

# Gifted Education Recommendations

*Gifted Education Task Force  
Established by Commissioner Terry Holliday  
2012-2013*



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# **Executive Summary**

The Gifted Education Taskforce was formed in December 2012. The charge for the group was to review current regulations and policies and the effect on gifted students. They were to determine where improvements in gifted education needed to be made and to assess the challenges and barriers faced by students and educators. The group was also to seek resolutions to removing barriers in gifted education in order for advanced and high achieving students to continue to move forward in their educational experiences. Resources were to be considered and their effect on the enhancement of gifted education. Recommendations were to be suggested for the 2014 Legislative session. After several meetings, the group formulated 18 draft recommendations in the areas of accountability, professional learning and funding. The taskforce then narrowed its recommendations to the top nine thought to have potential for the biggest impact. The taskforce also selected three overall recommendations for the 2014 Legislative session.

## **Introduction:**

Imagine a gifted child who is never allowed to work above grade level with intellectual peers, peers who are at the same cognitive or academic ability, and who scores at proficiency throughout his/her school career. Parents and educators are pleased that he has “done well.” However, several pressing questions arise. Has she performed at the top of her potential? Is he truly college and career ready in light of his potential? Is she prepared for the rigors and challenges of the innovative productive careers her potential indicates she could pursue? Kentucky needs to develop talent to its full potential to compete and lead in this century.

The myth that “gifted students do not need help; they will do fine on their own” is just that, a myth. These children have exceptional intellectual and academic needs that require additional guidance from well-trained teachers who challenge and support them. Some gifted students also have learning or other co-existing disabilities. They come from all economic backgrounds and all racial and cultural groups. Gifted students may be so far ahead of their same-age peers that they know more than half of the grade-level curriculum before the school year begins. To not have needs and strengths recognized can lead to low achievement, despondency and/or poor work habits. (“Common gifted education,” 2013)

To settle for less than excellence may not be noticed on a daily basis, but more potential for future innovative productivity is lost with each passing year as students languish unchallenged in Kentucky classrooms. Kentuckians have a choice. They can continue to overlook the needs of our gifted and talented students, or they can commit to a systematic process of identifying and cultivating the Commonwealth’s most talented students, this includes both needs we presently acknowledge, as well as, those that remain to be discovered through proper identification and appropriate services by well-trained teachers, administrators, and other school personnel. (“State of States,” 2010-2011) Decision-makers must commit the funds necessary to make excellence possible on a daily basis for all Kentucky students, including those who are gifted and talented.

Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2010) recommend making “closing the excellence gap a National and State priority” (p. 30). They specify that decision-makers should ask two questions when education policy at any level is considered:

- How will this [decision] affect our brightest students?
- How will this [decision] help other students to begin to achieve at high levels?

When we ask these questions, policy will focus on developing the talents of all children across the Commonwealth. Excellence will become the focus of policy rather than proficiency.

These recommendations are respectfully submitted to the Kentucky Department of Education staff for consideration and action.

## Accountability Recommendations

### Recommendations:

- 1. The Department shall encourage adding Gifted and Talented students to the categories of students for which disaggregated data are obtained and used for assessment, accountability, and performance information. Develop a comprehensive system to gauge effectiveness of gifted services that extends beyond K-PREP and ACT performance data, including the use of measures targeted to students' areas of high potential. Incorporate data on gifted and talented children in the data set included with the school report card.**

In order to instill a sense of urgency among communities, school leaders, and teachers, the public disclosure and highlighting of achievement and growth data is necessary. Experts in statistics and accountability systems should be tasked to work with experts in gifted education to develop a system that can distill achievement test scores and any other necessary data into a global score representing student achievement and growth. The data should be further disaggregated by areas of identified giftedness in addition to being distilled into a single score. In subsequent years, performance deliverables should be developed and publicized. A parent satisfaction survey should be developed by the Kentucky Department of Education and administered each year. These results should be made public as well. An aggregate improvement score will be developed and schools and/or districts not meeting improvement goals should be subject to increased monitoring, scrutiny and mandatory development of improvement plans.

