

February 8, 2016

President Gunlock, members of the board,

My name is Arjun Kurup and I am a 5th grade gifted student in Troy City Schools. I am here to discuss the new set of policies for gifted education that you are considering. You may remember that my gifted classmates and I sent you a letter back in November. Here are a few copies of it... I spent most of third grade alone and friendless. Then, in fourth grade I started doing GATE. I made friends who shared my interests and situation. Even now, my friends at school are all in GATE and we frequently discuss the oddest things (like what the core of Jupiter is made of and what the best animation technique is). All of that is linked to GATE where we learn different things in an interactive and fun way that we do not experience outside of GATE. Some of those “different” things are (and this is just a few);

- Coming to America – a simulation in which we are immigrants with different backgrounds coming to America in the early 1900s.
- Merchant – which was a simulation about running a business, in which we got to set up our own business and compete for resources and customers.
- Agency – a simulation about advertisement in which we are an advertisement agency trying to sell a certain product that we are currently doing in GATE.
- Code Blue – a simulation about medical practice in which we are doctors in training. We learn about the respiratory, circulatory, and nervous systems, different infections, and general disease prevention.
- Independent Study – we get to learn about something of our own choice.

And then we have mini units like;

- Latin
- Math Contest
- Invention Convention (occasionally)
- Engineering

The point here is that we learn by roleplaying and immersion at GATE which is not in use anywhere else in our district. GATE means a lot to us. It’s the one day of the week that keeps us going and it is the only day of the week that we learn on our level. We only get GATE (our gifted class) once a week and even then; if there is an unexpected cancellation, a holiday, or a field trip; we miss GATE. In fact, we only have 5 GATE days this entire quarter. There are kids in my class at regular school who are struggling to keep up with the standard and they have a class and a separate teacher to help them every day. So, if they have a special class to help them stay at level, why can’t we have a special class for kids like me? If that seems unfair to others look at it from our angle – we are learning at our level with kids like us. Also, we make friends at GATE, some we see regularly but some we only see on GATE day. That means we have less of a chance that we can interact with people like ourselves. So, I would like to ask you to consider making gifted education more frequent and mandatory instead of making it less frequent and non-mandatory. Thank for your time.

GATE

I am Siddharth Kurup in the 2nd grade at Concord elementary school in troy, Ohio. I am not a 5th grader but I have the same point view as the 5th graders I love GATE. I recently heard that you might be stopping GATE. I like school but I like GATE better because it is more engaging and I learn more than I do at regular school. Last year I entered Concord as a 1st grader. That same year I entered GATE. GATE was one of my favorite things to do as we did lots of really cool things. This year things are even better. Our unit is forensic science right now. I am having a lot of fun right now in GATE learning about forensics. A few weeks ago we even inspected our fingerprints. GATE is only half a day for us 2nd graders and it is only once every week. And we do not get makeup for GATE. So my teacher and principal worked hard to give me math with 3rd grade and I must thank them for it. However the schedule is very complicated because I miss the end of science/social studies and most of my specials. Last year I was bored because I was already reading chapter books and my class was learning phonics. GATE allowed me to feel that I was learning something. So if you take away GATE kids may slide and even forget what the regular class is learning. And I am sure you don't want that to happen. So I hope you won't take away GATE but add more hours to the 2nd grade GATE schedule.

Thank you

Rachel Winters Testimony

When my son came to me, not long after starting fifth grade, to ask me to have him “tested for gifted,” my first feeling was dismay. I’ve known a significant number of highly intelligent people and not all of them are happy because of it. So I asked him, “Why?” hoping he would say something like, “My friends are in that class;” instead he said, “I’m not learning anything; everything’s easy. I like my teacher, and I think she likes me ok, but that’s not enough.”

So we had him tested again, and he was identified as gifted and placed into the magnet school our district has offered for gifted students for more than fifty years. The school was full of gifted-licensed and dedicated teachers and many opportunities for academic challenge during and outside of the school day. For the next four years, with few exceptions, he thrived, even during the notoriously difficult middle school years, when he was fortunate to loop through the same two gifted-trained, pragmatic, yet caring teachers whose greatest gift as educators was their ability to see a group of “gifted” students not as a homogeneous group, but as separate and unique individuals with separate and unique academic, social, and emotional needs. “He’s always going to march to his own drummer,” one of them told me, “and on top of that we know he’s one of the kids who wants to know why he has to learn something before he’ll go about learning it. So we’re helping him discover his own ‘whys.’”

