

Gifted Students Have Individual Needs Too

Logan Addison

HONS 340

December 10, 2019

## Abstract

In Pennsylvania, there are gifted students being deprived of reaching their full potential because they are not being challenged. National standards have been created to help benefit gifted students, but some states are just allowing schools to slide by with the programs they have implemented to enrich these bright students in the classroom. School districts should provide ways to educate their teachers on how to enhance the social life and academic abilities of students who have been identified as gifted, but funding can become a problem. This paper will argue that school districts can help better the understanding of gifted education through applying for grants and providing professional development in gifted education. If teachers cannot identify students as gifted, how are they supposed to educate their gifted students? This will allow teachers to learn the best strategies to guide gifted students towards reaching their full potential.

## I. Introduction

According to the office of civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education, there were 3.2 million students who were identified as gifted and talented and involved in gifted programs (“Gifted Education in the U.S. | National Association for Gifted Children,” n.d.). In Pennsylvania, there are 68,000 students who have been identified as gifted. There is zero funding to be provided by the state for implementing programs for the gifted, but the state requires school districts to have a gifted program set in place. Federally, gifted students fall under the No Child Left Behind Act, but they seem to be forgotten when placed under this umbrella. There are many ways to provide funding for these students.

Gifted students are often first identified as students who misbehave in class or may possibly have attention disorders, when in reality, these students are bored in the classroom and not getting the support they need. They sometimes think school is too easy, so they complete tasks quickly. Since they complete tasks quicker than most, they begin to talk to others and find other ways to occupy themselves causing them to get into trouble by their teacher. If teachers could identify these children as being gifted, there would be less issues with their behavior in the classroom.

Many people assume gifted students do not need extra support in the classroom. In fact, many think they need less support. In reality, they need to be challenged and their social abilities still may need support. Due to their academic abilities and IQ being so strong they may struggle to make conversations with their peers at an early age. Educators should look into how to help support their students and enhance the gifted abilities. Teachers should want all of their students to reach their full potential and if they do not know how to identify a gifted student nor provide adequate strategies for them, how are they allowing each student in their classroom to reach their

fullest potential? Gifted student should be educated in a way to enhance their academic and social abilities, but school districts may not have properly trained teachers or funding to implement the programs. To begin describing this process, the Pennsylvania Code: Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students should be discussed first to help with knowing how to identify a student who has gifted or talented abilities.

## II. Gifted and Talented Program

Identifying a gifted student decrees specific rights to the student and their family. According to the Pennsylvania Code: Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students, students who are defined as mentally gifted have “outstanding intellectual and creative ability the development of which requires specially designed programs or support services, or both, not ordinarily provided in the regular education program.” To qualify for gifted programming, any student, kindergarten through the twelfth grade, can be evaluated through a variety of assessment techniques. These students who are identified as mentally gifted typically have an IQ of 130 or higher but are not identified on IQ alone. They often exhibit higher level thinking, leadership, communication skills and high levels of academic interest. Once a student is identified, the school district should provide the gifted programming in an instructional setting to meet the student’s individualized educational needs that will foster student progress. To meet this objective, the gifted education program should give the gifted student an opportunity to participate in enrichment and acceleration programs that are aligned with their intellectual and academic abilities (Pennsylvania Code...). In addition, this programming should be delivered at no cost to the parents. (Pennsylvania Code...).

Additional guidelines for gifted and talented programs require special attention by district, school, administrator, and teachers. One requirement is that schools are to have a set gifted

education plan where the public can access the plan and make comments on at least 28 days before the program is implemented into the school district (Pennsylvania Code...). For a student to be identified as mentally gifted, by a psychologist, a Gifted Individual Educational Plan, also referred to as a, GIEP, needs to be created. A GIEP is a written plan to fit a specific gifted student's educational needs. With the consent of the parents or guardian, school administrators arrange for a team to create the GIEP (Pennsylvania Code...). The school psychologist, gifted education teacher, parent or guardian, school district representative, the student, and any teacher the student may have for a class represent the GIEP team and determine the best placement for the gifted student's educational needs through specially designed instruction. The student is only part of the team if the parent would like the student to participate in the meeting. The district's responsibility requires them to provide appropriate staff to meet the requirements of each GIEP, while following some specific guidelines. One guideline states that a specific gifted teacher can have no more than sixty-five students per case load but no more than twenty in a room at a time with one gifted teacher (Pennsylvania Code...). According to The Pennsylvania Code: Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students, school districts cannot say they did not provide a gifted student with services set in place in their GIEP due to the lack of qualified personnel, support of services, and space or facility to facilitate any portions of the services stated in the GIEP. Confidentiality of the team creating the plan and providing services to each gifted student is also imperative.

