* June 15th, 2023 GTAC Meeting minutes draft
* Educational Vision slides presented by Komal Bhasin