DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 793 EC 302 365

TITLE	Educational Reform Issues, Including a Dialogue with Lionel R. Meno, Commissioner of Education.
INSTITUTION	Texas Education Agency, Austin. Div. of Gifted/Talented Education.
REPORT NO	TEA-GE2-052-01
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	46p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Update on Gifted Education; v2 n2 Fall-Win 1992
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; *Educational Change; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Gifted; Program Effectiveness; Special Education; Student Attitudes; Student Educational Objectives; Student Needs; *Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Texas

ABSTRACT

This theme issue of "Update on Gifted Education" brings together accounts of diverse efforts being made to encourage excellence and equity in schools. A dialogue with Lionel R. Meno, Commissioner of Education in Texas, stresses how services for gifted students fit into the larger picture of addressing the needs of all students, examines strategies for achieving excellence and equity, explains his positions on program flexibility and homogeneous grouping, and comments on school finance. "Using Higher Level Thinking Skills" (Anne Udall) argues that the ability to think well should be an outcome goal of education and outlines seven realities that teachers must face as they prepare to teach thinking skills. "The Effectiveness of the [Talented and Gifted] TAG Program at Killeen High School: The Students' Perspective" (Katie Bernstein) offers results of a survey of 27 gifted students which determined that students preferred Talented and Gifted programs and Advanced Placement programs over Honor programs. "Results-Based Monitoring: New Directions for Accountability" (Evelyn Levsky Hiatt) describes a system that will determine if there is excellence and equity in programs for gifted students, and lists indicators for academic excellence, program excellence, and compliance. Two annotated bibliographies on gifted education are described, and a question-and-answer section is included. (JDD)

UPDATE ON GIFTED EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL REFORM ISSUES

Including a Dialogue With Lionel R. Meno Commissioner of Education

Vol. 2, No. 2
Fall/Winter 1992

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update on gifted education

VOL. 2, NO. 2, FALL/WINTER 1992

Educational Reform Issues

The pace in education today is rapidly accelerating. Changes that affect our assessments of and services to students occur on what seems to be a daily basis. This issue of *Update on Gifted Education* seeks to bring together some of the diverse efforts that are being made to encourage excellence and equity to our schools. The dialogue with Dr. Lionel R. Meno, commissioner of education, stresses how services for gifted students fit into the larger picture of addressing the needs of all students. Other articles in this issue support this view and range from insights on teaching thinking to how gifted students view the options offered to meet their needs in high school. Regular features, such as the question and answer section, are supplemented by the TEA February conference registration, the Results-Based Monitoring indicators, and bibliographical data on recent articles relating to gifted education and students. As always, we seek your suggestions on how to improve the *Update*.

Inside this issue...

This publication was developed by Texas Education Agency staff members in the Office of the Executive Deputy Commissioner for Programs and Instruction.

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A Dialogue with the Commissioner of Education

Dr. Lionel Meno
Commissioner
Texas Education Agency

On June 6, 1992, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented co-sponsored a statewide conference for parents of gifted youth. Dr. Lionel Meno, Commissioner of Education, conducted a dialogue with the parents during the opening session of the conference. Following that meeting, staff from the Division of Gifted/Talented asked Dr. Meno to elaborate on some of his comments. The following article reflects his responses.

Since you came to Texas, you have repeatedly stated that we have one goal in Texas public education—excellence and equity. Would you explain the relationship of gifted education to this goal?

I have been very clear about what our goal is—excellence and equity in education for the children of the state of Texas. Now, when we look at these issues in relation to the education of gifted youngsters, unfortunately we have achieved neither. Major strides have been made over the last ten years in Texas in providing for the needs of gifted youngsters, but we still have a long way to go in developing programs of excellence. On the equity question, we are still far from both identifying and providing services for the full range of our population. We have a significant disparity in representation of various groups. This defies logic because we know that there certainly are gifted youngsters within those populations. So we have a lot of work to do, but that shouldn't discourage us. That should encourage us that indeed there are challenges and this certainly is a period of opportunity to move forward.

During our discussions of excellence and equity, we've also talked about the fact that there are two things in the new system we are developing that are non-negotiable. The first is the student. The student is non-negotiable because it is our job as educators in this state and in the public schools to educate all the youngsters. That doesn't mean shoot for the middle and ignore those at the top or the bottom, or shoot at the bottom and ignore the others. What it means is to educate all the youngsters in a manner that meets their needs. That clearly includes gifted. It shouldn't be "and gifted students," it is "gifted as part of all students" that we are talking about.

The second non-negotiable is what the real world requires of youngsters. We have a world that is changing very rapidly. It is becoming more and more competitive and it's going to be necessary for youngsters to go beyond meeting minimum standards. Minimums are just what they say—preparation for minimum survival for the rest of your life. What we need is youngsters focusing on the maximum of their capacity, with every youngster

stretched to the absolute maximum. That's a very different mind-set than we've had before. Again, this isn't meant to be discouraging. Many of the things required for assessment—the use of multiple criteria, of selection committees that have the final decision over program placement, even the expanded definition of giftedness—all work to support access to services for gifted students. The framework is there—we simply have to move faster to assure that the frameworks are implemented in such a way that student needs are adequately assessed and met.

What strategies do you envision in Texas public education in order to achieve excellence and equity?

We have a number of key strategies from the state level that are designed to develop a system that will be responsive to the world and truly prepare our youngsters for full adulthood. The first is that we believe the state has a key role in identifying desired outcomes. That's creating a lot of rethinking about what we want for all our youngsters. There are a whole series of new reports that show that the skills for tomorrow's world are going to be very different than the skills that were required previously. Skills like problem solving, decision making, and group dynamics are all areas that are getting more and more attention and we intend to put the spotlight on them. In doing so, obviously, people will turn to those with experience in gifted education because gifted education has been the leader in these areas. That, however, does not mean that gifted education can stand still while everyone else catches up. What we need to do, again, is move the whole agenda forward. As services improve for all students, clearly services for gifted students will also change and improve.

This leads to the second strategy. We need to have accurate assessments of how well youngsters have learned those outcomes. This is critical. If we are going to have a results-based accountability system versus a process driven accountability system, we have to have some way to measure what the result is. If you're going to get true services for gifted youngsters, then what you have to have is an assessment system that measures the degree to which we are getting the results that we are looking for rather than one that focuses on whether or not there is a particular program in place. As we establish outcomes, we need to be careful about assuring that exemplary performance by students can be assessed as well as simple mastery.

A third key strategy is accountability based on student achievement, based on results rather than process. One of the great games that we have is to focus on process. That means putting a state mandated program in place. If people can put the program in place and get no achievement out of it, technically, they're off the hook. That is, unfortunately, what has happened in some areas of gifted education across the state. The program has been robotically put in place with no spirit, with no creativity, and as a result our children have not benefitted by it. The focus needs to be on the result. Give local educators flexibility in terms of what the program is, but hold them accountable to get the results. That's what we intend to do through the use of results-based monitoring, through work with the Commissioner's Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted Students, and through our work with local district educators.

A fourth key direction is to advocate a structure that promotes the development of programs that work, programs that work for children. Services for gifted students are

some of the least scrutinized in a district. We have to assure that the level of services for all students creates challenging learning experiences for them and that means, I believe, that programs for gifted students also will need to be enhanced.

Some have interpreted your statements on program flexibility to mean that district educators now have the flexibility to do away with programs for the gifted. Is that an accurate interpretation?

What I'm saying is, "We'll determine what the result should be, we'll assess the degree to which you accomplish it, and then we'll give you maximum flexibility to come up with a program that works for those youngsters for whom services are designed." That is absolutely true. Unfortunately, however, some people are interpreting that all kinds of programs can go away and indeed the accountability for those programs go away. That is not at all true. I am very open to providing program flexibility, but I am absolutely inflexible in regard to getting the results for gifted children that are necessary. What we're going to do is require people to be able to identify the level of results that they are getting now and to be able to show that under various program circumstances, they are going to be able to improve the level of results for gifted youngsters.

Unfortunately, when we talk about excellence and equity and what the nonnegotiables are, there are some people who perceive some new shift and think that now all of a sudden, we are not focusing on gifted youngsters. They think equity means bringing up the bottom and doing nothing for those who already meet or exceed our outcome measures. Now that may be true for people who can't walk and chew gum at the same time. But that isn't what we have to do in this state. What we have to do is address all of these issues simultaneously. You don't put the focus on one at the expense of the other. What we need to be doing is moving all of the agendas forward at the same time. It is a misinterpretation of things that I have said and you certainly shouldn't stand for it as you continue to work for gifted programs that make sense for children.

I am very open to providing program flexibility, but I am absolutely inflexible in regard to getting the results for gifted children that are necessary.

Would you address the issue of waivers at kindergarten through second grade and the district flexibility in identifying and serving students in grades K-2?

There have been a number of requests for something called "talent pooling," which is basically a concept of delaying specific identification of gifted youngsters until the end of second grade. The purpose is to provide an enriched program for all youngsters and the proposals that have been put forward indicate this will improve performance of gifted youngsters, increase identification of underrepresented populations, and provide an enriched program for all youngsters. In reviewing those proposals, I have been looking for criteria that would assure me that there will be no loss of results and services for gifted youngsters. That's one of the things about which the Commissioner's Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted Students was very concerned. They wanted me to be aware of the need for appropriate programming in the early grades because there could be lost time for students. A second thing that the waivers suggest is that the talent pool will yield greater diversity in students identified for the gifted program. One of the things that is alluded to in some of these proposals is that because everyone is in the talent pool to be-

gin with and given an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, a broader identification of youngsters will result. Of course, there is an element of truth to that. If you've never been in a particular environment, it's very difficult to show the behaviors that one would expect. The bottom line, however, is that we've got to ensure that in any alternative proposal, there is a likelihood that we will be able to maintain or increase the results for gifted youngsters. Most of the waivers that come in turn around in 30 days. I have been mulling over the ones in gifted education for over six months, which is very uncharacteristic. However, it is very difficult to balance the assurance of services to gifted youngsters against appropriate program flexibility. That's what we've tried to do.

