

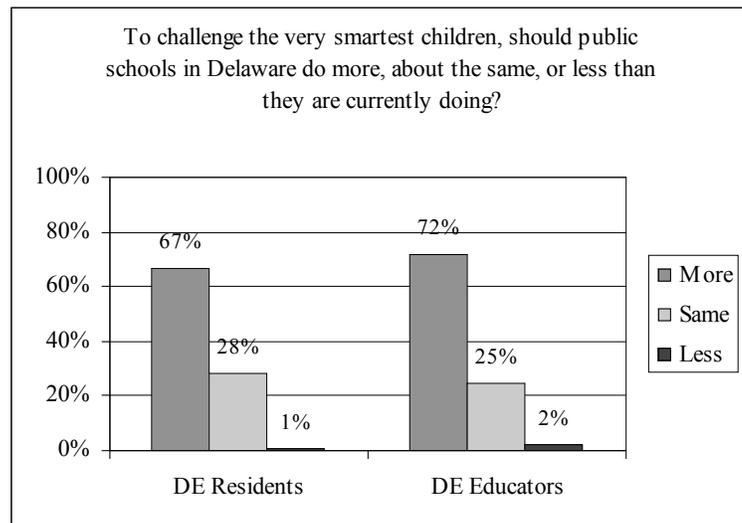
Education Policy Brief

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Gifted and Talented Education

Data from two statewide polls by the Delaware Education Research and Development Center (R&D Center) indicate that the majority of educators and the public support doing *more* to challenge the brightest children in our schools.¹ Like individuals with disabilities, who function at different levels than the majority of students, gifted and talented students have different abilities and needs. We cannot assume that gifted and talented students will succeed in school based on their ‘gifts’ alone. Research shows that they may get bored, become disruptive, lose their love of learning, drop out of school, or simply remain quiet while they learn little in their classes. Many gifted and talented students do better in school when they have access to specialized programs delivered by educators who are trained to work with them.²



This *Education Policy Brief* is an introduction to issues in gifted and talented education. What does ‘gifted and talented’ mean? What federal policies address the needs of gifted and talented students? What programs exist in Delaware? What issues should be considered to promote the educational potential of Delaware’s gifted and talented students?

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DEFINING ‘GIFTED AND TALENTED’

Education researchers, practitioners, and policy makers use a variety of definitions of gifted and talented. The definitions vary in their emphasis on several criteria, including personality traits, demonstrated abilities, and potential performance. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education published this widely used definition:

[Gifted and talented students are] children and youth with outstanding talent to perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.³

Definitions can help policy-makers and educators identify and serve gifted and talented students. However, definitions can also reflect overgeneralizations that hide the diversity among these students. Appreciating the variety of individual characteristics among gifted and talented students as a group provides a more complete and complex picture:

- According to the 2002 book, *Re-forming Gifted Education*, many gifted and talented children do not excel in school without differentiated programming. The diversity among gifted children requires careful consideration of how to meet individual educational needs.⁴
- The performance of gifted and talented students on intelligence tests does not necessarily reflect their abilities. Gifted students from low-income families, ethnic minorities, English language learners, and those with disabilities are more likely to perform below their potential on standardized assessments. Therefore, multiple sources of information should be used to identify students for gifted and talented programs.⁵
- Gifted and talented students can have learning disabilities and mental health concerns. The problems experienced by gifted and talented students are often unnoticed or misdiagnosed because teachers, doctors, and parents may be unfamiliar with the characteristics of gifted individuals.⁶

FEDERAL AND STATE POLICIES

NCLB and Gifted Education. There is no requirement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for states to identify and serve all gifted and talented students. NCLB requires that public schools help all children meet minimum performance standards, but the legislation does not address the needs of students who already meet the standards. As a consequence of state standardized testing programs, teachers may feel pressed to focus on basic test preparation.⁷ In a national study, elementary teachers reported that gifted and talented students were not being adequately served because the teachers focused lessons on students whose performance did not meet the standards. Teachers said they used low-level test preparation activities, like drill and practice and worksheets, more than they would have if there was less emphasis on standardized tests.⁸ Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, former President of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), has stressed the importance of both equity and excellence, suggesting that NCLB supports “the proposition that proficiency is good enough.”⁹ To ensure the growth of all children, she argues that under NCLB funding and monitoring should continue when children move beyond basic proficiency.

