

Testimony to the State Board of Education
Testimony of Kimberley Curran
November 12, 2013

President Terhar, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kimberley Curran. I am the parent of four gifted children who attend Northridge Local Schools, a small, rural school in Licking County. My two older children are finishing up their Sophomore and Senior years in high school and were able to participate in the Gifted Services which were offered to elementary students. I would like to tell you about the experiences of my two youngest children, Alayna and Christopher, who are a year apart, and have very different experiences due to the loss of funding for Gifted Services.

Northridge is a small, rural school district. There are a little over a hundred children per grade. Our school has limited open-enrollment options. Our district has been unable to pass a levy for a number of years, and there have been many budget cuts as a result. For example, many programs at the Middle and High School level have been dropped, and as a result, my older college-bound child is finding it difficult to compete academically with students at other schools with many more course offerings. Although my daughter ran out of available classes last year, our district has been unable or unwilling to add more advanced offerings. Also because of the budgeting problems, last year, it cost me over a thousand dollars for my children to participate in the activities they were interested in, most of which were academic in nature – Quiz Bowl, Ohio Model United Nations, the high school musical, etc. Another casualty of the budget cuts is in the area of services for gifted children.

Two years ago, our school lost all services for gifted children, and I would like to tell you a little about the different experiences that Alayna and Christopher had during their fourth grade year. When Alayna was in fourth grade, Northridge placed all of the identified-gifted children together in one class. This group traveled to all classes together, and instead of attending the regular math or reading class, they would go to the teacher of Gifted Services, who taught them not only what the other children were learning, but also more advanced concepts. The children who were identified as Superior Cognitive also participated in yet another class in which they worked on engineering concepts and other more-advanced problem-solving skills to further stimulate and help them grow.

Alayna thrived in this environment, and I can honestly say that this was her favorite year for learning, because her individual needs were being met. She didn't have to keep quiet and find something else to do while things she understood already were explained at a slower pace to others. She was not constantly bored and given additional work instead of work that was appropriate for her level. It was truly a golden year.

The following year, when budget cuts were implemented and we lost our Gifted Services, my son Christopher was entering the fourth grade, and his experience was very different from his

sister's. Instead of thriving in an educationally challenging, supportive environment where he learned at his level, he was trapped in a classroom with many children who were not only at a much lower educational level, but they were also known behavioral problems.

Christopher quickly grew tired of being made fun of for always knowing the right answers, so he stopped paying attention. He hid a stash of books in every imaginable place that he had access to, and soon, instead of paying attention and learning, and dealing with being bored, he repeatedly got in trouble for pulling out a book in every one of his classes and for not listening or paying attention. He grew to hate science and math especially. He went from being a happy, bubbly child who never wanted to miss school, even when he was sick, to a child who never wanted to go to school. He told me over and over how dumb he is and that he can't do math and science. Based on many conferences with his teachers, I started medicating him for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. One of the medications made him suicidal. The one we settled on made him not hungry. Ever. It was a very bad year.

Last year, Christopher was in the classroom of our district's former teacher of Gifted Services, and several of the more advanced children were also in his class. Christopher re-discovered his love of learning. Because this teacher understands differentiated education, he no longer had to hide books to read in class instead of paying attention. He now understands that he is smart and that he can do the work. He is no longer in trouble at school. He no longer takes any medication.

My husband and I continue to worry this year about his progress in sixth grade. He is back with the "regular" crowd, and has told me that he does not plan to try to be the best or get the best grades because he does not want to be on the receiving end of negative attention for being smart. He says his life is much easier when he can just be "regular."

At home last year, he worked on advanced math concepts, including algebra and geometry, in the hope that he would be able to accelerate out of sixth grade math into eighth, like his sister Alayna did. Even though I requested that he be placed in the one advanced class that is available, math, and I explained that he will work up or down to match the work of his peers, I was told that his grades did not warrant acceleration according to the standards set by the school's new curriculum director. At the fall conferences, I was told that he is more than capable of doing the work and is not living up to his potential. Unbeknownst to me, he picks and chooses which assignments to turn in or leave un-done. Yet when placed with the other kids that are more accelerated, he excels. I am at a point where I feel rather helpless.

I realize that many people feel that services for Gifted Education are not important. Countless resources at our small school are funneled toward children on the lower end of the spectrum, from reading and math intervention to personal classroom aides and special classes and teachers and a Special Education Coordinator to help. I hope that relating my personal experiences with my two youngest children, who are a year apart and who felt the direct impact of the loss of Gifted Education, will illustrate the need for funding for Gifted Services and the real harm that can come from not having set rules to mandate how available funds

need to be spent. Much focus is on children with educational challenges. Much focus needs to be placed on the kids on the other end of the spectrum as well.

Thank you.