Somewhere out there, I am sure there are some creative educators who want to do better things for gifted youngsters in grades K-2. They have got a different way to do it than the ones mandated by the state. The trick is to enable them to do those kinds of programs. There's one thing, though, that I want to clarify. One waiver request said the district wanted a talent pool so all kids could be challenged, not just the gifted. Of course all kids should be challenged, but we can't use that as a rationale for diluting services to gifted students. They also need to be challenged. Our stand on equity dictates that all students receive appropriate services, so I say to that superintendent, "Show me how your general program challenges all students and how the talent pool will extend those challenges for those who require it." That's the kind of waiver we want to approve.

Parents and teachers call us often and tell us that their district personnel tell them that the state has directed them to move from homogeneous grouping to heterogeneous grouping. Would you explain your position on homogeneous grouping versus heterogeneous grouping?

There is no state directive regarding homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping. It is a local programming option. Unfortunately, some people have talked about homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping as if they each have very inflexible definitions and you have either one or the other. One of the things that you have to look at with either one of those is, "What else goes with the meal?" It's kind of like talking about whether you're having a lobster or steak dinner without talking about all the other things that make up the dinner—the appetizers, the beverage, and whatever. There are some people who are saying the state has now made a decision that everyone is going to heterogeneously group students. That is absolutely untrue. Absolutely untrue. In the State Board of Education's policy statement for middle schools, they indicated that heterogeneous grouping, along with about five other conditions, was something that was seen nationwide as an exemplary practice. But there is no new mandate. There is no new directive from us saying that you have to move in a particular direction. As I've gone across the state, I've seen homogeneous programs that had avoided the pitfalls and evils of tracking and that were very good programs. I've seen homogeneous programs that were tracked programs which kids couldn't break out of and they were very bad programs. They lowered expectations for some youngsters. On the other hand, I have seen heterogeneous programs with differentiated opportunities for youngsters built in and they were excellent. I've seen some heterogeneous programs that were absolute disasters—teaching to the middle and serving neither

the top or the bottom. It is not a question of one being the right way and the other being the wrong way. It is a question of developing a program that meets the needs of students in a particular area. When we ran differentiated programs where I was a superintendent, we would set the expectation for that course and anyone who wished to could come in to the course. But then the expectation, the rigor, and the challenge were there. That's very different from saying, "Only this group of 30 kids qualifies for the program." We should give the child who may well have the capability and the parent who believes that the child can expend the extra effort, the opportunity to participate in the program.

We have to get people to recognize differences in youngsters and to accommodate those differences. If this is done, heterogeneous grouping can support services to gifted students. As long as the program is just a pullout program for a particular category, someone is always going to be left out. Somebody is just below the cut-off point. Somebody isn't recognized based on the criteria that the district is using. In heterogeneous classes, teachers who recognize student differences can individualize in the classroom in a child-find effort seeking those students with potential and also supplement services for students already assessed as gifted. The truth of the matter is, it's just plain hard work in terms of increasing the understanding of people at the local level. It will take training, it will take time, and it will take the recognition that there's no one answer for all kids.

I do know that the only way that you move an agenda forward is by increasing dialogue about what good practice is. It is not by giving a new set of top-down mandates telling people you will do this and that. It's to get people to understand at the campus level what homogeneous grouping really is, its pros and cons, its applications, what heterogeneous grouping is, what cooperative learning is. There are a variety of things that need to be brought into the mix. You have to design programs that fit the particular student population that's in front of you and at your campus. That's the way it has to be done and that's why I'm so big on the issue that we must have 15 to 20 days of staff development and collaboration. It's going to take that much to get people's skill levels up to where they need to be. That's where it's got to be. One of the mistakes we've made is that we've got all this information in higher education, but that information isn't translated down to people at the campus level who are asked to implement new programs. The bottom line—and business and industries learned this—is that you have got to have the people at the classroom level with the information. It's not enough that the university people have it. The people I want to have it are the people who are in the classrooms working with our kids.

We have to get people to recognize differences in youngsters and to accommodate those differences. If this is done, heterogeneous grouping can support services to gifted students.

How does the school finance issue affect gifted education?

We're not going to go forward in gifted education or anything else until we get a solution to the equity in financing issues. What's happening, year after year, is that people at the school level—superintendent, boards of education, central office people—don't know until the eleventh hour how much money they're going to have. That uncertainty freezes people—paralyzes them—and therefore you don't

make any forward movement. There has been a lot of discussion in this state about who are the winners and the losers in school finance. As we go into 1993, there will only be losers if we don't have a settlement—only losers. There will be no winners, because what's happening is that we're getting into a downward spiral. Because local educators can't plan for the future, we're not getting the increase in student results that we should be getting, or the change in programs that will lead to increases in student results. Therefore, the public's not willing to put more money into public education. What we need to do this year is get a settlement to the fiscal equity issue. It is going to be painful, because there is no way that you move money from one place to another for equity without it being painful. But we have to have a settlement this year so we can get on with the business of addressing the adequacy question that is equally fundamental in terms of the kinds of programs that our youngsters need to have.

Using Higher Level Thinking Skills

Dr. Anne Udall
Tucson Unified School District
Tucson, Arizona

In February, 1992, Dr. Anne Udall from the Tucson Unified School District, keynoted the Institute on Critical Thinking sponsored by the Division of Gifted/Talented Education. The following includes excerpts from that speech. Dr. Udall also will be presenting sessions at the division's Institute on Elementary School Programs for Gifted Students that will be held in Austin on February 21-23, 1993.

Today, more than ever before, we are concerned with teaching our students to think more creatively and critically. This emphasis on higher level thinking is not occurring in a vacuum. We need to remind ourselves that the focus on thinking skills is only one part of the much larger focus on educational reform. You would have to have been teaching on a desert island with yourself as a student not to be aware of the tremendous concern about schools and schooling both inside, and outside, of education. Everywhere you turn, people are talking about the state of our children's education. Our professional journals, as well as the mass media, bombard us with the plea, sometimes the threat, to teach our kids better. In response, a variety of reform efforts have emerged.

The reform movement is vast and complicated—like a Shakespearean play, there are many characters, subplots, intrigue, madness, tragedy, and faith—hopelessly complex and most of all, difficult to understand. It is easy to become discouraged, perhaps even pessimistic about the state of education and the efforts to reform it. However, we must remain optimistic and turn barriers into opportunities. There is much to be hopeful about within the reform and restructuring efforts—and one of them is the thinking skills movement.

I have often likened the teaching of thinking to the taking of a journey—an exciting, but dangerous, adventure—into a place far off the beaten trail. At a minimum, any hardy soul considering the trek must possess a great deal of courage and even greater sense of humor.

Thinking skills in the past were not as vital as they are today. It would be ridiculous to suggest that people didn't think in the past, but it is true that the demands of our society were different 100 years, 200 years ago. On the whole, one could make the generalization that society was less complex and in many ways, less mentally demanding for our grandparents and great grandparents. Although the ability to think on complex levels would be an asset for most anyone, success in past eras was not dependent on such ability.

But over the past 100 years, the United States has moved from a rural-based economy to an industrial-based one and now to a technological/information based economy. Rapid, and at times, unimaginable, change has been the trademark of our lifetimes. We have seen the development—no, a better word might be explosion—of computers, of unbelievable medical technology, of communication tools, and of scientific knowledge that has been unparalleled in history. It has been estimated that today, scientific and technological information doubles, at a minimum, every 20 months.

The teaching of thinking is not another tactic—for example, like phonics instruction—it is the stage on which all other innovation occurs.

With an increased rate of change has come more complexity which, in turn, has led to increased problems. Pollution, nuclear waste, growing populations, scarce resources, ozone depletion, are just a few. We, both as Americans and as inhabitants of Spaceship Earth, are faced with innumerable challenges that have been created because some people weren't thinking perhaps as critically and creatively as they needed to and which clearly require critical thinking and problem solving abilities to tackle them. Now, more than ever, we need our future generations to possess such skills. In fact, there are some who say "reasoning" should become the fourth "r"—right beside reading, writing and arithmetic. I go further—the ability to reason and problem solve needs to be the number one teaching priority in our schools. Without those skills, our children will face the future ill-equipped.

Being convinced that the ability to think well should be an outcome goal of education is a far different cry from actually teaching higher level thinking skills. I have often likened the teaching of thinking to the taking of a journey—an exciting, but dangerous, adventure—into a place far off the beaten trail. At a minimum, any hardy soul considering the trek must possess a great deal of courage and even greater sense of humor. There is little to guide us because few have gone before to mark the best paths and place the rock cairns. Most of us start the journey with little more than a wave goodbye from our colleagues. I am fond of saying to my friends, "I'm right behind you" when they suggest an adventure I'm keen to take, but only after someone else goes first and returns to tell me about it. "I'm right behind you" say the principals, the school boards, and the other teachers when you talk about wanting to teach our youth to think better.

Even so, we begin to plan our trip. Right away we ask ourselves questions such as: What are higher level thinking skills? How can I teach them well? And how do I do this and everything else I have to do? To answer these concerns, we begin to look for help—we look for ideas, we look for materials, and we look for experts. You find out that there are lots of people eager to point you in what *they* perceive to be the right direction. Many materials are available to assist you. We—because we are concerned and interested in integrating more thinking into our classrooms and because we, as educators, are, by and large, practical, action-oriented types—buy the materials or attend the workshops, trusting that they will show us the way. Yet, by doing so, we make a fundamental mistake.

We cannot approach the teaching of thinking as a technique or strategy that can be "handled" by reading a book, or attending a few workshops or adding a cur-

riculum component on thinking skills. The teaching of thinking is not another tactic—for example, like phonics instruction—it is the stage on which all other innovation occurs. Without students, and teachers, who can think on higher levels, all other reform will fail.

