



Cambridge Advanced Learning Association

Providing community, resources, and advocacy for families

<http://cambridgeadvanced.org/>

CALA Informal Steering Meeting

Feb 13, 2012

Home of Daniel Serfaty

In attendance: Freedom Baird, Ari Epstein, Joyce Gerber, Tara Greco, Janie Katz-Christy, Katharine London, Linda Rabieh, Daniel Serfaty, Susan Shelkrot

Agenda

Things we've accomplished to date:

- Consciousness raising: needs of advanced learners have become part of the conversation about meeting the needs of students in the CPS
- Formation of a substantial parent community with online activity, in-person activity, & web presence
- Mention of "students significantly above grade level" in written policy for the CPS Upper Schools
- SAPs and "flexible grouping" to be implemented the middle grades
- Commitment from JY to send staff to 18th Annual New England Gifted Education Conference
- Some of our district and school leaders becoming aware of the practice of cluster grouping, and it's benefits, including grouping across grades
- Connection to and conversation with Cambridge Library Media Services about reading needs of advanced learners
- Freedom Baird was invited to speak, in April, at annual meeting of the Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education (MAGE), on the formation of CALA

Challenges:

- The new CPS Academic Challenge Plan and Policy includes the cancellation of ISP, and of the math acceleration option that was piloted in 2011-2012
- There are some well-functioning middle-grades classrooms at current k-12s which use differentiated instruction in a heterogeneous setting. Currently no alternative to these (or replication of these) is slated to be offered at the new upper schools.

Short Term goals for winter, spring 2012:

- **CALA governance:** Encourage members to lead key initiatives. Potentially create formal roles, i.e., officers, rotating chairs, rotating minute-takers, event volunteers. Consider creating by-laws for the organization, and a code of conduct for the Yahoo group. These measures will strengthen CALA.

- **Improve outreach**, find ways to connect with underserved families. Collaborate with the district on this. Reach out to principals. Issue flyers in the backpacks, etc.
- **Budget**: convince district to include hires for Academic Challenge Program [CALA Budget Proposal doc is included at the end of the minutes]
- **Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model**, convince district to meet with Dr. Brulles, and implement it [Handout describing Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model is attached at the end of these minutes]
- Convince district to co-offer **workshop on SAPs and Cluster Grouping** for parents of upperschool-bound advanced learners
- Support Lenore Cowen et al. in their **math-for-advanced-learners in the middle grades fundraising initiative**
- Encourage the **study of successful differentiation** in current classrooms
- Should CALA **take a stand on certain issues?** Which initiatives?

Looking ahead farther:

- Set up calendar of monthly workshops, meetings, for this year, and school year 2012-2013
 - o February: CALA Social Get-Together with Books
 - o March: Planning meeting for Lenore et al, to talk about funding a middle-school math initiative
 - o April: SAP and Cluster Grouping info session (hopefully co-produced w the district), maybe get someone from Brookline Pub Schools? Cluster Grouping info session
 - o May: a District Official, to meet with parents, answer questions and listen to ideas for improving education for advanced learners in Cambridge
 - o October: Parents' Rights
 - o November:
 - o December: Holiday party with parents and kids
- Continue meetings with Principals and Family Liaisons
- Create a packet to talk with teachers about, to be used when a kid is identified as being advanced
- Collate booklist generated on the parents' Yahoo group

Meeting Minutes

Please note: a core principal of CALA is to maintain the confidentiality of information about our children and families that we share with each other. Any such information in the minutes will be stripped of identifiers, and included in a pool of information from multiple contributors.

Please be mindful of not publicizing personal information, online, in email, or in conversation, without permission. Thank you.

