



Gifted in the 21st Century

A Report of Findings and Recommendations

Executive Summary

**Prepared by the
2002 Ohio Gifted Task Force
Columbus, Ohio**

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In the foreword to *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Ross, 1993), former U.S. Department of Education Secretary Richard W. Riley spoke of children with gifts and talents in relation to our country's economic growth: "Our neglect for these students makes it impossible for Americans to compete in a global economy demanding their skills" (p. iii). The National Excellence report documents how our country wastes "one of its most precious resources...the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students" (p. 1). At a time when Ohio desires to become a leader in high-tech enterprises to meet the challenges of a global economy, its youngest citizens with the greatest potential to become the future leaders and creators of these enterprises often are not challenged.

In response, Dr. Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio's state superintendent of public instruction, commissioned the Ohio Gifted Task Force to make recommendations as to how Ohio could develop this "most precious resource" to benefit individual children and to improve the future economic success of our state. In the summer of 2002, the Task Force met six times over the course of two months to review the status of gifted education in Ohio and the latest state and national research on best practices in gifted education.

After reviewing their experiences with gifted education in Ohio in the context of this research, the Task Force found that current practice has not dramatically improved educational opportunities for children who are gifted. Indeed, the warning of a "quiet crisis in educating talented students" (Ross, 1993, p. 5) is still relevant. Although Ohio, since 1984, has addressed the identification of children who are gifted, districts are not required by state law to provide appropriate services to meet the needs of these students.

The Task Force's analysis of their experiences with gifted education in Ohio in the context of the latest research and best professional practice resulted in the following findings related to the status of education for children who are gifted in Ohio:

- **Finding 1: Policy:** Policies at both state and local levels should promote educational opportunities for children who are gifted. Many local board of education policies present barriers to best practices in the education of children who are gifted. Further, some state procedures and other policies may be detrimental to the provision of services for these children.
 - **Finding 2: Accountability:** Currently, schools are not held accountable for ensuring that children who are gifted are served according to their needs. There is no system in place to ensure these children reach their full potential. Ohio's report card system, while addressing district results in proficiency, does not specifically address children who are gifted. In addition, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has not yet addressed the gifted population in the state accountability system or in the guidelines and subsequent documents from the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)*. If Ohio is to enter the 21st century as a leader in gifted education, accountability for all children, including children who are gifted, will need to be an integral component of all policy and accountability decisions.
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- **Finding 3: Services and Identification:** Currently, districts are not required to offer any services to children who are identified as gifted. A recent survey indicated that during the 1998-1999 school year, of the 236,804 children identified as gifted in Ohio, only 103,087, or 43.5 percent, were receiving any kind of service. Of those receiving services, only 41,245, or 40 percent, were receiving services through state funding. Without a system that supports acceleration, differentiation options and other appropriate services, the probability increases that children who are gifted will become alienated from school.

It is critical to accurately identify children's gifted areas to know what services to provide. Ohio Administrative Code (3301-51-15) requires districts to identify in the areas of superior cognitive ability, specific academic ability, creative ability and visual and performing arts ability. Even though Ohio has mandated that districts identify children from kindergarten through grade 12, too little emphasis has been placed on the early identification of children who are gifted. In addition, many special populations go unnoticed in the identification process. Without attention to these underrepresented populations, appropriate services cannot be planned or provided.