Because the teaching of thinking is so important, we need to have a very clear sense of where we are headed and what we may encounter on our way. With such knowledge, the dangers and opportunities are clearer and our ability to be successful is greatly enhanced. I am a hiker and a large part of my hiking is getting together my water bottle, the right clothing, matches, food, my Swiss army knife...and yet, my preparations are rather useless, even a bit ridiculous, if I don't know where I are headed. It's the old adage: dressed up and no where to go. Before I can gather supplies, I need to decide where I am going to take my hike—in other words, I need a map. A map tells me the terrain I will encounter, the level of difficulty, where to begin, and most of all, where I am at all times in relation to the rest of the outdoors. Once I am cognizant of the conditions I will confront, then I can select the necessary and proper equipment. If hiking in the desert in June, a wool hat would be ridiculous; it would be equally strange to carry large amounts of water when hiking in the Rockies.

The map we need for our journey—the teaching of higher level thinking—is one that outlines the realities we will encounter. If we don't understand what we are getting ourselves into, we risk failure. The teaching of higher level thinking is too crucial to leave to chance; we need to know what is ahead for us. Given this imperative, I would like to outline for you, based on my experience, the seven realities we will face as we prepare for the journey—the teaching of higher level thinking to our students.

Reality #1: The teaching of higher-level thinking is first, and foremost, an attitude and it starts with us.

If there is one single thing that I have come to realize over the past several years as I have struggled to learn how to teach teachers to teach students to think better, it is this: the teaching of thinking is an attitude first and an action second.

When I say that the teaching of thinking must be an attitude first, I mean that we must value critical and creative thinking in our lives, both personally and professionally. In other words, how do we show our students that we believe thinking is important to us in our daily lives? More importantly, how do we show ourselves that we value thinking? Do we find time to read a thought-provoking book, or educate ourselves about a political issue, or take a class outside of the college of education or stretch ourselves to do something we have never done before?

Professionally, an attitude means we see ourselves and our students as thinkers first and foremost, and that we believe most all children are capable of higher level thinking. Not only do we believe that, but we strive to live that belief—our language, our school days, our treatment of students, the curriculum—all reflect commitment to thinking. In order to create thoughtful environments, we must start with ourselves. Lauren Resnick, an educational leader in the area of thinking skills says, "I believe

In short, we cannot reduce thinking to a step by step approach and we do not know the best way to teach students how to better their thinking ability.

we must make thinking the main agenda of our schools, and that won't happen unless teachers are expected to think."

If we are going to think more about teaching and curriculum, we must demand more say in how our days are designed, more time for planning, and less regimented curriculum to cover. It means that we must be up to the task. Let's face it: as much as we grumble about not having influence on those decisions that affect the students in our classrooms, when things go wrong or don't work, it is nice to be able to point the finger at someone else.

If we are going to teach higher-level thinking well, the system must eventually change to accommodate that focus. In other words, to have the educational system remain in roughly the same design it is now, and begin to teach students how to think better, is only re rranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

My experience has been that most educators welcome the challenge. Like our students, we will rise to the occasion when high expectations are set for us. We often hear of things that don't work in education, but there are many, many schools where staff are being empowered to restructure the system successfully. I can guarantee you that such success is contingent on giving teachers both the time and the permission to think about what they are doing.

Reality #2: There is no cookbook available for teaching higher-level thinking.

A cookbook is a lock step, fool proof way to achieve success. People want a cookbook for teaching thinking, "Give me a workbook or an activity or a packaged program," I often hear. Effective use of a cookbook is dependent on knowing the ingredients. We don't know the ingredients of thinking, even though people talk about thinking as if they know what it is. Yet, when I ask people in my workshops to show me thinking, they might do any number of things: look at you blankly, strike a pose much like Rodin's statue, scratch their head, and so on. But in reality none of those behaviors is thinking. We cannot touch, or see, or smell, or hear, or taste thinking—any more than justice, love, or hate can be experienced by our senses. Thinking is an abstract, and therefore unobservable concept...it is an artifact of language.

Now, that should give us all reasons to pause for a moment—here we are, spending all this time and energy and effort talking about teaching our kids to be better thinkers and incorporating thinking into our curricula and so on—and we don't even know what thinking is. The facts are: thinking is extremely complex and we, as yet, do not have an accurate model of the thinking process; we are only now beginning to learn how the brain works. In short, we cannot reduce thinking to a step by step approach and we do not know the best way to teach students how to better their thinking ability.

Before you get discouraged by this piece of news that we don't know what we are doing, I would suggest the optimist's perspective. Not having all the answers available in some cookbook forces us to be thinkers about the teaching of thinking. We must use our experience, professional knowledge, and intuition in our classrooms when figuring out a) what is good thinking and b) how to teach kids to think better.

We all know what good thinking looks like...When Louis Armstrong was once asked what jazz was, he replied, "Man, if you've got to ask, you ain't never going to know." That's equally true of good think-

ing. Our task, then, is to figure out how to increase good thinking. Not being stuck in a "right way" or "only way" mentality means that we can experiment, we can take time to find out what works, and we can learn from our mistakes. Finally, it also means that no one can get dogmatic and talk about the one right way to teach thinking, which is one of the rather sinister traps we often get into in education.

Finally, no cookbook doesn't mean there isn't support. A number of people such as Art Costa, Richard Paul, Robert Swartz, and I must include myself and my co-author and colleague, Joan Daniels, have written helpful material to guide you in your quest—but every one of us is saying the same thing: it is impossible to teach thinking thoughtlessly.

Reality #3: Teaching higher-level thinking is not easy and furthermore, it requires time that we don't have.

The demands on teacher's time are phenomenal these days. Nothing is ever taken away; only added. One of the greatest myths in education that is put on us, and that we, in some ways, perpetuate, is that of the "super teacher." You can do this and everything else too. Wrong. At some point, something has to give when you start teaching, and remember, there are no cookbooks! So what do we do?

We will give up some things and combine others. Some things you used to do well, you won't do as well. Some of your test scores may drop. And it will be okay because the need to teach our students to problem solve, to be creative, to analyze, is too important to ignore. We will realize that a good part of the content we are teaching today is already, or will become, obsolete in our lifetimes; the ability to tackle a problem, to approach an issue creatively, never wears out.

Be warned: it is very difficult to teach higher level thinking within the existing school structure. Let's face it: schools are not designed to encourage thinking on the part of the students or on the part of the teachers. If we are going to teach higher-level thinking well, the system must eventually change to accommodate that focus. In other words, to have the educational system remain in roughly the same design it is now, and begin to teach students how to think better, is only rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Reality #4: Many Americans do not want their children to become creative, critical thinkers.

Teaching kids to think creatively and critically is a subversive activity. You are asking students to challenge, to risk-take, to be independent in their judgments and perceptions. School systems historically have been designed to discourage any such behavior from students. In fact, I recently heard schools described as the places where kids go to watch adults work. If we valued thinking in our schools, our society would reflect that emphasis. Schools reflect the society they are in and not the other way around.

This reality should not come as any surprise to educators of the gifted. We, probably more than any other group of educators, are aware of the ambivalence that Americans have about educating students to think critically, to be problem solvers. The constant struggle we have had to justify our programs and to maintain their existence is,

...if it is important to you that your students like you, don't begin to teach thinking skills....When you start teaching thinking skills, don't expect your kids to rush up to you and say: "Miss, do that some more. It is so good to have to think that hard—I really like not knowing the answer and having to strain to figure something out."

in part, a result of this American uncertainty about educating students to their potential, not just to the norm.

It has been my experience that many gifted students, because the curriculum has been so inappropriate for them and expectations have been consistently low, have become sloppy in their thinking and will settle for little depth when initially pushed.

In fact, I have even wondered recently if a "backlash" to complexity is emerging. It seems to me, that as our world becomes increasingly complex, we grapple with a need to simplify it, perhaps out of fear. One example can suffice: we know, unequivocally, that standardized tests do not tell us about the ability of students to problem solve, to analyze, to generalize, and yet, plans go ahead for yet another standardized test, this time at the national level.

Richard Paul, a guru in thinking, said recently that there is no country or culture he knows of that honors critical thinking; that conformity is, in fact, far more important to the success of any culture. He goes on to say that the country that resists least the efforts to educate their children to think critically will defeat those who resist the most.

Reality #5: Teachers of the gifted are fundamental to the success of this enterprise.

As you may have noticed, much of this is relevant to all students, not just the gifted. However, educators of the gifted have a unique role. For years, teachers of the gifted have been attempting to figure out successful ways to teach critical and creative thinking skills, and our curriculum goals and guidelines reflect this emphasis. One of the major premises of the thinking skills movement is that most students are capable of higher level thinking. We can become protective of our knowledge and experience; thereby reinforcing the isolated position many teachers of the gifted hold, or we can play a different role. First, we can be open to learning from our colleagues in other areas of education about what they know about the topic. But, most importantly, we can share what we know with others in our buildings and schools. Remember, when it comes to teaching thinking skills we are all blind men and women feeling the elephant, and trying to describe what it is. By doing so, we go a long way to promoting collegiality, and promote the continued success of education for the gifted.

Reality #6: Our students will not greet the teaching of higher-level thinking with great joy.

Recently a college professor very committed to teaching his students how to think, said to an audience of teachers that if it is important to you that your students like you, don't begin to teach thinking skills. Students will be very resistant to these efforts. You are breaking the unspoken rules within the culture of the classroom when you begin this journey. The rules are simple and understood by all: the teacher asks the questions; there is one right answer to any question; the teacher knows the right answer; and if you wait long enough, someone else will give the answer. When you start teaching thinking skills, don't expect your kids to rush up to you and say: "Miss, do that some more. It is so good to have to think that hard—I really like not knowing the answer and having to strain to figure something out."

