

The “Quiet Crisis” Continues

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Abstract

Gifted Education remains funded poorly at best. Funding levels have not increased; in fact, levels have decreased since NCLB (No Child Left Behind) legislation. The authors establish a history of funding inadequacies over the past twenty years that represents a leap backwards in support of students with untapped potential.

The effort to improve overall test scores and general competencies has overshadowed gifted education. In an effort to be all to everyone an important segment of the population has been largely ignored by funding and instructional efforts. A conscious effort to engage these human resources is necessary to impact our future. These students are students with special needs, special needs that remain unmet.

Keywords: funding the gifted, NCLB impact, quiet crisis, Javits

Introduction

In November 1993 Secretary of Education Richard Riley wrote that the nation's top students are "in a quiet crisis" in that "youngsters with gifts and talents that range from mathematical to musical are still not challenged to work to their full potential (Brain drain, 1994). This statement resounds yet today in the shadow of the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] legislation, which tends to leave schools focusing resources on the students on the low-achieving end of the spectrum rather than giving every child Joseph Renzulli's (National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented) optimal combination of the "encouragement, resources, and opportunity to reach the highest level of achievement" (Brain drain, 1994). The problem facing schools appears to be the classic one of economics. Resources are limited, where should they be allocated to get the best return? (Brimelow, 1994).

The Funding Decline

Over the last twenty years, gifted education has seen a drastic decline in state and federal funding. Oregon, for example, cut its annual spending on gifted programs from \$800,000 to \$100,000 in 1993 (Brain drain, 1994). Michigan spent \$5 million in state resources on gifted education in 1995 as compared to a previous \$19 million, and cut spending again to \$500,000 in 2002 following the enactment of NCLB (Kenney, 2007). New York State budgeted about \$13.4 million per year from 1988-1994 out of a total education budget of approximately \$9.1 billion (Brain drain, 1994). Illinois went from spending \$16 million yearly on gifted education to zero as a result of NCLB (Kenney, 2007). A national estimate of state and local expenditures aimed at gifted and talented students in 1990 was two cents out of every \$100 (Brimelow, 1994). Statistics

such as these simply validate the following statement: “state departments of education have provided lip service and mandates for gifted education, but they have followed up with double talk and minimum funding for programs” (White, 2007).

The Javits Initiative

The purpose of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 (Title IV, Part B) was to “provide financial assistance to State and local educational agencies...to initiate a coordinated program of research...designed to build a nationwide capability in elementary and secondary schools to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students” (Willard-Holt, 1997). This legislation provides grants for schools and also helps fund the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented [NRC/GT] housed at the University of Connecticut (Delisle, 2006, January). While this act was welcomed for its “recognition of the existence and needs of gifted and talented students,” it has failed to mandate programming and provide due process rights regarding services, as special education students have (Willard-Holt, 1997). Since its inception, the Javits’ share of federal education funding has never exceeded one-tenth of one percent (Brimelow, 1994).

Proponents of the Javits Act cite the increases in funding and positive changes in gifted education. Since 2002, Javits funding has provided grants to states to build the infrastructure for gifted education at the state level (Roberts, 2006). As a result, schools explored the use of a variety of assessments for identification of gifted students (Teicher, 2007). Curriculum for gifted students has spread beyond the original districts where developed and professional development opportunities for teachers have increased (Roberts, 2006). In 2002, Congress boosted Javits’ funding fifty percent to

\$11.25 million annually (Fine, 2002). The NRC/GT has provided results from a wide range of studies that are used in “states, districts, and schools across the country as they make decisions about educational opportunities for children who are gifted and talented” (Roberts, 2006).

The Javits Act has also been criticized in light of its shortcomings. Funding has often fallen victim to the increasing demands on the federal government, such as response to natural disasters and war efforts (Delisle, 2006, January). In 1993, the Department of Education proposed to divert Javits’ funds to programs developing school-wide gifted curricula in efforts to provide challenging curricula and enriching instruction to all students (Brain drain, 1994). Critics further challenge that funding has “gone down one bureaucratic hole after another,” with millions being spent on university overhead, summer stipends for graduate students, and travel fees to send grant coordinators to Washington (Delisle, 2006, January). One suggestion has been to redirect the Javits’ funds spent on the NRC/GT to individual states and give local agencies authority to “distribute funds to deserving school districts” (Delisle, 2006, October).

Positive Funding Examples

The National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], a national advocacy group, cites four school districts across the country that are continuing to support the needs of gifted children (Kenney, 2007). In Colorado the Cherry Creek School District spends more than \$3 million on gifted education, with only \$350,000 coming from the state (Kenney, 2007). This district uses the funding to train teachers in the art of differentiation, and an effort is made to include discussions of gifted instruction with

those of good instruction for all kids (Kenney, 2007). In Madison County, Kentucky the school district works with the Madison County Business Education Partnership in running a youth leadership initiative. This program includes a “challenge course” orientation at Eastern Kentucky University “followed by daylong seminars every other month centered on themes” (Kenney, 2007). The funding for transportation and the orientation is shouldered by the school district, while the remainder of the cost is covered by donations of time and materials by community members (Kenney, 2007). The school district in Rockwood, Missouri created the Center for Creative Learning about ten years ago. This school is a standalone elementary school attended by about 1,200 gifted students in grades K-8. Each student’s weekly learning is compacted into four days at his/her home school and they spend one day at the center. Because the program has been in place for many years, funding is not diverted because the community can see the results as students progress to higher grade levels (Kenney, 2007). Finally, the Kerrville Independent School District in Texas has Challenge Labs for elementary students, which cost the district about \$175,000 annually. In the elementary schools, students are given a pre-test on material to be covered each week and students showing mastery of the planned work are sent to the labs for enrichment activities run by a full-time certified teacher (Kenney, 2007).

Still other funding options exist and are being employed by various districts. High achieving schools in California and Wisconsin have applied for charter status in effort to gain more state aid and circumvent the funding focus on low-achieving students as a result of NCLB (Toppo, 2003). In other communities, like Vacaville, California, businesses have partnered with schools in fundraising efforts and have donated proceeds for the preservation of certain programming (Kuehner-Hebert, 2003).

In Summary

“The effort to leave no child behind is a major threat to high-ability students, whose cognitive and affective needs are increasingly falling by the wayside from default” (Kenney, 2007). This legislation lacks incentives or mandates for programming and accommodations for students achieving above grade-level standards (Kenney, 2007). Hope exists in the example of the state of Indiana, whose General Assembly passed legislation providing \$13 million for gifted education (as compared to \$5.8 million previously) and mandated that all Indiana school corporations “identify students of high ability in the general intellectual and specific academic domains and to provide them with appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction in areas of core content in grades K-12 (Burney, 2008). Shawn Colleary, director of gifted education and advanced learning at Cherry Creek School District in Colorado sums it up: “The reality is that the upper-end kid is probably the easiest group to move forward, but they do need the support and they do need the focus. Bright kids need instruction like anybody else” (Kenney, 2007).

National-level legislation refers to gifted and talented students as those who show the capability of high performance; in specific academic disciplines and in such areas as creativity and leadership (Koch, 2009). Gifted and Talented students require special services by schools to develop these capabilities (Maker & Nelson, 1996). Fewer and fewer schools are addressing these students with the onset of NCLB and its unfunded financial mandates and other curriculum and assessment requirements. The history of funding for gifted and talented has been a rocky one since major movement in

the late 1950s. We have not yet realized the true potential of these students in an effort to be everything to everyone.

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