Following the guidelines for gifted and talented programs, each GIEP is required to have established goals and services the student will work towards to help challenge them and improve their educational experience. The goals should be annual goals and be accompanied by the services needed to meet each goal. Also stated in the GIEP, are the grades and classroom

performance of the gifted student. The student's achievement levels based on the standards of their grade level and the performance as seen by the teachers who interact with the gifted student are also included. To strengthen the individuality of each plan, a section is included for the team to specify the gifted student's interests and special skills that benefit their education. Finally, the student's parents or guardians must sign a Notice of Parental Rights for Gifted Students to provide consent to the contents stated in the GIEP.

The National Association for Gifted Children and the Council for Exceptional Children have created standards and guidelines that need to be met in order for a college or school to have an approved gifted program. A study done by Callahan, Moon, and Oh, shows only 53.6% of elementary schools, 39.1% of middle schools, and 27.5% of high schools follow all of the standards set in place for creating gifted programs (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2017). School districts should be implementing programs to help meet the needs of the standards and the students. The Pennsylvania Code: Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students is the way they perceive the national standards. Every state does not have to follow the national standards but, they are set up as a guideline for the states to follow. Throughout this paper, there will be explanations on how schools can meet these standards in an effect, positive way. In order to begin putting the programs into place, funding for the programs should be considered.

### III. Grants

Instruction at an appropriate level of challenge that suits gifted students' individual needs must be provided to each student with a GIEP (Pennsylvania Department...). Providing each gifted student with a specially designed instruction plan can become costly depending on their abilities and needs. Screening tests, materials for activities, providing professional development, paying educators, and more are all costs to be considered when thinking of a gifted program. If

students come from rural areas, it may be hard for school districts to find funding for gifted students. School districts are required to provide their students with the support services they need. There are many ways to find funding to help provide students with their proper education. Obtaining the funding may take some extra time and work, but it will benefit students in the long run. Schools cannot use a lack of funding as an excuse to refuse needed support services to any gifted student. To try and solve the lack of funding, school districts can apply for grants to help implement a program that benefit the gifted students since it is not a federally or state funded program (Callahan et al., 2017). Students can also apply for scholarships through the schools to go into programs that help enrich and challenge them in topics they are interested in. Not only is it hard for schools to provide the students with the proper support services, it is also hard for schools to provide the proper training and resources for teachers who are instructing students who are identified as gifted. Many of these students are placed into inclusionary classrooms due to the least restrictive environment laws, and not all teachers are certified or educated on how to enrich the education of gifted students.

Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program is a grant that can be applied for to help schools with providing funding to better their gifted programs. This grant can also be put towards supporting science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. This grant can provide states with funding to give to schools to help with funding gifted and talent programs. The grant can include educating teachers on evidence-based instruction strategies to help teach their specially designed instruction or to put money towards the students support services.

Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies has awarded funding to help with enriching gifted programs in schools. They have a focus on universal screening and

researching the benefits of identifying the gifted population. They also would like to know how this way of screening impacts the students being identified. This grant helps make sure that what schools are doing are fully benefiting their students in positive ways with a focus on research.

Every Student Succeeds Act signed in 2015 was to place gifted children into the No Child Left Behind Act. This allows the students to be placed under the federal law kindergarten through twelfth grade. This requires schools to be responsible for the student's achievement levels. Approximately twenty-one billion dollars is being funded by the federal government, but this does not solely fund gifted programs ("Every Student Succeeds Act | National Association for Gifted Children," n.d.). It is to be used for all special education programs and gifted programs are typically overlooked. Talent Act, which is under the umbrella of this act, provides no-cost options to provide a better education to the gifted population.

