

Joint Select Committee on School Finance Weights, Allotments & Adjustments

Origin and History of Gifted/Talented Allotment: In 1987, the 70th Legislature passed funding that offered money on a formula basis for gifted education to every school district in the state for the first time, as it mandated identification of and services to gifted students. Prior to that, the only state money available came via competitive grant applications to the Texas Education Agency. The passage of HB 1050 set the formula at a weight of .047, with an increase to .12 established for the 1990-1991 school year. Funding was capped at 5% of a school district's student population. Both the formula and the funding cap have remained the same for the past 20 years.

The 74th Legislature reaffirmed that formula when it passed §42.156 of the Texas Education Code, *Gifted and Talented Student Allotment*, in 1995; that law remains in effect, along with §29.121-§29.123, *Education Programs for Gifted and Talented Students*, which includes the *Definition, Establishment, and State Plan: Assistance*.

Rider 69 passed by the 76th Legislature in 1999, providing money for what is now known as the Texas Performance Standards Project. The intent was to develop an assessment system and statewide standards for gifted and talented students at all grade levels. While it has shown promise in creating opportunities for demonstrating high levels of achievement in any or all of the four core content areas, school district participation in the project and use of these standards is voluntary. No additional funding for participating districts has ever been available.

Magnitude: in 2008-2009 school year, there were 355,801 identified gifted students in Texas, a total of 7.5% of all students in the state. TEA allocated approximately \$87 million to local school districts for gifted education; that constituted approximately 21% of the \$416 million that was spent statewide by school districts on gifted education. This amount represented 1.4% of Total Operating Expenditures.

How the Allotment is Spent: It is virtually impossible to know how state or local money is actually spent. There is no requirement that local school districts report how this money is spent, no data is collected on the types of programs and services that a school district offers to gifted students, nor is there any formal evaluation of the effectiveness of these services. It is my belief (through 10 years of work at TAGT and 19 years of teaching in the field) that the vast majority of this money is spent on a portion of the salaries for

teachers who provide services to gifted students. The number of teachers coded to gifted education in 2008-2009 was 6,514, approximately 2% of all teachers in the state.

Dollars and Sense: As the charts indicate, the number of identified gifted students, the number of teacher assigned to provide services to them, and the amount of money spent on these services vary widely by region. The number of identified students and designated teachers varies regionally by more than 4%, and the expenditure of local revenue on gifted education varies by more than 58%.

Unique Considerations: Since the inception of gifted education in Texas, there has always been a wide range of programs and services, and it is an area of education that firmly remains under local control. Although state law and rule, as noted in the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students*, clearly requires the identification of gifted students and services provided to them, how that is accomplished is left to local school districts. Since the removal of compliance monitoring under District Effectiveness and Compliance, there has been no formal accountability of any type for gifted education. Consequently, identification and services can vary widely from district to district.

Recent Legislative Efforts: The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT) has attempted in recent years to bring accountability and transparency to gifted education services and funding.

In 2005, TAGT helped draft legislation to create incentives for school districts which successfully participated in the Texas Performance Standards Project. HB 2058 was sponsored by Rep. Jerry Madden; a similar measure, SB 1394, was sponsored by Sen. Florence Shapiro. Each bill would have given a small stipend to school districts for each gifted student who completed a project at the requisite score level. A modified version of Sen. Shapiro's bill was in an early draft of an omnibus bill, but was removed in Conference Committee.

In 2009, Rep. Scott Hochberg and Rep. Rafael Anchia co-sponsored HB 1692; Sen. Shapiro introduced the companion bill, SB 1998; a portion of the bill ultimately was added to HB 3 and became law. It requires the commissioner of education to adopt standards to evaluate school district programs for gifted and talented students to determine whether districts operate programs in accordance with the Texas Performance Standards Project or other comparable programs. These standards have not yet been released by the commissioner.

82nd Legislative Recommendations: TAGT will continue its efforts to support funding and bring accountability and transparency to gifted education services. The following are proposals that incentivize gifted/talented services and education and could serve as the basis for future legislation:

Proposal #1: The association would support the refilling of HB 1692 next session, as it incentivized districts to serve its gifted population while ensuring accountability by TEA. To significantly limit or lower the fiscal note next time, the association would recommend:

- a) establishing a cap of 8%;
- b) limiting eligibility; and
- c) establishing a small allotment of \$5 million.

Proposal #2: The association is especially interested in creating tiered funding for gifted education, similar to legislation passed last session for career and technology education. In that model, all school districts receive a base level of funding for their programs, and receive additional funds for offering more sophisticated and comprehensive programs.

- With an allotment of \$5 million, the association would support maintaining the existing funding for gifted education, and offer incentive funding for those districts that provide services at the Recognized or Exemplary level, as defined in the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students*.
- Documentation for tiered funding beyond the basic level could be submitted on a voluntary basis to TEA, perhaps utilizing the soon-to-be released evaluation standards developed by the commissioner, as directed in HB 3.

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Weinberg, TAGT Associate Director, April 22, 2010.