

*Unintended Consequences of NCLB Mandates on Gifted Students**By Sally Beisser, Ph.D., Professor of Education, Drake University*

We are to provide an education adapted to the years, the capacity, and the condition of everyone... directed to their freedom and happiness. We hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Abstract

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, education policy makers have focused on students at the lower end of the achievement spectrum, specifically those struggling to meet standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, those who are considered gifted have been increasingly underserved, at the expense of high ability learners. When the NCLB law was enacted in 2001, it forced schools to deeply subsidize the education of students performing below grade level. As a result, gifted programs have suffered. For example, Illinois's gifted and talented programs experienced a \$16 million cut while \$5 million was eliminated from Michigan's GT programs. Federal spending declined from \$11.3 million to \$7.6 million in recent years (Cloud, 2007). This paper reveals educator responses to NCLB and gifted education, funding trends for NCLB and gifted programs, and the impact of this legislation on our nation's best and brightest students (Kaplan, 2004).

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind federal mandate (2001) did not intend to leave any children behind, nor was it designed to curb the progress of those at the top of the learning curve. However, since this law was passed, the focus of many schools in the United States has shifted toward providing time, attention, resources, and policies in the direction of students scoring under the 40% level of achievement in reading and mathematics. This focus is necessary in order to avoid governmental sanctions impacting school funding and parental choice to choose a different school if their child is not achieving at this level of competence. According to the Four Pillars of NCLB this law will result in stronger

accountability, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents.

While high stakes testing is the engine that drives NCLB, there is growing literature to suggest unintended consequences are damaging the education of our students (Nichols & Berliner, 2008). This does not represent freedom for high ability students in the educational system, nor does it provide teacher incentive or support to meet gifted student's needs. Despite recent promises from the Obama administration (March 2010) to overhaul NCLB indicating the education law will get a new name and direction to make up academic ground, benefits for gifted students remain unaddressed.

Unintended Consequences: Narratives from Educators in the Field

Educators from three Midwest states responded to the question, *How has the NCLB legislative impact made a difference in your gifted education program such as resources, attention, instructional time, faculty, district focus, etc?* According to responses from teachers, coordinators of gifted and talented programs, administrators, and parents, gifted students are "overlooked and underserved." One teacher laments that there is lack of space for her gifted classroom. She states, *next year the gifted program in our school will share one room with special education to make room for another elementary classroom. There are other programs that could be asked to do this, but it is the GT program that will be hit again. I guess I am glad that I am retiring.*

Teacher of the Gifted in Iowa

Many teachers stated that district focus is on low performing students while bright students' scores are slipping. Sadly, the districts do not seem concerned because low students reach average proficiency. This teacher says, *the biggest impact I have seen with the NCLB is that all the focus seems to be on the low performing students. As the TAG instructor, I analyzed the ITBS [Iowa Tests of Basic Skills] scores for my gifted kids and found that many of them had shown significant decreases in their scores in the math area. Many of them*



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The mission of the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association is to recognize, support, and respect the unique and diverse needs of talented and gifted learners through advocacy, education, and networking.

THE ASSOCIATION

ITAG, an affiliate of the National Association for Gifted Children, is a tax exempt, 501C3 organization which was organized more than 25 years ago with a vision that gifted and talented children in the State of Iowa should receive an education commensurate with their abilities and needs. It promotes advocacy at the state and local level, pre-service and in-service training in gifted education, and parent/community awareness, education and involvement. ITAG is comprised of parents, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who share an interest in the growth and development of gifted and talented individuals in Iowa. ITAG annual membership dues are: Member, \$45; Friend, \$100-\$999; or Sponsor, \$1000 or more.

THE BOARD

Meets during the months of November, January, March, May, August, and during the Annual Conference in October. Interested persons are welcome to attend meetings. Please contact a Board Member for the date, time, and location of a meeting if you plan to attend.

THE ITAG NEWS

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From the President

Many a school year brings distinguishing events that make it memorable: a change of assignments, new co-workers, new initiatives, special challenges, or unique triumphs. For me, I gained not one, but two BFF's this year: the persons before and after me on the weather calling tree. I've come to know much about the morning routines of these two colleagues, and am frankly glad to have had the phone distance between us in the wee, dark, pre-coffee hours of the morning. Other colleagues who thought they were going to retire this spring may celebrate with fireworks instead! No doubt we'll all remember the winter of '09-10 in some way, if for no other reason than the winter we **didn't** want another snow day!

Are you receiving your ITAG Spotlight? One of the ITAG member services is a monthly e-mail "spotlighting" current issues in gifted education, such as a practical tip or resources for teachers, parents, and students. March's spotlight provided information on the 2010 Young Scholars' programs held in April. The Spotlight for February featured professional development opportunities for teachers. If you are not currently receiving the ITAG Spotlight, please send an e-mail to itag@assoc-serv.com to be included. Check for Spotlight archives on our website.

In early March, ITAG sent Treasurer and Legislative Co-Chair Gail Kenkel and Legislative Co-Chair Linda Moehring to Washington DC to be a part of NAGC's legislative days. This awesome experience is composed of two and a half days of extensive training and one day to meet with as many of Iowa's Representatives and Senators as time will allow to explain the support needed for gifted education. It is so essential that legislators put a face onto gifted so that they will be encouraged to vote for legislature on our behalf. At this time, the only federal funding that gifted education receives is through the Javits Grant, which funds research projects in the field. Having been cut several

years ago, the Javits monies have remained steady the past few years; however, we know that, in these times, it wouldn't take much for them to disappear. Look for pictures highlighting Linda and Gail's experience in this issue of the ITAG Newsletter.

Dr. Sally Beisser has studied the effects of No Child Left Behind on gifted students. Clearly, this population was not taken into account when this initiative was conceived. With impending NCLB modifications, it is important for information like Sally's to be pushed to the forefront for decision-makers who have the ability to make school districts accountable for growth for gifted learners also. Be sure to read Sally's article in this issue.

If you're looking for resources, don't forget to access the ITAG website, www.iowatag.org. In addition to information about your organization, there is an extensive list of links for educators and parents that might bring you just the piece of data you seek. Also check for announcements, conference details, and lists of local and state-wide contacts. Newsletter archives may also be accessed from the webpage. If you have an idea for something you'd like to see on our website that will help you, please let us know.

As you prepare to close on another school year, your ITAG board wishes you a peaceful transition into whatever summer holds for you. We are hopeful that you will continue your contact with ELP/TAG/GATE students next year. (We have an awesome fall conference planned!) However, if you find yourself with other assignments, please help any new teachers of gifted to access the ITAG Association as a resource. This is *your* organization and we're here to serve you!