Some of these programs may be hard for rural areas. They may not have colleges close by nor can they afford to take the funding out for only a handful of students. If they do not provide their gifted students with an enhancing education, they are depriving them from the opportunity of reaching their full potential. These students can even apply for individual scholarships for specific schools. The school districts can even partner up with other schools around to provide transportation to other schools designed for specific gifted domains or to colleges for dual enrollment programs.

These grants will help school districts implement a gifted program that is beneficial to the students and their needs. Not only do these grants help implement programs into the school, they also allow research to be conducted to find the best practices to apply in the classroom. In order to implement evidence-based practices, schools should consider ways to fund the programs.



#### IV. Educating Our Educators

Many schools use the excuse of a lack of teacher qualification to educate students who have been identified as being gifted through the Pennsylvania Code: Chapter 16 Special Education for Gifted Students. This excuse has been stated as not being an acceptable excuse to use as a way to deny services for gifted students in the Pennsylvania Code.

Each state has their own requirement for a teacher to develop qualification to become a teacher for the gifted. Only seventeen states require teachers to have an endorsement or certificate in gifted education in order to teach gifted or talented students. Five states require educators to have professional development towards gifted education (Callahan et al., 2017). School districts can provide teachers with professional development, but a study by Callahan et al. has shown that most schools do not include or focus a significant amount of resources to gifted education during professional development. This study indicated as little as fifteen minutes of professional development is dedicated to specific gifted professional support and the most being four days of professional development in a year (Callahan et al., 2017). Throughout Pennsylvania and Ohio, there are a variety of programs that educators can join to gain more knowledge on enriching gifted student's education.

Cleveland State University located in Cleveland, Ohio has a master's program called Curriculum and Instruction Gifted and Talented Learners and it is one hundred percent online. This program requires you to have a bachelor's degree in order to enroll and a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or higher. The total credit hours to obtain this degree is thirty credits. The brochure for the program states:

Within the program, educators explore a variety of teaching strategies and curriculum designs, including differentiation and compacting, assessment techniques, communication and collaboration models, equitable identification processes, and technology infusion.

Particular attention is paid to the distinct characteristics of gifted and talented learners and how to create classrooms, schools, and communities that nurture such students' development (Cleveland State University Marketing, 2013).

The purpose of this curriculum focus is to help preservice educators learn the best practices as shown through the college's research that meets the standards set by the National Association for Gifted Children. This will be very helpful when a teacher is nominated or hired as the gifted education teacher.

The University of Toledo, in Toledo, Ohio, has a master's program in Gifted and Talented Education that has a focus on the needs of gifted students over their lifespan (Gifted and Talented Education, n.d.). This program teaches educators on cognitive and affective domains and knowing how this correlates to the development of learners (Gifted and Talented Education, n.d.). The program allows educators to gain many experiences with different levels of gifted students. To earn this master's degree thirty-three to thirty-six credit hours are required. At this time the University of Toledo is also the only University in Ohio that has a doctorate in gifted education. These graduates seem to be highly employable as the university reports one hundred percent placement rates after obtaining either their master or doctorate degree.

Located in Millersville, Pennsylvania, Millersville University Pennsylvania, part of the Pennsylvania State system has a master's program in gifted education. The program focuses on teaching educators how to teach in the inclusion setting (M.Ed Gifted Education (Plus Certificate And Endorsement), n.d.). The program is all online to help accommodate the busy schedules of

educators, with three different levels of education. The first level is twelve credits and is an endorsement program. The next level is eighteen credit hours. This program earns the educator a graduate certificate. While the third level requires thirty-six credits, allowing the educator to earn a multidisciplinary master's degree.

Muskingum University's gifted endorsement program is completely online. Located in New Concord, Ohio, Muskingum points out how gifted students are being underserved in the educational setting (Online Intervention Specialist Gifted Endorsement, n.d.). Their program allows the educator to complete their field work in their own school district or through their own summer program. This can be completed in one term. These credits can be used to work towards a master's degree program.