President Terhar, members of the board, gifted classes and services have been essential for our family's children. The gifted classes in our school system are outstanding, and the gifted students learn far more in that one day a week in gifted class than in the other four days in their regular classrooms. Gifted students would suffer greatly from the end of these gifted programs.

My name is Charlie Toland, and we have two children in the Hilliard schools -- a 10 year old daughter in sixth grade, and a 7 year old son in second grade. Both of our kids started kindergarten eager to learn, with a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement about finally going to a big school. In the first couple of months, both quickly learned to hate school. There was nothing there for them to learn. Our daughter would ask why she had to go to school, and there wasn't much of an answer to give her. When our daughter started gifted classes in January during kindergarten, it was the first time she had any real hope that school held something for her to learn.

In December of our son's kindergarten year, the gifted specialist in the district office spent four long sessions doing out of level testing with him. This was the first time he had had any recognition at school of his abilities. In January during kindergarten, the gifted teacher started meeting with him one on one for half an hour a week to do math. Our son's math sessions illustrate the futility of trying to measure the outcomes of gifted programs. By spring of his kindergarten year, the gifted teacher was doing simple algebra with him, such as solving for multiple variables at the same time. He was already very strong in arithmetic, so a regular math test would not have measured what he had learned in his gifted sessions.

Are we going to start testing all gifted kids in kindergarten for their ability to solve for multiple variables? Would our son be given tests based on the particular strengths of students in another part of the state?

Tests can't measure output unless they are tied to the specific curriculums covered in the gifted classes, which would be impossible to standardize because of the differences and the individualized nature of gifted classes around the state.

Gifted students are very eager students with a deep love of learning. Unfortunately, the presence of gifted students in regular classrooms challenge some of the most fundamental principles, theories and assumptions on which our K-12 education system is based. This creates a paradox where these bright and eager kids become a problematic and unwelcome presence in our schools. School systems often prefer to ignore them. However, much could be learned from the experience of gifted students, if someone was truly interested in reforming our educational system.

During a budget crunch in 2010 the Hilliard City School District decided to eliminate all of the gifted programs in the district. I wish I could show you a video of our daughter's tears and questions of "why would they do that?" This was devastating for her. A few months later the school board reinstated the K-5 programs. They would not have reinstated these gifted programs if the current regulations were not in place, tying funding to the gifted programs and requiring minimum hours, certifications, etc. That is,

if the proposed changes were in place then, Hilliard would not be doing anything for gifted students now.

Our district hasn't done anything to compensate in grades where the gifted programs were cut. In our daughter's sixth grade school, there is no clustering and the gifted kids are spread around as evenly as possible. There are 680 sixth graders under one roof, providing an opportunity to do great things for a range of students, but this is avoided. If the proposed changes go through, our district would be happy to cut the remaining gifted programs and ignore the gifted kids.

The recently released report card on gifted education in Ohio apparently used a test that was not designed for evaluating the gifted programs. This is the equivalent to rating a pilot training program by giving the student pilots a driving test.

Please lets drop all pretense that the proposed changes are being put forward for the benefit of gifted children. There is no effort to replace the gifted programs with other changes that would benefit gifted students and reduce the need for these gifted programs. Many districts would love to spend the gifted money on other things, and ignore the gifted students.

Gifted students need to the state to provide leadership and direction. Please provide it.

President Terhar, members of the board:

“Sarah will show growth in higher order thinking skills”. This statement was my daughter’s Written Education Plan (WEP) this year. Can you tell me how is the State going to hold Olentangy accountable to meet my daughter’s WEP?

My name is Sandra McGuire and I have two daughters in the Olentangy School District identified as gifted. At Olentangy, gifted students receive excellent direct services from 3rd to 5th grade in Math and Reading only. At the Middle School we have NO direct services for the gifted. They are supposed to be 'clustered' yet they receive no flex grouping, differentiation, pre-testing, or any other enrichment activity unless they have a teacher that truly cares. The gifted intervention specialist (GIS) is doing her best to train the regular classroom teachers but her time is limited. Last year she was also assigned lunch, library, and other miscellaneous duties. To properly serve all Olentangy gifted students we need more than 20 additional GIS, an investment the district is not willing to make.

Why are we parents so concerned about standards that do not require gifted money to be used in direct services for gifted? Why are we so concerned about having properly trained gifted coordinators? Why are we stubbornly asking for ‘inputs’ and ‘process’ standards?

The State requires identification of gifted children. Yet, my district has no standards for identification in Creative Thinking Ability or Performing Arts because there are not any expectations or verification of procedures for identification.