Thank you for all you do for gifted kids!

By Diane Pratt, ITAG President

In this Issue:	
Unintended Consequences of NCLB Mandates on Gifted Students	1, 4, 5, 6, 7
Contact Information.....	2
From the President	3
Announcements	7
The Voices Silenced by No Child Left Behind: Why Advocates of Gifted Children Need to Speak Up	8, 9, 10
ITAG is seeking Nominations for Fall 2010 Elections	10
Distinguished Service Award (Pull Out Section)	11
2010 ITAG Conference Information (Pull Out Section)	12
Meet the 2010 ITAG Keynote Speakers (Pull Out Section).....	13
2010 Call for Presenters (Pull Out Section).....	14, 15
2010 Conference Registration Form (Pull Out Section).....	16
2010 Affiliate Conference	17
Cluster-Grouping: Introduction and Definition.....	18, 19, 20
NAGC Membership Form and Joint Membership Form.....	21, 22
Friends of ITAG.....	23
AEA Contact Information.....	23

Continued from the front cover

*showed a 20-point decrease or more! Unfortunately, this was not even a major issue with our district because they [gifted students] had scored **above** the State of Iowa NCLB minimum score.*

Coordinator of Gifted Programs in Iowa

A vast amount of time, money, and energy is focused on meeting the NCLB mandates in many districts. Curriculum is unchallenging, as gifted students are forced to review concepts they already have mastered. For example, another teacher writes, the curriculum is being 'watered down' to fit lower students so that the NCLB scores show that those students meet the goal. Teachers felt that they couldn't 'move on' because so many students hadn't mastered a concept. Therefore, those that had mastered it, sat and reviewed....again and again.

I was allowed time with the top kids to enrich them but this was limited to a 30-minute period a week, not nearly enough. Teachers are reluctant to let students out of class. They don't see that students already know material. Pre-testing was encouraged, but not accepted by most teachers.

Talented and Gifted Teacher in Iowa

One woman shares that there is a lack of district services, focus, time, or resources in gifted education. She says, In my position as gifted facilitator for grades K-8 for 20 years and raising two grown gifted students in Kansas, I will tell you that there has been NO significant impact in our county in services, district focus, additional time, or in regular education to teach the gifted. I have 65 students on my caseload and provide advanced classes for grades 6-8 plus test-outs of regular curriculum, enrichments, independent studies, etc. Our classroom teachers are so overburdened with additional NCLB testing, preparation for testing, and paperwork that they can't possibly keep up with that much less provide more for gifted students. Unfortunately, gifted students are expected to "make it on their own."

Facilitator of Gifted Students in Kansas

My role as principal is to continually advocate for necessary resources to meet the needs of my students. It is a real uphill battle to say the very least. Our district is about 60% free/reduced lunch at the elementary level so the needs are very high. The main goal is to have the schools make AYP [Annual Yearly Progress] and almost all district and federal resources go to support those efforts. It is very frustrating.

Elementary Principal in Illinois

Again, instructional focus is on lower achieving students as growth declines for gifted learners. This woman shares her experiences. At almost every grade level, gender, and S.E.S. [social economic status] our highest achieving section of students is decreasing. We are seeing growth in our median population of students. While it is evident that NCLB is working to help some of our lower achieving students, it is definitely having a negative impact on our high achieving students simultaneously! Many of the general education staff expressed concern about being required to teach to the lower achieving group in order to bring them up to the proficiency level and not having the time to give any consideration to the high-end students.

Gifted Teacher in Iowa

Contemporary Gifted Education

Slighting the needs of gifted children is not a new problem. Historically, there exists both ambivalence and tension in any democratic society between equity and excellence when any one group has attention or advantages seemingly not available for all members. As a culture, Americans are ambivalent about genius or excellence. We seem to simultaneously admire and admonish giftedness as an undeserved, unearned privilege.

Several significant events precede the contemporary gifted education movement in the United States. In 1869 in a study called "Hereditary Genius" by Sir Frances Galton, it was determined that genius was genetic or caused by hereditary factors. Researchers were interested in how to determine who was highly intelligent. From this the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test was developed in 1900 then revamped in 1916. In 1925 Lewis M. Terman began the classic 30-year study of identified gifted students. These individuals, selected by a single intelligence quotient (IQ), were followed into adulthood. The study of gifted individuals was centered on precocity, rarity, and oddity rather than characteristics of difference that might represent high performing students in a regular school setting (Davis & Rimm, 2003). Gifted students did not generally receive programmatic attention or opportunities in school settings.

Interestingly, the Soviets launched Sputnik into outer space in 1957, causing sudden increase in the U.S. mathematics and science curriculum, particularly in coursework that was condensed for high school and college students. Education of America's best and brightest students took center stage. Gifted programs sprang up in public schools. Private schools were founded and attention to gifted learners flourished. Interestingly, on a recent trip to Russia with

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), the author had an opportunity to study schools for the gifted in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Dr. Evgeny Markelov, principal of the State Educational Institution Boarding School for Intellectual Students, remarked that Russians feel "suspicious of people who are clever." Unfortunately, U.S. sentiment was eventually similar and our enthusiasm for gifted education continually waned.

Following this fading interest in gifted education, national reports and studies have driven the current level of interest. For example, the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *The Marland Report* (1972), indicated that 5-7% of students in the U.S. were gifted, but most were not receiving the education they deserved. In the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, a critical analysis of the U.S. educational system, indicated that the U.S. was losing ground compared to other nations in educating its youth, particularly the gifted ones. In 1993 *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*, the executive summary suggests that the United States is squandering one of its most precious resources--the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students. In a broad range of intellectual and artistic endeavors, it seems clear these students are not challenged. The problem is especially severe among economically disadvantaged students, who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed. *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (2004) by Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, is a classic study that argues for the academic acceleration of qualified gifted and talented students. Despite evidence of acceleration as best practice for many gifted students, this strategy is often unemployed in U.S. schools and districts. Parents are worried, teachers are reluctant, and administrators are uninformed. Gifted learners' needs remain generally unmet.

Officially, in 1974 the Office of Gifted and Talented was given official status within the U.S. Department of Education. In 1988 the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act was passed to provide grants to secondary and elementary students. Unfortunately, the amount of funds appropriated has declined. In recent years no new grants were awarded because of lack of funds. This tendency reveals our national ambivalence that thwarts opportunities for gifted learners, their teachers, and ultimately American society.

Unfortunately, recent test scores (Siegle, 2008; Silberman, 2003; Viadero, 2007) suggest that gains do not favor gifted learners. Research results suggest the following:

- "Bubble kids" (middle or average) made the largest test-score gains.
- Bottom 20% made the least progress.
- Top 10% of students made either no academic gains or were smaller than those in the middle.