The lack of qualified educators to support the needs of gifted students could be the product of the deprivation of focus and priority within the schools for gifted programming. These programs are ways schools can help educate their teachers on the best practices to enrich gifted students. The ones mentioned above are just local ones to help teachers who possibly are under the Pennsylvania code. Colleges offer a variety of different certifications to educators who may encounter gifted student in their classroom. Teachers even have the opportunity to participate in research to find the best practices to help future gifted educators. Not only does educating teachers benefit students, it completes the second standard set by the National Association for Gifted Students. This standard discusses the assessments of programs, identification, and learning progress and outcomes. By having an educational background in gifted education, teachers will be able to identify gifted students and provide the best education for those students.

## V. Practices

Now that we have found funding to help educate our teachers, and our teachers have been provided with ways to gain strategies on how to educate students who are identified as gifted, the practices to be used in the classroom can be addressed. It is important to get to know your students first no matter what their ability level may be. Specifically, gifted students have their own unique specialty where they excel more than the average person. Similarly, to students who have special needs, gifted students need differentiation as well. “Districts should be aware that the use of extra work, peer tutoring or helping the teacher does not constitute specially designed instruction or gifted education, and Advanced Placement or Honors courses are not in and of themselves gifted education if they do not respond to the student’s individual needs (Pennsylvania Department...).” Many high schools have used Advanced Placement classes as a way to meet gifted students need, but they are not always the best match for the student. Students with disabilities benefit from instruction that is tailored to their interest and motivates them in positive ways. Teachers should use motivation and interest to help build a deeper understanding in gifted students as well. This way gifted students are not just receiving more of the same level of work of every other student but are receiving content at a level more suited to their needs and level of comprehension. By doing this, teachers are creating a more enriched instruction for gifted students but do not have to teach something completely different.

If teachers have a background in special education, they can use this to help them provide a specialized instruction plan, or differentiate, for a gifted student that is in their inclusionary classroom. Even if teachers do not have this background, they could ask a colleague to provide them with strategies or even participate in one of the programs discussed early in the paper. Carol Ann Tomlinson developed a model for differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction

does not only benefit gifted students. It will help better the education for every student in the classroom. By using differentiating instruction, teachers can adjust their lessons to meet the needs of students in the classroom. This is done by having teachers be responsive to students varying needs by tailoring their lessons on specifically what they teach and how they teach it. Teachers can do this by providing a variation of activities with the same goal but the way the students express their knowledge may be different from one another. Using Tomlinson's differentiated instruction model allows teachers to create lessons that meet student's interests, readiness, and learning profile ("Differentiation: An Overview," n.d.). By meeting these three criteria, lessons provide a better understanding for students of the goal that teachers are trying to meet. Tomlinson makes a point that the lessons must be engaging to the students ("Differentiation: An Overview," n.d.). If students are not engaged, how are they learning? Students need to be actively involved in what is being taught to them, so they are not just memorizing and forgetting after they take an assessment.

A specific strategy that can be used for differentiating reading in Elementary school is NewsELA. NewsELA provides news articles for students to read but the level at which they are reading can be changed to meet the need of the reader. Comprehension questions can even be added to the article to meet the student's needs. Once a teacher has a class discussion, the general class will know the main points of the article, but the reading level may have varied from student to student. This strategy fits the first standard from the National Association for Gifted Children. This standard is learning and development which consists of making sure teachers promote self-understanding to the gifted student, educating the community and school about the student's cognitive and affective needs, providing meaningful and challenging experiences.

Another possibility is a Pull-out Program. This can be done through grouping students with similar ability levels in a specific discipline. By grouping the students, you can provide instruction to suit their needs. If students are accelerating in mathematics, teachers can provide a deeper or more advanced mathematical curriculum to fit the students. Pull-out programs allow for a smaller class allowing the students to be more engaged. It allows the teacher to have a better focus on the few students' individual abilities. Teachers can create lessons that are suited towards the student's interests and gifts since the class size is smaller.