- **Finding 4: Educators Who Serve Children Who Are Gifted:** Current teacher preparation programs in Ohio do not require any coursework in differentiated instruction, assessment or appropriate service options for children who are gifted. According to Passow and Rudinski (1993), most states acknowledge the crucial role of teachers in the identification and education of the gifted and the need for providing staff development. Without adequate knowledge, attitudes and skills, teachers are unable to provide differentiated instruction to children who are gifted. From the results of the Ohio Survey on Gifted Education, Joyce Van Tassel-Baska (1997) found that staff development on the needs of gifted students was often infrequent or nonexistent for Ohio teachers.
- **Finding 5: Funding:** Ohio school districts vary widely in the options and services available to children identified as gifted. Those with more local resources are able to offer additional services, in contrast to districts that depend on state dollars alone. Even with local dollars, however, only 8 percent of districts reported that all of their identified gifted students were receiving services during the 1998-1999 school year. Van Tassel-Baska (1997) reported: "State funding is pivotal to maintaining gifted programs in the state of Ohio."
- **Finding 6: Leadership:** ODE currently funds two consultants for gifted. To build capacity for the task force's recommendations, it is critical for additional staff to be funded to serve Ohio's school districts. Technical assistance, policy review and development, professional development and accountability are critical activities of state leadership.
- **Finding 7: Families and Community:** VanTassel-Baska (1997) recommends stronger parent involvement in local programming in Ohio districts. Families and community are an integral part of all children's education. It is imperative that ODE and local districts acknowledge the importance of families in the entire process of educating our children who are gifted.

While it is critical for Ohio educational leaders to "leave no child behind" in the plans to reform the education system, it is equally important to "hold no child back" from maximizing his or her abilities and potential contributions to society. Ohio can no longer tell its brightest students "not yet" or "we can't teach you that" when they strive to move faster than their peers through the traditional school curriculum. Providing an appropriate education for children who are gifted is indeed an investment in our economy and, ultimately, a successful future for our state.

Accordingly, the Task Force offered the following four broad recommendations and action steps that will move Ohio to the forefront nationally in providing an appropriate education for children who are gifted:

- **Recommendation 1: Policy:** ODE will address the needs of children who are gifted in all policies and standards, including *the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)*. For example, the method developed to determine adequate yearly progress (AYP) must be able to measure the growth of children who are gifted.

State policies will be developed to support high expectations for all children and provide children who are gifted with numerous opportunities for reaching their potential. Such policies, adopted by the State Board of Education, will be implemented in all school districts.

ODE will review current policies that may contain barriers to the education of children who are gifted. Further, ODE also will establish state policy that will require local boards of education to examine and remove local policies that present barriers to children who are gifted from reaching their full potential.

- **Recommendation 2: Accountability:** Ohio will define “adequate yearly progress” for children who are gifted and use a state accountability system that overcomes the challenges of assessing the growth of gifted children. All districts will be held accountable for a level of growth consistent with each gifted child’s written education plan (WEP). This should include, but not be limited to, growth in achievement, creative production and social and emotional skills. Accountability for services will be included in Ohio’s accountability system, including the Local Report Card. Although accountability for an individual child’s growth is the ultimate goal, the overall accountability system will also include measures of the critical components of quality services for children who are gifted, such as family involvement, educational planning and utilization of resources.
- **Recommendation 3: Services and Identification:** By 2012, all districts in the state of Ohio will assess and identify children for giftedness using best practices. In addition, those children identified as gifted will receive appropriate services based upon their identified areas of strength in appropriate settings at the local, regional and state level.
- **Recommendation 4: Educators Who Serve Children Who Are Gifted:** All educators in Ohio will have the skills and abilities they need to plan, develop and deliver services to children who are gifted. To develop these skills, all educators, including teachers, administrators, school counselors, school psychologists and other support service providers will have formal training in meeting both the academic and the social and emotional needs of children who are gifted. It is critical that teachers have the skills to provide instruction in a differentiated manner. Therefore, it is recommended that ODE work with the Ohio Board of Regents to ensure all teachers have appropriate preservice and inservice training.

Finally, the Task Force describes action steps to successfully implement their recommendations by the year 2012. Implementing many of these action steps requires changes in state and local policies, while others may require more substantial changes in law and increased funding of services for children who are gifted. The Ohio Gifted Task Force firmly believes that all of the recommendations are critical if Ohio is to achieve its bold mission of becoming a national leader in the education of all children, including those who are gifted, by 2012.
