

**The Failure of the National Research Center for
the Gifted and Talented and the
Need for Legislated Federal Standards in the
Education of the Gifted and Talented**

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The first legislation making provisions for the gifted and talented was the Gifted and Talented Children's Educational Assistance Act of 1969. It inserted the words "gifted and talented" into existing legislation to allow administrators to spend present funds in these areas. John Erlenborn, House sponsor of the bill, described its impact: "... it provides no money, nor does it earmark any funds." (Congressional Record, 1969, p. 1998) However, the Act did direct the Commissioner of Education to study the state of gifted education and to report back to Congress on any necessary new programs. In 1971, United States Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland provided that report to Congress. The report concluded that gifted and talented children "require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular program in order to realize their contribution to self and society." The report described "the Federal role in delivering services" to the gifted and talented population as "all but nonexistent." To remedy the problems reported by Commissioner Marland, Senator Jacob Javits introduced the Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act in 1972. It would have authorized \$50 million in fiscal year 1973 and \$60 million in fiscal year 1974 for the purpose of establishing programs for gifted and talented children through high school. The 92nd Congress ended without acting on the bill. Senator Javits reintroduced the bill in the 93rd Congress with funding authorized at \$170 million for fiscal years 1974-1976. The bill became part of the omnibus education legislation that year and included "Gifted and Talented" in its provisions for "Special Projects." The federal government would establish an Office of the Gifted and Talented in the Office of Education, create a National Clearinghouse for the Gifted and Talented, fund grants to state and local education agencies, provide grants for training and research and establish model projects related to gifted and talented. The original Congressional appropriation was \$12.25 million, later pared to \$2.56 million annually for three years, fiscal years 1976-1978. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1981 consolidated programs to assist states and local education agencies in meeting special needs. This eliminated all funds earmarked for gifted and talented education. Congress was not the only agency involved in taking away previous gains: the White House began to dismember the Department of Education, beginning with the Office of Gifted and Talented in 1982. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Children and Youth Education Act was introduced in 1987 and passed in 1988. Although the Act authorized \$20 million, only \$7.9 million was funded. This money was to be used to reestablish the Office of Gifted and Talented in the Department of Education, reestablish

a national research center, train teachers, and fund programs for gifted and talented children. In 1990, the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented was established with \$1.5 million from the Javits bill. The Center's tasks were to evaluate methods of identifying gifted students, examine classroom practices, evaluate different teacher preparation programs, and study the progress of gifted students not served by special programs. (Timeline adapted from Harrington, Harrington, & Karns, 1991)

It is now 1999, and we have neither national standards nor national funding for evaluating and educating the nation's gifted and talented children. The United Negro College Fund used the slogan "A mind is a terrible thing to waste" as part of their fund raising campaign. This slogan also applies to gifted and talented children and youth from elementary to high school. We must find these irreplaceable young minds so that they can be nourished and challenged. In the absence of a federal mandate, not all states see a need to provide programs for the gifted. Thirty-three states have a mandate and some funding, but fourteen states have no mandate. (Roeper Review, May/June 1995) Among the states that have programs for the gifted and talented, there are differences in implementation between different school systems within the same state. For example, a girl whose IQ of 133 qualified her for the gifted program in East Hartford, CN, was denied access to the program in West Hartford, where her family moved the following year. The entry requirement for the gifted program in West Hartford was an IQ of 135 and she was no longer eligible. (Walton, 1982) Did moving across the river make this child any less intelligent? Obviously, single criterion evaluation is a problem and indicates that we need a reliable way to determine which children are gifted and talented.

The first step in finding these children is to define what is meant by the term "gifted and talented." The most commonly used definition is the one in the Marland report, as revised by Congress in 1978: "... children and, whenever applicable, youth, who are identified at the pre-school, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing and visual arts, and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school." (US

Congress, Educational Amendment Act of 1978 [P.L. 95-561, IX (A)]) To meet this definition, we must be able to accurately measure “high performance capability” in each of the listed areas.