“The State does not require any services for gifted”....Oh Boy! This is a sentence that probably every parent of a gifted child has heard from somebody at the school district. I should consider my daughters lucky that they get any services at all. While both of my daughters have shown consistent growth in Math and Reading, they have been stagnant in Science and Social Studies. As a matter of fact, Sarah, who at the age of 3 was asking me about the origins of time and the universe, now hates science. Her scientific wonder squashed by boring lessons. **Services in ALL areas identified should be mandatory.**

How can administrators use the money appropriately if they don't have the training or the trained staff to implement effective programs? Can administrators coordinate gifted education? This year, Sarah and 4 of the most highly gifted students in 7th grade were clustered in a classroom with

a groups of students with high behavioral needs. The school administration seemed to believe that the gifted children would be good role models. Well-intentioned administrators that are not familiar with the research that shows that this type of arrangement is detrimental for both groups of students can cause serious harm. Ironically, the fastest way to have her classes changed was to request an accommodation based on Sarah's sensory disorder and not on the detriment to her education.

Standards for training AND demonstration of proficiency in gifted education of GIS' should be mandatory.

Outcomes? Outcomes measures require Above Grade testing. For example, Sarah reads at high school level. How is a 7th grade test going to measure that she had any growth during the year?

A true measurement system of continuous quality improvement always includes measurement of inputs, processes, outputs and short term and long-term outcomes. Learning at the end of the year that my daughters did not learn at least a year's worth is not acceptable. This would be the equivalent of only measuring the success of the airline industry by measuring the amount of crashes in a year. Would you fly in a plane where the airline industry had complete 'flexibility' to determine how to fly? Without any rules for inputs such as number of pilots, number of work hours, licensing, education and continuous training requirements; no rules for processes like checklists, protocols and maintenance guidelines. Why do you expect that we put our children's brain development in institutions without any regulations on what is a minimum standard for an adequate education?

We need operational standards that hold the school accountable for the constitutional right of ALL children to an appropriate education. For a gifted child, that includes identification, direct services, true differentiation, appropriate acceleration, social and emotional support. Only through properly trained teachers and adequate resources, will children like my daughters be able to thrive. My daughters deserve to have at least a years worth of growth just like any other child.

President Tehar, members of the board. My name is Sarah McGuire and I'm a 7th grader at Olentangy Orange Middle School. Last year I wanted to drop out of school. I would sit in class for 8 hours just to listen to the teacher talking about concepts I learned two years before. I woke up every morning and cried before school because I was learning nothing and wasting my time. I loved elementary school and hated my first year of middle school. The difference? In elementary school I was working with a gifted teacher in math and language arts, and being extended in class during science and social studies. The only enrichment I had last year was being in Enriched Pre-Algebra, even though that was still all review. IELA class was just reading a book aloud with the class and taking a test on it later. No discussions, no deep-thinking or challenges. Just follow along with the teacher as she read and take a multiple choice quiz afterwards.

As my mom began to notice my boredom and my talk about dropping out, she talked with the gifted teacher at my school. After that, a few students and I got pulled out of English every Wednesday. That lasted about two weeks before my teacher gave it up. So then it was back to sitting and pretending to act interested in class. Science class was basically made up of reading the same passage of the textbook everyday for 3 days or until memorized, then do the review questions on the back of the section. Social Studies was my favorite class because my teacher actually did what my gifted teacher was teaching her and applying it to our class. Everyday we walked into class and experienced something new. Whether it was taking a trip on the Nile to different towns when we studied Ancient Egypt, or becoming archeologists and uncovering the secrets of Mesopotamia. This class kept me excited about learning and school.

I had taken the Explorer test the year before and maxed out in most subjects so of course I was going to be bored in 6th grade. But the school wouldn't do anything about it except suggest I skip a grade. Then later that year I took the ACT. I got a 23/32 overall and a 28/32 in reading. That's when the school finally decided to do something. I got accelerated to Algebra 1 as a 7th grader and was placed in an English class with a former high school teacher that now gives me high school work. I love school now enjoy the classes I'm enriched in. I love Algebra because I'm challenged to the point that I have to think, and once I get, it comes naturally. But I would still like to actually work with or see my gifted teacher once in a while, as I did elementary school, so that I don't have to sit with 8th and 9th graders during class. And when checking my grades on Powerschool, I see that I'm

supposed to be having a class labeled Intervention Specialist and getting grades for that. But that has never happened. Any projects she comes up, we end up not following through with. And it's not her fault. She was assigned so many lunch duties, bus duties and library duties, she couldn't do her job.

All throughout elementary school I was clustered with other gifted kids in every class. Every one in the room would come up with deep questions and we would have debates. But now in middle school I find myself with no gifted program and being placed in a classroom with people with average grades of Ds and Fs. These kids are so unfocused in class, the teacher had to stop every two minutes and wait for everybody to stop throwing things and to stop talking. I was used to sitting in classes with people who actually wanted to learn and was fascinated with topics. I couldn't focus on getting anything done, and ended up with leftover class assignments as homework, making me miss gymnastics practices.

