

Gifted Education:

Nourishing A Natural Resource



Carol Majors

A leader in education for gifted students since the early 1960s, North Carolina still offers widely varying programs for these children. The state has never defined "appropriate" services for gifted students. New criteria for identifying gifted children—based heavily on standardized testing—underscore the need for determining what types of services local systems should provide. Other policy issues also demand attention, from the discrepancies in funding among systems to the allowable pupil/teacher ratio.

by Susan Katz

Seven-year-old Emily went to the beach last May with her academically gifted class. Prior to the trip, the children studied pirates and shipbuilding. At the beach, they explored a shipwreck, visited Brookgreen Gardens, collected and classified shells, and competed in a sandcastle contest. The second-graders earned the money for this trip from a student production of *The Wizard of Oz* they had staged in January.

In another part of the same county, Kenneth, a bright 12-year-old, was sent out to mow the school's lawn because he'd finished his schoolwork. Neither teacher nor principal knew what else to do with him.

State law mandates a "free appropriate publicly supported education to every child with special needs," including those who are academically gifted.¹ But programs for gifted children across the state vary as widely as the terrain.

"North Carolina is a mature state in gifted education," says Dr. Lyn Aubrecht, associate professor of psychology at Meredith College and

Students from Hunter Elementary, one of Wake County's gifted and talented magnet schools, inspect a bird house on a field trip.

chairman for legislative action within the N.C. Association for the Gifted and Talented (NCAGT). "We have taken on the correct burden of trying to serve every gifted child in the state. For that, we ought to be proud.

"Yet, statewide," he adds, "there is a lot of room for improvement."

State policies affecting academically gifted (AG) children have often evolved through the context of "special education." At other times, the needs of AG students have required specific actions by policymakers. This article attempts to sort out the complexities surrounding education for academically gifted students. First it reviews the mechanics of state policy, then summarizes important policy issues for the future.

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Gifted Education from a State Perspective

North Carolina has a long history of ambitious projects in gifted education.

* Summer programs for gifted children abound across the state—from the Cullowhee Experience, begun in the '50's (one of the nation's oldest summer programs for gifted students); to the Duke TIP (Talent Identification Project) program, where high-testing seventh-graders can earn college credit; to a parent-sponsored summer program in Wilmington.

* The Governor's Schools program, begun in 1963, is the "oldest statewide summer residential program for gifted and talented rising [high school juniors and seniors] in the nation."²

* The N.C. School of Science and Mathematics in Durham has attracted national attention, and turned out nationally ranked scholars, since opening its doors in 1980.

* The Odyssey of the Mind, an international problem-solving competition among gifted high schoolers, came to North Carolina in 1982.

* All but 1 of the 142 school districts in the state now provide at least limited special services for gifted children. (As of the 1984-85 school year, only the Weldon City Schools offered no special programs.) In 1984-85, the basic public school system served more than 60,000 academically gifted students—more than 1 of every 20 public school children in the state, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

In 1961, the General Assembly set in motion the vehicle for gifted education in the public schools when it created the Division for the Education of Exceptionally Talented Children within DPI.³ The legislators allocated \$150,000 for each of the first two years of developing programs statewide for gifted students. Then, in 1968, Superintendent of Public Instruction Craig Phillips merged programs for gifted and handicapped children into a new agency—the Division for Exceptional Children.

Over the next nine years, the legislature enacted statutes requiring appropriate education for exceptional children, both handicapped and gifted. The Equal Education Opportunities Act in 1974 mandated education for all children to their "full potential." The Creech Bill in 1977⁵ reiterated for North Carolina the federal special education law PL 94-142, but went beyond that act of Congress to include gifted and talented students. The Creech Bill required an appropriate education for all exceptional children, including "individualized education programs." Today, special education and the Creech Bill continue to receive the scrutiny of legislators and the support of a vocal special-education lobby. Among the activists are parents and teachers who want

North Carolina to remain a leader in education for gifted children.