Let us start with intelligence. The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test, developed by Lewis Terman from Alfred Binet’s work in France, was the first test associated with a “numeric” measure of giftedness. Those who scored 130 or 140 or whatever was agreed on were considered gifted. (Kirk & Gallagher, 1983) Terman did a long term study of some 1,500 gifted students who scored 140 or above on the Stanford-Binet. The selection process was flawed since two Nobel Prize winners, Luis Alvarez and William B. Shockley, were excluded from the Terman study because their IQ scores were below 140. (Davis & Rimm, p. 20) IQ may be one measure of intellectual ability, even if not the primary one, but which of the dozen “standard” intelligence tests should be used? Some of these tests may be biased against children who are nonverbally gifted or speak a subculture dialect. (Davis & Rimm, p. 76) We can conclude that there is no single standard for testing intelligence. A single all-purpose test is not appropriate for children of different ages and backgrounds but research in testing could provide better tests, ones that more accurately evaluate children’s intellectual abilities and potentials. These tests should have detailed means of verifying the test results, such as “If you use Test A, its results can be verified by Test C” and “If you use Test C, its results can be verified by Test F.”

Tests of creative ability are not significantly better in evaluating their areas of giftedness than the intelligence tests are in evaluating theirs. Davis & Rimm include their own tests of creativity in the warning that “... scores from a single creativity test might be quite misleading ...” and they recommend using two criteria of creativeness. (p. 78) A student who scores high on a creativity test and is seen as very creative by a teacher is likely to be a creative person. (ibid.) Here also we are faced with the question of which test to use. Some of these tests are categorized by age or grade in school and others are more generic. Again, there is no single standard for assessing creativity. Is one test better than another for a specific child or group of children? We do not know because there has been no systematic evaluation and comparison of the various tests over the same group of children.

Since there is no standard for testing, having teachers nominate the children they think are gifted may seem a reasonable alternative. However, the children who please the teacher -- neat work, on time, no class disruptions -- are the most likely to be nominated. Bright underachievers, bright disruptive students, and unconventional creative students may be overlooked. (Davis & Rimm, p. 78) Teachers may fail to identify up to half of the academically gifted children in their classrooms. (Kirk & Gallagher, p. 86) This happened to my younger daughter. Her second grade teacher considered her a problem in the classroom (too independent and strong-willed) and had an unusual concept of cause and effect: "The content of her writing is excellent, but I can't display her work on the board because her penmanship is terrible." However, my daughter's third grade teacher recognized a child who was bored with the regular curriculum and recommended her for the gifted program. This teacher felt content was the most important quality of writing and dismissed penmanship with the comment: "Some adults have terrible penmanship, too." Same child, same behavior, but we see a vast difference in the interpretation. Would the second grade teacher have seen this child the same way if all teachers received training in recognizing gifted children?

Once children are selected for inclusion in a program for the gifted, they should be placed with a qualified teacher. Who is qualified as that teacher? In a 1991 study we find "... 21 states required courses for specialized certification to teach the gifted, while three more had optional provisions." (Karnes & Marquardt, 1994) We are presented with the possibility that half of the gifted and talented population is being served by teachers of unknown qualifications.

One of the tasks given the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented in 1990 was to "evaluate methods of identifying gifted students." The number of papers listed on the Center's Web page indicate that research has been done, but as yet no evaluation document that compares the reliability and validity of the various tests has been presented. The most recent studies indicate that each existing means of measuring giftedness has limitations and that determination of giftedness should involve multiple means of measurement. This is not new information. "The flaws of intelligence tests need to be understood by all test users..." (Kaufman, 1978, p. 2) A detailed evaluation and cross-reference should have covered all the areas of giftedness identified by Congress in 1978 and we should not be left to wonder whether leadership

ability be measured or only observed, if anyone other than a drama teacher can evaluate a child's ability in the performing arts, or whether an elementary art teacher qualified to evaluate ability in all areas of visual arts (such as videography). The National Center was also tasked to "evaluate different teacher preparation programs." Even if we knew what was required of a qualified teacher of the gifted and talented, we would not know how the best way to meet those requirements because this evaluation has not been provided.

Would national standards for identifying gifted and talented children, certification standards for their teachers, training of all classroom teachers in recognizing the traits of gifted children, and funding for these programs improve the quality of their education? I think these things would improve not only the quality of the education received by the gifted and talented students, but the overall quality of education for all children. Teachers with enhanced training in recognizing specific abilities can provide better support for every student. Can I guarantee an improvement in the quality of the education of the gifted and talented? No, but there may be a reverse guarantee: "... although a federal mandate would hardly guarantee the adequacy of any new programs, the lack of a mandate virtually insures (sic) that the needs of gifted students will largely go unmet." (Ford, Russo, & Harriss, 1994)

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