I hate to break the bad news to you, but this reality is particularly true of gifted students. It has been my experience that many gifted students, because the curriculum has been so inappropriate for them and expectations have been consistently

low, have become sloppy in their thinking and will settle for little depth when initially pushed. Do not be surprised if your gifted students resist you the most! This is the generation accustomed to quick fixes, passive entertainment, and the 2 minute segments on Sesame Street. Our uneasy sense that our students just don't think the way earlier generations used to is being supported by current research. There is some strong evidence, most notably put forth by Jane Healey, in a provocative and rather disturbing book, *Endangered Minds: Why Kids Can't Think and What We Can Do About It,* that teaching thinking is made even more difficult by changes in the brains of our children today. She suggests that kids don't think as well now as they did 30 or 40 years ago because of this technological age—because of such influences as TV, video games, and current family pressures. So, we are in a double bind—needing our students to think more than ever and quite possibly, them losing their ability to do so.

The first six realities of teaching thinking to students paint a rich and complex picture, full of both dangers and opportunities. The lack of direction, support and time can leave you feeling, at times, frustrated and discouraged. Yet, going forth armed with the knowledge of the realities you may encounter can, paradoxically, free you to do the task. I have saved the best reality for last.

Reality #7: Teaching higher-level thinking to students is the most rewarding teaching in which you can engage.

It challenges you intellectually and professionally. It is, as one of my fellow teachers recently said, professional protection against burnout. You will want to do more—the rewards are that great. When I see a kid I never believed could give me a thoughtful idea or watch the hand go up of a student who has sat quietly in a room for the whole year, my heart just fills with excitement and joy. I realize this is the reward for dealing with all the other realities of time, and discomfort from my students, and misunderstanding from parents or colleagues. When I participate with other teachers as we discuss how to structure a lesson or peer coach with them, I feel enthusiastic, and re-energized and committed to the journey at hand. Every once in a while, in those moments, I realize that those of us who push children to think, to problem solve, to explain, to create, are doing nothing less than making a difference in the collective journey we are all taking.

The Effectiveness of the TAG Program at Killeen High School: *THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE*

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Katie Bernstein is a teacher in Killeen Independent School District and a student in the gifted/talented endorsement program at Baylor University. In each future issue of the* Update, *we will feature an article by an endorsement student. Submissions are welcome.

Many high schools in Texas offer three different categories of advanced courses: Talented and Gifted (TAG), Advanced Placement (AP), and Honors (H). Prior to a student being admitted to the TAG program, he or she must meet the specific requirements established by the individual school district; grades alone do not qualify a student for entrance into the program.

In the Killeen school district students are identified gifted in the area of general intellectual ability (academic) according to a point system on a screening matrix that includes; results from achievement tests, an IQ test, grades, teacher checklists, a creativity test, and a student interview. These results are presented to a committee of professional educators to make the final decision. However, eligibility for placement in the AP or Honors courses is determined by an index based upon four variables. These variables include: performance in previous course work, performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, measured scholastic abilities index, and achievement test scores within the specific discipline. Each of these are weighted and applied to a scale, and an index number is determined. If the number is acceptable, the student is eligible to take the course. If the score is within a borderline range (gray area), a teacher recommendation is considered. If it is below the gray area, the student is not eligible to take the course.

Advanced Placement students are enrolled in courses in which they will earn college credit providing that they pass the AP test in the specific subject area. No college credit is earned in the Honors or TAG programs. A TAG student will most likely qualify for the AP or Honors program, but the AP or Honors student may not always qualify for the TAG program because they may not meet the criteria established for entrance into the program. Therefore, TAG students may be enrolled in TAG, Honors, and AP classes at the same time or at some time during their high school career.

Issues

How should TAG students be served? Can an AP or Honors program facilitate the learning process for these students or is there a need for a TAG program as well? The National Commission on Excellence (NCE)

suggests that instructional material for gifted students should be at a higher level and present more complex and abstract concepts than ordinarily found in the mainstream, or general education classroom (National Commission on Excellence, 1983). The NCE also feels that teachers should present students with high quality instruction, concentrating on higher level thinking skills, and organize concepts and principles into a coherent and meaningful structure. They should also involve students in a variety of stimulating and generative learning experiences.

Advocates in gifted education would say that a program encouraging divergent thinking, interaction with peers, and developing ideas with different products as the outcome, can only be achieved in a TAG program. A teacher, who has taught all three types of classes at Killeen High, said that in contrast to the TAG classroom, the Honors classroom has more structure and does not often encourage self-directed learning, requires that all students produce the same product, and allows less interaction among students. An Advanced Placement program stresses the specific content area, does not often encourage creativity or individuality, and focuses on the student's mastery of the content to pass the AP test to gain college credit.

Purpose

While comparisons have been made among Honors, AP, and TAG programs, little research has been conducted to determine the gifted and talented students' attitudes toward the three different classes.

The objective of this study was to determine how TAG students perceived the three programs (TAG, AP, Honors) offered at Killeen High School and if their perceptions differ from TAG coordinators and experts in gifted education. One method of determining the students' perceptions of any one of these programs is to have them compare the positive and negative qualities of each and then examine the differences in these perceptions.

Method

A questionnaire was developed to determine the TAG students' opinions about the similarities and differences among the three different types of programs. In designing the questionnaire, standards were reviewed and two experts in the field of gifted and talented curriculum design were consulted: Mrs. Ann Wink, Director of the TAG program at Killeen Independent School District and Dr. Susan Johnsen, Director of the Programs for the Gifted and Talented, at Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

A TAG teacher distributed the questionnaire to fifty-one 11th and 12th grade TAG students at Killeen High School. The students were asked to check the one answer that most reflected their views regarding the twenty-six questions on this assessment instrument. The criterion necessary for a student to participate in this survey was current (or previous) enrollment in TAG, AP, *and* Honors programs, at the secondary level. Of the 51 students surveyed, 22 did not meet the above mentioned criterion, 27 met the criterion, and 2 failed to complete the questionnaire correctly; therefore, only twenty-seven of the fifty-one responses could be used for statistical purposes.

Subject

This study focused on the responses of thirteen female and fourteen male students ages sixteen to eighteen years. Five of the students are in the eleventh grade and twenty-two are in the twelfth grade. All students are currently (or had previously been) enrolled in a TAG, AP, and Honors program.

Results

The data, reflecting the opinions of the TAG students, were tabulated and recorded, in raw score and percentages, and placed in the boxes corresponding to the appropriate question (see Table 1).

In evaluating the results the students perceived the TAG program in the following manner:

- 85% select TAG when asked about freedom of choice regarding topics to be studied;
- 85% say TAG encourages creative thinking skills;
- 83% think that TAG provides the least structured classroom environment;
- 82% chose TAG because a friend did;

• 67% feel TAG is comprised of students most like themselves;
• 64% regard TAG as providing the safest learning environment;
• 63% think TAG encourages critical thinking and problem solving skills;
• 61% feel that TAG generates negative feelings on their campus;
• 59% prefer the TAG program over the AP or Honors classes;
• 59% feel that TAG provides the most appropriate environment for students' learning styles;
• 59% said that TAG provided topics that were most interesting to them;
• 58% feel that TAG helps to elevate their self-esteem;
• 52% view TAG as helping them become more confident in their abilities.

The students perceived the Advanced Placement program in the following manner:

• 82% said AP provided the best preparation for college;
• 78% feel AP is the most challenging;
• 78% said AP required the most amount of work;
• 55% think that AP provides the most relevant information to help prepare them for the future;
• 50% think that AP generates positive feelings on their campus.

The students perceived the Honors program in the following manner:

• 82% feel that Honors classes have the most busy work;
• 79% said Honors classes are the least challenging;
• 78% said Honors classes repeat the same type of work that is taught in the regular classroom;
• 72% feel that Honors classes provide the most structured classroom environment;
• 67% said the Honors program is made up of students unlike themselves;
• 64% think the Honors classes are the most boring;
• 58% would eliminate the Honors program.

Discussion

Although a small number of students participated in this survey, the results appear to match the perceptions of coordinators and the characteristics of gifted and talented programs defined by the National Commission on Excellence. In the perception of the gifted and talented students, the majority preferred TAG over the AP and Honors courses. It encouraged critical and creative thinking, used less structure, provided a safe learning environment, helped elevate students' self-esteem, and provided opportunities for interaction with students most like themselves. In addition, most students had freedom of choice regarding topics to be studied.

On the other hand, the AP classes were viewed as the most challenging, requiring the most work, and providing the best preparation for the future or college. The TAG students in this study did not appear to like the Honors classes as much as the other two classes. They viewed the Honors classes as the least challenging, the most structured, and containing the most busy work.

From these results, it appears that the gifted and talented students prefer the TAG and AP programs. The TAG program appears to offer the flexibility and encouragement of creative/critical thinking among peers while the AP program provides an avenue for future career development.

It is interesting to note that the students perceive that the TAG program generates the most negative feelings of the three. This criticism may be due, in part, to the "elitist" label that is sometimes attached to TAG students. However, 82% (14) of the students said they chose TAG because a friend did. This desire to be with others like themselves supports the need for separate programs for gifted and talented students.

Summary

In conclusion, the results of this questionnaire give the informed observer insight into the preferences of those who, as students and beneficiaries of the process, are the most directly involved in the gifted and talented program. If the curriculum presented to students is deemed by them to be of interest, their desire to learn and become successful may be maximized. With the ability to emphasize quality in education and critical thinking skills, educators must accept the challenge of looking to the student for guidance in creating a worthwhile and meaningful curriculum.

TABLE 1

In thinking about your overall experiences in the TAG, Advanced Placement (AP), and Honors programs, consider each of the following questions carefully and check the one program that most represents your opinion.