I’m not here to tell you how proud I am of the Lego League medals my son earned in middle school. I am here to tell you that our moment of greatest joy--and relief--was the moment he graduated from high school with the bare minimum of requirements. Because from the time he was a freshman, graduation ceased to be a guarantee, even though he was identified as gifted.

As a former high school teacher, I was sure I’d be able to provide mutual support with his teachers to my son once he started high school. I couldn’t have been more wrong. At the end of the first marking period of his freshman year, still blinking in shock from the dismal report card, I requested a meeting with his teachers and the new guidance counselor to brainstorm ways we could work together to help my son get back on track. I envisioned a collaborative, practical discussion like the parent-teacher conferences we’d had in elementary and middle school; I brought my son so he could again be an active participant in the problem-solving process. Looking back, I should have known the minute we entered the room to ten hostile stares that we should have turned around and gone home, or at the very least that I should have deposited my son in the hall and shut the door. I listened in stunned silence as every one of my son’s teachers said, “He just needs to try harder.” “He’s smart, he just needs to do his work,” and worse. It was clear that the general consensus was that if a white, middle-class “gifted” boy from an educated two-parent family couldn’t do his schoolwork and wouldn’t pay attention in class, then the only reason he wasn’t was because he was lazy and disrespectful at best, a potential criminal at worst. I was there to ask for help in motivating my son, and in helping him continue to learn that hard work is important no matter how smart you are; they were justifiably frustrated by a challenging student, and they did not have the tools to help him that training in gifted would have provided them.

We didn’t leave the district for a suburban district or for a private or charter school, but we also didn’t initiate any more problem-solving meetings with his teachers. We sought help in the county mental health system; we explored early graduation options with one of the guidance counselors, the sole person beyond the district gifted coordinator who showed a glimmer of understanding; and I did a fair amount of praying it would get better as my son drifted further and further away from us and from the image that even I had in my mind of that stereotypical gifted student--the one who takes a full suite of AP classes, volunteers with the National Honor Society, participates in extracurricular activities.

In the end, the district Digital Academy worked for my son: he went to school most days. He stayed out of jail. He did not become a father. He resisted hard drugs and alcohol. He completed the credits he needed. He graduated, and was one of the students invited to share remarks during the graduation ceremony.

But along the way he lost a sense of himself that he was just starting to settle into in middle school--a sense of his own strengths, a confidence in his own ability to power through a challenging situation or problem and come out on the other side, a joy and excitement about learning for learning's sake, opportunities to practice the connection between hard work and success. If it weren't for the music lessons, for the fellow students who were 'into' music--some of whom ended up in the Digital Academy with him, although not all of them graduated like he did--I don't know where he would be now. I know he wouldn't be carrying a diploma.

I am here to advocate for students like my son, for those who may not have a high-school-teacher-mom to advocate for them. For my son, for his friends who didn't yet graduate, we ask you to adopt a set of gifted operating standards that holds teachers to rigorous expectations requiring them to have training in the unique needs of all kinds of gifted students, even the ones who don't act like they're gifted even on their best days. Rigorous standards make a difference. I know that my son's educational experience would have been vastly improved had his teachers and counselors known how to help him. Had they known the signs to recognize, they may not have so quickly jumped to the mistaken conclusion that my son didn't care, didn't want to learn, didn't want to feel safe, secure and accepted at school. All educators who come into regular contact with gifted children need a basic understanding of the diverse ways these students can exhibit their gifts and of the real barriers these students can experience to developing into confident young people. Without training, we revert to stereotypes--that all gifted students can achieve at high levels without support, that all can access some innate desire to learn without guidance, that all gifted students are successful on their own.

We aren't out of the woods yet; at 19, my son has some maturity to find. But I've watched him grow, confronted with real life and with the support of his workplace, family, and friends, most of whom have taken it upon themselves to get educated about the specific ways we can help our "gifted underachiever" discover his gifts again. I just wish the support had happened sooner, and you can positively effect that today.

Thank you.