"North Carolina is one of the top states in the country regarding gifted education," remarks Patricia Bruce Mitchell, project director for the National Association of State Boards of Education. "You have had programs ongoing for a long time, which is important because it takes a long time to develop a good program, and you have good leadership in the state department of education and within advocacy groups." According to Mitchell, North Carolina is 1 of only 17 states with specific policies requiring special programs for academically gifted children.⁶

For North Carolina to maintain a national reputation in education for gifted children, educators and lawmakers will need to keep a close watch on how state policy affects the local level. North Carolina has a strong tradition of local autonomy in education. Consequently, a special-education curriculum, to a great degree, is a local matter. But the state exercises considerable control of gifted education by issuing guidelines for identifying gifted students and by providing special-education funds for their schooling.

Identification of Gifted Students. DPI maintains a count of students eligible for special education. They are classified in 15 categories of need, all specified by statute. Thirteen of the categories specify students with some kind of mental or physical disability—"mentally handicapped," "behaviorally, emotionally handicapped," "visually impaired," "multi-handicapped," and so on. Pregnant teenagers, with their particular educational needs, are a 14th category. "Academically gifted," the 15th group, reflects a special learning ability. Of a total of 182,346 children in all these categories in the 1984-85 school year, about 60,160—almost one-third—were classified as academically gifted, according to reports filed by local school systems with DPI.

The State Board of Education determines general procedures for serving special-needs children at the local level.⁷ DPI has published the board's requirements as *Rules Governing Programs & Services for Children with Special Needs*. Ted Drain, former director of DPI's Division for Exceptional Children and now an assistant superintendent in DPI, considers *Rules* the "Bible" of the program.

According to *Rules*, academically gifted students are those "who demonstrate or have the potential to demonstrate outstanding intellectual aptitude and specific academic ability . . . [and] may require differentiated educational services beyond those being provided by the regular school program."⁸

A day in the life . . .

Stephen McInerney and Fritz Gugelmann are two gifted nine-year-olds in different parts of the state. Stephen completed third grade in a self-contained academically gifted class at Southern Pines Elementary School; Fritz is a fourth-grader at Washington Elementary School, a G-T (gifted and talented) magnet school in Wake County. Both boys describe their school as the "best." A look at their school experiences illustrates what can happen in gifted programs that work well.

In Stephen's class, students stayed together all day with one teacher, LuShep Baldwin. When asked to describe a typical day, Stephen made his day sound much like any third-grader's: math and language arts in the morning; library, art, music, or gym just before lunch; science and "different things" after lunch. But this was no ordinary class.

During the year, the class studied North Carolina—"the different regions, the state symbols, state insect, state bird, state reptile, and state mammal," says Stephen. In June, Stephen's class, along with the second-grade gifted students, took an overnight trip to Raleigh, financed with \$1,800 netted from their two-night public performance of *Peter Pan*. Stephen played John Darling. "Before *Peter Pan*," he remembers, "we worked on smaller plays and did them for the school."

Students also kept weekly journals, with page-long assigned entries on their families, vacations, and class trips. When Stephen's math group was studying graphs, he produced one "showing how we spent our day."

A calendar hung on the classroom wall, marked with birthdates of notable people. At the beginning of each month, each student chose one of the people, then prepared a 5-minute class presentation for that person's birthdate. Mozart was Stephen's choice one month. He had been taking piano lessons, so he asked his piano teacher about the composer. The piano teacher helped him find a Mozart piano duet, which Stephen learned with his mother and then taped. On Mozart's birthday, Stephen gave his report to the class accompanied by the tape he had made.

Fritz attends Washington Elementary School, a G-T magnet in Raleigh. Located in a predominantly black neighborhood adjacent to a public housing project, Washington has attracted students of many backgrounds from all

over the county and achieved a good racial balance. In keeping with the Wake County superintendent's philosophy of magnet schools, students may attend Washington simply upon nomination by their parents. There are, however, "G-T select" course offerings which are open only to those students identified as gifted. Fritz, for example, took a combination of third-to-fifth grade electives, chosen at the beginning of each semester.

A typical day for Fritz was divided into eight, 45-minute periods, beginning with two periods of language arts in his homeroom. The last two classes of each day were math and science, taught by another third-grade teacher. In between were three electives and lunch.

Fritz's Monday-Tuesday elective schedule included theater production, lifetime sports, and French. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, he took inventions, aeronautics, and French.

In theatre production, Fritz was a stage manager for the full-length musical, *The Princess and the Magic Pea*, produced in May. As stage manager he "had to block everything, and tell people when to come out." During fourth period he had lifetime sports—basketball, softball, roller skating, and gymnastics. In his second semester of French, he learned songs, conversation, and vocabulary.

