

Thoughts on Advanced Work at BPS (updated March 10, 2018)

by Lisa Jeanne Graf

This year my daughter tested for advanced work. Experiencing this process personally makes me understand it's impact better. I learned that two options were available- Advanced Work and Excellence for All. Advanced Work is only offered in General Education classrooms. This is not ideal for students who need a smaller classroom for reasons like autism (less kids = less overwhelming). Because of this, I was happy that Excellence for All was an option. It seems like an improvement on making advanced work accessible to more students.

Next, I considered the schools that offered both options. The schools that were offered for my home address were schools that were not a good fit when I looked for schools back in pre-K. The schools that I would have been happy with either didn't offer Advanced Work, or Excellence for All or were not options. For me personally the thought of my daughter going to a school that doesn't feel like a good fit makes me only want to consider Advanced Work if she could go to another school with at least one friend. And this brings up a real problem. If a school has a group of students that all want to do Advanced Work it would be hard for them to go to another school as a group because most likely they live in many different neighborhoods. I would recommend that students have an option to go to a nearby school as a group. This would allow some friends to go to advanced work together. Maybe it could be set up to be like sibling preference.

One other problem about advanced work is that it is dependent on the lottery system. You might want a spot for your child in a school, but it might not be available.

Another problem is that each year students are tested to be in advanced work. If a student has a tough year that impacts their learning they are taken out of the program. This can be heart breaking for families (this happened to a friend's daughter this year). Now she will not have access to test prep for the exam schools even though she is very bright and wants to remain in advanced work. If she were in an excellence for all classroom I am guessing she could keep going and dive back into her studies. So this seems like another reason to embrace the Excellence for All approach more.

One thing I recently learned about advance work placements is that choices are determined by a zone system of three areas. Here is a link to see that zone map:

http://ljgraf.com/BPS/DistrictMapSY18_19_%203ZoneAssignment.pdf

If the schools were more evenly offered around the district money could conceivably be saved on busing costs. It might be a non-issue however as few families would want to choose a school that is super far away.

I would much rather each school offer some type of Excellence for All program. It would be much fairer and cause less transitions. It would be much better for maintaining

friendships which is huge especially for students that have a difficult time building friendships.

P.S. I just learned about a new program yesterday from my neighbor whose daughter was taken out of advanced work. Her daughter's school is offering International Baccalaureate Diploma and International Baccalaureate Middle Years programs. The mother is very excited about this program and is even considering keeping her daughter in the school's upper school instead of her original plan of shooting for an exam school. She loved the international part of the program and how it would open opportunities for college outside of our country. She also liked that it gave access to advanced work, without shutting students out. I am excited about this program too and want to learn more about it.

I would be interested in hearing other families' thoughts on Advanced Work.

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