Disparate Funding Trends

There are approximately 3 million gifted students in the United States, according to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). In an Analysis of Funding and Services for NCLB - Special Education and Gifted Children in USA (Table available from Beisser, 2008) comparing funding trends in all 50 states including Puerto Rico, Guam, and Washington, D.C., it is evident there were fewer gifted students served, as well as less funding, for gifted education programs overall. Data for some states, however, is not reported and for others is reported using various formulas. Gifted students appear to be an underfunded population with fewer dollars to nurture their high potential.

Cloud (2007) states, "to some extent, complacency is built into the system. American schools spend more than \$8 billion a year educating the mentally handicapped. Spending on the gifted isn't even tabulated in some states, but by the most generous calculation, we spend no more than \$800 million on U.S. gifted programs. It can't make sense to spend 10 times as much to try to bring low-achieving students to mere proficiency as we do to nurture those with the greatest potential." In an article asking if it is right to put emphasis on equity over excellence, Sue Winter of Missouri states, "If the whole pie equaled \$100, the meat of the budget goes to No Child Left Behind at \$64, special education gets \$32, gifted education gets \$0.026" (*Gifted Education Support is Rare*, 2008).

Impact on Gifted Students

Gifted students are overlooked and underserved. In the face of unequal, inadequate resources for gifted learners, adequate learning is compromised in multiple ways. America's teachers are distributing time and energy to serve required needs of those at the other end of the learning spectrum. The need to focus on underachieving students at the expense of high ability students means teachers are less motivated and unrewarded to provide for their most gifted students. Therefore, impact on gifted learners includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Continued on Page 6

1. Vast amounts of time, money, and energy is focused on meeting the NCLB mandates in many states and districts, at the expense of developing curriculum for gifted learners.
2. Lack of planning time, faculty development, and physical space for gifted education.
3. Gifted students' academic performance and test scores are declining.
4. Curriculum is watered down and unchallenging as gifted students review concepts they already have mastered.
5. Not enough in-classroom time for enrichment of high ability students.
6. Teacher reluctance to release students from class or pre-test material for mastery.
7. Districts lack of concern for G/T because these students reach average proficiency.
8. Teachers are so overburdened with additional NCLB testing, preparation for testing, and paperwork that they are unable to provide more for gifted students.

apprenticeship relationships, appropriate use of cooperative learning, questioning, independent study, and advanced use of technology. These strategies must be practiced, supervised, and evaluated.

3. Set challenging curriculum standards for the gifted learners. The content standards, curriculum, and assessment practices must challenge all students, including those who are talented. National standards in gifted education must guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum.
4. Provide social-emotional support for gifted students and their families dealing with concerns with perfectionism, isolation, invisibility, multi-potentiality, gender disparity, underachievement, double labeling, fears, and additional issues experienced by high functioning children.
5. Increase learning opportunities for disadvantaged and minority children with outstanding talents, particularly in early childhood. They need extra support to overcome barriers to achievement. Schools must make more high-level learning experiences available to these students.

In summary, administrative and instructional focus is on lower achieving students as growth in both performance and opportunity declines for gifted learners. Unfortunately, gifted students are expected to make it on their own, a myth we continue to perpetuate.

Goals to Better Serve Gifted Learners

1. Train regular classroom teachers and pre-service teachers to understand needs and characteristics of gifted learners and to implement pedagogical strategies for a qualitatively, differentiated curriculum to meet their needs in and out of the classroom (Beisser, 1997). According to a survey from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education think tank, 64% of teachers received little to no training in gifted education in college and nearly 60% have received no professional development focused on gifted students (Siegler, 2008).
2. Offer professional development for teachers and administrators to know how to teach high-level curricula to high-achieving kids. They need support for providing instruction that challenges students with outstanding talent as well as children at every level of learning. Effective pedagogical strategies include differentiation, flexible grouping, cluster grouping, acceleration, mentorship or

6. Provide challenging learning opportunities. Schools and communities must provide more and better prospects for gifted students to learn advanced material, take courses not offered in the regular curriculum (e.g., The author once helped a 3rd grader learn Swahili), develop leadership skills, expand creative and critical thinking, or take risks to learn something difficult, yet not fear failure. Learning opportunities and resources for exceptional students must be available both inside and outside of school.
7. Allocate resources for the gifted. Gifted children are generally denied educational justice if they fail to receive an education that adequately challenges them. A challenging education is essential to human flourishing. Without resource appropriation, it is obviously less possible to adequately challenge gifted children in any environment (Merry, 2008).
8. Do not imbalance appropriate instruction or funding for gifted learners as a result of focused

attention on lower achieving students. Both those struggling to meet the standards, as well as those who surpass them, require a quality education commensurate with their needs to reach their potential, experience appropriate levels of challenge, build a sense of community, and develop self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, education policy makers have focused on students at the lower end of the achievement spectrum, those that are struggling to meet standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, those who are gifted have been increasingly passed over at their own expense (SAS, 2008). The United States must learn from nations whose top students perform well and take steps to ensure that high-achieving American students compare favorably with their counterparts around the world.

On a personal note, one critic blogged an anonymous response to a local news article on my upcoming presentation at the 20th Oxford Round Table presentation by saying, "Gifted students are odd balls, usually contribute little to society because they have no common sense, or life experience and end up within the hallowed walls [sic] of academia." I was disheartened by such uninformed public sentiment in a newspaper column blog.

However, remember the wisdom from one of our nation's most gifted leaders and entrepreneurs, Thomas Jefferson, who countered that *we are to provide an education adapted to the years, the capacity, and the condition of everyone directed to their freedom and happiness. We hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated.* Few would argue against this for students performing at low or average levels. However, if our nation is to achieve a world class educational system we need to appropriately educate our high performing students in disciplines such as written communication, information literacy, historical consciousness, ethics and civic engagement, mathematics, science, writing, politics, the expressive arts, critical thinking, business, history, health, and global living and learning. It is my hope that United States will refrain from squandering one of its most precious resources, including the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students.

Note: Dr. Beisser presented the full version of this paper as an invited presentation at the Oxford Round Table July

2008 at the University of Oxford. It is published in the *Forum on Public Policy* at University of Oxford. For the paper and references, see the web site below or e-mail sally.beisser@drake.edu.

See <http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/summer08papers/papers08summer.html>.

ITAG Partners

PLEASE HELP!!! We are in need of experienced TAG/ELP educators who could serve as a mentor/partner with a less experienced colleague. This connection may be based on e-mail correspondence, but could develop into whatever relationship the two teachers decide.