Inventions was a G-T select course. "We learned how to think like an inventor," he says. "For instance an inventor could look at a straw as something other than a drinking instrument." Each student in that class, given instructions for a variety of simple machines, had to make one and modify it in some way. Fritz built a bubble-making machine.

Aeronautics was another G-T select elective. "Now, that was a good course," nine-year-old Fritz reminisces. There students learned "what keeps an airplane up in the air," learned about instrument panels, and designed and built their own model gliders. "We learned how to create lift and thrust, how to cut back on drag, and how to make it streamlined." Did the gliders work? "Some worked, some sort of worked," he responds diplomatically.

Although Fritz's bus ride to and from school is over an hour long, he and his brothers make the trip because they and their parents feel it's worth it. "I think G-T schools are great," says Fritz, "especially Washington." □

—Susan Katz

Until 1983, this special education category was called "gifted and talented." Then, in 1983, the legislature dropped the word "talented" and changed the terminology to "academically gifted," reflecting the program as actually implemented on the state and local levels.⁹ Many schools provide for the development of artistic talent in students, but they must do so outside the AG funding structure. Some school systems—like Wake County's—offer gifted-and-talented "magnet" schools, but the "talent" components are outside state special-needs guidelines and are not funded with that pot of state money. In refining the statutory language on gifted education, some legislators felt that "talented" students were served best by a special school to develop their abilities, the N.C. School of the Arts in Winston-Salem. According to DPI, the 1983 change in language that dropped "talented" has not affected which children participate in AG programs.

To identify gifted children, local school officials employ an elaborate "point" system, as detailed in *Rules*. The process attempts to allow for a variety of "giftedness" and cultural background. Students may be nominated by their teachers, peers, or parents. They then face an assessment procedure which includes points for various tests and subjective judgments.

New criteria, which took effect on January 1, 1985, altered the point system somewhat. Under the new criteria, IQ and standardized achievement test scores are weighted evenly, each carrying a maximum of 50 points. Grades carry a maximum of 10 points. A student earning 98 points automatically qualifies for services. This ranking system puts less weight on subjective measures such as teacher recommendations. It weeds out the obvious "teacher-pleasers," who smile nicely in class but who might not really need special programming. It frees teachers to offer programming that truly is geared to those children who are significantly "different" from the standard population.

The new criteria are also intended to help identify children who might be gifted but disadvantaged, i.e., those who score high on an IQ or achievement test but who have been unmotivated or misplaced in school, earning low grades. Usually, individual teachers know their students best, but sometimes a child's exceptional abilities can be obscured by shyness, lack of motivation, or other factors.

Finally, the new criteria attempt to hone what have been some rough edges in identifying gifted minority students. The new criteria include a section labeled "Special Consideration/Further Testing."¹⁰ This section recognizes that stan-

dardized tests "do not always adequately control for the lack of environmental or cultural opportunities to learn." But to compensate for this weakness in identifying gifted students, the section offers this remedy: "further standardized testing shall be completed and the scores used in determining eligibility."

Once identified, gifted children enter a special planning process to determine the most effective course of study for them. Until 1983, each gifted child—like every exceptional student—was entitled to an "individualized education program"(IEP). In 1983, however, in the same legislation that changed the term to "academically gifted," the General Assembly determined that gifted children may not require individual plans. Legislators decided that the greatly diminished paperwork required by *group* plans outweighed the benefits of individual programs, especially since most of those individual plans had been similar. Former state Sen. Gerry Hancock (D-Durham), who headed the legislative study of the Creech Bill, says that it was not the subcommittee's intention to dilute programming. Those gifted children whose needs are not met by a group plan, he says, "*shall* receive individualized treatment."¹¹

Paying for Gifted Education. In a national study, Dr. James J. Gallagher, director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, found that programming for gifted children costs about 15-to-45 percent more per pupil than standard curricula.¹² For example, if it costs \$2,000 per pupil, per year, to run a regular school program, programming for gifted students would cost about \$2,300-2,900.

"A little more than \$114 million" is the amount of state funding going for *all* special education per year, according to Bill Pilegge, assistant controller for financial services at the State Board of Education. (For FY 1985, the General Assembly raised the figure to \$141 million.¹³) How much of that is earmarked for gifted children? The complex funding formulas won't yield an answer, says Pilegge.