Response to Proposed Revisions to Ohio's Gifted Education Standards
Mrs. Karen Sherwood
Teacher, Grade 5, Program for Academically Gifted Students
Strongsville City Schools

Links to the two projects cited:

Project #1:

http://momath.org/wp-content/uploads/RosenthalPrize2012_Winning_Lesson_Plan.pdf

Project #2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWI5zE4SnBQ&feature=youtu.be>

President Gunlock; members of the board. My name is Karen Sherwood, and I teach in the Strongsville City Schools' Program for Academically Gifted Students. I teach a self-contained 5th grade class, which means that the students, all designated as having "superior cognitive" ability, are with me all day, every day.

I'd like to speak from a teacher's perspective about the proposed changes to Ohio's gifted education rule. To illustrate my points, I want to briefly share with you two 6th grade math projects that teach the same topic, statistics, in two different ways.

Project #1 is from the Museum of Mathematics in New York City, and was their 2012 prize -winning lesson for innovation in math teaching.

You cover a wall with paper. The students get to put paint on their hands. Each student stands by the wall and puts a handprint on the paper. They then jump as high as they can and slap another print on the wall. They measure the prints to see how high they jumped. Then they calculate the mean, median, and mode of the measurements to draw conclusions about the height of a typical 6th grader's jump. Very engaging.

Let's now look at the extensions – that is, further content for students who've mastered the topic much more quickly than their peers.

This project has two. The first is simply to repeat the process of finding the mean – but to do it for the entire 6th grade. In other words, you were so good at adding and dividing 25 numbers that now you're going to do 75 of them! This isn't going further or deeper. This is just more of what they already know.

The second modification is to take the rankings used when calculating the median and change them to percents. Again, more repetitive calculations. And by the way, the students are doing this off by themselves while the teacher works with the rest of the class. They are self-educating.

Project #2 is one that I developed for my class. Their assignment was to use statistical methods to find out what a typical 5th grader at our school is like.

First, they had to create an online survey that was taken by the entire 5th grade. They were required to design all the questions in a way that would elicit specific data: numerical; categorical; data that could be displayed in a histogram, or a pie chart, or a box and whisker plot.

Once the survey results were in, they had to clean up and organize the data into tables, display the information in a variety of graphs, and prepare written reports summarizing and interpreting their findings both by individual classrooms and for the grade level as a whole.

They then created a bulletin board display for the whole school to see, the centerpiece of which was a life-size cutout of a 5th grader dressed and decorated to show what they concluded was typical.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is gifted education.

I want you to come away with three things from a comparison of these two projects.

First, let's look at depth, richness and challenge. #1: Totally teacher-driven and full of repetition versus #2, where students are in the driver's seat the entire time: analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing – the highest order thinking skills. And if we're talking college and career readiness, which would you choose?

The second point is the need for full-time specialists working directly with the students. Staff who are trained and licensed to compact the regular curriculum and to add the extra depth and challenge that bring out the best in these kids. My project was difficult. There is no way they could have handled this off in the corner teaching themselves. They needed a mentor every step of the way.

Finally, let's talk about progress. Our annual state assessments are geared specifically to measure whether every student has made a full year's academic progress AT HIS OR HER LEVEL in a given school year. This is every child's legal and moral, right. Which of the two projects I've described will accomplish this?

When viewed through this lens, it's pretty obvious that Project #1 is simply NOT what our gifted students need. But if the proposed revisions to the gifted rule are implemented, that's exactly what they are going to get. Because it's easier. Because it's cheaper. Because there is not enough funding or support to do otherwise, as in my district, where our self-contained program is being eliminated after over 30 years of excellence in education.

In an editorial last November 14th, the *Columbus Dispatch* stated, and I quote, "Gifted kids in Ohio get the short end of the stick. Ohio has shortchanged gifted students for years." Ladies and gentlemen of the board, it's time for our elected officials to start taking seriously the importance, not only of no child being *left* behind, but of no child being *kept* behind.

Thank you for your attention.

President Gunlock, Members of the Board:

My name is Diana Budke and I am the mother of an 8-year-old cognitively gifted son. Daniel is currently in third grade at Mount Orab Elementary in the Western Brown Local school district. Western Brown Local is a rural high poverty district in southwestern Ohio.