We currently need experience at all instructional levels. Please consider guiding a new colleague in uncharted territory! E-mail Kenn Wathen, Educator Outreach, kwathen@hamburg.k12.ia.us if you would be willing to help.

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The Voices Silenced by No Child Left Behind: Why Advocates of Gifted Children Need to Speak Up

Abstract

This paper discusses the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on the gifted population. Many gifted students are adversely affected by NCLB mandates and policies. However, their voices are silenced by their apparent academic success. Now more than ever, advocates of the gifted need to speak up for these students to ensure schools do not leave them behind.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has seemingly done just that, left students behind. The legislation was formulated to help struggling learners who were not performing well on high-stakes standardized tests. While valiant in theory, NCLB has had unintended consequences for other populations, specifically those at the other end of the spectrum. Gifted children are suffering from the mandates of No Child Left Behind. Programs that serve these students have lost funding, favor, and priority leaving these students to fend for themselves. Because of this, advocates for gifted students need to speak up for these students who are silently falling off the radar of policy makers.

Background Information on No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind expanded the federal mandates of standards-based education and high-stakes testing to measure districts' success in meeting the standards set by each state. Each district's federal funding is directly reflective of the ability to meet state standards. Failing to do so penalizes districts with funding cuts, added regulations and reports as well as close observation to ensure success of the students using all means necessary. Consequently, schools concentrate efforts, time, and resources on students failing to show proficiency on standardized tests which is the basic purpose of the legislation. Unfortunately, this focus on non-proficient students has created an unintended consequence. The students on the opposite end of the testing spectrum, the gifted students, are losing the efforts, time, and resources once used to concentrate on their needs.

NCLB's Impact on Gifted Education

NCLB has four basic pillars according to the United States Department of Education: stronger accountability, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods and more choices for parents. (U.S. Department of Education) Each pillar created a benefit for struggling learners at the sacrifice of our gifted learners.

Stronger accountability emphasizes hiring highly-qualified teachers, provides district report cards for parents to assess schools, and measures in place for schools not adequately progressing. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) means schools are closing the achievement gap. While highly-qualified teachers are great for gifted learners, the supplemental resources required for students not meeting proficiency takes away from resources for gifted learners. AYP and the closing gap should mean "the low performing groups will improve, not that the high performing groups will regress!" (Gallagher, 2004)

The additional freedoms state and communities were allotted allows for flexible spending with federal funds. Since the emphasis is placed on raising the scores of low achieving students, so are the funds. Consequently, funding for gifted programs decreases. According to Laura Thornquist (2008) of Missouri, "If the whole [educational] pie equaled \$100, the meat of the budget goes to No Child Left Behind at \$64, special education gets \$32, gifted education gets \$0.026 which goes to research. It's just a crumb for the smartest kids in our state." Other states are also struggling with funding for gifted students. Illinois funding for gifted programming was cut by \$16 million in 2002, just after NCLB was enacted. At the same time, Michigan reduced funding from \$5 million to \$500,000 and federal funds declined \$3.7 million over a five year period (Cloud, 2007).

In theory, the third pillar "using proven educational methods" should benefit all students. However, again the emphasis is finding research-based methods to bring up those who are struggling to meet proficiency. Robert J. Sternberg (2008) proposes "a hypothetical school in which, indeed, no child is left behind, but all children are achieving barely passing grades-in letter terms, D-." The question he poses is powerful, "Would anyone call such a school excellent?"

Concentrating on excellence is further restricted by society. On a recent visit to St. Petersburg, Sally Beisser (2008) observed both Russians and Americans feel "suspicious of people who are clever." Additionally, exhibiting confidence in an advanced intellectual capacity is viewed as a haughty and arrogant quality while athletes exhibiting confidence are revered. An example of this is a 2008 Matt Lauer interview with Dara Torres just before the Summer Olympic Games. Lauer asked Torres if she was using performance enhancing drugs. Torres, who knows Lauer personally, denied the allegations and joked, "Maybe I am a little more athletically gifted than you are." The crew of the Today Show is heard chuckling in the background (Celizic, 2008). Imagine if Bill Gates had said to Matt Lauer, "There is no way you could have created Microsoft. Maybe I am a little more

academically and intellectually gifted than you are." The crew certainly would not have chuckled at such a conceited remark. Since society approaches gifted individuals with skepticism and apprehension, so do schools. The NCLB requirement of research-based methods does not directly encourage schools to look at gifted research as well.

Parents have more choices with NCLB if their child's school is not meeting or exceeding state standards. They can transfer their child to another school or accept supplementary services outside of the school day. Sadly, NCLB does not specifically provide supplementary services for gifted students, only struggling students. Parents of gifted children need the choice of appropriate services for their students too.

The Benefits and Burdens of NCLB for Gifted Students

Sandra Kaplan of the University of Southern California argues the negative impacts of NCLB are a matter of perspective. She points out the roots of NCLB can be beneficial to gifted children when manipulated and analyzed. "While [the concerns about NCLB's impact on gifted students] must be heard, it also seems productive to define methods by which educators of the gifted can reconcile the existence of the NCLB legislation that has been rooted firmly in today's education with gifted education... Using the underlying philosophy and practices of gifted education as a foundation to review and respond to the NCLB legislation affords educators of the gifted an opportunity to use the legislation to benefit gifted students." (2004) While she makes an interesting point, it is concerning educators, parents, and community members who need to deeply analyze the legislation to figure out how to apply it to gifted education which creates a struggle for advocates in need of an overt explanation.

More educators and advocates of gifted children see the NCLB Act as a crippling movement for gifted education. Joyce VanTassel-Baska (2006), in a speech at the NAGC Conference, spoke for many gifted educators, "It is the worst of times for gifted education in many respects. The overall landscape of education is not propitious for the work that we do with the best learners in this country. The No Child Left Behind Act has energized schools to focus on students at the cusp of passing the test, not on those who are already above the mean of performance." The era of education dominated by NCLB is not a friendly one for gifted learners.

Marcia Gentry (2006), director of the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University, writes school counselors have just as much responsibility for advocating for the needs of gifted students as their teachers and parents. "It seems school counselors are in a unique position not only to work with children, but also to bring to the table conversations concerning some of the issues [facing gifted children because of NCLB]... Services to gifted children have been cut, and funds, in contrast, have been allocated to remediate students.

Students drop out at alarming rates[.] "The dropout crisis in our nation's high schools is as relevant for gifted students as it is for lower achieving ones. Approximately 5% of both populations drop out of school" (Beisser, 2008). Nearly 41% of low SES elementary students identified as gifted do not graduate from college (Rawe, 2007). Gifted students need affective and academic services to address the unique problems facing these talented youngsters. NCLB does not address these needs in any way. Shamefully, the United States risks losing these great minds because of this neglect.

