

Key Question Five:

How can parents and community resources be best used to assist schools in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students?

RECOMMENDATION 5.1.

LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

A local advisory council at the district level should be established to assist in developing local action plans and identifying community resources to supplement educational services for gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Schools should develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of students whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program.

RECOMMENDATION 5.3.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Schools and school systems should develop partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups to strengthen educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Five: *How can parents and other community resources be best used to assist schools in their efforts to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?*

LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: A local advisory council at the district level should be established to assist in developing local action plans and identifying community resources to supplement educational services for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "A positive school climate fosters optimal student learning by nurturing constructive attitudes and involvement on the part of staff, students, parents and community. Administrators, teachers, and other school system staff can create a positive climate by fostering appropriate participation and active involvement among all members of the school and community."

RATIONALE: Providing challenging opportunities for all students with outstanding talent will take a coordinated effort by a broad spectrum of constituencies with an interest in creating a world-class educational system. Establishing a local advisory council made up of a cross-section of representatives from the school system and the larger community, including local parents, will provide the leadership and knowledge needed for each

subdivision to provide adequately for their gifted students.

School systems are implementing processes for shared decision-making at the school level in recognition of research that shows this decision-making process to be more effective in securing commitment to change. When people feel a part of the process, generally the process is implemented more effectively. Establishing a local advisory council will give a voice to all those who are affected by the plans for gifted education services and will also engage the community in identifying and making community resources accessible to the school system. Ideally, each school improvement team should include a representative of each subgroup of students including gifted and talented, so that the subgroups' issues and concerns will be recognized.

Although the ideal situation is the creation of a council convened specifically for the purposes above, the responsibilities of such a council could be adopted by a group already in place for one or more other purposes.

"School reform cannot work if it is imposed on the community top-down. Genuine, long-lasting reform grows from the grassroots."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning
Prisoners of Time

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

Key Question Five: *How can parents and other community resources be best used to assist schools in their efforts to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?*

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 5.2: Schools should develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of students whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program.

PERSPECTIVE: "At the same time, far greater efforts must be extended to provide similar kinds of awareness-training for parents to ensure that they are able to recognize and nurture talents in their own children and to help them become proactive partners in the educational process."

RATIONALE: Parents are critical to the development of talent in children. According to a study by the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) at The Johns Hopkins University, significant factors in talent development are "early and ongoing parental support and intellectual stimulation." Therefore, it makes sense for schools to design ways in which parents can be a critical part of their child's educational planning.

Schools need to develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of any student whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program. This is especially true for those subgroups of talented students who continue to be underserved. These are students whose abilities may not be readily recognized and who often need even more specialized services. These groups include:

- (1) The child with exceptional giftedness in one or more curricular areas;

- (2) Gifted students who have a learning disability that masks their ability, or whose strengths are neglected in order to address particular weaknesses;
- (3) Disruptive youth whose behaviors mask their high abilities or whose giftedness causes the disruptiveness;
- (4) The underachieving gifted child who has high potential but lacks certain skills or motivation necessary to consistently achieve at the expected level.

For these students, the development of a very individualized set of goals and objectives to help them achieve will require the best problem-solving efforts of parents and educators working together in a cooperative and collegial atmosphere. It is to everyone's benefit for this type of relationship to be encouraged and to become standard practice.

For situations where the educational services provided are not adequate to meet the student's needs, schools must have in place an advocacy process that is clearly defined, as well as an appeals process that is not burdensome.

Finally, state and local advocacy groups are critical to a parent/community voice and should be supported by the local and state departments of education. Such groups can be used to help disseminate information to parents and community, and to help parents become better advocates for their children. Local schools can, and should, facilitate contact between families for the purpose of establishing and supporting such local advocacy groups.

"The role that parents of gifted and talented students play is often forgotten in the confusion of trying to implement and maintain programs for their children."

Beverly Parke
Gifted Students in Regular Classrooms

RECOMMENDATIONS

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 5.3: Schools and school systems should develop partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups to strengthen educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "Outside-of-school experiences should be encouraged, supported, and integrated into each system's educational program."

RATIONALE: Schools should work in collaboration with parents and community leaders to find all available options and opportunities to help motivate students to excel and reach their full potential. To this end, partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups should be developed. In this way educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students can be strengthened and expanded.

Furthermore, outside-of-school experiences such as internships, opportunities to work with experts or mentors, or academic coursework at a local college or in a summer program like that conducted by the MSDE or the Center for Talented Youth at The Johns Hopkins University should be recognized as legitimate educational options that supplement and enrich the school's attempts to meet the needs of talented students. Such options should be encouraged, supported, and integrated into a student's full educational program. Credit should be

awarded if legitimate academic work is successfully completed. Certainly, such experiences should be considered when placement decisions are made. Where appropriate for placement decisions, competency tests could be available to document the extent of learning as a result of these extracurricular activities.

Finally, each local system should establish a database (modeled after a similar database maintained by MSDE staff) that identifies these local resources and nontraditional options so that they can more comprehensively meet the full range of needs represented in their student population. Parents, teachers, and students should be informed of, and have access to, this database. In developing this database, the newest technology should be employed (through assistance from the state) with the goal of developing a system where eventually student records, achievement levels, and strengths and interests can be matched to the resource database and a list of services and programs can be generated that matches that student's profile. Each school should be linked to the system database with the option of including local school resources for in-school use. This option should be available to all students in the system.

In the case of counties with a small student population and/or few resources, several adjoining systems could pool their resources and develop a regional database.

"The barriers between teacher and student, adult and child, school and community must become more permeable, so that the individual student's desire to know may be nourished by the resources of the larger community."

Durden and Tangherlini
Smart Kids: How Academic Talents are Developed and Nurtured in America