Funding for exceptional children comes from federal, state, and local sources, although programs for gifted students are excluded from federal money. State funding for exceptional children is determined by categories (i.e., physically handicapped, visually impaired, gifted, etc.). But state monies go to the local education agencies (LEAs) in a lump sum, not by categories. Each LEA receives a sum marked "exceptional children's funds," and the local school board can disburse it as it wishes.

This lump-sum distribution stems from the

state's traditional attitude of encouraging local autonomy in education. But local autonomy in spending the money causes tremendous variance among school systems in program funding—and in educational opportunities for children with special needs.¹⁴

Gail Smith and Ruby Murchison, DPI's two state consultants to local schools for gifted education, report wide discrepancies among gifted education programs throughout the state. Smith and Murchison are available to consult with school personnel, run workshops, and interpret *Rules*. They can make recommendations to LEAs for program development, but they cannot prescribe how local schools spend their special education money. State law mandates "appropriate education" for gifted children, but many local programs for gifted students are much better developed—and funded—than others.

State regulations allow public schools to assign 175 children each week to an AG resource teacher, a student/teacher ratio that permits very little individual attention to each of these special-needs children. The state also offers little direction to ensure for these students an effective curriculum, one that can depart from standard textbooks and conventional class assignments. And, while some school systems begin identification of gifted students in kindergarten, the process more often begins no earlier than third grade.

While state funding formulas do not determine how LEAs *spend* their money, they can encourage the local systems to *identify* academically gifted children. Prior to 1980, funding for all exceptional children was based on Average Daily Membership (ADM) of all students. This did not encourage districts to identify gifted children, for the districts received a set amount of money from the state, based on their ADM.

In 1979, the General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to switch to a "headcount" system, where LEAs would receive funds according to actual numbers of exceptional children identified. Many special-education advocates prefer headcount, for it encourages schools to locate exceptional children. Says Lyn Aubrecht, "You don't find 'em, you don't get the money."

To prevent runaway funding, the State Board put limits, or "caps," on each of the 15 special-education categories. Academically gifted populations could not exceed 3.9 percent of the average daily school membership, a percentage of the population estimated to be gifted. In the State Board formula, local education agencies would receive one-third the funds for each gifted student that they receive for each

handicapped child.

Some of the school systems with high ADMs, however, stood to lose funding in a headcount system. So the State Board wrote a "hold-harmless" clause into the formula, stating that if a school district would lose money by switching to headcount, the loss would not appear for three years. On July 1, 1983, the hold-harmless provision was scheduled to disappear, leaving a strict headcount formula in effect.

The 1983 General Assembly, however, decided to extend hold-harmless through the 1983-84 year and to modify it for 1984-85 so that school systems could lose only part of the funding difference by switching to headcount. In 1985-86, headcount was scheduled to become the sole basis for determining state funding for local special education programs.

In June 1984, increased state revenues greeted legislators arriving in Raleigh for the short session. The lawmakers decided to increase state support by \$4.1 million (not including an across-the-board teacher salary hike) for all local special-education programs, including AG. With all LEAs thus scheduled to receive increased funds, the General Assembly eliminated the modified hold-harmless clause for 1984-85 and directed that strict headcount become the funding basis this school year instead of in 1985-86.¹⁵

What's Next in Gifted Education?

The school year 1983-84 was a time of re-evaluation and change for gifted education in North Carolina, "a year of fine-tuning," according to Gail Smith at DPI and others throughout the state.

By changing from individualized to group educational programs, says Smith, teachers had a load of paperwork lifted off their shoulders without sacrificing their attention to individual students. In addition, she says that group plans "help teachers build in program consistency across schools in the same system," correcting a prior weakness in gifted education.

But other areas of education for gifted children wait to be addressed.

Increased opportunities for teacher training in gifted education would improve programs statewide. As long as no college or university east of Raleigh offers graduate level courses in gifted education, it is difficult or impossible for teachers in the eastern part of the state to keep up their own training. Graduate credits earned in locally run workshops are not sufficient to acquire or maintain skills for teaching gifted students. (For more on teacher training, see *Questions about gifted education*, p. 41).

The Palcuzzi Ploy

The following apocryphal tale is reprinted with permission from James J. Gallagher, *Teaching the Gifted Child*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975, pp. 83-4.