The irony of NCLB is the strategies implemented to reach the standards of the legislation are not working for the intended population either. The bottom 20% of students showed the least amount of progress on standardized assessments. Some struggling learners even lost ground. In comparison, the gifted population (top 10%) showed little to no academic progress. The real winners of NCLB era policies and practices were those in the middle. "Students in the middle of the pack made the largest test-score gains" (Viadero, 2007). This marginalization of education exemplifies the need for advocates to speak out. "[Despite] its intention to 'leave no child behind,' more and more children are marginalized in a bare-bones educational system" (Gentry, 2006).

In his article, *Excellence for All*, Robert Sternberg (2008) focuses on avoiding a swinging pendulum to temper education. Looking at the bottom, as NCLB exemplifies, cannot be the only focus of education. The temptation is to lower standards and expectations to increase achievement, even if it is achievement just above failure. "A better model for defining and achieving excellence is to focus on excellence in education for all students and let the numbers emerge as a result of seeking excellence, rather than the main goal" (Sternberg, 2008). Data and test scores need to provide an end to the means, not the means to the end.

Working With and Around NCLB in Gifted Education

As the pendulum of education swings in the direction of struggling learners, the voices of gifted students are silenced under the shouts of intellectual equality. Their learning suffers as the system attempts to close the inherent intellectual gaps. "This one-size expectation does not account for variation among individuals on variables that affect learning... Children are individuals, and they learn at different rates; they come with different skills and different experiences; to expect them to be the same defies the ability to nurture individual children and to help them reach their fullest individual potentials" (Gentry, Fall 2006). However, without a choice, advocates of gifted children must confront the realities of No Child Left Behind and find ways to provide the services for these unique students in the current atmosphere of education.

Continued on Page 10

Continued from page 9

Sternberg (2008) suggests all teachers focus on the six R's of education which includes the familiar three of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic as well as an additional three: reasoning, resilience, and responsibility. The new Rs emphasize thinking skills, individual goals, and character development. Advocates can use Sternberg's suggestions to avoid focusing solely on high-stakes tests. Gifted children need challenging curriculum with critical thinking opportunities. These students will benefit from the affective components of resilience and responsibility. Speaking up for the value of individuality in education is the most critical component of Sternberg's message.

Sally Beisser (2008) and Joyce VanTassel-Baska (2006) offer practical suggestions for gifted advocates. Each suggests a synergy of strategies instead of step-by-step to serving the gifted population. Both focus on the best use of available resources including investing in long-term benefits such as professional development opportunities, training classroom teachers on best practices in gifted education, and differentiating the district curriculum. These strategies spread knowledge, power, and responsibility for serving these students. Following their sage advice as a guide for surviving NCLB, advocates can speak up for the gifted students they serve.

Conclusion

The motives of the No Child Left Behind Act were pure: help suffering kids succeed. However, gifted learners are suffering from the unintended consequences of the legislation. Reduced funding and resources available to these students have pushed their needs to the background and silenced their cries for help. Parents, teachers, and other advocates for gifted students need to use the data and suggestions available to speak up for these deserving students. Waiting for the pendulum to swing back is not enough.

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By Ashley Delaney
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ITAG is Seeking Nominations for Fall 2010 Elections

The Iowa Talented and Gifted Association is seeking candidates to serve on the ITAG Board of Directors. You may submit names of qualified individuals or self-nominate candidates for the Fall 2010 elections. The qualified individual must be a current ITAG member (dues in good standing) and willing to serve a two year term. The individual must be willing to attend four regularly scheduled meetings each year. The Board of Directors represents personnel from the Area Education Agencies, colleges, local school districts, local chapter affiliates and parents... **Deadline for submission is July 1, 2010.** Mail nomination to ITAG Office, 5619 NW 86th Street Suite 600, Johnston, IA 50131-2955 or email to schartier@nwaea.k12.ia.us. Please receive approval from your nominee prior to emailing or sending the information.

Voting for ITAG Board Members will take place online. The fall News Magazine and the email Spotlight will contain candidate bios, pictures, and the voting link.



Please mail your nominations to:
Kenn Wathen
1400 Main Street
Hamburg, IA 51640

If you have questions, please contact Kenn Wathen at kwathen@hamburg.k12.ia.us

Nominations must be received by June 30, 2010

The Iowa Talented and Gifted Association Distinguished Service Award is presented in recognition of an individual's exemplary service, contribution, and commitment to Iowa's talented and gifted students. This includes parents, teachers, administrators, or others who have demonstrated effort to positively impact services and opportunities for gifted learners.

Anyone may make a nomination for the award. Affiliate chapters are especially encouraged to submit nominations. Since only one award is usually given each year, many exceptional nominees are yet to be recognized. Current ITAG Board Members are not eligible for this award.

Please use the nomination form on the ITAG website: <http://www.iowatag.org> (resources page) or duplicate this form. Additionally, please include a statement (500 word limit) explaining your reasons for nomination. You may attach other supporting documents and letters of support from administrators, teachers, parents, or students.

No materials will be returned.

Nominee name _____

School district _____

Street address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Number of years of service to gifted and talented _____

Nominated by _____

Daytime phone number _____

Evening phone number _____

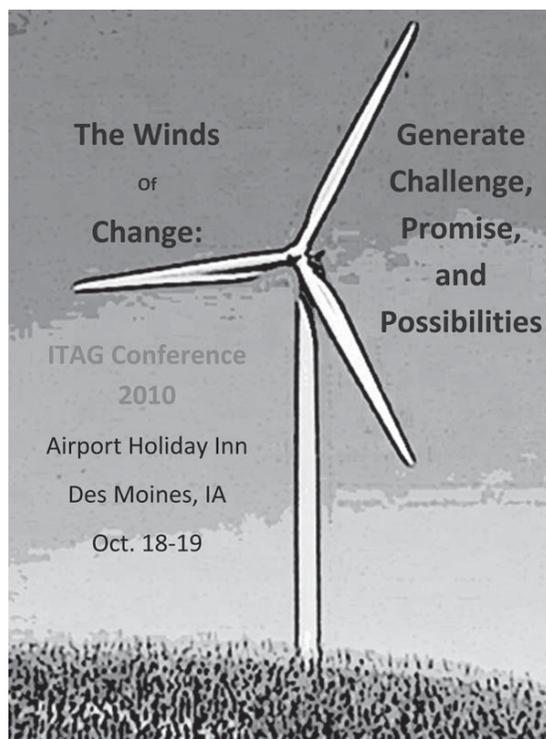
Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Relationship to nominee _____

Come Join ITAG and the Des Moines School District Gifted and Talented Department at the 2010 ITAG State Conference, October 18-19, 2010 at the Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines, Iowa!