Among the TAG, AP, and Honors classes, which one...	TAG	AP	H
1. ...did you prefer?	(59%) 16	(41%) 11	0
2. ...did you find to be the most challenging?	(22%) 6	(78%) 21	0
3. ...did you think was the most boring?	(18%) 5	(18%) 5	(64%) 17
4. ...required the most amount of work?	(15%) 4	(78%) 21	(7%) 2
5. ...generates positive feelings on your campus?	(28%) 5	(50%) 9	(22%) 4
6. ...is best at preparing you for college?	(18%) 5	(82%) 22	0
7. ...repeated the same type of work taught in the regular classroom?	(15%) 4	(7%) 2	(78%) 21
8. ...would you recommend to a friend?	(48%) 13	(45%) 12	(7%) 2
9. ...required critical thinking and problem solving skills?	(63%) 17	(26%) 7	(11%) 3
10. ...would you eliminate if you had the choice?	(29%) 7	(13%) 3	(58%) 14
11. ...provided the most structured classroom environment?	(10%) 3	(18%) 5	(72%) 19
12. ...had the most busy work?	(7%) 2	(11%) 3	(82%) 22
13. ...provided the most relevant information to help prepare you for the future?	(45%) 12	(55%) 15	0
14. ...did you choose because your friends did?	(82%) 14	0	(18%) 3
15. ...generates negative feelings on your campus?	(61%) 8	(23%) 3	(16%) 2
16. ...was the least challenging?	(17%) 4	(4%) 1	(79%) 19
17. ...provided the safest learning environment in which to try out new ideas?	(64%) 16	(28%) 7	(8%) 2
18. ...was comprised of students most like yourself?	(67%) 18	(33%) 9	0
19. ...gave you the most freedom of choice regarding topics to be studied?	(85%) 23	(15%) 4	0
20. ...was the most appropriate for your learning style?	(59%) 16	(41%) 11	0

21. ...helped you feel more confident in your abilities?	(52%) 14	(33%) 9	(15%) 4
22. ...was made up of students unlike yourself?	(26%) 7	(7%) 2	(67%) 18
23. ...encouraged creative thinking skills?	(85%) 23	(11%) 3	(4%) 1
24. ...helped to elevate your self-esteem?	(58%) 14	(25%) 6	(17%) 4
25. ...provided the least structured classroom environment?	(83%) 19	(17%) 4	0
26. ...provided topics that were most interesting to you?	(59%) 16	(37%) 10	(4%) 1

Comments: In cases where line totals do not equal 27, it is because some students chose not to respond to the specific question.

Results-Based Monitoring:

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

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Texas Education Agency

In November, the Texas Education Agency began to pilot the Results-Based Monitoring System (RBM). RBM analyzes services provided through programs such as special education, bilingual education, and accelerated instruction. Programs for gifted students also are included in the system.

All agency special program divisions, in collaboration with leaders in their respective fields, developed program excellence indicators and reviewed compliance standards as part of the system. All of the indicators in gifted education are designed to assure that all student populations are equitably assessed for advanced level services and that all those assessed as needing those services have access to courses and program options designed to meet their needs. In other words, the system will determine if there is both excellence and equity in programs for gifted students.

As Figure 1 indicates, there will be a three-fold system of checks to determine if services offered students are meeting their needs. First, there will be a desk audit done at the agency. The desk audit will review all information that has been received in-house regarding the program. As examples, PEIMS and AEIS indicators will be reviewed, information from the Division of Complaints will be analyzed, and data gathered as part of the waiver process will be assessed. At the same time that this review is taking place, districts will be doing a local assessment of their programs. This local review enables a district to spot its own problems and either make immediate adjustments or develop a plan that will lead to the necessary modification in student performance. This local review is the real key to the system, as it focuses the district's effort to reflect upon the quality of its services and determine what type of technical assistance or support would be needed to improve student performance.

The final check will be onsite visits. It is anticipated that there will be two kinds of onsite visits. One type is a focused visit and reflects a concern based on either a failure to meet compliance standards or because student performance is not meeting state developed standards. The other will be a data verification visit, which will be made to assure that all data are accurate and correct. In other words, the onsite visits are not necessarily a sign that there is a problem in student performance or in compliance with the law, but might also be designed to assist agency personnel in helping others locate promising practices in other districts.

As noted earlier, RBM is still a system in progress. During this year's pilot, a review of both the system and the indicators will be ongoing. To assist in this review, the indicators relating to services for gifted students are included in this issue of *Update*. Should you wish further information on the system or have comments on the indicators, please contact the Division of Gifted/Talented Education at the Texas Education Agency. We will do our best to keep you updated on our progress.

Division of Gifted/Talented Education

I. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE INDICATORS

A. Indicator: Gifted students obtain a passing score on each of the three sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Performance Standard: 90% of gifted students pass all sections within three years.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

B. Indicator: Attendance of gifted students.

Performance Standard: 97% average attendance to be reached within a three year period.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

C. Indicator: Drop-out rate for high school gifted students.

Performance Standard: .5% to be reached over a five year period.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

D. Indicator: Students in the gifted program complete advanced courses.

Performance Standard: 90% of gifted students complete advanced courses.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

E. Indicator: Graduation rate for high school gifted students.

Performance Standard: 99% (one year) to be reached over a five year period.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

F. Indicator: Students in the gifted program graduate with an advanced seal on transcript.

Performance Standard: 90% of gifted students graduate with an advanced seal on transcript.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

G. Indicator: Students in the gifted program and enrolled in the college preparatory program take college admissions examinations.

Performance Standard: 90% of gifted students take college admissions examinations.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

I. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

H. Indicator: Students in the gifted program meet or exceed state standards on college entrance examinations.

Performance Standard: 99% of gifted students receive a Scholastic Aptitude Test Score of 1000 or above or 25 or above on the ACT.

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS

A. Family and Community Involvement

1. Indicator: Families are provided information that assists them in understanding and accessing special programs.

Recommended Performance: A minimum of two efforts are made to distribute information.

Data Source: (Local) Review of meeting agendas, letters to families, copies of brochures, campus bulletins

2. Indicator: Information in the home language is disseminated as necessary to families regarding the assessment of students for the gifted program.

Recommended Performance: Materials on assessment and program services are available in the dominant languages of the district.

Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
(Local) Review of assessment procedures and materials on program services that have been translated or that are available in dominant languages of the district

3. Indicator: Family and community support for the gifted program is solicited and maintained by the site-based committee.

Recommended Performance: Parent association or district support group meets at least twice a year.

Data Source: (Local) Review of meeting minutes and agendas

4. Indicator: Site-based decision committees solicit information about and use research on gifted students to develop campus recommendations and services.

Recommended Performance: To be determined

Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
(Local) Review of letters to families and community members, survey responses, copies of articles and research relating to gifted education

5. Indicator: Parents and community members serve in an advisory capacity regarding program services for gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: Advisory council and/or mentor program is established in district.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of letters of invitation, meeting agendas, minutes of meetings

B. Access

1. Indicator: Nominations for program services are accepted from a variety of sources including parents, counselors, teachers, peers, and students themselves, as well as through a review of test scores and student performance.

   Recommended Performance: At least 50% of nominations come from sources other than test scores.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of letters inviting nominations, campus information on program, student folders

2. Indicator: Nominations are ongoing, solicited, and reviewed to determine if additional students require services offered to gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: Nominations are received in grades 1 through 12 and students are placed in program services.

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data, complaints, waivers
   (Local) Review of teacher, family recommendation forms, student folders, schedules of workshops for middle and high school teachers on characteristics and needs of gifted students, minutes of selection committee meetings, student folders

3. Indicator: All students at the kindergarten level are considered for nomination for advanced level services.

   Recommended Performance: Portfolio or other performance data is maintained on 100% of the kindergarten students.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of student folders

4. Indicator: Nominated students reflect the demographics of the district and include those from special programs serving migrant, bilingual, and special education students.

   Recommended Performance: Proportional to the campus/program populations

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of workshop agendas for teachers in special programs, lists of nominated students

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

C. Student Eligibility

1. Indicator: Student assessment reflects a holistic approach that includes multiple and diverse criteria.

   Recommended Performance: More than five criteria are used reflecting objective, subjective, traditional, and non-traditional measures; data are reviewed by a committee with members representing different roles in the district.

   Data Source: (Desk) Waivers, complaints
   (Local) Review of minutes of meetings of selection committees, of student profile data, assessment procedures

2. Indicator: The process for appealing decisions regarding student placement is widely disseminated, and appeals are promptly reviewed and processed.

   Recommended Performance: Appeals are processed within two weeks of receipt.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of district identification procedures, student folders

D. Implementation

1. Indicator: Program services are based on student needs.

   Recommended Performance: Program services reflect identified areas of student strengths.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of district needs assessments on student strengths, minutes/agendas of meetings on student assessment

2. Indicator: Curriculum content for students identified as gifted is defensibly differentiated from the regular curriculum in its complexity, depth, and range.

   Recommended Performance: Teachers receive adequate training and materials to deliver curriculum focusing on complex content, issues, and themes.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of district curriculum designed to meet the needs of advanced level students, workshops for teachers on implementation of curriculum

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

D. Implementation (Continued)

3. Indicator: Products developed by students identified as gifted are meaningfully related to the differentiated content and require complex thinking, and independent effort. Products use new techniques, propose new ideas, and are evaluated by self, peers, and outside experts.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of the students are offered opportunities to self select areas of study and provided support in developing in-depth products.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of student products, district curriculum, schedule of professional development on curriculum implementation

4. Indicator: Students use advanced level, challenging materials that support curricular objectives.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of students use above level material that supports the differentiated curriculum.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of materials used in classes serving gifted students

5. Indicator: Students assessed as gifted in elementary, middle, and high school participate in experimental and/or innovative courses, services, and options specifically designed to challenge students of exceptional ability, interest, and motivation.

   Recommended Performance: 15-20% of elementary, 30% of middle school, and 50% of high school students participate in services such as the Future Problem Solving Program, talent search programs, mentorships, curricular based community programs, and Odyssey of the Mind.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of campus and district student services and courses

6. Indicator: Students and families are informed of and encouraged to pursue options offered through Chapter 75 that are appropriate for gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: Districts provide 100% of students and parents with information on services such as advanced placement examinations, concurrent enrollment, and credit by examination.

