

Recommendations of the Committee on Special and Gifted Education Pertinent to Gifted Education

The Committee on Special and Gifted Education recently conducted a series of statewide public roundtables to solicit perspectives on the current Chapter 16 regulations (Special Education for Gifted Students). The roundtables were convened to fulfill a commitment made by the Board, per 22 Pa. Code 16.6(c), to conduct periodic reviews of its regulations governing gifted education as part of the ongoing supervision of how Chapter 16 is interpreted and applied.

Public roundtables were held in Harrisburg on May 14, in Pittsburgh on May 22 and in Philadelphia on June 5. More than 45 individuals participated in the discussions, including representatives of school districts, intermediate units and Catholic schools; teachers; gifted education advocates; statewide professional associations; and parents of gifted students. The Committee also invited members of the public who were unable to attend the roundtables to submit written remarks on the current regulations. Written comments were submitted by four citizens.

In addition to inviting public comment on the current regulations, the Committee held a public meeting on March 12, 2014, at which it received two informational presentations to inform its deliberations. A report was made by the Department of Education outlining the Department's responsibilities related to oversight of gifted education programs, findings of gifted compliance monitorings conducted from the 2008-09 school year through the 2012-13 school year, and the number of gifted due process hearings requested through the Department's Office of Dispute Resolution during that same timeframe.

The Committee also received a presentation on the status of gifted education in the Commonwealth from the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC), which highlighted the findings of a gifted education study the LBFC recently completed at the request of the General Assembly per House Resolution 139 of 2013. In addition to providing background on current gifted education programming and how Pennsylvania's gifted education policies compare to those of other states, the LBFC study also included policy recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly, Department of Education and State Board of Education.

Throughout these proceedings, concerns were brought to the Committee's attention in the following key areas: qualifications of professional personnel; the cost and frequency of evaluations for gifted services; compliance monitoring and enforcement of current regulations; planning requirements; and access to gifted education services for nonpublic school students.

The Committee convened again on July 9, 2014, to review the information gathered during its review of Chapter 16 and to discuss its next steps. After considering the information presented during its public review process, the Committee concluded that it did not support proposing substantive amendments to Chapter 16 at this time. However, the Committee identified a number of actions the Department of Education could take to improve gifted education in the Commonwealth, along with areas where the Committee felt additional information was needed before it could determine whether to propose amendments to the regulations.

Stemming from its required periodic review of Chapter 16, the Committee endorses the following recommendations pertinent to gifted education:

- The Department of Education should establish a voluntary Program Endorsement Certificate for Gifted Education consistent with the parameters established for endorsement certificates in Chapter 49 section 49.62b (related to Program Endorsement Certificate).
- The Department of Education should incorporate instruction in the needs of gifted learners as part of the programs offered to meet the continuing professional education requirements of school and system leaders per Act 45 of 2007.

As approved by the State Board of Education on September 11, 2014

- The Department of Education should allocate resources to enable the Bureau of Special Education to increase the frequency with which it conducts focused monitorings of districts when complaints are filed with the Department related to a district's provision of gifted education services and compliance with the requirements of Chapter 16.
- The Department of Education should post its Compliance Monitoring Manual for gifted education on its public website for districts to be able to preview.
- The Department of Education should post the Executive Summary and Corrective Action Plans resulting from its cyclical compliance monitorings of school districts' gifted education programs on its website for public review.
- The Department of Education should amend its Gifted Education Guidelines to encourage school districts to share the Executive Summary of the Department's compliance monitoring findings with professional personnel in the district.
- The Department of Education should maintain support for gifted education liaisons through the state's network of Intermediate Units to provide technical assistance to school districts in meeting the needs of gifted learners.
- The Department of Education should disseminate information among school districts about a new approach to identifying and supporting gifted students being used by some districts in the Commonwealth through the use of a Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework (RtII) modified to meet the needs of gifted students.
- In order to identify best practices in universal screening, the Department of Education should conduct a literature review of research related to universal screening and should survey school districts to identify the landscape of universal screening tools districts may be using voluntarily to identify students that should be further evaluated for gifted services. Findings about best practices in universal screening should be shared as an informational resource for districts across the Commonwealth.
- The Department of Education should utilize its Standards Aligned System portal (SAS) to offer training videos and resources for educators in meeting the needs of gifted students. A link to gifted education resources available through SAS should be provided from the main page containing information about Gifted Education Programs on the Department of Education's website.
- In its Gifted Education Guidelines, the Department of Education should provide clarity on the requirements of section 1371(2) of the Public School Code as it pertains to the school district responsible for conducting and paying for gifted evaluations for nonpublic school students.
- In the gifted education report produced by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) per House Resolution 139, some concern was expressed about the cost of evaluating students for gifted services and whether such evaluations could be conducted more efficiently. Accordingly, the Committee expressly raised this issue and sought input from stakeholders as part of its review of Chapter 16. However, the Committee did not receive information as part of its review process that would allow it to either validate or refute the cost projections made by the LBFC. The Committee

As approved by the State Board of Education on September 11, 2014

identified this as an issue that requires additional follow-up in order to have an informed discussion about whether potential policy changes should be proposed.

Therefore, the Department of Education should work with the State Board of Education to gather information from school districts on the cost of evaluating students for gifted services in order to determine whether the statewide costs projected by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee are accurate. Information should be gathered on the cost of evaluations, the frequency of parental requests for re-evaluations, and the number of evaluations that do not result in students being identified as gifted. This information should be used to inform future policy discussions about whether the process for re-evaluating students for gifted services can be conducted more efficiently without closing out students who are potentially gifted.

- The Department of Education should make a progress report to the State Board of Education on its implementation of these recommendations at one of the Board's scheduled public meetings during the fall of 2015.
- The State Board of Education should make a technical amendment to Chapter 16 to align references to strategic planning in section 16.4 with recent changes to the strategic planning requirements in Chapter 4.
- The State Board of Education should consider issues raised by stakeholders related to qualifications of educators providing gifted instruction – pertaining to certification, preservice education requirements, requirements for earning a Level II Instructional certificate, and ongoing professional education requirements – as part of its next comprehensive policy review of Chapter 49 (Certification of Professional Personnel).

In addition to the above recommendations endorsed by the Committee, the Committee would like to make the Department of Education aware of the following suggestions that were presented by stakeholders during the Board's statewide public roundtables on Chapter 16 so that the Department may review and consider whether it is prudent to make such changes to its internal processes and requirements.

- The Department of Education should include gifted students as a subgroup within the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) and should disaggregate state assessment data to determine whether students identified as gifted are making expected growth.
- As part of its compliance monitoring process, the Department of Education should review disaggregated student data to determine whether there is a disparity in the populations of students receiving gifted education services.
- The Department of Education should increase the number of districts monitored annually for compliance with Chapter 16.
- The Department of Education should improve its current compliance monitoring process to address program quality, not just compliance, by making the following changes to the monitoring process:
 - PDE monitors should review GIEPs from all buildings within a district with at least 2 GIEPs from the same grade level in the same building.

As approved by the State Board of Education on September 11, 2014

- A representative of the professional staff from each building within the district should be present at the Summary of Findings Closure meeting.
- Regional Monitors should be assigned to assist current PDE staff (this role could be played by gifted liaisons as long as the districts being monitored are not within the boundaries of the Intermediate Unit by which they are employed).
- Consequences for districts that do not follow through on corrective actions should be codified.
- Assessment data specific to the gifted cohort should be reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the gifted services being provided.