

Key Question Two:

What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

RECOMMENDATION 2.1.

STATE MANDATE

The Maryland State Department of Education must adopt a mandate for gifted education guided by a clear declaration of philosophy that will ensure that all school systems in the state provide appropriate services for students with unique talents and abilities.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2.

FUNDING

Adequate and on-going funding for gifted education services must be available to local systems to assist them in complying with the state mandate, but made contingent upon meeting state standards that are flexible and responsive to local needs.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3.

STATE DEFINITION

The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with the definition put forth in the federal report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent."

Key Question Two:

What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

RECOMMENDATION 2.4.

STATE OFFICE FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED

The Maryland State Department of Education should establish an Office for Gifted and Talented Education to be staffed with a coordinator, a staff specialist, and a clerical support person. Additionally, a reasonable operating budget to support the duties of this office should be provided.

RECOMMENDATION 2.5.

SUMMER CENTERS

Current funding levels for the Maryland Summer Centers should be increased to ensure continued availability of these centers to qualified students from across the state. Additionally, the current implementation procedures should be reassessed.

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

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STATE MANDATE

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: The Maryland State Department of Education must adopt a mandate for gifted education guided by a clear declaration of philosophy that will ensure that all school systems in the state provide appropriate services for students with unique talents and abilities.

PERSPECTIVE: "If appropriate recognition and services for our most talented and high achieving students are not addressed clearly and directly in our efforts to provide the best education possible to **all** students, we will have failed these students, fallen sadly short of our goal for true educational reform in the State of Maryland, and compromised our nation's future. ... A statewide mandate accompanied by sufficient funding — with the force of law — must serve as the cornerstone of this effort."

RATIONALE: The Maryland State Department of Education should develop a mandate that includes a philosophy, a statement of mission and guidelines for advancing gifted and talented education. It should be clearly understood in this mandate that appropriate and comprehensive educational services must be available for students who are highly able, uniquely talented, or academically advanced as part of our responsibility to respond to **all** students with special needs, not just those with learning problems or those who are achieving at a low level. By developing such a mandate, the Department can provide the leadership necessary to ensure excellence for *all* students throughout the state.

As more and more schools move to shared decision-making and school-based management, it is essential to have clear guidelines for schools' ongoing

development. Guidelines must incorporate ways to ensure that all students' educational needs are met. A plan designed for the "typical" child in that school may very well overlook the needs of particular groups of students. Gifted education needs to be a piece of total school reform efforts. As we work toward excellence for all students, we must expect the most of our most talented students. If we don't, what message do we send to the general population? If we don't include services and options for our most able students as part of overall school improvement, what are we saying about the importance we place on academic excellence?

At the present time over half of the states (66%) have some type of legislation mandating the identification of gifted students; sixty percent of the states mandate programs for gifted students. The levels of funding accompanying these state mandates vary widely.

In the states without mandates, appropriate services are encouraged for gifted students and some provide state funding for this purpose; however, both services and funding are felt to be precariously dependent on the whim of decision makers and the condition of the budget.

A mandate does not guarantee excellent or even appropriate services unless other conditions accompany it. Stronger state policies, however, provide a clear mandate for services and attach funding to program standards. A mandate serves as an impetus at the state and local level for providing adequate programming for gifted students. A change in the law does not assure a change in attitudes, but if individuals are required to comply with the law or mandate there is the chance that their change in behavior can lead to a change in attitudes.

"To ignore, either directly or indirectly, the needs of gifted students is a waste of human potential. Ideally, equitable funding, mandates and legislation will result in more gifted students being served. ... Absent a state-wide mandate, gifted students in small or poor districts are less likely than other gifted students to have access to a program designed to meet their needs."

Russo, Ford, & Harris
The Educational Rights of Gifted Students: Lost in the Legal Shuffle

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

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FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Adequate and on-going funding for gifted education services must be available to local systems to assist them in complying with the state mandate, but made contingent upon meeting state standards that are flexible and responsive to local needs.

PERSPECTIVE: "In the name of equity and fairness, to ensure our nation's global competitiveness, and with the goal of improving education for all students, we **must** transform our indifference toward, and neglect of, our most able and high-achieving students into dedicated action."