- 2. Include Gifted and Talented indicators in all existing program reviews, as required by Senate Bill 1, in order to increase awareness of and accountability for meeting the needs of gifted/talented students as well as integrating quality GT services across all facets of instruction.**

Quality school programming requires integration of instructional policies and procedures that support data-driven instructional decisions with an emphasis on continuous progress for all students, including students who have the potential to learn material at a different pace. The nature and needs of these students require shared responsibility and awareness across all school and district initiatives. Inclusion in existing program reviews will establish a priority level that will strengthen current state delivery plans (College and Career Readiness and Persistence to Graduation) without adding a stand-alone review for all schools.

- 3. The Department shall encourage the mindful and conscientious implementation of the Gifted Student Services Plan (GSSP) according to KRS 157.196 as a tool to 1). Outline goals to address individual student's interests, needs, and abilities, 2). Communicate to parents those goals and student growth toward those goals will be reported, and 3).**

**Provide progress reports related to the student's GSSP to the parents as part of other communication on student progress at least once a semester as stated in 704 KAR 3:285 Section 5, (3).**

The GSSP, as proscribed by law (704 KAR 3:285 Section 3, 6), in 1998 has the ability to provide a continuous improvement model and tracking mechanism for gifted students and the delivery of services at a statewide level. Continued implementation and utilization via Infinite Campus can provide portability of student data to ensure level of services for intra-district transfers as well as those between districts.

### **Professional Learning Recommendation**

The role of professional learning is vital to building teacher capacity to identify and meet the needs of gifted and talented students. The Professional Learning Standards regard the role of professional learning in guiding instructional leaders and decision-makers in the development of programming and policies that maximize the potential of every student as critically important. One of the standards which addresses Professional Learning Communities, shows how important it is to have well-trained professionals who are indispensable for identifying and properly serving high-potential and high-achieving learners. Without trained teachers and program administrators, even significant investments in other resources and services may fail to attain meaningful and sustained results (“State of States,” 2010-2011). One of the Professional Learning Standards is Kentucky must be committed to meaningful and sustained results to ensure the future. It is essential that ongoing professional learning is in place so that students are prepared for admission and success in selective programs and careers that utilize their talents and abilities.

According to the 2013 TELL Survey in Kentucky, 57% of teacher respondents reported that they needed professional learning in differentiation of instruction, while 52% said they needed professional learning in Gifted and Talented Education. In addition, 92% of respondents reported that they had not had Gifted and Talented professional learning in the last two years. The professional learning demands in Kentucky schools are so extensive that GT is difficult to sustain as a priority.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. The Department shall encourage all professional learning activities to address the needs of the Gifted and Talented students and consider the impact on gifted/high ability students by all initiatives.**

Kentucky teachers and administrators face a wide range of initiatives (i.e. RTI/KSI, differentiation, de-escalation/restraint, and implementation of Kentucky Core Academic Standards, closing achievement gaps, PBIS, technology integration, early entry into kindergarten policies, mandatory attendance ages, K-PREP, CIITS, common

assessments, and more). Each initiative requires ongoing training of teachers and administrators for successful implementation. It is important that the needs of identified GT students and other high potential students are intentionally and thoughtfully addressed in the delivery of training and implementation of the initiatives in order to foresee and eliminate potential barriers to the development of the full potentials of these students. It is important to consider the needs of advanced students in every facet of standards implementation and the related assessments (Plucker, 2010).

**2. The Department should encourage professional learning for all staff on gifted education pedagogy including strategies to reduce underachievement among gifted students.**

Research indicates that 40 to 50 percent of all students underachieve (Ciaccio, 2004) with the high percentage of gifted students who underachieve characterized as both society's greatest loss and society's greatest untapped resource (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Closing achievement gaps means reducing underachievement for a high percentage of Kentucky's students and that will require teacher and administrator training.

**3. Develop and deliver training about the nature and needs of gifted students to school boards, school administrators, Site Based Decision Making councils, community civic groups, parent groups, and business leadership.**

All leaders and stakeholders must be informed and involved in order to develop and sustain policies and programming that will effectively meet the needs of gifted/talented students. Adequately meeting the needs of all students, including gifted students, is both a moral and economic imperative. It is important to develop and present quality training to all stakeholders to build a base of understanding and support. Consequently, this will result in greater access to the range of resources needed. Training could be developed and delivered by KDE, using existing networking groups, such as the Kentucky Education Cooperatives.