I don't want to drop out of school anymore, but it's still not as fun as it was when I was working with a teacher trained to teach gifted, versus one who doesn't have time to even do her job. And my English teacher last year... she's now the school's Language Arts specialist. Regardless, with Algebra and English keeping my hands full, I'm definitely being challenged more and not sitting in class listening to the teachers drone on for an hour about 5th grade material. I just hope I never have to experience what I went through last year ever again. Thank you for your time in allowing me to share my experiences of struggling to stay excited about learning throughout middle school and the difference of being taught by a well-trained teacher through the gifted program has made to my education.

President Terhar and Members of the Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Operating Standards for the Identification of and Services for Gifted Students. My name is Sandra Freeman, and I am the Coordinator of Gifted Education at the Western Buckeye Educational Service Center, serving local schools districts in rural Van Wert County and Paulding County in northwest Ohio.

There are several factors that impact gifted students in rural schools that make it imperative that high quality gifted services staffed by licensed, experienced gifted educators are provided.

The first of these factors is geographic isolation. Many of the avenues for talent development that are available to students and parents in urban and suburban areas simply do not exist in our rural communities. The nearest cities, Lima, OH and Fort Wayne, IN are more than 30 miles away, as are the nearest college campuses for post secondary opportunities. Small rural schools do not have the resources to offer courses beyond the core requirements: one local district has no art instruction prior to 8th grade, foreign language instruction is limited to a single language (Spanish or French) for only two or three years, with no option for advanced study in this critical 21st century ability, and there are very few opportunities for advanced study in any STEM areas. There are very few (and diminishing) dual credit programs, AP courses are generally regarded as too rigorous, and post secondary enrollment opportunities are increasingly confined to online options in general studies such as composition, government and philosophy. Parents of gifted students generally cannot attend the advocacy organizations that exist in urban and suburban areas and rely on the gifted professionals in their schools to meet the needs of their children.

The second factor impacting our districts is situational poverty. The average rate of poverty in the local schools I serve is just over 38%, and none of them achieved a value added score for gifted students above a “C”. This is consistent with results of rural districts across the state: only 14% of rural, high poverty and 20% of rural, average poverty achieve gifted value added grades of “A” or “B”, significantly below suburban districts (35%) or all districts (25%). Addressing the needs of these students will require gifted professionals familiar with the technical merits of tests which have been developed with similar populations and systematic screening of whole grades at multiple grade levels. Once identified, students from poverty may require specific scaffolds and research based curriculum and instruction, such as the *Jacob’s Ladder Reading Comprehension Program* developed by the Center for Gifted Education, College of William & Mary, in order to reach their academic potential.

The third, and most critical factor, is the one voiced to me recently by a local superintendent. I asked what supports, within gifted operating standards, are necessary to the success of gifted education in small, rural schools. The answer was, “we need parity for our gifted students with that provided for our students with disabilities.” The superintendent went on to explain that the district has a full time Director of Special Education, and seven full time intervention specialists for SWD, while contracting with the ESC for .2 FTE Gifted Coordinator and .6 Gifted Intervention Specialist, and pointed out that the students with “the greatest potential as future leaders” have one-tenth of the human resources provided to the less able students. I then asked if gifted funds would continue to directly support gifted students if not tied to personnel by unit funding, but included in general funding without specific guidelines or accountability. The candid response was, “not if the parking lot needed paving.” This was not the response of an uninformed or ineffective leader; this superintendent is in touch with the

priorities of the constituency, and further explained that the gifted indicator on the Local Report Card is a small piece of the district's grade, and receives little, if any, attention.

This district, along with others in my area, strives to improve the education of gifted students with limited resources. They depend on the guidance and expertise they currently contract through the ESC, while respecting the provisions of the operating standards. Any alteration of the standards that makes it more difficult for administrators to allocate resources to the education of gifted students (or easier to divert resources to other needs) will inevitably result in diminished services to this most able group of Ohio's students.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

Sandra Freeman

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President Terhar, Members of the Board:

My name is Pat Farrenkopf, and I am a gifted coordinator for New Albany Plain Local Schools, the co- director of the Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted at Otterbein University, and a doctoral candidate in Education Leadership focusing on gifted education. I am here today to share my thoughts regarding the proposed changes to the gifted operating standards in the framework of the haves and the have nots . The most recent value-added results for gifted students indicate that many districts are not growing their gifted students. Our ODE response to this observed weakness has not been what was expected. Instead of increasing the quality of instruction to support gifted children, even the newest version of the draft gifted operating standards essentially takes us back to the future by eliminating standards of quality service and creating a condition of haves and have nots for our gifted students.