- Short discussion about the Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model. Some principles of the model:
 - o Within each classroom the center of the range varies
 - o There are widely overlapping ranges in the different classrooms
 - o The model creates opportunity for learners at a variety of levels to be the leaders in their classrooms
 - o It includes creating cohorts of similar learners that are greater than two. 4-5 in a cohort is the recommended amount.
 - o CPS's implementation of the model can include rigorous, frequent assessment, so kids are very able to shift from one group to another
 - o Assessment of kids needs to include reflection on previous assessments. A way of following the student over time. A longitudinal view of how they're doing
- Teachers don't only need professional development around this model, and around the issue of advanced learners. They need to be empowered in their classrooms, to meet the needs of these kids.
- Cohort size of 4 or 5 is very important. Teacher can work with that cluster to move at a faster pace, do more complex work.
- Important that there will be room to move, that no one will be held back from participating in an advanced cluster.
- Concerned that this model won't be enough. That kids will be bored.
- Montessori model is worth considering: three grades per class, with students at a wide range of levels. Is it efficacious for meeting the needs of advanced learners? Don't know, have to research that.
- Can we find a comparable district to reference?
- MA has no state mandate for gifted education, we need to advocate at the state level.
- The NCLB waiver will help districts, principals and teachers. There will be reward points for "above proficient" at schools now.
- When it comes to teaching models and approaches, Cambridge goes through these pendulum swings. In another few years they might come back to having ability-grouped classes in the middle schools.
- Our long term goal: have a high level of advanced learning available to these kids.

- Lenore Cowen's idea, to do fundraising for advanced math learners in the new Upper Schools, has a lot of promise. Some thoughts:
 - o Lenore, Linda and others will look into applying for a grant through a foundation
 - o Program would need to include assessment, to identify kids who need more advanced math learning, and coordination of volunteers
 - o Tara Greco is in touch with a rep at Google who deals with STEM-related funding of programs
 - o Lenore has participated in the Bridge program at Tufts. It's like Interface at MIT. An early "bridge" for students who need more support when they get to challenging undergraduate colleges.
- Julie Croston has connected with Marjorie Berger, Assistant Director of Library Media Services at CPS. Marjorie is willing to meet with CALA parents. Can work with her on putting together a book list to give to each library. To enable librarians to recommend appropriate books for advanced readers.
- Apparently the Academic Challenge Policy will be voted on a second time. Need to verify this.
- About CALA governance, and sharing the workload:
 - o It's too early for bylaws, too early for formal governance. Could bog us down.
 - o It's important to have representation from all the schools. Need to keep doing outreach.
 - o Can invite three people to be co-facilitators on the CALA listserv. "Peacekeepers". They can work out a code of conduct. Get input from the community. Settle on a final version. Use that to guide the online discussion.
 - o For producing events: can have two or three people "own" each event or workshop. They can "produce" it. Freedom can provide a "how-to". Anyone who submits an idea for a workshop can become the "chair" of making it happen.
- Organize a session for CALA parents to meet with Dr. Young in a forum, to ask questions. Hold him accountable for his decisions. He might be willing to meet with one rep from each school.
- Keep the issue of advanced learners on the front burner. We have four audiences: administration, SC, teachers, parents. We need to always be thinking about these four audiences. What they need, how we can connect with them.
- Post the "Common Myths About Advanced Learners" doc to the CALA listserv
- Some people who are opposed to the goals of the organization may join the group. That's fine. Use their perspective to enhance what we do.

- In our conversations with the district, teacher, etc, we need to reinforce the notion that we're talking about 1,000 or so kids in the CPS, not just a small, fringe fraction (the "3-sigma kids").
- Concerned that SAPs are a red herring. Concerned about this language: "students significantly above grade level". That it's a way to say: "services will only be provided to geniuses".
- Concerned that with only SAPs, and without ISP, things will be *worse* for disadvantaged families. Need to look for kids who have the *potential* to be above grade level. Not just for kids who already are.
- One way to identify and describe kids is the phrase "first-time learners". Kids who get it the first time.
- **A short-to-medium term objective: change the language in the Policy from "students significantly above grade level" to: "students who have the potential to be achieving above grade level". What's the mechanism for doing this? For getting the language of the policy changed? We have to learn what that is.**
- One parent submitted a general info blurb about CALA to her school's newsletter. It was bounced by the newsletter person, for approval, to the principal. It still hasn't been published yet. The irony of this is: it's making the resources of CALA less accessible to parents who don't have internet access.
- What are some other ways to do outreach?
 - o Can connect with folks at Breakthrough Cambridge
 - o Can connect with folks through Cambridge Youth Centers
 - o Can request an item on the CSAG agenda. It's once a month. JY attends. It's a way to connect to at least on rep from each school, school principal and family liaison of hosting school, and JY.