   Data Source: (Desk) Waivers, complaints
   (Local) Review of campus/district brochures explaining program options, letters to families and students, policies relating to access to program options

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

D. Implementation (Continued)

7. Indicator: Middle school students who score 1000 or above on the SAT or 25 or above on the ACT receive counseling on advanced and diverse curricular options.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of students are advised on appropriately challenging curricular options.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of materials available to advanced level students, student folders for alternative curricular adaptations

8. Indicator: Organizational patterns, including grouping and special classes, that maximize student potential are designed and implemented for gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of the students have a variety of options including independent study, multi-grade groupings, seminars, etc.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of scheduling and grouping options available to students

9 Indicator: Time frames in which students participate in services designed for gifted students are appropriate for meeting the desired student outcomes.

   Recommended Performance: To be determined.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of district documentation

10. Indicator: The affective needs of gifted students, including a sensitivity for the unique needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, are addressed in the curriculum and services that are offered.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of the students are exposed to a multicultural curriculum.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of district documentation, including perceptions relating to acculturation and attitudes toward one's home culture

11. Indicator: Instructors delivering services as part of the gifted program receive more than the minimum professional development required in State Board of Education rule (19 TAC §89.52(a)(2)).

   Recommended Performance: Number of teachers with endorsement and number of teachers receiving ongoing training increases each year.

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS (when available)
   (Local) Review of professional development schedules

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

D. Implementation (Continued)

12. Indicator: Instructors delivering services as part of the gifted program reflect the diversity of the district.

Recommended Performance: To be determined

Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data

E. Transition

1. Indicator: New students to the district are informed about program services upon entry into the district.

Recommended Performance: 100% of parents of new students to the district receive materials on assessment and program services.

Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
(Local) Review of student folders

2. Indicator: Students who participate in gifted programs in other districts are automatically assessed for services and appropriately placed.

Recommended Performance: 100% of transfer students from gifted programs in other districts are assessed and appropriately placed within six weeks.

Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data, complaints
(Local) Review of identification procedures, student folders

3. Indicator: Students receive a continuum of services within a district from elementary school through middle and high school.

Recommended Performance: To be determined.

Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
(Local) Review of curricular scope and sequence, student folders

4. Indicator: Students receive counseling regarding career and post public school options that will challenge and match their potential and interests.

Recommended Performance: Beginning in middle school, 100% of gifted students receive a minimum of one counseling session per year regarding career and educational options.

Data Source: (Local) Review of brochures and materials available to assist counselors in discussing options with students

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

E. Transition (Continued)

5. Indicator: Students confirm that services offered through the gifted program enhanced and supported later educational and professional opportunities.

   Recommended Performance: To be determined

   Data Source: (Local) Review of district documentation

6. Indicator: Exiting of students from the program is based on multiple criteria relating to performance in the program and involves input from the student, teacher, parent, and counselor.

   Recommended Performance: Records of students exiting the program indicate that multiple criteria were used to determine the need for exiting.

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of identification procedures, minutes of meetings on student placement

F. Support

1. Indicator: Teachers of the gifted receive planning time to coordinate with other teachers and support staff.

   Recommended Performance: 95% of program teachers report adequate time for collaborative planning.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of survey results, teacher input

2. Indicator: Personnel delivering services that are part of the gifted program are included on district wide planning committees.

   Recommended Performance: At least one representative from gifted education serves on all district-wide planning committees (such as the technology planning committee).

   Data Source: (Local) Review of lists of members of district committees

3. Indicator: Teachers and administrators participate in professional development activities that support the cognitive and affective development of gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: 100% of district staff have received introductory training on the needs and characteristics of gifted students.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of district professional development plans, teacher surveys

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

F. Support (Continued)

4. Indicator: Assessments are completed to determine professional development needs of campus staff.

   Recommended Performance: Needs assessments are completed at least once every three years.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of needs assessments and professional development schedules

5. Indicator: Personnel delivering services that are part of the gifted program are included on grade level/subject area committees.

   Recommended Performance: To be determined

   Data Source: (Local) Review of committee membership lists

6. Indicator: The district expands or creates new staff roles to ensure that the individual needs of all students are met.

   Recommended Performance: Teachers have resources and support personnel who reinforce their services to gifted students.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of minutes of site decision committees, teacher needs assessments

G. Evaluation

1. Indicator: Services for gifted students are assessed annually.

   Recommended Performance: At least one component is reviewed each year and recommendations are implemented.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of campus/district program evaluation report

2. Indicator: Parents, students, school personnel, and community members assess the effectiveness of programs and services for gifted students.

   Recommended Performance: At least 75% return district survey.

   Data Source: (Local) Review of survey results

3. Indicator: Performance of individual students is assessed appropriately to determine if program services are challenging student potential and is used as a basis for modifying services offered in the gifted program.

   Recommended Performance: Increased number of students mastering TAAS; NAPT scores increased.

   Data Source: (Local) Performance indicators

II. PROGRAM EXCELLENCE INDICATORS (Continued)

G. Evaluation (Continued)

4. Indicator: Evaluation results are used to plan program improvements.

Recommended Performance: Campus improvement plan includes improvements for gifted/talented program.

Data Source: (Local) Review of program evaluations, campus improvement plans

5. Indicator: Students in the gifted program attain mastery of TAAS objectives.

Recommended Performance: 85% of students in the gifted program master all objective on TAAS

Data Source: (Desk) AEIS

III. COMPLIANCE INDICATORS

A. Family and Community Involvement

1. Indicator: Districts provide orientation and periodic updates for parents of students identified and served as gifted. [19 TAC §89.52(a)(6)]

Performance Standard: 100%

Data Source: (Local) Review of letters of invitation, meeting agendas, minutes

B. Access

1. Indicator: Final selection of students is made by a committee of at least three local district educators who have received training in the area of gifted education. [19 TAC §89.51(b)]

Performance Standard: 100%

Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
(Local) Review of lists of selection committee members, identification procedures, minutes of meetings

III. COMPLIANCE INDICATORS (Continued)

C. Student Eligibility

1. Indicator: Written identification policies are developed and approved by the local board of trustees. These policies include provisions for ongoing screening and selection of nominated students based on a minimum of five equally weighted criteria that represent both objective and subjective assessments; provisions regarding the exiting of students from the program, transfer students, and appeals of district decisions regarding program placement. [19 TAC §89.51(a)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Local) Review of identification procedures

2. Indicator: Data and procedures used during the identification process are designed to assure that the population of the program for gifted students reflects the population of the total district. [19 TAC §89.51(c)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS disaggregation, complaints
   (Local) Review of program student demographics, identification criteria and procedures

3. Indicator: Students at the kindergarten level through grade 12 are identified and served. [19 TAC §89.51(d)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data, complaints, waivers
   (Local) Review of identification procedures, letters soliciting nominations, campus information on program services

4. Indicator: Parents or legal guardians give written permission for students to participate in program services. [19 TAC §89.51(f)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of student folders

D. Implementation

1. Indicator: The district complies with state policies and procedures that relate to the appropriate and equitable use of fiscal resources.

   Performance Standard: 85% of state funds designed for gifted programs are used within the same fiscal year

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data
   (Local) Review of district financial record

III. COMPLIANCE INDICATORS (Continued)

D. Implementation (Continued)

2. Indicator: Curriculum specifically designed for gifted and talented students and that includes student objectives and a kindergarten through 12 scope and sequence has been developed and is implemented. [19 TAC §89.52(a)(4)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Local) Review of program guides and curricula

3. Indicator: Districts provide full year services that include instructional and organizational patterns that enable identified students to work together as a group, to work with other students, and to work alone. [19 TAC §89.52(a)(5)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) PEIMS data, complaints, AEIS
   (Local) Review of program alternatives, options, and services

E. Transition

1. Indicator: Students remain in the district program unless they are removed in compliance with local board approved exiting procedures. [19 TAC §89.51(e)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) Complaints
   (Local) Review of identification procedures

F. Support

1. Indicator: Teachers of gifted students have received a minimum of 30 hours of staff development in the area of gifted education. [19 TAC §89.52(a)(2)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Local) Review of professional development schedules and plans

2. Indicator: District staff receive ongoing training in gifted education based on periodic needs assessments. [19 TAC §89.52(a)(3)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Local) Review of teacher and administrator surveys on training needs, professional development schedules