In 1991, as then president of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children, I worked with then Reynoldsburg superintendent Dick Ross and The Ohio State University associate professor Raymond Swassing to create the Commission on the Future of Gifted Education. I have included a copy of the *Roeper Review* article on this commission with the text of my comments for today. The goal of the commission was to establish a consensus of realistic priorities which educators of the gifted should pursue into the 21st century. Well, here we are, well into that timeframe, and the nine priorities recommended to be reached by 1999 have not been actualized. The recommended priorities, including minimum levels of support for the state's gifted students, have not been actualized. Just as with gifted students not being able to "make it on their own", the commission's actions assumed that the various advocacy groups represented at the Commission table would proceed on their own. The reality is we cannot help gifted students without the support of all educational groups, whether these groups are totally dedicated to gifted students or not. We cannot help gifted students

without the support of our state board of education. We cannot help gifted students without the support of our legislators.

Support was actually better when I started as coordinator/teacher of a gifted program in London Ohio in 1984, having one of Governor Kasich's top staff as a student in my class. By the way, that gifted program in London was eliminated after many years of successfully serving their gifted population. What is not mandated is the first to go when districts experience financial cuts. In another example, stronger legislative support was present when I served as on site director of the Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted at the Ohio State University. That program for gifted high school juniors was a line item in the state budget and so of no cost to students. That line item was completely removed in 2009 which required a move of the Essex School from Ohio State to the willing receipt of Otterbein University. However, due to the lack of state budget support, we now have to charge students to attend. This again creates a situation of haves and have nots. Bright students who are economically disadvantaged cannot afford to attend. My co director and I have even given scholarships from our own wallets but that is still not enough to bring all of the worthy students in Ohio to this opportunity.

Gifted students are just as statistically significantly different from average as our special education students. In my district, our gifted population is 2 ½ times the size of our special education population. There are multiple fulltime directors, coordinators, and 80 special education staff members and they need every one of those positions. Compare that level of staffing to 1 coordinator and 5 gifted intervention specialists at grades 2-8. We do not have gifted staff at the primary and high school as of this date. Pre-service teachers are not required to take any coursework in meeting the needs of gifted students so in-service teachers have to elect to be trained to meet the needs of those students who are in their classrooms. When I began teaching in 1973, I was delighted to see PL 94-142 come into effect. What followed was adequate numbers of personnel trained in educating handicapped

children. Classroom teachers also received training, at no cost to us. That was my first graduate level class. I thought something similar for gifted would be coming soon. I was wrong. Again, we have the haves and have nots.

When I testified to the legislative body 2 years ago, I was particularly moved by a young man who had prosthetic legs. He testified, making the point that he was doubly exceptional – he had also been identified as gifted. He pointed out that he was served for his legs but not for his brain. At that time, I also testified, sharing statistics taken from a newly formed credit recovery program in a district I was serving. These students had either physically or mentally dropped out of school. After having the opportunity to talk with them and see their work in progress, I was curious to review their school records. What I found was at first shocking to me and then after reflection made sense with my experiences in gifted education and with half of my career as a building level principal. Two-thirds of the students in that credit recovery program had been identified as gifted in their elementary years but had no evidence of any program besides the general education classroom. Their grades dropped steadily throughout middle school and into early high school – and then the heartbeat stopped as they were no longer registered as a public school student and wore the new label of drop out.

So if there is no guidance in the standards for encouraging development of special programs for gifted students by competent persons who use research and data and foster teacher education growth in gifted services and with possible financial assistance, so what? Without this language in the standards, there is no reminder of the obligation we have to serve this population as well as the other students in Ohio who exhibit other characteristics.

So if there is no gifted identification standard and the remaining minimum standards do not apply to those who are gifted but not served, so what? The resulting discriminatory action would not be in

the best interest of anyone, especially those who are not in districts able to provide adequate services.

So if there is no specific level of coordination service stipulated in the standards, so what? The role of coordination should not be optional. Gifted intervention specialists need to be focused on working with students. Coordination is based on the needs of those students and supports the work of the gifted intervention specialists.

Attempting to provide a patchwork of administrative support yields a patchwork of services which may or may not meet anyone's needs.

So if we erase all funding accountability requirements, so what? The General Assembly has specified a record amount of gifted funding intended to be spent to serve gifted students. Taxpayers are paying for these services, but there is little guarantee that any those funds will actually be spent to support gifted children. This is not in line with Ohio Revised Code. Do not misunderstand; many districts, including my own, are true to directing funding where it is intended. The reality remains that we do not have a mandate to serve, so eliminating funding accountability requirements simply does not make fiscal sense.

So what if gifted minimum caseloads and time requirements are reduced before we test the proposed output measures for their appropriateness? That is like putting the cart before the horse. It is like trying a new recipe before we know what it should taste like and continuing to add salt and more heat and longer cooking time before final presentation. The resulting meal is on a collision course with Pepto Bismol.

I stand with OAGC and ask that before board members finalize standards for gifted students that you focus first on putting quality outputs and accountability measures in place and evaluated as to their effectiveness. The provisions that hide the quality of services provided, that eliminate standards for contact time and case-load maximums, and that ignore staff qualifications as well oversight and accountability should be revised. As the draft stands now, gifted students and particularly those in poorer districts, their parents, taxpayers, and the

public at-large will witness a situation of haves and have nots...and mostly the latter.