### **Funding for Gifted and Talented Education Recommendation**

Why provide additional funds for gifted education? That is a question often asked to those who advocate for gifted and talented students. What difference does it make? It matters a great deal for the students who are eligible for gifted education services. Gifted and talented students represent diverse experiences, skills, ethnicity, and cultural and economic backgrounds. All of them require a responsive and challenging educational system if they are to achieve to their highest potential. ("State of States", 2010-2011)

Funding to support gifted education is about meeting student needs and the needs of Kentucky's future.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Request funding for Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding for a child who is enrolled in kindergarten by a district, but does not meet the kindergarten age requirement of turning five years of age by a specific date.**

Senate Bill 24 (SB 24), enacted during the 2012 Regular Session, amends KRS 158.030 by requiring each local school board to adopt a policy for parents or guardians to petition the board to enroll a child who does not meet the kindergarten age requirement of turning five years of age on or before October 1. The change in KRS 158.030 compels the local school board to develop a process that is consistent with Kentucky's school readiness definition and ensures children who are not age-eligible for kindergarten demonstrate readiness in all development domains. Senate Bill 35 (SB 35), enacted in 2006, was a similar bill in that it allowed a kindergarten student to advance through the primary program if the student is determined to have acquired the academic and social skills taught in kindergarten as determined by local school board policy. The bill also provides that the student may be classified as other than a kindergarten student for purposes of funding under KRS 157.310 to 157.440. Currently, SEEK funding for kindergarten students is approximately \$1,918 per student. In the 2013-2014 school year, 171 students were admitted early to kindergarten. Based on this data, if funds had been allocated for early entry, an estimated \$328,063 would have been spent on students who were admitted early to kindergarten this year. Funds from IDEA cannot be allocated for early entrance to kindergarten because this money can only be used for students who are identified as having special needs. The Taskforce on Gifted Education in Kentucky recommends that similar wording for funding be presented as an amendment to SB 24 in the 2014 General Assembly session that would allow SEEK funding to follow a child who is enrolled in kindergarten through early entrance.

- 2. Request a funding study of the gifted and talented state-allocated funds and their distribution among school districts. The goals of the study should be recommendations for implementation of short and long term funding plans that bring the allocation in line with inflation and the needs of districts to provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented children. In addition, the study should include recommendations for more equitable and adequate distribution of funds without penalizing any school district for the current allocation it receives.**

According to the *State of the States* report, "there is a markedly insufficient national commitment to gifted and talented children. Without support from the federal government, it is up to the states to fund gifted and talented education" ("State of States,"

2010-2011). Since 1978 and the first competitive gifted education grants, Kentucky legislators have provided some pecuniary support of the appropriate education for gifted students. The following chart shows the amount of the state allocated funds from 1990 to the present.

<b>Gifted and Talented Education: Funding 1990-2014</b>				
Allocation used to fund GT service for gifted students.				
75% of a district's funding must go for direct services to GT students.				
1990-1991	\$5,985,000		2002-2003	\$7,121,500
1991-1992	\$5,900,000		2003-2004	\$7,109,400
1992-1993	\$5,900,000		2004-2005	\$7,121,500
1993-1994	\$6,250,000		2005-2006	\$7,121,500
1994-1995	\$6,270,000		2006-2007	\$7,121,500
1995-1996	\$6,270,000		2007-2008	\$7,121,500
1996-1997	\$6,270,000		2008-2009	\$7,121,500
1997-1998	\$6,270,000		2009-2010	\$6,875,400
1998-1999	\$6,851,500		2010-2011	\$6,806,700
1999-2000	\$7,406,000		2011-2012	\$6,622,300
2000-2001	\$7,406,000		2012-2013	\$6,622,300
2001-2002	\$7,406,000		2013-2014	\$6,622,300
Updated by Susan Perkins for the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education, July 2013				

The current allocation of \$6.6 million provides a beginning but in no way covers the full cost of professional learning, comprehensive identification, and appropriate gifted and talented services. From 1990 until the present, little gain in funding has been realized.

Every district receives an allocation for gifted and talented education from the small funds available. The allocation is based on a formula that is either unknown or poorly understood. Many districts, including large districts, receive amounts that do not cover even one teacher's salary. Larger districts receive more but, with the larger student population, find that the allocation does not go far enough to provide needed services. If a district wishes to offer more to their gifted and talented students, then the funds must come from local monies.

