

Highly Capable Program

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Good Evening board members and student representatives,

I am writing to you as the parent of an SKSD student marked 'gifted'.

Director Daily brought up some valid questions at a previous board meeting some time ago. He asked why there was a decline in SOAR and/or AP participation. I have since been curious about this and would like to share my experience thus far.

My daughter was marked as 'gifted' in Kindergarten. She received excellent services throughout elementary school at South Colby. We opted NOT to send her to SOAR at [REDACTED] for a variety of reasons.

Last year, the 2020-2021 school year, [REDACTED] was a remote student and ended up with teachers in all three middle schools. Again, I was pleased with the instruction and the choices for her as a 'gifted' student.

This year, my daughter was excited to return to school as a seventh grader at [REDACTED]. This quickly turned into a negative experience for her as she discovered the National History Day project in her advanced ELA class.

As a highly capable student, [REDACTED] is in ninth grade algebra and loving it. She is an AVID student and has enjoyed researching university programs. She LOVES science. The advanced ELA program is almost exclusively about the NHD paper, media presentation, and showcase. Why is this the platform of the SOAR program for ELA? I asked her teacher and was told this was what they did.

Unfortunately, [REDACTED] will not be able to participate in this showcase as she is a competitor in the [REDACTED] for [REDACTED]. She will be touring the country this spring participating in master classes and conventions for [REDACTED]. When I asked her teacher for an alternative assignment for ELA, I was told she could either participate in NHD or leave advanced ELA next term.

We are going to leave the program. Highly capable students come in all forms as stated in the SKSD website on how to spot a 'gifted' child. Why are we not offering differentiated instruction for our highly capable students? Why is this exhaustive project the only way to challenge our 'gifted' students in ELA? Is this all or nothing approach the best way to address the spectrum of learning?

Speaking to other SOAR parents, I discovered some interesting information. A Cedar Heights SOAR parent had never heard of National History Day and her son never did a project? He is a 10th grader and SOAR student since 3rd grade. A fellow John Sedgwick parent said the NHD project left her daughter with anxiety and was the reason they left the program. Our neighbor participated and although I was impressed with their research, dedication and amazing projects, I also noticed they didn't participate in sports, clubs, or even have friends....

I have been assured by the counselor at [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] can remain in advanced math and AVID. I was also told she can still take advanced placement classes at the high school. This led me to believe that the highly capable program only exists at [REDACTED] to somehow boost scores or aid in obtaining grants or some other award for STEM participation. Does highly capable mean more academic work by students for the benefit of the school?

Please look into this program as a whole. I hope my experience sheds light on how the program is not the same among the middle schools and not aligned to the SKSD vision of nurturing growth and inspiring achievement.

As a teacher, I understand how difficult it is to provide challenging material to every student. As an employee of the district, I also understand that there is not a quick fix and we are in a state of crisis with Covid.

The town hall last week was great. I appreciate all of you and understand how tough things are at the moment. This email is to provide information, not complain or beg immediate change. Thank you in advance for any input you may have and your time.

Very Respectfully,

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