The conference, titled ***The Winds of Change: Generating Challenge, Promise and Possibilities*** hopes to provide gifted and talented administrators, consultants, classroom teachers, school administrators, school counselors and parents with exciting new use-on-Monday ideas and cutting edge research findings, while at the same time honoring the sage wisdom of long standing visionaries and practitioners in our field. Come be enriched and enlightened by George Betts, Dennis Higgins, Elizabeth Nielsen, Marcia Gentry, and dozens of our Iowa educators and consultants as we come together to learn from each other and celebrate all that is challenging, promising and full of possibilities for gifted education in Iowa!



Hotel Information:

The Airport Holiday Inn is located at 6111 Fleur Drive in Des Moines, Iowa

**ITAG room block rate is \$85.00 plus 12% tax
Please call 800-248-4013 to make phone reservations.**

Deadline for room block is September 27, 2010

Meet the 2010 Keynote Speakers



George Betts, Ed.D., is a Professor of Special Education in the area of gifted and talented education at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado, and a former teacher and facilitator at Arvada West High School in Arvada, Colorado. He has been a professor and director of the Center for the Education and Study of the Gifted, Talented and Creative, as well as director of the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) since 1978. Dr. Betts is an internationally acclaimed speaker and consultant helping schools, districts, states and national organizations implement and refine programs for the gifted and talented. He has worked extensively in the United States, Canada, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Taiwan. He is currently serving his sixth three-year term on the executive board of the National Association for Gifted Children. Betts is a featured speaker at the annual International Conference on the Autonomous Learner Model. He received the 1990-91 Distinguished Service Award from NAGC and he was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented in 1996. He lives with his wife, Donni, in Greeley, Colorado.

Marcia Gentry, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Research Methodology and the Director of the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University. Her research interests include student attitudes toward school on constructs including Appeal, Challenge, Choice, Interest, Enjoyment, Meaningfulness and Self-Efficacy, and the connection of these attitudes toward learning and motivation; the use of gifted education pedagogy as a means of improving learning and teaching; the use of cluster grouping and differentiation to meet the needs of gifted and talented students while helping all students achieve at high levels; the use of non-traditional settings for talent development such as Career and Technical Education; the development and recognition of talent among underserved populations including students with diverse cultural backgrounds and children who live in poverty; effects of test-driven school climates on student learning and teacher practices; and limitations to currently practiced methods of identifying gifted children.



L. Dennis Higgins, Ed.D., works directly with twice-exceptional students in the Albuquerque Public School System in self-contained, full-day sessions. He authored and implements a comprehensive, three year cycled curriculum designed to meet their social/emotional needs, gifted education, special education and academic needs. He works as a consultant for twice exceptional programs to many school districts across the nation. Dr. Higgins serves as co-coordinator for New Mexico's Technology SPOTLIGHT project – a project that connects gifted children from the state of New Mexico with enriched classes and mentors via internet and on-line services. He is former coordinator for the Albuquerque Public Schools Summer Programs for the Gifted and Talented and former president of Albuquerque's parent organization for gifted children. He served as the Chairperson of the Futures Studies Division for the National Association for Gifted Children, is a former faculty member of the Texas Governor's Honors Program, a summer program for highly gifted high school students in Texas, and the Summer Enrichment Program in Colorado. He has

authored and coauthored numerous articles, two chapter books and has produced several music and video recordings that focus on twice-exceptional children. He has contributed and consulted on the joint CEC/NAGC "Twice-Exceptional Dilemma" document. His program is featured in the PBS Television Special, "A Chance to Read" for the syndicated program Reading Rockets. In 2006, Dr. Higgins was inducted into the Kansas Music Hall of Fame for his national contributions to children's music. In 2007, he was awarded the New Mexico Golden Apple for Excellence in Teaching for his service to the Albuquerque School District. In 2008, he was awarded the Albuquerque School District Teacher of the Year. He was most recently honored by the New Mexico Autism Society for his work with children with Asperger Syndrome. He is recognized as a Southern Methodist University School of Education and Human Development Distinguished Lecturer.

M. Elizabeth Nielsen, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of New Mexico (UNM) and serves as the coordinator for the Gifted Education Teacher Training Program. Dr. Nielsen has served as a UNM College of Education Assistant Dean for Research and is the recipient of the Burlington Foundation Faculty Achievement Award for Excellence in Teaching. Since 1985, Dr. Nielsen has focused much of her university work and research on the unique populations of gifted learners with learning disabilities. She has published numerous articles and textbook chapters regarding these twice-exceptional students. Additionally, she has been a keynote speaker at various state conferences and has made over fifty presentations at national, regional, and local conferences and has assisted in the production of nationally disseminated audio and video recording on this topic. She has been the principal investigator for two university and public school district collaborative projects focused on gifted students with disabilities. Dr. Nielsen has served as a reviewer for several gifted education/special education journals and is an active member of the National Association for Gifted Children's Special Population Division. Dr. Nielsen holds B.S. and M.A. degrees in Education from the University of Louisville. Her Ph.D. is in Educational Psychology from Purdue University.



“Winds of Change: Generate Challenge, Promise, and Possibilities”
 October 18-19, 2010
 Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines, Iowa

ITAG 2010 Call for Presenters!



Iowa Talented and Gifted Association invites gifted and talented resource teachers, classroom teachers, parents, counselors, coordinators, and administrators to present successful practices and significant issues and theories related to serving the needs of gifted and talented students.

Last year’s conference participants and this year’s survey respondents requested the following sessions be offered by colleagues throughout the state:

General Interest PK-12

- Virtual and hybrid learning opportunities, programs and courses
- Consulting with GT parents
- Successful options/programming for students from poverty
- Successful options/programming for ELL and refugee students
- Managing the small and/or rural GT program
- Personal Education Plans
- Individualized student planning and monitoring (contracts, etc.)
- Mental health concerns of GT students and their families
- Teaching GT students with ADD and ADHD
- Counseling and advising GT students
- How to get your building/district administrators on board
- How to provide quality GT staff development for regular classroom teachers
- Advanced differentiation strategies and lessons

Elementary and Early Childhood Specific Interests:

- Early childhood GT identification
- Curricular ideas, particularly in math, creativity and science
- Curriculum Compacting
- Cluster Grouping
- Early childhood GT programming

Middle school specific interests:

- Underachievement
- Curriculum compacting

- Cluster grouping/flexible grouping
- Curricular ideas in math and creativity
- 4 year plans, post-secondary and career planning

High School specific interests:

- Career/college planning
- Underachievement
- AP and Honors courses
- Competitions and competition-based curricula
- Curricular ideas in science, math and social studies

Also requested, seminar/facilitators leaders for:

- New GT consultants and all new to the field information and resource group
- Seasoned GT consultants issues and trends group
- Categorical funding review
- Small district and rural resource and information session
- Balancing it all – self care for the GT consultant
- Urban GT consultant information and resource sharing session
- Book review session – professional development and student favorites

If you have great ideas for any of these or another topic of interest, we welcome your participation! If you have colleagues who would be great presenters for any of these topics, please let us know and we will contact them or you could encourage them to submit proposals. Also, if you have had a “full house” at a past session, please consider presenting the same session twice. Session length: 60 minutes. Table provided. Presenter provides all other AV equipment. Reduced conference fee for presenters.