3. **Include in the Kentucky Department of Education's budget additional support for developing and implementing a monitoring program to support and assist districts whose gifted students do not make adequate annual growth. The monitoring program would support Kentucky school districts in providing comprehensive professional learning, identification, and service delivery options for their gifted and talented students as outlined in 704 KAR 3:285 Programs for the Gifted and Talented.**

The Gifted and Talented Program Review could allow districts to reflect on current practices being used with gifted and talented students and provides opportunities for professional growth for its educators and for more appropriate services for students. As a result, schools will increase the instructional effectiveness and efficiency, professionals

focus on the implementation of best practices and on-going progress monitoring, and most importantly, gifted students realize individual student growth and achievement that is suited to their needs.

### **Top Three Legislative Recommendations**

- 1. Provide Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding for a child who is enrolled in kindergarten by a district, but does not meet the kindergarten age requirement of turning five years of age by a specific date.**

Senate Bill 24 (SB 24), enacted during the 2012 Regular Session, amends KRS 158.030 by requiring each local school board to adopt a policy for parents or guardians to petition the board to enroll a child who does not meet the kindergarten age requirement of turning five years of age on or before October 1. The change in KRS 158.030 compels the local school board to develop a process that is consistent with Kentucky's school readiness definition and ensures children who are not age-eligible for kindergarten demonstrate readiness in all development domains. Senate Bill 35 (SB 35), enacted in 2006, was a similar bill in that it allowed a kindergarten student to advance through the primary program if the student is determined to have acquired the academic and social skills taught in kindergarten as determined by local school board policy. The bill also provides that the student may be classified as other than a kindergarten student for purposes of funding under KRS 157.310 to 157.440. The Taskforce on Gifted Education in Kentucky recommends that similar wording for funding be presented as an amendment in the 2014 General Assembly session that would allow SEEK funding to follow a child who is enrolled in kindergarten through early entrance.

- 2. Request the Kentucky Department of Education conduct a funding study of the gifted and talented state-allocated funds and their distribution among school districts. The goals of the study should be recommendations for implementation of short and long term funding plans that bring the allocation in line with inflation and the needs of districts to provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented children. In addition, the study should include recommendations for more equitable and adequate distribution of funds without penalizing any school district for the current allocation it receives.**

According to the *State of the States* report, "there is a markedly insufficient national commitment to gifted and talented children. Without support from the federal government, it is up to the states to fund gifted and talented education" ("State of the," 2010-2011). Since 1978 and the first competitive gifted education grants, Kentucky legislators have provided some pecuniary support of the appropriate education for gifted

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Updated by Susan Perkins for the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education, July 2013				

The current allocation of \$6.6 million provides a beginning but in no way covers the full cost of professional learning, comprehensive identification, and appropriate gifted and talented services. From 1990 until the present, little gain in funding has been realized.

In addition to the lack of gain, current for GT programs has not kept up with inflation. In 2010 the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education asked Susan Perkins Weston to construct a graph showing the buying power of allocated gifted education funds from 1990 - 2010. She recently updated the chart to show how the current gifted and talented funds would compare to today's cost with a rise in inflation. The following table shows that the buying power began to lag in 1991 and has never caught up.

Every district receives an allocation for gifted and talented education from the small funds available. The allocation is based on a formula that is either unknown or poorly understood. Many districts, including large districts, receive amounts that do not cover even one teacher's salary. Larger districts receive more but, with the larger student population, find that the allocation does not go far enough to provide needed services. If a district wishes to offer more to their gifted and talented students, then the funds must come from local monies.

**3. Augment funding for the Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science to bring the total number of students at any year to 200.**

The Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky has completed its sixth year, and it has been recognized in 2013 and 2012 as the number one public high school in the United States by *Newsweek*. As a residential school, the numbers are limited to the number of beds in the residence hall. Private funds are being secured for building on wings to increase the capacity of Florence Schneider Hall to 200

Academy students. This request is to increase operating funds to accommodate the additional students. The Kentucky General Assembly currently allocates a lump sum to Western Kentucky University of approximately \$22,000 per student. Class size at the Gatton Academy fluctuates between 120-125 students a year. The cost for 200 students would be about \$4,400,000.

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