I am here today to tell Daniel's story.

Like all parents, we thought our son was bright, but we really didn't know how bright until November 2014. Daniel started reading at the age of 4. At first we thought he was simply recognizing logos on store signs, or memorizing the books we read to him every night; but when he read to me the sign above the cart corral at the local supermarket, I knew he wasn't memorizing.

Daniel began kindergarten the fall after he turned 5 and we were blessed with a phenomenal kindergarten teacher. She recognized that Daniel was advanced beyond most of her other students and found ways of differentiating for him. Daniel flourished in her classroom.

Daniel's first grade teacher would best be described as hostile to the gifted. Though he had been benchmarked at reading level "M" at the end of kindergarten, she insisted that he read level "H" and "I" books in her classroom, despite the fact that he had read his first "Wimpy Kid" book over that summer. She rarely read with Daniel, maybe once every two to three weeks despite our complaints to her and to the school's administration.

When Daniel was in second grade, we began to see behaviors that concerned us and had him evaluated for both cognitive development and ADD/ADHD. We were thrilled to hear Daniel did not exhibit any undue signs of ADD/ADHD, and were surprised to learn that he had a very superior IQ. Daniel scored a 144 on the WISC IV and tested just short of 6th grade reading level on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement. His psychologist provided many suggestions to support his development, including curriculum compaction, differentiation and acceleration. We provided this information to the school, only to have it ignored. We were troubled to learn at Spring parent/teacher conferences that on his STAR reading assessment he had declined nearly 100 points since January. The teacher and school counselor were not concerned.

April 2015 we decided to refer Daniel for acceleration in Reading and possibly Math. I was told the first step was to have him formally recognized as gifted. It took two weeks and multiple emails to discover the school did not recognize gifted children until third grade, and that testing for the gifted program would be in the next few weeks. I contacted the ESC coordinator who was completely unaware of Daniel's test scores. She said if we could provide her with copies of the scores, they would welcome him into the program in the Fall.

I assumed he was now formally identified as gifted and went back to the school to request the referral for acceleration. Two weeks later we finally had a referral form which we submitted

the following day and waited several more weeks. We were then told that, despite our test results the local School Board required the district's school psychologist to conduct their own testing and asked for our consent.

Later that week I received a very curt phone call from the elementary principal informing me that Daniel's IQ, as measured by the school psychologist, was too low to qualify him for acceleration. Later, after researching, I discovered that Ohio Administrative Code specifically prohibits denying services to a gifted child based upon re-testing, I contacted the school psychologist for explanation as to why Daniel was denied and she referred me to the Assistant Superintendent. Several days later I received an email from the Assistant Superintendent with a very lengthy explanation on why they re-tested, chief among them was that our testing was done "some time ago and out of state". Both charges were untrue. After I pointed out Administrative Code regarding time frame and whose scores they were to accept she grudgingly agreed to accept our test scores. By now it was mid-June and we were informed that everyone was gone for the Summer, and that we would have to table our request.

At the end of Summer I resumed my request to convene an acceleration committee. Finally, after multiple emails and my questioning why this process had greatly exceeded the state policy's timeframe of 60 days, in late September 2015 we were able to convene an acceleration committee. Much to our surprise and delight, the committee decided to accelerate in Reading. I am happy to say that Daniel's reading is progressing, and he gets much more regular reading instruction. He recently benchmarked at level W and in his STAR assessment last week showed the most growth of any of the students in his class.

So why tell you Daniel's story? It is the perfect illustration for why we need specific Gifted Operating Standards. Absent the current specific rules on testing, identification and acceleration Daniel would not be part of the Brown County Challenge Program, nor would he be accelerated one year in Reading. Without these very clear rules we would have had no way of convincing a reluctant administration to provide the educational services Daniel needs and deserves.

Before his acceleration I asked Daniel one day how he liked school. He said he would like it better if it weren't so boring. He said his Challenge days were about 5% boring and the rest was exciting. The non-Challenge days were about 90% boring. How sad that a child who loves learning and loves school would have to be bored for most of his time there. Nowadays with his Challenge class, Reading acceleration and some Math differentiation thrown in, he says that only 25% of his non-Challenge days are boring. I think that's progress.