An option that many think could be harmful is acceleration. They believe this because they relate it to holding children back. According to Xin Ma, acceleration often times better the confidence and social skills of gifted students (Ma, 2002). Acceleration programs can consist of grade skipping, the combining of two grades, change of curriculum, and much more. This allows the students to jump to grade levels at which their ability levels meet or are challenged. Dual enrollment also falls under the acceleration program. This is where students are eligible to sign up to take college classes while in high school. These can count as college credits and credits for high school classes. The student can either go to the college to take the course or a teacher in the high school may teach the course but from the curriculum of the college. Advanced Placement classes are also an opportunity for students identified as gifted, if it fits the student's abilities. The national standards state Advanced Placement classes cannot be the sole option for gifted students. The schools should have more enrichment programs set in place. Advanced Placement classes can be part of an acceleration program, but many believe that this may cause students to develop social and emotional dilemmas. Another factor the study found is gifted students who participated in acceleration programs were more likely to continue their education after high

school graduation (Bailey, S., Chaffey, G., Gross, M., MacLeod, B., Merrick, C. & Targett, R, n.d.). Overall, it really depends on the child and the social experiences they encounter.

## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, gifted students are being deprived of reaching their full potential. On average, 74% of students obtain a high school degree and only 72% of those students enroll into college to potentially obtain a bachelor's degree. 30% of Americans have a bachelor's degree and only 3% of Americans have a doctorate degree (Callahan et al., 2017). If we want some of the best academically advanced or talented students to be successful, teachers need to help guide, motivate, and challenge these students to reach their fullest potential. Many of these students are bored in the classroom or just going through the motions. Educators are supposed to be guiding students to make a difference by being an influential member of society. In order to do this, we need to focus on all types of learners and students in the classrooms. Gifted students deserved to be challenged similar to their peers. A big concern in education world has been the gap between student's achievement levels. In order to continue to better our students and for each of them to reach their full potential, we need to allow gifted students to stretch that gap. These students are sometimes being pulled back and they are not being as successful as they can be. As teachers, we should want all students to be at their best. As put, school districts need to set aside resources or apply for funding to help generate a gifted program. Teachers need to be educated on way to enrich the minds of gifted students in the classroom. They can do this through obtaining an endorsement, masters, doctorate, or even through professional development held in the schools. After teachers have been educated, they can find the program that best suits the individual needs of the gifted student.

To wrap everything together, finding funding for programs is the first step. This will allow schools to find a way to educate their teachers or for future teacher to look into to help educate them on the best practices on enriching and challenging the education of gifted students. Teachers then should tailor their lesson to the need of all of their children. This may not be all at once but over the course of the year. Allow for differentiation in test giving and lesson facilitation. Even though gifted students are already above their peers in achievement levels does not mean they cannot reach higher achievement levels. We should allow them to reach their full potential no matter how high that may be. Overall, many studies have shown that gifted students are more likely to attend a college and pursue higher degrees in education if they are provided with a more challenging curriculum to fit their abilities either through differentiation, pull-out program, and/or acceleration.



## Resources

- Bailey, S., Chaffey, G., Gross, M., MacLeod, B., Merrick, C. & Targett, R. (n.d.). Types of acceleration and their effectiveness. *Canberra, Australia: Department of Education, Science and Training*. Retrieved from <https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10487>
- Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., & Oh, S. (2017). Describing the Status of Programs for the Gifted: A Call for Action. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 40(1), 20–49.
- Cleveland State University Marketing. (2013). *Curriculum and Instruction: Gifted and Talented Learners*.
- Differentiation: An Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved November 5, 2019, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108028/chapters/Differentiation@-An-Overview.aspx>
- Every Student Succeeds Act | National Association for Gifted Children. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2019, from <http://www.nagc.org/get-involved/advocate-high-ability-learners/nagc-advocacy/federal-legislative-update/every-student>
- Gifted and Talented Education. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2019, from [http://www.utoledo.edu/education/depts/ecpse/programs/gifted\\_education/](http://www.utoledo.edu/education/depts/ecpse/programs/gifted_education/)
- Gifted Education in the U.S. | National Association for Gifted Children. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2019, from <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/gifted-education-us>
- Ma, X. (2002). Early Acceleration of Mathematics Students and its Effect on Growth in Self-esteem: A Longitudinal Study. *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 48(6), 443–468.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021334707732>

M.Ed Gifted Education (Plus Certificate and Endorsement). (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2019, from Millersville University website: <https://www.millersville.edu/eled/graduate-programs/gifted-education.php>

Online Intervention Specialist Gifted Endorsement. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2019, from <https://www.muskingum.edu/gcs/online-gifted-intervention>