Mr. Palcuzzi, principal of the Jefferson Elementary School, once got tired of hearing objections to special provisions for gifted children, so he decided to spice an otherwise mild PTA meeting with *his* proposal for gifted children. The elements of the Palcuzzi program were as follows:

1. Children should be grouped by ability.
2. Part of the school day should be given over to special instruction.
3. Talented students should be allowed time to share their talents with children of other schools in the area or even of other schools throughout the state. (We will pay the transportation cost.)
4. A child should be advanced according to his talents, rather than according to his age.
5. These children should have special teachers, specially trained and highly salaried.

As might be expected, the "Palcuzzi Program" was subjected to a barrage of criticism. "What about the youngster who isn't able to fit into the special group; won't his ego be damaged?" "How about the special cost; how could you justify transportation costs that would have to be paid by moving a special group of students from one school to another?" "Mightn't we be endangering the child by having him interact with children who are much more mature than he is?" "Wouldn't the other teachers complain if we gave more money to the instructors of this group?"

After listening for ten or fifteen minutes, Mr. Palcuzzi dropped his bomb! He said that he wasn't describing a *new* program for the intellectually gifted, but a program the school system had been enthusiastically supporting for a number of years—the program for *gifted*

basketball players! Palcuzzi took advantage of the silence that followed to review his program again. Do we have ability grouping on our basketball team? Yes, we do. No doubt, the player who does not make the first team or the second team feels very bad about it and may even have some inferiority feelings. However, this will not likely cause the program to be changed.

Do we allow part of the school day to be given over to special work? Generally speaking, the last hour of the day can be used, by tradition, for practice of basketball talents.

Do we allow these children to share their talents with other students from other schools and other cities? Yes, we do, and, what is more, we pay the transportation costs involved without very many complaints being heard.

Do we allow gifted basketball players to advance by their talents rather than by their age? Indeed, we do. Any sophomore who can make the team on the basis of his talents gets the privilege of playing with seniors, and no one worries very much about it.

Finally, do we have special teachers who are specially trained and more highly salaried than the ordinary teacher? Yes, we do, and although there is some grumbling about it from the regular teachers, this does not materially affect the program.

What does this tell us? The culture and the community will support the kinds of activities that they find necessary, valuable and/or enjoyable. If they feel that a program is sufficiently necessary or sufficiently enjoyable, all sorts of objections are put aside as being relatively inconsequential. If, on the other hand, the community is not fully interested or involved in supporting such a program, all kinds of objections can be raised as to why these things should not be done, or cannot be done. □

A concerted effort needs to be made to find gifted students—including minority students. By relying heavily on standardized testing, the new criteria for identifying gifted students will help differentiate "teacher-pleasers" from children needing special services. But some analysts worry about the long-term effects of these criteria.

"Under the new, tougher criteria for identifying gifted students, far fewer students will be labeled academically gifted," says Lyn Aubrecht of the N.C. Association for the Gifted and Talented. Relying so heavily on testing will require students in most cases to score well in order to meet the criteria, adds Aubrecht.

Identification of gifted minority students should continue to be a prime concern. Despite the new section in the *Rules* acknowledging the shortcomings of testing minority students, the main remedy prescribed for that problem is still more testing. Research indicates that, statistically, black and native American students do not

generally test as high as white students.¹⁶ Minority students, then, under the new criteria, are somewhat penalized when so much weight is given to IQ and achievement scores. In the absence of a good standardized measure for minority students, it is doubly important for teachers to be alert for gifted minority students.

The freedom to depart from standard textbooks and delve more deeply into subjects is mandatory for any program for gifted students. Third-graders who have already mastered fractions may need the fourth- or fifth-grade math book. Indeed, they may even need a hands-on math lab to practice the things they have learned and to be encouraged to discover more. They may need, for example, a class in aeronautics to discover velocity as a meaningful ratio.

Allowing LEAs to tailor programs to their own needs is part of the state's tradition of local autonomy. Such local flexibility allows for creativity to meet a diversity of needs. But this same

flexibility results in some LEAs paying little attention to specialized curricula for academically gifted children.

