

gifted all day long

Recently enacted legislation did away with the 200-minute-per-week requirement for service to gifted students (AB 2313, effective Jan. 1, 2001). Does this give permission to local districts to do nothing for their gifted students, as some parents are beginning to complain? Not at all, as a brief look at the new standards approved by the State Board of Education last October will demonstrate.

Recognizing that gifted students are gifted every day, all day — not just on Tuesday afternoon — the new legislation specifies that services in GATE (gifted and talented education) programs must be an integral part of the school day, and include modification and extensions of core curriculum appropriate for gifted

IMPLEMENTING NEW STATE STANDARDS THAT REQUIRE GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION SERVICES TO BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CORE CURRICULUM WILL RESULT IN IMPROVED TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR EVERYONE.

learners. The new program standards provide guidelines for ensuring that this occurs on a regular basis.

What does this mean for local districts and school sites? It means first that greater emphasis must be placed on professional development. No longer can we justify providing training only for assigned after-school or GATE pull-out teachers. Since most gifted students spend the majority of their time in regular classes, regular teachers must be pro-

fessionally trained to meet the needs of gifted students in those regular classes. In other words, it is time we recognize that every teacher is a teacher of the gifted and prepare all of them accordingly.

Furthermore, it is not enough for administrators and teachers to give lip service to the notion of curriculum differentiation (modification). Teachers must be trained to develop the skills to provide the depth and complexity as well as accelerated pacing and novelty required by gifted learners. At the same time, administrators need to know what to look for when they come into classrooms where core curriculum is being differentiated for gifted students.

By Margaret Gosfield

No longer can we take the easy way out by offering a pull-out program unrelated to the core curriculum and feel satisfied that we are adequately meeting the needs of gifted learners. Districts can still have pull-out programs, but they must be considered adjunct programs and do not take the place of primary programs, which must have differentiated core curricula at their centers.

The new standards were four years in the making, a joint endeavor of the California Department of Education and the California Association for the Gifted. The extended committee writing and reviewing the standards document was made up of a great variety of interested people, including CDE staff, school administrators, teachers and psychologists, as well as parents of gifted children and members of the community.

Input was also provided by representatives from other education organizations, including ACSA, CTA, PTA and the California Association of State and Federal Education Programs. People from small, medium and large districts, well as from inner city, rural and suburban school districts, provided input on many different levels. The document went through several drafts before being submitted to the State Board of Education for approval.

Structure

The standards are divided into eight sections, covering each of the basic program components: program design, identification and placement, curriculum and instruction, social and emotional needs, professional development, parent and community involvement, program assessment and budgets. The sections are brief, with one page devoted to each.

The standards document was structured to provide both a base of minimum standards that all programs must meet and a vision of what exemplary programs would look like. Therefore, the standards are presented in columns, with those items considered minimal shown in column one, commendable standards in column two and exemplary standards in column three.

The immediate payoff for an exemplary program is approval for three years

instead of one, avoiding the necessity of preparing a new application yearly. But the greater dividend comes in improved programs and services for this special needs group of students. Parents in particular will be looking for schools and districts that have achieved exemplary status for their GATE programs.



An added benefit is that when program services for gifted learners improve, the level of teaching and learning for all students goes up (Clark, 2002). In other words, the skills and techniques effective in teaching gifted learners transfer to serving all levels and groups.

Following are brief synopses of the eight components of the standards document.

1. Program design: The program must provide services to gifted learners as part of the regular school day. This eliminates the previous requirement of 200 minutes of service per week, stipulating that meaningful services must occur on a regular basis throughout the school day. Administrative groupings approved for gifted learners include: cluster grouping (5-7 students) in heterogeneous classes; part-time grouping (such as homogeneous grouping for certain content such as math or reading); special day classes (self-contained GATE classes) and magnet schools. Regular intellectual peer interaction is one of the requirements.

2. Identification: In order to serve special needs students, they must first be identified; this is the only legitimate reason to label certain children as "gifted" or any of the other special-needs labels used in our schools. Equity requires that all children have access to program services when they qualify, which means we must be vigilant in not overlooking certain groups of children. Therefore, the standards require that all staff be trained in the nomination process, with knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of gifted learners.

The district must actively seek referrals of typically underrepresented populations (minorities, English learners and children in poverty), and use multiple and varied measurements to determine eligibility. These measurements should be both traditional (standardized cognitive ability and achievement tests) and non-traditional (portfolios, interviews, observations, committees) and tailored to fit the specific background of the students being assessed.