Proposals should be submitted by Monday, May 17, 2010.

2010 Call For Presenters



*“Winds of Change: Generate Challenge,
Promise, and Possibilities”
October 18-19, 2010*

Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines, Iowa

2010 ITAG Conference Presentation Proposal



Send to: ITAG office, 5619 NW 86th Street, Suite 600, Johnston, IA 50131-2955.
(515) 225-2323 FAX: (515) 225-6363 itag@assoc-serv.com

Title of my presentation(s)* _____

Session will target (please check all that apply):

Audience New G/T Experienced G/T Classroom Teacher Parents
 Administration Support Personnel Counselors

Student level Primary Middle School High School General

Session preference Monday Tuesday Willing to present twice? Yes No

Name _____

Home Address _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

School/Organization _____

E-mail _____

Position/involvement w/GT students _____

Fax # _____

Work Address _____

* Please attach a typed 25-50 word abstract of your presentation for use in the conference program.

**Additional conference materials will be available
this fall and summer! Please continue to check our web site
at www.iowatag.org for further details.**



Affiliate Education Conference in Washington, D.C.



**James Rice, aide to
Senator Charles Grassley**

Often as individuals we ask, "How can one voice make a difference? How can a small group make an impact?" Rebecca Odoardi of Utah's Association for Talented and Gifted wove a tale of connections that started small, and ended with a working relationship with Orrin Hatch! She became Senator Hatch's "expert at home" on gifted education. Isolated incident? NO! But it was a startling illustration of how important YOU are to gifted education. Going to legislative coffees; attending town hall meetings; sending e-mails and making phone calls; as you build a personal relationship with your legislators, both state and national, YOU make an impact on their decision making for gifted education. What are you waiting for? Get started!

Linda Moehring and I learned that first hand as we met with each legislative aid on Capitol Hill. How do you make an impact on these key people in 15 minutes? Many of these bright people were either part of a gifted program in their educational experiences, or they SHOULD have been in one. Finding common ground, we could talk about key issues that are important to their peers, children, or family members. One legislative aide told us the story of his daughter who was enrolled in a public school in Washington, D.C. He proudly told us how bright she was, but said there was a boy in her kindergarten class who was off-the-wall brilliant. "For Hundreds Day, my daughter, like others in her class, brought the ordinary objects: 100 peanuts; 100 M&Ms; 100 paper clips. The extraordinary young man brought a sheet of paper.....with 100 prime numbers!" That gave Linda and I an opportunity to ask him, "Does his family advocate for him? What would happen if he was from a family who did not speak English as their first language? Or was from a family of poverty whose focus was meeting basic

needs? Or a child from a single parent household whose parent was working long hours and could not spend as much time as he/she wanted with the child?"

What did we advocate for on Capitol Hill?

- Funding for the Javits program, the only federal program that focuses on meeting the unique needs of gifted and talented students.
- Support for the Equity in Excellence Act of 2010 (S. 3086), introduced by Senators Christopher Dodd (CT) and Charles Grassley (Iowa) on March 8, 2010.
- Improving the accountability and reporting provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly No Child Left Behind) to include gifted and talented learners.
- Providing school and state leaders access to the research-based best practices and data necessary to serve and identify disadvantaged high ability students.
- Including professional development programs for teachers to learn about the unique needs of their gifted students.

For more information on these topics, visit the NAGC web site at www.nagc.org. On the left hand column, select *Advocacy and Legislation*, then *Legislative Update*. It's a great way to stay informed about legislation affecting our gifted kids.

**By Gail Kenkel
ITAG Legislative Co-Chair**



**Sally Reis, NEAG School of Education,
and Charles Garrison, legislative
aide for Senator Tom Harkin**

Cluster-Grouping: Introduction and Definition

Cluster-grouping involves placing a group of 6 to 12 or more elementary students identified as gifted, high-ability, high-potential, or high-achieving into a classroom for the express purpose of providing them with full-time educational services targeted toward their advanced learning needs. Cluster-grouping is an important topic in gifted education because it is an often-recommended and commonly used practice. In recent years its use has become increasingly popular due to inclusive heterogeneous grouping practices and budget cuts that have resulted in gifted program elimination. The following sections provide an overview of the background, applications, themes, outcomes, and future directions of cluster-grouping.

Background

The practice of cluster-grouping can be found in the literature as early as 1960. Applications of this practice exist from that time through the present in both the research and practitioner literature. Early research was limited to descriptive accounts of cluster group programs, follow-up surveys of students, and surveys of teacher uses of cluster-grouping. Through the 1990's and into the new millennium researchers used quantitative and qualitative methods to study cluster-grouping. This research revealed positive effects of cluster-grouping on student achievement and identification and on teacher practices. These findings, coupled with increased emphasis on accountability and tightened budgets, have led many elementary schools to implement the practice of cluster-grouping in an effort to improve student achievement while at the same time provide services to gifted and talented students. Most textbooks that address programming options for gifted students describe, suggest, or define cluster-grouping as a viable option for meeting their needs. Recently, more research has focused on investigating various aspects of cluster-grouping and its effects on student learning and affective outcomes.

Applications

Simple

The applications of cluster-grouping vary widely from school to school and from district to district. In its most simple form, cluster-grouping focuses on the needs of students identified as gifted, by placing them together in a designated classroom for the purpose of providing them with a differentiated education. A teacher with experience, training, and a willingness to work with gifted students is

designated to teach this "cluster class". In a simple application of cluster-grouping, little thought is given to the composition of the remainder of this class or to that of the rest of the classes in the grade level or building. The learning outcomes for identified gifted students form the basis of program effectiveness evaluation, which addresses whether the cluster-grouping program effectively serves the identified students. This narrow focus is reflective of many practices in gifted education that seek to serve the gifted students without regard to how such services affect other teachers, students, and programs.

