

## INTRODUCTION TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

**T**hese recommendations reflect task force consensus about initiatives needed to adequately provide appropriate educational services to students with exceptional ability or talent. Although a number of the recommendations involve new initiatives in Maryland gifted and talented education, others are designed to provide stability for existing services or address the issue of programmatic inequities across systems. Recognizing that commendatory programs currently exist in some places in Maryland, the task force believes that the recommendations in this report will reinforce these programs and extend similar educational services to students across the state.

**I**n this report, the task force has provided a guide for local school system assessment, study, goal setting, and decision making about the improvement of educational services for gifted and talented students. Since this report reflects current thinking and research about gifted and talented education, the task force believes that these recommendations will place Maryland in a leadership role in its effort to develop fully each student's potential.

**Key Question One:**

*What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?*

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**RECOMMENDATION 1.1.**

**APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION AND SERVICES**

*Students of all ages and from all backgrounds who have exceptional abilities, talents, or unique gifts will be recognized and supported by appropriate services and programs.*

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**RECOMMENDATION 1.2.**

**WORLD CLASS CURRICULAR STANDARDS**

*World class standards and high academic expectations matched to students' abilities and readiness to learn, accompanied by challenging curricula across all content areas, should be found in every school in Maryland so that students with exceptional ability and academic talent will be appropriately challenged and encouraged to develop fully their individual potential.*

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**RECOMMENDATION 1.3.**

**SYSTEM-WIDE FLEXIBILITY**

*School systems, administrators, teachers and other professional staff should be flexible enough to address the variety of needs presented by their students. They should be able to select from a variety of available services or programs in the school system, as well as the larger community, the most appropriate combination of educational options.*

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**RECOMMENDATION 1.4.**

**TRAINED STAFF**

*Instructional and administrative staff in every school in Maryland will receive training in how to recognize and nurture talents and exceptional ability in students from all backgrounds and all ages.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question One: *What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?*

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**APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION AND SERVICES**

*RECOMMENDATION 1.1: Students of all ages and from all backgrounds with exceptional abilities, talents, or unique gifts will be recognized and supported by appropriate services and programs.*

**PERSPECTIVE:** "...appropriate programming for gifted and talented students, while only one component of the total reform necessary to improve the quality of academic environments for all children, is a crucial, non-negotiable element of that reform."

**RATIONALE:** The identification and nurturing of highly able students, but most especially gifted minority and disadvantaged students who have been traditionally underserved in the past, are imperative if we are to compete globally and match the world performance of other countries in academic achievement.

The 1989 Education Summit defined six National Education Goals and declared that meeting them by the year 2000 "will require that the performance of our highest achievers be boosted to levels that equal or exceed the performance of the best students anywhere." (*National Excellence*, 1993, p.3) We **must** raise our expectations for all students, but most especially those with outstanding talent!

The need for appropriate recognition and services for students with outstanding abilities and talents is heightened in light of the decline in the last fifteen years of the SAT scores of college-bound seniors who represent our highest achievers. It has been noted that these students perform far below potential and often enter colleges ill-prepared (Singal, 1991). When compared to the top students in other industrialized countries, our most able students

perform less well on international tests. They are, however, also provided with a less rigorous curriculum, are asked to read and study less, and are rarely rewarded for academic excellence. As noted by Harold Stevenson, "In Asia, you are defying the norm by not doing well [in school]...In America, you are defying the norm by doing well." Echoing Professor Stevenson's concerns, William Durden laments that, "Good students may be becoming the pariahs of American education. We have arrived at a moment in our cultural history in which we are inspired by the excellence of athletes on the basketball court but resistant to the accomplishments of our intellectually aspiring students."

Although it is often assumed that our most able students will learn and achieve at the highest levels regardless of what the educational system does or does not do for them, the statistics sadly refute this assumption. We know that many of our most talented students languish in the classroom, uninspired and unchallenged, rarely motivated and often satisfied with mediocre performance since that is all that is expected. Various studies estimate that a number of gifted and talented students physically drop out of school, but we know that many more are intellectual dropouts.

We must provide students with exceptional potential appropriate learning experiences to develop that potential, regardless of racial or ethnic group membership, gender, wealth, or disability (Frasier, 1991). It has been suggested that we view our children as precious capital assets (Walberg & Stariha, 1992). We must be willing to invest a great deal more in those assets than we have done in the past.