The State Board of Education should evaluate the current student/teacher ratio requirement. The State Board's gifted education guidelines for pupil/teacher ratio allow up to 175 pupils per week for an AG resource teacher. This 175 to 1 ratio for a resource model is far more than any other category of special education student (35 to 1 for learning disability, 35 to 1 for educable mentally handicapped, 20 to 1 for hearing impaired, and 20 to 1 for behaviorally emotionally handicapped). School districts which do not improve upon this ratio may not be providing an adequate response to the special-education needs of gifted children.

If fewer students are labeled academically gifted under the new, tougher criteria, then there will be a reduction of state money for gifted education at the local level. "This could mean a substantial reduction in the number of teachers of the gifted in some local areas," says Aubrecht. "Too few teachers may be left to provide adequate programs for the widely scattered gifted students that remain."

Conclusion

The enhancement of gifted education over the next few years does not depend on a single policy decision by legislators or by state education officials. Instead, the system will need a series of adjustments if gifted students in every part of the state are going to receive creative teaching instead of lawn-mowing assignments.

Policymakers will address AG questions primarily through modifications to the Creech Bill and to the rules and regulations issued by the State Board of Education. Some issues will affect *all* special education. Others will affect gifted education only. These are a few of the concerns that state legislators and state education officials should be considering:

- * discrepancies in funding, teacher quality, and curriculum among AG programs statewide;
- * the headcount formula and its effectiveness in channeling special-education funds where they are needed;

- * the accuracy of the 3.9 percent funding cap, which represents an estimate of academically gifted students within the school population;

- * the current pupil/teacher ratio of 175 to 1, for a resource program;

- * identification of gifted students, particularly among minority children; and

- * improvement of teacher training, especially in the eastern part of the state.

As a society, we claim to value the special abilities of our citizens. And North Carolinians have shown a willingness to develop these gifts as they appear among our schoolchildren. But such a development in education is itself a learning process. The General Assembly, the Department of Public Instruction, and local school districts have all accumulated years of instruction in providing gifted education. The next few years will show how much they've learned. □

FOOTNOTES

¹ NCGS 115C-106(b) *et seq.*

² *The Governor's School of North Carolina*, a brochure by the Division for Exceptional Children, N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction.

³ Chapter 1077 of the 1961 Session Laws.

⁴ Chapter 1293 of the 1973 Sessions Laws, 1974 Session.

⁵ Chapter 927 of the 1977 Session Laws, now codified as NCGS 115C-106 *et seq.*

⁶ The other 16 states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

⁷ 16 NCAC .1500.

⁸ 16 NCAC .1501(a)(2).

⁹ Chapter 247 of the 1983 Session Laws, codified in NCGS 115C-109.

¹⁰ 16 NCAC .1509(d).

¹¹ Chapter 247 of the 1983 Session Laws, codified as NCGS 115C-114(g), reads in part: "The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and regulations specifically to address the preparation of these group educational programs . . . and shall also include standards for ensuring that the individual educational needs of each child within the group are addressed."

¹² James J. Gallagher *et al.*, *Report on Education of Gifted, Vol. 1, Surveys of Education of Gifted Students, Executive Summary*, produced for the Advisory Panel, U.S. Office of Gifted and Talented, Washington, 1982, p.4.

¹³ Chapter 971 of the 1983 Session Laws, 1984 Session, HB 1496. The increase includes teacher salary boosts and a line item to increase program support for exceptional children.

¹⁴ For more on the recent history of special education funding, see " 'Hold-Harmless' to Equitable Distribution—Who Gets State Special Education Funds?" by Hilda Highfill, *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 6, No. 2-3, Oct. 1983, p. 80.

¹⁵ The General Assembly included a one-year, hold-harmless provision affecting seven local systems due to possible reductions of federal funds for handicapped children in those systems. The federal special-education law *does not* cover gifted education, and hence federal funds do not go towards a local system's gifted program. However, state special-education funds, which *do* cover gifted children, are distributed in a block fashion. Hence, the one-year hold-harmless provision was necessary for the state funds going to those seven systems.

¹⁶ James J. Gallagher, *Teaching the Gifted Child*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975, pp. 371-81.

Questions about gifted education

Education policymakers at state and local levels have sometimes made decisions without adequate background on what "academically gifted" means. Even though the term "gifted" is not new, myths and misconceptions exist. Some frequent questions follow.

What is an "appropriate education" for gifted students?