For more information, please contact Pat Farrenkopf at 614-413-7905 or farrenkopf.1@napls.us

Ohio In Brief: Commission On The Future Of Gifted Education

Raymond H. Swassing
Patricia A. Holcomb

The goal of Ohio's Commission on the Future of Gifted Education was "to establish a consensus of realistic priorities which educators of the gifted should pursue into the 21st century." The Commission, initiated by advocates within the gifted education community, includes legislators, members of professional education and parent organizations and concerned stakeholders. The Commission has formed an advocacy network and has reached consensus on advocacy priorities and goals to be reached by the turn of the Century.

Raymond H. Swassing, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor and coordinator of programs for the gifted at The Ohio State University. He is currently Chair of Ohio's Interuniversity Council for Gifted and Talented and has been Co-Director of Ohio's Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted for the past 15 years. **Patricia A. Holcomb**, M.A., is Supervisor of Programs for the Gifted for the Westerville (Ohio) City Schools. She has been involved in teacher training, teaching courses at the college level and a frequent in-service presenter.

Advocacy means making the decision-makers and stakeholders aware of the benefits of policies that mitigate for and against appropriate education for the gifted. Ohio's gifted education community consists of three groups; the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC), the Consortium of Ohio's Coordinators for the Gifted (COCG), and the Inter-University Council for the Gifted and Talented (IUC/GT). OAGC and COCG are the major advocacy groups [the IUC advocacy efforts have historically been through OAGC and COCG].

One of the major advocacy efforts co-sponsored by OAGC and COCG is the Adopt-A-Legislator program. Members contact their adopted legislators, provide them with written information, sometimes inviting them to them to attend a meeting or a school children's

program or visit a classroom. The purpose is to keep that legislator as involved and informed as possible.

It was obvious to Ohio's leadership in gifted education that a more comprehensive plan of advocacy was essential if, by the year 2000, all the State's gifted and talented were to receive appropriate services—namely, a range of mandated, fully funded programs. The Commission on the Future of Gifted Education evolved from the process of "rallying everyone who cares to convert plans to action" (Fichter, 1984, p. 296).

To rally "everyone who cares," the Ohio Department of Education's Consultant for Gifted Education, the president of a local school board and the president of Ohio's Association for Gifted Children (OAGC) met in early 1989 to consider ways to guide advocacy efforts. Early in the discussions, the president of the Consortium of Ohio Coordinators for the Gifted (COCG) was invited to join the efforts. Ohio's Commission on the Future of Gifted Education became the umbrella organization under which the key groups acted, bringing representatives of school associations together with the state department, the state level associations for the gifted, university representatives and legislators. The purpose was "to establish a consensus of realistic priorities which educators of the gifted should pursue into the 21st century." The Commission was co-chaired by a local school superintendent and a school board president. The steering committee included the officers mentioned above plus a representative of a state university and the legislative liaison for the gifted (see Table 1 for a listing of the Commission membership).

Accomplishments of the Commission

The Commission met three times and announced the adoption of nine priorities to guide advocacy efforts aimed

at crucial "interested parties"—legislators, business and industry, parent groups, educators and educational administrators at site, local and state levels. The Commission saw these priorities as realistically attainable. These priorities were:

1. Expand the OAGC/COCG Adopt-A-Legislator program to include all of Ohio's legislators.
2. Increase funding to 1200 local units, the minimal number for the population of gifted children already identified.
3. Advocate for required programs, with supportive resources, at both the state and national levels.
4. Increase presentations to related professional organizations (i.e., School psychologists, PTA, School Boards Association).
5. Prepare fact sheets for distribution to organizations and in response to inquiries.

Membership Of Ohio's Commission on the Future of Gifted Education

President, Board of Education, Co-Chair
Superintendent of a Local School District,
Co-Chair
Assistant Superintendent of Public
Instruction
Business and Industry (One Each)
Able Learners Alliance, and
Vice president of a large business
Consultant for the Gifted,
Ohio Department of Education
Legislators — One Senator and One
Representative
President of Ohio Association for Gifted
Children
President of Consortium Of Ohio's
Coordinators for the Gifted
School Associations (One Each)
Buckeye Association of School
Administrators
Ohio Association of
Elementary School Administrators
Ohio Association of
Secondary School Administrators
Ohio Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development
Ohio Education Association
Ohio Parent and Teachers Association
Ohio School Boards Association
Ohio School Psychologists Association
University Faculty Member
(Representative of the Interuniversity
Council for the Gifted and Talented)

6. Work through Ohio's Inter-University Council (IUC/GT) to communicate with education deans and appropriate department chairs.
7. Initiate a survey of Ohio's ongoing research efforts and a data base that supports a "track record."
8. Locate alternate sources of funding for special projects.
9. Continue coordination with organizations that provide financial aid to needy gifted and talented students (for example, Support for Talented Students).