Inclusive—Special Needs Groups

Other applications of cluster-grouping are more inclusive and take into account the role that cluster-grouping has in the grade-level and in the school. These applications might go so far as to cluster other groups of special needs learners such as English as a New Language students or students with Learning Disabilities into designated classrooms. Such applications of cluster-grouping take the model one step further than the simple applications by considering the needs of other special needs students when developing classroom student composition. Program evaluation of such implementations would include components measuring learning outcomes for all special-needs learners who were cluster grouped and might include components that describe how cluster-grouping functions as a program within the context of the school. This broadened focus recognizes that cluster-grouping involves more than just the identified gifted students.

Complex—Total School

Finally, some more complex applications of cluster-grouping are implemented as total school models in which the identification, placement, and achievement of all students are considered in developing the program. Students at all achievement levels (i.e., low, low-average, average, above-average, high) are identified to facilitate their placement into classrooms. Educators use a combination of achievement and classroom performance data to identify student achievement levels, and then use the identification categories to develop classroom lists that specifically reduce the number of different achievement levels in each class. One nuance that has been recommended in this more complex application of cluster-grouping involves placing gifted students or high-achievers in one classroom and a group of above-average students in other classrooms, thus providing each classroom with a group of students who

achieves at levels above the average. These more complex applications of cluster-grouping thoughtfully place students of all achievement levels into classrooms in a manner that increases their opportunity for educational success. Reducing the range of achievement levels in each teacher's classroom makes planning lessons and differentiating instruction more efficient, because as teachers plan for fewer ability levels, they have time to develop higher quality lessons focused on the specific achievement levels of the students in their classrooms. Thus program evaluation of more complex applications of cluster-grouping is concerned with how the use of cluster-grouping affects all students and educational programs within the school.

Common Themes of Cluster-Grouping

Full-time Services

Regardless of whether the implementation of cluster-grouping is simple, more inclusive, or complex, general themes and rationale exist for its use. First, cluster-grouping provides full-time services to gifted students by placing them full-time with a teacher who has agreed to modify curriculum and instruction based on their special learning needs. Other gifted programs in elementary schools often consist of only a few hours of service each week with students placed in general classrooms for the majority of the school week. Whether gifted students' educational needs are addressed in general classrooms depends on their teachers' knowledge, skills, and willingness to adjust curriculum and instruction to the advanced learning needs of these students. Thus, in general classrooms, how well gifted students' needs are addressed varies widely.

Qualified Teachers

Second, cluster-grouping places gifted students with a qualified teacher who takes responsibility for appropriately challenging them with curriculum and instruction suited for their advanced learning needs. Grouping identified students with qualified teachers, helps ensure that students' needs are more consistently met, while providing teachers with several students who require advanced planning. It is more efficient for a teacher to plan for a group of advanced learners than to plan activities for one or two such learners.

Intellectual and Age-Peers

Third, cluster-grouping provides gifted students with intellectual peers and a challenging learning environment. The literature clearly indicates that gifted students need to spend large parts of their day with others of similar ability. Cluster-grouping facilitates this need, while at the same

time provides them with opportunities for continued interaction with their age-peers.

Low Cost and Efficient

Fourth, cluster-grouping provides an efficient way to group students and increase the chances that their learning needs will be met without additional cost to the district. Often special programs for gifted students are non-existent or under-funded. With school budget constraints and funds directed toward accountability, supporting additional staff to address the special learning needs of gifted students is frequently viewed as an impossible luxury. Cluster-grouping requires no additional staff, but rather a simple reconfiguration of how students are placed in classes to provide full-time services to gifted learners.

Complementary Programming Practice

Fifth, cluster-grouping provides one program on a continuum of gifted education services. It works well in conjunction with other programming options for gifted students including but not limited to pull-out programs, self-contained classrooms, magnet programs, flexible achievement grouping in subject areas, and specific models such as the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. Cluster-grouping is not designed as a stand-alone model to replace existing services, but rather as an additional effective programming practice that can enhance existing services. Often cluster-grouping provides schools with a means of offering services to additional students who may not qualify for placement in the magnet school, or whose parents may not want to bus them to another school, or who might be placed on a waiting list due to a limited number of spaces in a "more exclusive" program. As such, cluster-grouping offers schools the opportunity to provide more inclusive gifted education services to their students.

Flexible, Inclusive, Identification

Sixth, cluster-grouping allows educators to identify and serve gifted students without limitations placed on the program based on how many spaces are available in the program. Simply put, cluster-grouping can be used to accommodate any number, and varying numbers, of identified students even if these numbers increase as the students in the school progress through the grade levels. Yearly identification is recommended in cluster-grouping models as it facilitates the recognition of students whose

Continued on Page 20

Continued from page 19

achievement increases. Thus, cluster-grouping has the potential to address the long-standing problem of under-identification as gifted of students from specific populations, namely, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or of African American, Native American or Latina/or ethnic backgrounds.

Outcomes of Cluster-Grouping

Cluster-grouping has been shown to result in more students being identified as gifted and fewer students being identified as low-achieving over time. Additionally, cluster-grouping has resulted in the increased achievement of all students in the school as they progress through the grade levels. Thus, cluster-grouping seems to meet the needs of high-achieving students while offering the opportunity for other students to grow, develop, and emerge as achievers.

Implementing a complex model of total school cluster-grouping has been shown to increase all teachers' knowledge and use of gifted education and talent development strategies. This means that classroom teachers responsible for students other than those identified as high-achieving engaged in the use of strategies typically reserved for gifted students, such as acceleration, curriculum compacting, independent study, and student-directed inquiry. This enriched teaching and advanced use of differentiation by many teachers undoubtedly benefits all students in the school.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Elementary school personnel should consider learning more about how to implement a complex version of cluster-grouping in their efforts to help all students reach their potentials. When viewed in the larger context of school reform and extending gifted education services to more students, cluster-grouping has been shown to reach and benefit students and their teachers. This reach extends beyond just those students identified as gifted to all students in a school. Thus cluster-grouping may offer elementary educators a win-win opportunity by helping them better address the diverse learning needs of all their students while providing direct services to students identified as gifted.

Research concerning the use of cluster-grouping is currently limited to studies conducted about elementary applications of cluster-grouping. Thus, before generalizations can be made concerning the use of cluster-grouping in middle schools, research is needed to help inform practice. Elemen-

tary schools and middle schools are quite different from one another, with elementary students placed into a classroom for most of the day with a single teacher and middle school students moving hourly from one subject area teacher to another. Thus, the practice of cluster-grouping, which works well in the elementary setting, may not work in the same manner or may not work at all in a middle school environment.

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