III. COMPLIANCE INDICATORS (Continued)

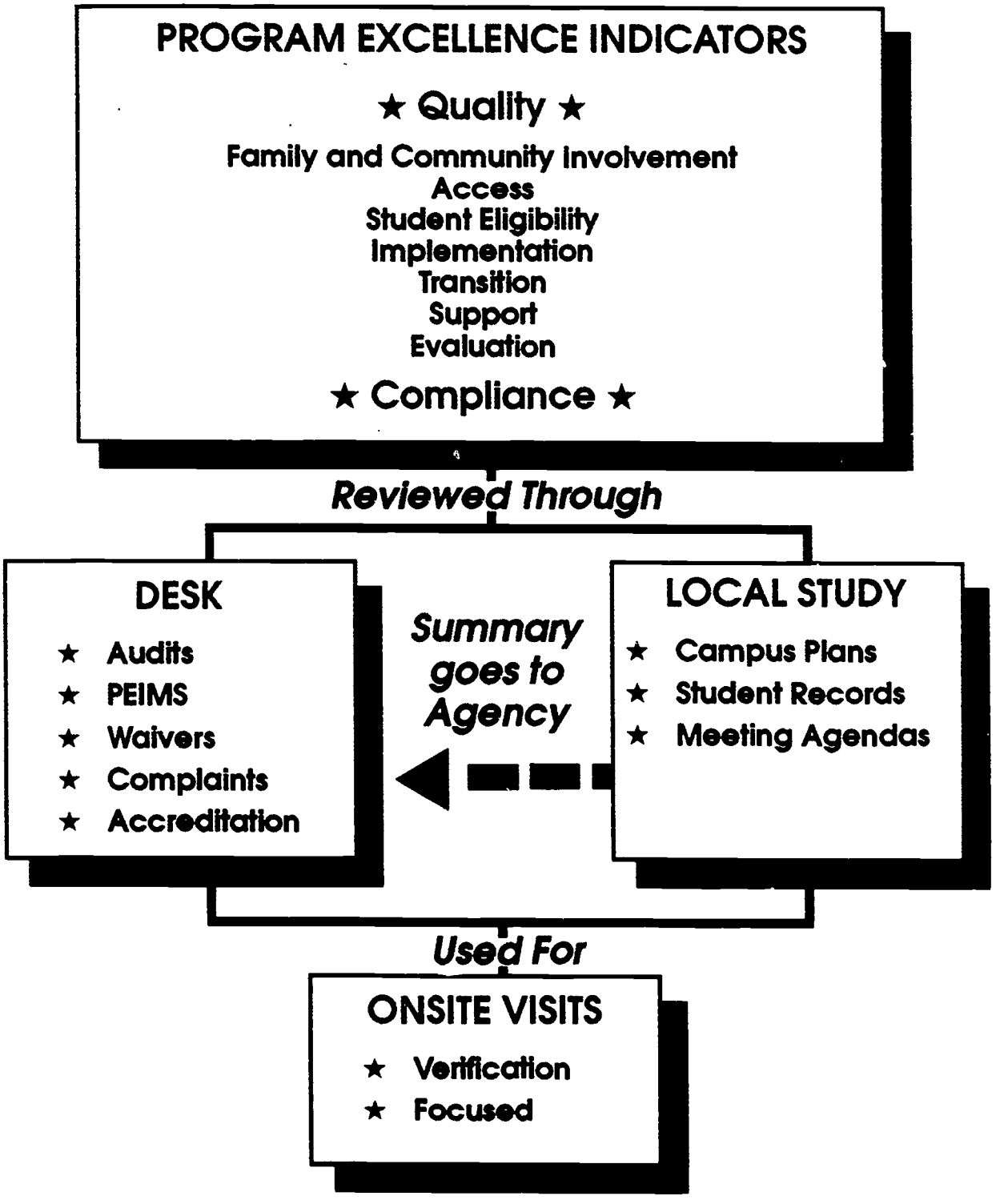
G. Evaluation

1. Indicator: Districts submit planning or evaluation reports to the Central Education Agency periodically as required by the commissioner of education. [19 TAC §89.52(c)]

   Performance Standard: 100%

   Data Source: (Desk) Division of Gifted/Talented Education files

RESULTS BASED MONITORING



Annotated Bibliographies

Jeanette Covington
Division of Gifted/Talented Education
Texas Education Agency

Gifted Students Talk About Cooperative Learning

Marian Matthews
Educational Leadership, 50, 48-50, 1992

In this article, Matthews summarizes information gleaned from interviewing fifteen 6th and 8th graders from a wealthy suburban school district who had been trained initially in cooperative learning in 1983 with David Johnson and Roger Johnson. The district has continued to provide follow-up training and support for cooperative learning since that time. The students' opinions did not concur with those often cited by researchers, advocates, administrators, and teachers concerning student gains from cooperative learning. According to the interviews, students resented taking time away from their own learning to work in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups and indicated they did not understand the material better after explaining it to others. They saw no benefits for themselves and felt their being bored with the material could be harmful to other students. Regarding social skill behaviors, the students indicated that there was often a lack of trust in their classmates to do the quality of work gifted students felt necessary. This often led to the gifted students taking over the leadership and the work of others. The students felt much less negative about cooperative learning when working in groups that were more homogeneous.

Six ways to make cooperative learning more effective are described in the article. Matthews has conducted a nationwide survey of 800 gifted students involved in cooperative learning and says that while the results are not yet analyzed, the survey seems to support the findings of the interview--that high-ability students prefer cooperative learning in homogeneous groups.

What to Say to Advocates for the Gifted

David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson
Educational Leadership, 50, 44-47, 1992

Johnson and Johnson provide answers to some of the most frequently asked questions concerning whether or not cooperative learning is detrimental to high achieving students. The discussion in the article addresses high-ability and gifted students as one group. High-ability students are defined as the academically top 33 percent and gifted as the academically top 5 percent. Three specific points are cited as important. First, high-achieving students should not always work in cooperative groups; secondly, when high-achieving students do work in cooperative groups, the groups should not always be heterogeneous; and third, well-structured cooperative learning groups are quite different from traditional classroom grouping and poorly structured cooperative groups.

A question and answer format is used throughout the article and targets concerns about the academic benefits of cooperative learning for bright students, how critical thinking, higher-level reasoning skills, and social needs are affected. Suggestions are given for what can be done for bright students who are disinterested in school and to assure that bright students have successful careers.

Questions & Answers

Jeanette Covington
Division of Gifted/Talented Education
Texas Education Agency

What must a district do to receive a waiver related to gifted education?

Section 11.273 of the Texas Education Code (TEC) states, "A school campus or district may apply to the commissioner of education for a waiver of a requirement or prohibition imposed by law or rule that the campus or district determines inhibits student achievement." There is an application for waiver form that is available from the Waiver Unit of the Division of Field Services that is used to apply for a waiver. Information concerning the following seven items must be given in the application:

- A brief description of the waiver requested;
- The specific objective addressed in the district or campus plan if applicable;
- The exact citation from the Texas Education Code or the Texas Administrative Code that the district or campus wishes to waive;
- A description of the plan to be implemented in lieu of the current rule or law that inhibits student achievement, including requested effective dates;
- An explanation of how granting this waiver will remove the existing inhibition(s) to student achievement;
- A plan for evaluating the impact of the waiver on student achievement;
- Names of the individuals, or committee members and committee name(s), involved in developing the waiver request.

The waiver application must have board approval and the board president must sign the application as well as the superintendent. These same regulations apply to all programs and services.

In gifted education, several factors have to be considered The question arises, "How does identifying and serving gifted students at any grade level inhibit their achievement?" Many requests for a waiver suggest that implementing services for gifted students inhibits the development of *other* students. This clearly should not be the case and begs the question of those students for whom services are designed. The intent of granting a waiver related to gifted education is to allow a campus or district to have a more innovative approach to assessment and services for gifted students--one that supports quality services for all.

My district would like to get a waiver related to assessing and serving gifted students in grades kindergarten through two. Is it possible and what should we do?

Because several waivers to use a talent pool to identify and serve gifted students were requested during the 1991-92 school year, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Lionel Meno, requested input from various associations and groups that would assist in making decisions regarding approval of the waiver request. Agency staff participated in meetings with the Commissioner's Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted Students, a group of parents from across the state, as well as representatives from some of the districts that had applied for waivers. Criteria for alternative programs for gifted/talented students (Figure 1) were developed for waiver applications that applied to gifted education. All through the process, Dr. Meno stressed that the waiver would not be used to allow anyone to walk away from the law or rules. If a rule stood in the way of meeting the needs of gifted students and a better way was found, the agency

would be amenable to approving the request. Not only would the waiver be approved if the request met the criteria developed, but agency staff would be kept apprised of progress and would visit and observe the program in operation. Gifted education is comparatively new as a mandated program and agency staff are open to ideas for identifying and serving gifted students as long as student needs are met.

Adherence to these criteria can provide district educators flexibility in relation to board rules and yet assure that gifted youngsters will be served even though formal identification is delayed. The literature is filled with admonitions from many researchers including Isaacs (1963), Bloom (1964), Fox (1971), Gallagher (1979), and Whitmore (1979,1980) that the early years of education are critical in preventing underachievement among gifted students. It behooves us to make absolutely certain that we provide nurturing, caring, challenging environments for students at all grade levels so that they may achieve maximum levels of potential.

As Dr. Meno states that in attaining our goal of excellence and equity in Texas public schools, the student is the only non-negotiable. When asked by a parent if that included gifted students, the Commissioner's response was, "Absolutely."

My district has reviewed Appendix M on talent pool development and the criteria for alternative programs for gifted/talented students. Tell me exactly what I must submit to the agency with my application.

In addition to the application, the information included in the alternative criteria must be submitted. A close examination of each criterion listed in Figure 1 will clarify what the district must submit to the agency with the application.

Criterion #1: *The district staff development plan indicating the training teachers have received or will receive that will enable them to provide the enriched curriculum and assess students during the process, thus linking the assessment and instruction.*

Criterion #2: *A sample of the enriched curriculum, over and above the regular curriculum, that is ready for use in the talent pool.* It is not necessary to submit the entire enriched curriculum for grades K, 1, and 2 that has been developed. One unit for one grade level may be submitted. The critical component of this criterion is that it is curriculum that has been developed over and above what is used in the regular curriculum.

Criterion #3: *An indication of how records of individual student performance on the enriched curriculum will be kept and used by the selection committee when identification takes place.* Forms or a narrative describing the process that will be used may be submitted. It must be remembered that the purpose of using the talent pool is to observe and document which students continually respond and excel with the enriched curriculum that is open-ended and requires divergent thinking skills.

Criterion #4: *A plan indicating how additional services will be provided for those talent pool students who show unusual capability and need something beyond the enriched curriculum.* Examples of what agency staff will be looking for might include allowing a youngster in kindergarten, first, or second grade who is reading above grade level to be accelerated for his/her reading class. The same might be true for math. Another example might be an individualized education plan for the student with extraordinary abilities. No child should have to sit and wait for a mentally challenging educational experience designed to meet his/her academic level.

Criterion #5(a): *The plan for evaluating the talent pool approach that indicates whether or not gifted students are performing at higher standards at the end of grade two than in the past.* Suggestions include starting to collect achievement test data to compare students who participate in this program with second grade students this past year who were identified as gifted. Another suggestion includes parent questionnaires that would be sent to parents of students in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two to obtain information as to whether the services provided to their students are sufficiently challenging and meeting their needs. Teachers might be surveyed

FIGURE 1
TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED/TALENTED STUDENTS

Anticipated Outcomes

1. As a result of participation in the talent pool, there will be higher levels of achievement by students later identified as gifted than that which could have been achieved if traditional methods of serving formally identified gifted students had been implemented.
2. There will be students who are nominated and placed in the program for gifted/talented students based on talent pool records who would not have been identified by methods currently included in §89.51 of the Texas Administrative Code.
3. Students whose performance reflects unusual abilities will receive services that go beyond the enriched curriculum of the talent pool.

