



**Monday, November 6, 2017**

### **Council Looks To Encourage More Innovative Gifted Services**

A group convened by the superintendent of public instruction has begun work to improve the state's gifted education offerings, which stakeholders have long argued are lacking.

The Gifted Advisory Council's 20 members, including parents, administrators, and advocacy group representatives, met for the first time last month and have since been collecting information on programs throughout Ohio.

"We gave the committee some homework to do: Take a look at your district or region. What would an innovative gifted service look like? How could it look different for our students who are being served at this point?" said Kim Monachino, executive director of the Department of Education's Office for Exceptional Children, which is facilitating the council's work.

Created as part of [new operating standards](#) for gifted services, the council has been tasked with assisting in the development and updating of a department-approved plan for gifted education in Ohio and advising on policy recommendations.

The group must also establish criteria for identifying and recognizing schools, districts, and other educational providers that demonstrate an exemplary ability to serve students who are gifted.

The latter requirement is tied to the department's plans to establish a process and criteria for the submission and review of proposals for innovative gifted services, Ms. Monachino said.

ODE is expected to review submissions from schools and approve waivers for innovative gifted service programs that can be implemented for up to five years.

"I think that it could potentially bring about different ways of serving gifted students that we haven't thought about," Ms. Monachino said.

In addition to incentivizing schools to consider how they can better serve their gifted students, Ms. Monachino said ODE's plans to identify and highlight innovative practices can also be beneficial to those schools that don't submit ideas.

"I think we're always looking for models of schools that are doing really, really well to assist other schools," she said. "District A can call up District B and say, 'I heard about this program in your district, can you share with me how you implemented that program?'"

At the first council meeting, members applauded Ohio's gifted services standards for including professional development suggestions, but expressed there aren't enough opportunities to engage in high-quality professional development, she said.

Ms. Monachino said the council is also concerned with how services are currently being provided to students who are identified as gifted, which was a prime issue when the latest standards were being drafted. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, December 12, 2016](#))

"It's always a challenge because our students that are gifted can be identified as being gifted but they don't necessarily have to be served as part of the operating standards, so we're looking at how can we get more students identified and get more students served in their areas of giftedness," she said.

According to the Ohio Association of Gifted Children, which is represented on the council, about 243,000 students were identified as gifted through required testing in 2016. That number has been declining since 2009 when a high of 280,000 students were labeled gifted.

Of the students who were determined to be gifted in the 2015-16 school year, districts claimed to be serving about 44% of them. Of the more than 600 districts in the state, 87 districts reported providing no gifted services at all that academic year.

A total of \$73 million was allocated to districts for gifted education that year, but there is no enforced requirement that schools must put that money toward gifted services.

There is hope among advocates that the council will increase those numbers and ensure that students are receiving quality services, OAGC Executive Director Ann Sheldon said.

"I think it's really good to all be able to sit down and have a good dialogue about what's working, what's not working, and what can we do to improve things," she said.

The fact that the council has already scheduled all of its meetings for the fiscal year - in December, March and May - is a good sign that it can be effective in bringing parties together to compromise and proactively shape policy, she added.

"That in and of itself is really a hopeful sign that we'll have some sustained regular discussion about gifted from multiple perspectives because we typically don't have that," Ms. Sheldon said.

Ms. Monachino also said she's optimistic about the council's work and the role it will play in changing the face of Ohio's gifted services.

"These are passionate people that are good thinkers that understand gifted education and understand the needs of gifted students," she said. "I'm most excited about what kinds of ideas will be generated that will look different than what's in the operating standards and coming up with criteria with them as to how we can recognize schools and school districts that have innovative services for students that are gifted."