The federal Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education grant program, in place since 1989, is addressed in NCLB.¹⁰ The Javits program supports the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT), as well as grants for teacher professional development and instructional programs. The goal of Javits is to close achievement gaps among students at the highest levels of performance. The NRCGT focuses on the needs of gifted and talented children who are members of underserved groups targeted by NCLB. Professional development and instructional program grants funded through Javits reach a broader population of gifted and talented students.¹¹

Gifted and Talented Programs at the State Level. Among the states, policies and programs for gifted and talented students vary considerably. A 1998 study of state definitions of gifted and talented found that at least 30 states mention superior intellect, specific academic ability, and creative ability.¹² Demonstrated performance or potential to achieve were also frequently included. Fewer states included the visual and performing arts, leadership, and psychomotor ability in their definitions. While several states make reference to test scores as criteria for identifying students, very few explicitly call for the use of multiple criteria, as recommended in the NAGC *Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards* (see below).¹³

Based on information from the Davidson Institute for Talent Development (DITD), four states mandate programming *and* provide funding for gifted and talented education. Nineteen states provide funding, but may or may not mandate programming, and 15 states have a mandate with no funding to support it. The remaining 12 states and the District of Columbia have neither a mandate nor funding for gifted and talented programming.¹⁴

GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS IN DELAWARE

The survey results on page 1 suggest that Delawareans support doing more to challenge children with especially high potential. In addition, 84% of respondents in the R&D Center's most recent Delaware public survey feel that gifted and talented children have special educational needs, and 78% support increased funding to create educational programs for gifted and talented children.¹⁵

The state of Delaware is one of the 12 states identified by the DITD that have no mandate to identify and serve gifted and talented students, and no funding specifically targeted to gifted and talented programs. Instead, gifted and talented education programs in Delaware are funded through the Academic Excellence Block, which includes more than 15 assorted programs, including the arts and music, technology, limited English proficiency, and programs targeted by NCLB.

The Delaware Statewide Advisory Council on Programs for the Gifted and Talented includes representatives from the Delaware Department of Education (DOE), school districts, charter schools, and institutions of higher education. In 2003, the Council adopted the NAGC program standards for gifted and talented students as a guide for educational programming in the state. NAGC's *Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards* draw on empirical and theoretical research to establish both minimum and exemplary standards for educating gifted and talented students. The standards include gifted education program criteria for 1) student identification, 2) professional development, 3) socio-emotional guidance and counseling, 4) program evaluation, 5) program design, 6) program administration and management, and 7) curriculum and instruction.¹⁶ Although the NAGC standards were adopted by the Statewide Advisory Council and disseminated throughout the state, Delaware schools are not required to identify gifted students or to provide differentiated services to them.

In November 2003, the Statewide Advisory Council surveyed Delaware public schools to collect information on gifted and talented programming. The survey results indicated that of the 14 school districts with some form of programming for gifted students, half provided programs at seven or fewer grade levels. The

programs varied widely, including differentiated instruction in regular classrooms, pull-out programs, and self-contained instruction. The survey results also indicated that 30% of the educators teaching in gifted and talented programs had no formal training in the field. The remaining 70% reported some formal training, ranging from one college course to a graduate degree in gifted education.¹⁷ Currently, two school districts in Delaware have full-time gifted program coordinators.

Last year, Delaware DOE revised the certification requirements for teachers of gifted and talented students. Wilmington College responded by developing a course of study that meets the new certification requirements, and currently offers those courses during the school year. Wesley College and Delaware State University offer education courses that include some issues related to gifted and talented education, but neither has courses exclusively devoted to the topic. The University of Delaware has periodically offered two courses on gifted and talented education, and currently has no plans to expand these offerings. New policies to encourage gifted and talented student programs could increase the demand on Delaware's capacity to provide relevant preservice teacher education and inservice professional development opportunities.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Should Delaware require all schools to identify and serve gifted and talented students? If so, should the identification procedure be consistent with the NAGC standards?
2. Should state funding be specifically directed to educational programming for gifted and talented students?
3. Should the education of gifted and talented students be a component of the training of all certified teachers, just as all educators typically have coursework related to working with students who have other special needs? If so, should teacher education and professional development be consistent with the NAGC standards?
4. Would new policies to encourage gifted and talented education create the need to increase Delaware's capacity to provide gifted and talented teacher education and professional development?

RESOURCES ON GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Delaware Statewide Advisory Council on Programs for the Gifted and Talented, http://www.doe.state.de.us/Gifted_Talented/Giftedindex.htm

National Association for Gifted Children, <http://www.nagc.org>

National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt.html>

Davidson Institute for Talent Development, <http://www.ditd.org/public/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted, <http://www.sengifted.org>

Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students, <http://www.aegus1.org>

The Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Educational and Talent Development, <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/>

Gifted Development Center, <http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/welcome.html>

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