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February 12, 2012

Academic Challenge Program – proposed hires – *in order of priority, most needed first:*

(1) Academic Challenge Resource Teachers – Full time, one per Upper school (akin to math or literacy coaches; start with four in the upper schools; eventually one in each elementary school)

- Degree/background in gifted education
- Serve as a resource to classroom teachers, parents, students
- Work with classroom teachers, parents, and students to identify students, and develop and implement Subject Acceleration Protocols; emphasize identification of underserved students
- Work with classroom teachers to help them successfully differentiate instruction, do curriculum compacting, and develop extension and enrichment opportunities within their classrooms
- Work with classroom teachers to form flexible clusters of students in need of services
- Lead whole-class, cluster group, or one-on-one extension lessons as a way of supporting classroom teachers throughout the school year
- Work with clusters of students both inside and outside of the regular classroom for designated periods of time on specific topics

(2) Academic Challenge Program Manager - Full Time, District level (akin to Aida Ramos/Richard Whitehead)

- Degree/background in gifted education and program management
- Coordinate teacher training, professional development around issues of advanced learners
- Oversee student assessment and identification at the district level, insure identification of underserved students
- Coordinate delivery of services to identified students, including Subject Acceleration Protocols, Cluster Grouping, curriculum compacting, etc.
- Coordinate Academic Challenge Resource Teacher hiring and scheduling
- Seek out and write grants, pursue other sources of funding
- Seek out current research, best practices, attend conferences, keep the district and teachers apprised

(3) CALA Family Liaison, (akin to Rosalie Rippey/Melody Brazo) - Part Time

- Serve as a contact person for families, and as a liaison between families and the district
- Help families connect to resources and community around the issue of advanced learners

- Insure that underrepresented families are informed about resources & welcomed and included in events for advanced learners
- Coordinate monthly workshops and meetings, coordinate guest speakers
- Post up-to-date resources and news for the community

Drafted by Freedom Baird with input from six CALA parents – 2/12/12 – freedom.baird@gmail.com

Information Sheet on the Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM)

Cluster grouping within the Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM) is designed to:

- Insure a balanced mix of abilities in any given classroom, in any given grade
- Reduce the learning range in a classroom and allow for better differentiation in a heterogeneous classroom
- Give students access to academic peers

Intentional clustering of learners of different ability levels in any given content area is a key component of SCGM.

Possible example of middle school classroom composition using the SCGM
for a single content area, in a single grade level

22 Students per class in 4 classes	Group 1 Far Above Average <small>(advanced learners)</small>	Group 2 Above Average	Group 3 Average	Group 4 Below Average	Group 5 Far Below Average
Classroom A	5	–	12	5	–
Classroom B	5	–	12	5	–
Classroom C	–	9	4	4	5
Classroom D	–	9	4	4	5

Some notes:

- Clusters are organized by teachers, coaches, and specialists at intervals throughout the year
- Cluster designations are invisible to the students
- Cluster grouping is structured, yet fluid; with periodic assessments, students are moved from one cluster to another as needed
- Assessment instruments include: a mix of quantities and qualitative assessments, ability and achievement test scores, verbal and non-verbal tools
- If the integrity of the SCGM model is diluted, the likelihood of its success will be greatly diminished

(continued)

Benefits of the SCGM include:

- Reducing the range of abilities in a given classroom, allowing for higher expectations for all students
- Allowing teachers to better offer differentiation and curriculum compacting
- Giving clusters of learners daily access to academic peers
- Facilitating the emergence of above-average learners as academic leaders
- Providing staff development for all staff in differentiation, including in differentiation for advanced learners
- Serving all advanced learners regardless of their current levels of productivity, including those who are English language learners, are culturally diverse, are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or are twice-exceptional
- Low cost

References:

ASCD's Educational Leadership journal, February 2012 edition, article titled: "Clustered for Success"

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb12/vol69/num05/Clustered-for-Success.aspx>

Sample pages from "Clustered for Success"

<http://www.educationalleadership-digital.com/educationalleadership/201202/?pg=45#pg45>

New pilot program will better address needs of gifted students at Groton-Dunstable

Jan 27, 2012

http://www.nashobapublishing.com/ci_19834093

The Cluster Grouping Handbook by Winebrenner & Brulles

© 2008

http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Cluster_Grouping_Handbook_A_Schoolwi.html?id=V8Rj7F3wKzEC

Information Sheet prepared by Freedom Baird

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