Although establishing the advocacy priorities was the major outcome of the Commission, several less obvious but valuable outcomes were also evident from the meetings. For instance, the knowledge shared at the meetings fostered better understanding among the members about the issues surrounding gifted education. The Commission members were all involved in one way or another in education. Yet, many of the members had never met around a table and identified common goals and concerns. Meeting together gave each Commission member a new perspective on the problems faced by all concerned. Finally, it provided contacts in gifted for members who needed *accurate* answers. For example, one member of a school administrator's group said he received a very helpful packet of information in response to his request (Holcomb, Ross & Swassing, 1990).

Summary

Across the nation, the gifted education community is developing a comprehensive advocacy network (Mitchell, 1984). The International Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (CEC/TAG) have established a goal to "communicate to various audiences that our respective associations speak 'with one voice' when it comes to our field's most important issues" (Delisle, 1991, p. 2). In a recent survey conducted by members of the Governmental Relations Committee of the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG), 44 States and Guam requested a Federal mandate and 42 States and Guam requested Federal Authorization (Hamant, 1991). In addition, associations are interested in providing the best information for their business, industry, and political audiences and organizations within each state are learning to speak with one voice as well (Fichter, 1984). Ohio's advocacy efforts have evolved into Ohio's Commission on the Future of Gifted Education.

At this time the Commission's future actions are yet to be charted. Will the Commission be called back into action? Will the various advocacy groups proceed on their own or will they again organize into a single advocacy network with the Commission as the

umbrella organization? Exactly how the advocacy groups will translate the priorities into actions and the actions into results remain unclear. Although the final proof of the value of this effort will not be available until the turn of the century, milestones along the way will attest to the efficiency and progress of the work.

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President Terhar, members of the board,

My name is Kathy Stanley. First and foremost I am here as a parent, but I am also a taxpayer, voter and an Ohioan. In my view having my children, school district and state succeed is the ultimate goal with one not being conducive without the other. Today I am here to share with you a parental view on what I feel necessitates a quality gifted education. Most parents think their children are smart, but how smart and what to do once we find out is the question we often ask ourselves. We rely on school districts to help us identify and educate our gifted and talented children. As an elected or appointed board member you, as a body, are to determine what will be the standards for this subgroup of students. In those standards you will decide if you deem these children important enough to enforce language for services as well as honor the intent of funding by the General Assembly.

Earlier this year I took one of my daughters to a House Education Subcommittee hearing during the budget process. I wanted her to see the process of government and give her the power to be heard with her testimony. She had a wonderful experience and even one of the members of the House talked with her and said, "It is time to fix this for students like you". I am pretty sure she floated out of the Capital that day. Unfortunately, I had to share with her weeks later the Governor line item vetoed some of the specific funding pieces for personnel. She wasn't sure what this meant so she actually cried because she thought all gifted programming was gone. I explained to her I would call Rep. Amstutz, our representative, and ask him to clarify the funding piece so legislation she was promised and voted on would stay in place. Needless to say this was all the motivation I needed to become involved in state level advocacy for her and other gifted students.

Well, here we all are. So let me jump right to the point. Unless you set some mandates for gifted services they will not happen in all districts.

There isn't even consistency for a child once served to continue to receive services. A student could have services in the fourth grade but never again. They could have post-secondary or AP classes in high school, but no WEP or GIS to oversee and guide their curriculum and college options. Middle school tends to be where the slashing of gifted programming begins and unfortunately this is the age where students learn the most. As a parent I think a child once identified should have a yearly WEP through their entire schooling. The current list of services provides enough options for a district to be creative and serve the student cost effectively. Therefore, the required inputs should stay.

This leads me to waivers. If a district is doing great why would you give them the option to not follow the standards? The old adage of "if it isn't broken don't try to fix it" seems to apply here. I don't feel any district should have a waiver yet alone a three year one. This time frame amounts to almost one quarter of a student's entire K-12 education.

As you know, having the right person to do the job is paramount to success. I am not currently having chest pains, but I do know if I am to have heart surgery I don't want it performed by a podiatrist. So it stands to reason as a parent I don't want an administrator or general education teacher to be the GIS or coordinator. I am sympathetic to a general education teacher. In my opinion I feel they care a great deal about gifted students as well as any other student in their class and would love to work more with each of them. Using only differential instruction in the classroom has not been an effective instructional option for gifted students. Children at the other end of the cognitive spectrum are given many special services because they cannot be served effectively in the regular ed. classroom. I am aware of the options for special education because our boys were in this category. Now, for a little levity, I would love to see a show of hands by administrators who have time to add Gifted Coordinator to their job

description? Again, the right person for the right job is important to success.