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*"We must move toward the use of instructional programs which accommodate the diverse needs of all learners so that all, including the "gifted," can achieve their full potential."*

Robert Slavin  
*Ability Grouping, Cooperative Learning and The Gifted*

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

**Key Question One:** *What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?*

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**WORLD CLASS CURRICULAR STANDARDS**

*RECOMMENDATION 1.2: World class standards and high academic expectations matched to students' abilities and readiness to learn, accompanied by challenging curricula across all content areas, should be found in every school in Maryland so that students with exceptional ability and talent will be appropriately challenged and encouraged to develop fully their individual potential.*

**PERSPECTIVE:** "This imperative shift towards recognizing the needs of the gifted and talented calls for the coordinated effort of a broad spectrum of constituencies with an interest in creating a world-class educational system. To reach their potential, students must be provided with instruction and curricula that will, not only permit, but also encourage them to attain the highest levels of academic achievement."

**RATIONALE:** Our students cannot and will not achieve world class standards, nor will they be competitive globally in any manner, without a deliberate, methodical attempt on the part of the education system to recognize their needs and to provide the kinds of educational services and programs that will nurture and support their unique talents and abilities. They cannot be expected to achieve these standards on their own simply because they are bright or talented; they need to be fully engaged in the learning process in meaningful and

challenging activities and programs. Because they have the "potential to perform at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age," academically talented students require even more challenging curricula and higher standards than those provided in the overall school program.

The following statement from the Executive Summary of the National Excellence Report summarizes the need for curriculum reform in our schools:

"Reforming American schools depends on challenging students to work harder and master more complex material. Few would argue against this for students performing at low or average levels. But we must also challenge our top-performing students to greater heights if our nation is to achieve a world-class educational system. In order to make economic strides, America must rely upon many of its top-performing students to provide leadership in mathematics, science, writing, politics, dance, art, business, history, health and other human pursuits."

Curriculum development must be accompanied by performance standards in the core subject areas that challenge students performing at the highest levels. Additionally, assessment procedures based on standards that accurately measure the accomplishments of students who perform at the highest levels must be utilized.

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*"We need schools...where students know that parents, educators, and other important adults in their lives set high expectations for them and watch them closely to ensure that they work to their ability and develop their potential."*

*National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Key Question One: *What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?*

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**SYSTEM-WIDE FLEXIBILITY**

*RECOMMENDATION 1.3: School systems, administrators, teachers and other professional staff should be flexible enough to address the variety of needs presented by their students. They should be able to select from a variety of available services or programs in the school system, as well as the larger community, the most appropriate combination of educational options.*

**PERSPECTIVE:** "Effective school organization requires initiation and assessment of alternatives for scheduling, grouping, staffing and teaching practices correlated to unique student needs. It also requires staff who are sufficiently flexible to accommodate student diversity."

**RATIONALE:** Talents do not emerge at one set time, nor does any one service model or program type effectively meet the needs of all students with talents or high ability. School systems, as well as individual schools and teachers, must be flexible enough to address the talent when it presents itself and to seek out the most appropriate and effective type of service or program for nurturing the talent or gift.

Each school system must assess both the needs of its students and the resources available to meet those needs. In doing this, it is crucial that the system look beyond its own resources to those in the larger community and even those in a neighboring community in attempting to provide the best and most comprehensive services for its gifted and talented students. The "one-size fits all" type of general enrichment pull-out program so often used to provide for the needs of gifted and talented students, while still appropriate in some circumstances, is no longer adequate. Rather, a smorgasbord of educational options, both inside and outside the classroom, should be available so that the best match possible can be made between the educational services provided and the needs of the student. To achieve this, a system must be flexible and an atmosphere of creative problem solving must prevail.

To establish and maintain the level of flexibility necessary to effect these changes, school administrators need to adopt a model of facilitative leadership. In this context, administrators must involve, inspire, and coach staff to provide a variety of educational options to students of high ability. All staff should be working toward a more supportive, flexible, and responsive school climate for both students and teachers.

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*"Today's challenges require an expanded role for leadership. Beyond coping with change, leaders must tap and direct the power of participation to manage, and even to design change."*

Interaction Associates  
*Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation*