3. Curriculum and instruction: Gifted students must be taught the core curriculum as are all students; however, it must be differentiated (modified) to make it appropriate for their specific learning needs. The differentiated curriculum focuses primarily on depth and complexity of content, advanced or accelerated pacing of content, and novelty — the provision for unique and original expressions of student understanding. Appropriate instructional models must be used in teaching the differentiated curriculum.

Brain research results indicate that students whose minds are not stretched and stimulated actually regress (Diamond & Hopson, 1998); they must "use it or lose it." Therefore, it is not acceptable to let gifted learners just coast or believe that they can get it on their own. Educators have an obligation to teach all of their students and further their learning, including those who are gifted.

4. Social and emotional development: Just as gifted learners differ in their intellectual and academic development, so do they differ in their

social and emotional development. It is not acceptable to say that if they are truly gifted, they'll make it on their own. Teachers, administrators, parents and counselors need information regarding the unique social and emotional traits of gifted learners. They also need to be alerted to the at-risk factors faced by gifted students, so that appropriate counseling or other interventions can be made as needed. The standards focus on training, collaboration and interventions regarding the social and emotional needs of gifted students.


5. Professional development: Given the fact that most colleges and universities in California include little or no training in gifted education as part of their teacher preparation programs, it is incumbent upon districts to ensure that inservice training is available locally. Exemplary programs require certificates in gifted education for personnel assigned to teach and make decisions regarding gifted learners (something taken for granted as minimum in other special needs programs).

Certificate programs (12-15 units) are currently available at several California locations: University of California campuses at Davis, Riverside, San Diego and Santa Barbara (beginning stage), and California Lutheran University. In addition, local district (in-house) certificate models are available at Conejo Valley, Redlands and San Diego, among many others. Many of the in-house certificate models combine offerings from institutions of higher education, institutes and conference sessions offered by the California Association for the Gifted and local inservice.

Districts whose applications allocate significant portions of their state GATE funds to professional development will certainly be looked upon favorably, so long as the training is directly related to gifted education.

6. Parent and community involvement: The standards in this section focus on two areas: open communication and active GATE advisory committees. GATE parents have sometimes held the reputation of being "pushy par-

FIND OUT MORE



California's GATE standards may be found on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/gate> or through the CAG Web site at <http://www.cagifted.org>.

To further assist education leaders, the California Association for the Gifted has prepared a technical manual specifically aligned to the standards with a rationale as well as suggestions for implementation for each standard and its components. Information regarding this manual is available by calling (562) 789-9933 or by e-mail at CAGoffice@aol.com.

ents." As parents of gifted students, it should surprise no one that they are usually very articulate and generally choose to be well informed. When brought into the GATE program as meaningful partners, GATE parents have become some of the most effective supporters — not only of gifted programs but of entire schools and districts. These standards recommend methods to maintain both communication and committees with particular emphasis on including parents of diverse student populations.

7. Assessment: The standards provide guides for both student assessment and program assessment that serve as sources of information for improvement. Measuring the outcomes of the program and student achievement helps to show strengths and weaknesses, permitting educators and parents to focus on both positive reinforcement and needed changes.

In addition to an examination of standardized test results, practitioners are encouraged to collect data from peer evaluations, records pertaining to mastery of core standards and skills, classroom observations, questionnaires, rating scales, daily logs and anecdotal records. Development of rubrics specifically appropriate for gifted students are also recommended.

8. Budgets: GATE funds may be spent in four general categories: professional development (including parent education), direct student services, district-level coordination and the GATE identification process. The standards specify that GATE funds must supplement, not supplant, general funds, and that carry-over monies should be minimal and kept within district GATE accounts. Services for gifted students have always been underfunded, with the GATE funds equaling less than one tenth of one percent of the total education budget in California. Because the funding is so minimal, we must be especially vigilant to ensure that it is spent wisely.

Furthering the learning of all students

Contrary to the widely held myth, gifted learners cannot "get it on their own." This special needs group of learners have much potential both in terms of their possible personal accomplishment, but also in the potential contributions they may make to society through future problem solving and leadership. The California standards are meant to serve as a support and guide to you as education leaders in making sure these youngsters are neither ignored nor accidentally overlooked. ■

References

- Clark, B. (2002) *Growing up gifted: Developing the potential of children at home and at school* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Diamond, M. & Hopson, J. (1999). *Magic trees of the mind: How to nurture your child's intelligence, creativity, and healthy emotions from birth through adolescence*. New York: Penguin.

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