The range of children's intellectual functioning is a bell curve. "Children at either end of the spectrum have similar needs in terms of education," says Krista Oglesby, formerly of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center in Chapel Hill. "For both, the existing curriculum is not appropriate, and for both, special teaching strategies are needed."

Like mentally handicapped students, explains Oglesby, gifted students can be seen in terms of "mild," "moderate," and "severe." The appropriate program for each degree of giftedness depends on how a student's needs can be met in the regular classroom. For "mildly" gifted students, that might be enrichment within the regular classroom. "Moderately" gifted students might profit from a resource room, with special time there on a daily or weekly basis. "Severely" gifted children would best be served by a self-contained classroom. (For more about the schoolday of gifted children, see sidebar, p. 36).

"Gifted children are children first," emphasizes Oglesby. "They have some of the same problems as other children, and they are as diverse as other children." Truly appropriate programming, she says, would include an array of services.

However, such an array of services is a rarity in North Carolina, according to Lyn Aubrecht, associate professor of psychology at Meredith College. "The concept is good," he says, "but there are few places where this happens." Aubrecht says that too often the issue is what is *affordable*, not what is *appropriate*. "Schools need to be practical, but we need to ask first what is appropriate and then ask how we can manage to get that done," he adds.

The N.C. Association of Gifted and Talented (NCAGT) recently voted to fund a year-long statewide task force to study this topic. The group will work to identify the issues involved, to articulate and begin to resolve them, and to perhaps offer examples of "appropriate services." The task force plans to report to the association's 1986 state conference, planned for Raleigh on the theme, "Appropriate Services for Gifted Students."

Appropriate services for the gifted have never really been defined, says Gail Smith of DPI. The state law inherited the federal language, which focuses on a "free and appropriate education" for handicapped children and the "least restrictive environment." "Advocates of the gifted recognize that the mainstream classroom could be a *restrictive* setting for the gifted child," says Smith. "That's why the NCAGT task force on appropriate services is so important."

What about the stigma of being labeled "gifted"?

"At one time there might have been a stigma, but we're over that now," says Pat Hickmon, founder of Cumberland County's Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education (PAGE) and former chairwoman of the Cumberland County School Board. "Going to AG," she says, "is just like going to PE or any other class period."

In fact, long-running gifted programs often find students placing a premium on the slots, such as spaces at Enloe, Raleigh's only AG magnet high school.

Conclusions from a study of gifted programs nationwide found that "participants did not develop personality or social problems ... rather, participants showed improvement not only in academic areas but also in the personal and social areas."¹

Do teachers and principals regret having the students taken out of their classes and schools?

What often happens when you take out the top one or two in a class is "you give others a chance to fill that void," says Dr. Linda Weiss Morris, president of the N.C. Association for

Gifted and Talented and a former elementary school principal.

This is what some principals and teachers have discovered since the creation of the N. C. School of Science and Mathematics at Durham. Initially reluctant to refer their best math and science whizzes to a residential program, some principals and teachers are now realizing that other students were just waiting for their time to shine.

Aren't gifted programs just a lot of extra homework?

"Gifted," states Morris, "does not mean *more* [homework]. Children should not be penalized for being bright."

Gifted often does mean, however, different ways of learning and looking at things. Dr. James J. Gallagher, director of the Graham Child Development Center, emphasizes developing skills of cognitive memory (as in, "Whom did Hamlet kill by mistake?"), convergent thinking ("Explain why Hamlet rejected Ophelia"), divergent thinking ("Name some other ways Hamlet might have accomplished his goals"), and evaluative thinking ("Was Hamlet justified in killing his uncle?")²—precisely those skills one would wish of a potential leader and original thinker. Those skills are not developed by a seventh-grade AG teacher who simply assigns a literature class "the 30 questions at the end of the chapter."

What's available for teacher training?

Teachers are required to achieve AG endorsement within three years of starting to teach classes of gifted students. Unfortunately, appropriate teacher training is not available in all parts of the state.

Ten North Carolina colleges and universities offer state-approved undergraduate or graduate teaching programs in gifted education, but none of these is east of Raleigh.³ Teachers in the eastern part of the state are at a particular disadvantage in gaining their endorsements, especially while trying to hold down daytime teaching jobs. Currently it is possible for a teacher to receive endorsement credit at workshops, but the state exercises little control over the content or quality of locally run workshops. The improvement of AG teacher training will require that more colleges hire full-time faculty in gifted education and that DPI establish more oversight of workshops offering endorsement credit.