RATIONALE: Local school systems need financial support and assistance in implementing the recommendations in this report. Without adequate funding, statewide efforts to provide for the needs of gifted and talented students will continue to be haphazard at best and non-existent in many locations for many students. Fiscal resources and technical assistance must be established to assist each school system in assessing and setting priorities for its needs in terms of the standards set in the state mandate and in developing a plan of action for implementing the recommendations made in this report. Only with adequate state funding can these recommendations be translated into operational terms.

It is recommended that funding be adequate and on-going with flexibility in terms of local decision making as to the allocation of such funds needed to meet the standards. State funding is particularly important in addressing inequities that currently exist between counties as a result of geographic location and size of student population.

It is estimated that \$1,000,000 will be needed initially in start-up funds to address adequately the recommendations of this task force. The recommendations with budgetary implications fall into the following categories:

- Maryland State Department of Education staff positions and operating budget;
- funds to LEAs for implementation of state initiatives and requirements associated with a mandate;
- regional teacher training and resource centers; and,
- the development of a statewide database containing resources and educational options at the state and national level to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

"If state policies are to be more than words on paper, then substantial resources and support must be made available to educators at the local level to help them move written policies into active educational strategies that ensure full services to all gifted students."

Gallagher and Coleman

Gifted Students from Special Populations: Three States in Profile

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

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STATE DEFINITION

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with the definition put forth in the federal report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent."

PERSPECTIVE: "The definition that drives our identification of these gifts and talents must ... ensure that students from typically underserved groups have an equal opportunity to demonstrate and develop their talents."

RATIONALE: The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with, but not necessarily identical to, that stated in the report, "National Excellence: A

Case for Developing America's Talent." In addition, the state definition should:

- (a) reflect contemporary knowledge of the nature and diversity of human talents and abilities; and
- (b) provide a clear and effective foundation for practical instructional planning, rather than merely leading to categorical inclusion or exclusion decisions.

The standard view that intelligence is fixed and can be measured by one test has been challenged in the past two decades (Gardner, 1983, 1993; Sternberg, 1985). The current thinking is that intelligence takes many forms and therefore requires that many different ways be used to measure it.

"It is unrealistic to insist that equal opportunity must always take the form of identical experience. Equal education for all children in a democracy must be interpreted as equivalent opportunity in terms of each child's needs and capacities."

Gertrude Hildreth
Educating Gifted Children at Hunter College Elementary School

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

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STATE OFFICE FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: The Maryland State Department of Education should establish an Office for Gifted and Talented Education to be staffed with a coordinator, a staff specialist, and a clerical support person. Additionally, a reasonable operating budget to support the duties of this office should be provided.

PERSPECTIVE: "Generating models for adoption by local systems and locating additional resources both within and outside the state can best be accomplished by creating a staff position responsible for leadership of state-wide efforts in this area."

RATIONALE: Currently, MSDE has no full-time staff position to provide statewide leadership, coordinate services, or provide technical assistance to schools in the provision of services for gifted and talented students. Symbolically, this absence communicates the idea that such services must not be very important or worthwhile. Practically, this absence has resulted in a significant reduction of efforts that had

been present when there was a full-time gifted and talented education staff at MSDE. If the state is committed to the education of the gifted, it must give clear evidence of that commitment by establishing an Office for Gifted and Talented Education. In addition, support staff, equipment and an annual budget to support the effort of this office must be provided.

Research on state policies focusing on gifted education has revealed that strong state leadership is essential for effective policy development (Gallagher & Coleman, 1992). It has also been noted in policy studies of gifted education that, in general, it is the state-level policy that drives and guides local education policy and programs (Passow & Rudnitski, 1993).

In order to establish and implement an effective state policy, there must be designated staff. Without a strong state leadership role, efforts become inconsistent, fragmented, unfocused, and thus ineffective.

"In addition to mandates and funding, another sign of state-level concern for the education of gifted students is the appointment of a state coordinator in this area."

Coleman, Gallagher and Foster
Updated report on state policies related to the identification of gifted students from special populations.