Criteria for Alternative Programs for Gifted/Talented Students

Criteria	Yes
1. A staff development plan is included to indicate the training teachers will receive that enables them to deliver an enriched curriculum for talent pool students and to assess students for the program for gifted students.	
2. Enriched curriculum has been developed and is ready for implementation with the talent pool.	
3. Records of individual student performance on the enriched curriculum of the talent pool are kept and used as a criterion for placement in the gifted/talented program.	
4. A plan is included to indicate how additional services are provided for those talent pool students who show unusual capability.	
5. The success of the talent pool will be evaluated according to the following criteria: (a) Gifted students are performing at higher standards at the end of grade two than in the past;	
(b) The population of the program for gifted students clearly reflects the population of the district.	

to determine if they feel they have been able to provide services that were appropriately challenging to all students in their classes using this approach.

Criterion #5(b): *Data must be collected to show progress the district is making towards the goal of having the population of the program for gifted students reflect the population of the district because of the use of a talent pool.*

I have been told that some districts have realized they have more flexibility regarding regulations than they previously thought. Would you give some examples of services for gifted students that you have determined do not need a waiver?

One example that has been referred to us relates to student attendance. When high school gifted students attend a college class and the schedule requires that they miss some regular classes from time to time, the local attendance committee, with statutory authority (TEC § 21.041), may approve those absences as extenuating circumstances.

Another example was a district that asked to have open enrollment for an academy for gifted/talented students within their district. The academy was a "school-within-a-school" and the district wanted to allow other students who wished to participate in the program to do so. This did not require a waiver because the district was identifying gifted students, had developed a differentiated curriculum that included student objectives and a scope and sequence, and was complying with all the rules for gifted education. They did not need a waiver to allow other students to participate in the program who were not gifted. Districts may develop a course for gifted students and allow other students to participate as long as everyone understands that the curriculum is specifically developed for gifted students and as long as the challenging standards established are not lowered.

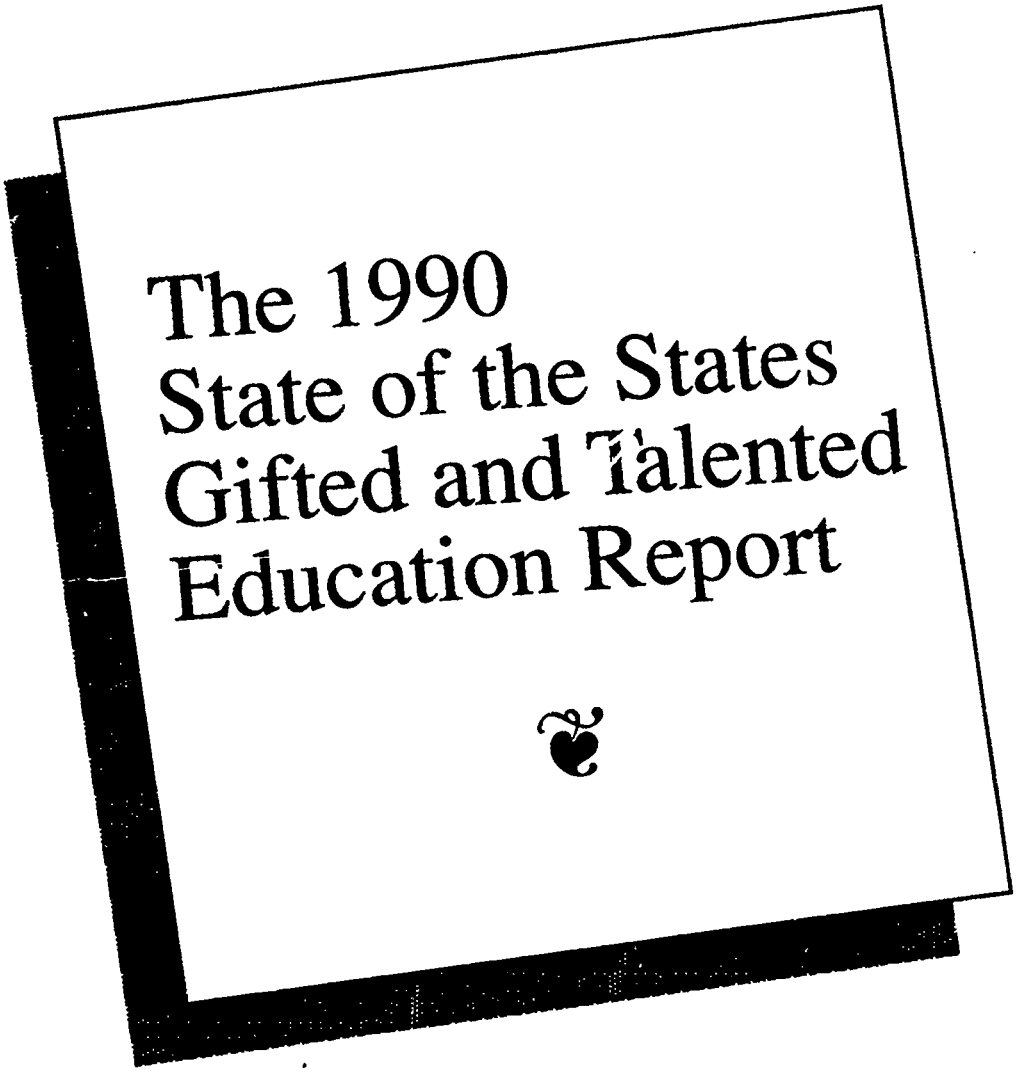
At times there are students in my district who are identified gifted but cannot participate in the program due to scheduling conflicts. Do we still count them on the PEIMS report as gifted students?

No, in order to count a student as gifted on the PEIMS report, the student must not only be identified as gifted, but also must be served. Therefore, if a student is not receiving services, he/she is not counted and no money from the gifted/talented allotment is provided for that student.

My district is very small and we are unable to offer some of the advanced courses that some of our students need. Are correspondence courses available and what are the advantages of using such an opportunity for gifted or advanced students?

Texas Tech University offers a number of courses by correspondence and many high school students have participated in independent study through Tech's correspondence courses. Courses may be taken for high school credit only, dual credit, or college credit. At the Institute on Middle and High School Programs for Gifted Students held in September 1992, Dr. Suzanne Logan told participants that in a recent newspaper article listing the Merit Scholar Semifinalists in West Texas, every one of them had taken a correspondence course from Tech. Taking correspondence courses help students learn to be responsible for their own learning. Independent study by correspondence is also beneficial when there are scheduling conflicts or when a student wants to take more classes or graduate early.

To obtain a catalog and more information on correspondence courses from Texas Tech, call 1-800-MY-COURS. Other options, such as high school seminar programs implemented by either an education service center or a consortium of districts, mentorships, or community based curricular projects, might be considered.



Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted

To order a copy of the report, send $25.00 to:

Valerie Terry Seaberg
Maine Department of Education
Department of Educational and Cultural Services
State House Station #23
Augusta, Maine 04333

(Editor's Note: This letter was mailed to all Superintendents on November 25, 1992. See the reverse side of this page for registration form.)

November 25, 1992

TO THE EDUCATOR ADDRESSED:

The Texas Education Agency is sponsoring an Institute on Elementary School Programs for Gifted Students on February 21-23, 1993, at the Hyatt Regency Austin. The institute is designed to assist district personnel in their efforts to better serve gifted and talented students at the elementary level. Participants may count the institute toward the 30 hours of staff development for teachers of the gifted required by 19 TAC §89.52(a)(2) or toward the ongoing training component of 19 TAC §89.52(a)(3).

The institute will begin at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, February 21, with a keynote address that will be followed by a reception at which institute participants may meet informally with presenters. On Monday, February 22 at 8:30 a.m. there will be a second keynote address featuring Dr. Carolyn Callahan who will speak on determining the effectiveness of services for gifted students. On Monday and Tuesday, breakout sessions featuring national consultants, as well as Texas educators, will highlight program services for identified gifted students in kindergarten through grade 5. Additionally, there will be sessions Monday evening that will feature panel discussions on various issues in gifted education. The final breakout session on Tuesday will end at 2:30 p.m.

There will be a $35.00 registration fee for the institute. Registration will be limited to the first 1,000 paid registrations. Because of the necessity of limiting participation, no phone or faxed registrations will be accepted. Please complete the attached form and return it to TEA Conference, P.O. Box 200169, Dallas, Texas 75320-0169. Should there be any questions regarding the institute, contact Carol Wise at 512/463-9455.

Sincerely,

J. R. Cummings
Executive Deputy Commissioner
for Programs and Instruction

Enclosure

REGISTRATION FORM

INSTITUTE ON
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS
Sponsored by the
Texas Education Agency

Hyatt Regency Austin
February 21-23, 1993

DISTRICT NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: ( ) _____

NAME(S) OF PARTICIPANTS TITLE
(Registration confirmation will be sent to the contact person.)

Contact Person:
(☐will ☐will not attend): _____

_____
_____
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_____
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_____
_____
_____
_____

TOTAL NUMBER REGISTERING_____ X $35.00 = $_____

Return form and check or money order, made payable to the Texas Education Agency--G/T Institute, to TEA CONFERENCE, P.O. BOX 200169, DALLAS, TEXAS 75320-0169 AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Registration will be limited to the first 1,000 paid registrations. Telephone or faxed registrations will not be accepted.

Participants should make their own hotel reservations. Rooms are being held at the Hyatt Regency Austin (512/477-1234) at the rate of $65 for a single room and $77 for a double, the Embassy Suites Downtown/Town Lake (512/469-9000) at the rate of $82 for a single and $92 for a double, and the Sheraton Austin (512/480-8181) at the rate of $55 for a single and $75 for a double.

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY
AUSTIN, TX 78701
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