James Gallagher says that more teacher training programs would appear if they were "money-makers," that is, if they could receive federal or state subsidies. "There are major *federal* funding supports for teachers of all exceptional children, except the gifted," Gallagher says. Of the *state* money going to train teachers of exceptional children, he says, not much is channeled into gifted education. He says that a state subsidy of \$60,000 could fund a college

Computer mini-course at Wiley Junior High in Winston-Salem.



Sharon Carson

program in gifted education with a full-time faculty member.

Aren't AG classes just a scheme to keep white families in the public schools? And do minority children get to participate?

Students in AG programs often do come from white, middle-class backgrounds. Sometimes this fact has been used in integration planning, by the placement of AG programs in magnet schools in predominantly black neighborhoods.

It's important in statewide planning to direct energies toward finding gifted children from minority ethnic groups. "The gifted are from all walks of life," says Gallagher. "You have to look for them in different ways."

Some locales, however, rely on group IQ measures—standardized tests without individual interpretation—to identify giftedness. Dr. Michael Katz, Wake County clinical psychologist and a former Fairfax County, Va., school psychologist, questions whether group measures are adequate in searching out the gifted, particularly those from cultural minorities. He has a hunch that "some are going unidentified, because group measures won't necessarily pick up on those kids who are gifted but tuned out, poorly motivated to do well in a group setting, uncooperative in class, or untrained by their home environments to do more sophisticated thinking." A well-trained psychologist can pick up on other indications of exceptional academic ability more clearly in an individual assessment. "There are nuggets one can look for," says Katz. In an individual test, a good examiner will take note of those nuggets and look more closely. A group IQ test says, in effect, "We're going to provide services to those kids who've learned the skill of standing out in a group test."

Dr. Smith Goodrum, associate dean of admissions and financial aid at Mars Hill College and former director of its Center for Gifted Education, suggests that emphasis on verbal ability may miss some kids. "I am more impressed by motivation, perseverance, and initiative than I am by IQ scores." In selecting students for Mars Hill's Summer Scholastics and Arts Program, Goodrum put more weight on the students' statements about *why* they wanted to participate.

Do parents of gifted children support programs?

While some parents don't wish to stand out from their neighbors and are reluctant to refer their child for placement, many others around the state are enthusiastic about the potential of gifted education. Currently there are 35 chapters of PAGE (Parents for the Advancement of

Gifted Education) across the state, according to Don Russell, retired professor of education at UNC-G, and state coordinator for the group.

Most of the PAGE chapters are very active, Russell says. In Pasquotank County, for example, PAGE sponsored "Kids' Kollege" in cooperation with the local school system. During six winter Saturdays, about 300 children attended special classes at the College of the Albemarle in astronomy, photography, creative writing, and other extracurricular subjects.

Johnston County PAGE ran a summer program in 1982 with courses in language arts, math, science, dramatic arts, TV arts, and dance. Data General Corporation loaned the program \$250,000 worth of equipment for the two-week program. Admissions were open; a child did not have to be identified as gifted to attend.

These organized parent groups can make a big difference. Parents monitor school board meetings and make their concerns known. Many generate financial support. Computers have been placed in schools through parent funding, and many PAGE chapters run Saturday morning enrichment programs in the schools. PAGE and the N. C. Association for the Gifted and Talented co-sponsor an annual statewide conference on gifted education.

In 1982, Wake County parents active in PAGE were divided over programs for the gifted. Some were delighted and others were upset. But the majority did not understand the complexities of the program. A special PAGE committee resulted, which produced a 27-page booklet, *Educational Programs for Gifted and Talented Children in the Wake County Public School System: An Overview with Observations and Recommendations*. The report and the meetings with school officials that followed not only reconciled differences but also provided a good example of what PAGE believes it can be—parents and educators working together toward a good and appropriate education of our gifted children. □

—Susan Katz

FOOTNOTES

¹ James J. Gallagher, *Teaching the Gifted Child*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975, pp. 292-3.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 238-9.

³ These colleges are Appalachian State University, Catawba College, Lenoir-Rhyne College, Mars Hill College, St. Andrew's Presbyterian College, Wake Forest University, Western Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Charlotte, and Greensboro.