Most districts underserve their gifted students. If a child can do fourth grade math in the second grade let her. If a sixth grade student has the capacity to comprehend at a ninth grade level he should be given the option to take an online course though a Talent Center. Use grade acceleration for a student who is ready. As a family we recently made this a choice for our daughter. Help high school students prepare for college entrance testing, application writing and interviews by using guidance and/or mentors as a service. I could go on and on, but it takes a commitment by the Ohio School Board to make it happen. The change can start with you and as they say “trickle down”. Districts have had years to start grassroots initiatives and it didn’t happen. I believe if the money is required to be spent as the General Assembly has legislated you will see many creative and collaborative options arise.

A recent document about philanthropy for talented and gifted students revealed the majority of gifted students are in the poverty range. I must say this surprised me at first and then I thought about how many families fit into this category. Quite a few and it isn’t in just urban areas either. Many can be found in rural areas such as our home district.

It’s time to change the mindset of gifted children having a leg up. On what? They have challenges just as every other student. Why is their future not important enough to require appropriate services? Gifted and talented students are competing with students from other countries for jobs and coveted college admissions. They are the future entrepreneurs, Shel Silversteins, Nobel Prize recipients and architects of world government, symphonic members as well as college professors, Blake Shelton’s songwriters or Yo Yo Mas. They are talented and gifted and we should honor and appreciate their differences. Quite frankly,

they are people first and foremost and should be treated with respect not as a burden to the financial health of public schools.

I have spoken with many who say they need to be responsible for the overall district. My reply to them has been, "Each district receives foundation money and local money for a total student expenditure amount. The gifted student is still in a chair, so educate them."

I thank you for your time and look forward to the day gifted and talented students find their place in public education. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

President Terhar, Members of the Board:

My name is Martin Bowe. I am the superintendent of Perry Local Schools in Stark County. Perry is a suburban district between Massillon City and Canton City. We are a district with a proud tradition and changing demographics. Each year, these changes present more and more challenges. Yet, we prevail. Our students are learning and growing. This is due to our amazing teachers who refuse to believe our students can't succeed. It is also due to our constant belief in support for all students, including gifted students. Today I want to explain why I, as a superintendent, a father and a citizen, have concerns regarding gifted operating standards without strong inputs and very few outputs.

It is difficult to understand how we can dedicate monies for any group of students without accountability to insure that these students will be supported as intended. If there were strong outputs this might be justifiable but we don't have those outputs. I have a fifth grade student in our district, who when asked to draw a picture of photosynthesis drew the chemical bonds which take place in the process. I don't think we have any measure in place to see how this young man has grown. Our district and many others have so many financial challenges that I fear without some simple accountability, the gifted students will not get what they need. I am passionate about these students, but many of my colleagues do not understand their unique educational needs. As a district, we too have room to grow if the grade we received this year is an accurate indication of our success with gifted children. The output did reveal some pockets of weakness and we are working to look at the rigor where this was revealed.

One of the road blocks to helping gifted students in our district and many others is the lack of consistent inputs and outputs over a period of time so that we can begin to gather data regarding what works and what does not. The funding stream has been so undependable with so little oversight, that it is no wonder the report card grades have been dismal. One can hardly call current inputs unsuccessful when they have never been followed with fidelity across the state.

As a superintendent, I obviously don't want a mound of paperwork or quagmire of rules. We have those for other things and sadly they sometimes stop us from doing what we know to be right and good for students. However, after the identification law was passed in 1999 we had an expenditure form to complete that was reasonable in the time to complete and the options for use of the money. We also had a very simple form when requesting unit funding which tied qualified personnel to the money. Again, this provided accountability but did not unnecessarily tie our hands at the district level.

I also want to support the need for a qualified leader dedicated to the needs of gifted students. One of the reasons Perry has maintained consistent service over the years is that we have maintained a credentialed person to make decisions regarding the needs and expectations for gifted students. Our gifted coordinator made changes so

that gifted teachers would be the teachers of record for our elementary students and accountable for their growth. Our coordinator has been at the table making sure our honors classes have a differentiated curriculum and that we get the right students in those seats. We have successfully accelerated many gifted students. Acceleration, a cost effective way to provide challenge for some gifted learners, is run by our gifted coordinator. While good for some, acceleration is not appropriate for all students. Each referral is unique and having the knowledge base here is crucial to making a decision that will help and not hurt the child. One of the most difficult duties when working with the gifted is the identification process. Without a qualified, dedicated person making these decisions, I fear we would miss students or misidentify. A gifted coordinator would also be crucial to making sure that all students have access to identification assessment. A coordinator is crucial when dealing with students and parents. As a superintendent I have had few if any issues from parents of gifted students because the coordinator handles issues before they ever get to me.

I like the concept of a waiver for school districts who are getting the job done. Districts, like the students they serve, are unique. If a district has come up with a way to maximize learning for the gifted population and who can provide outputs to support this they should have the ability to waive portions of the operating standards which impede their progress. However, I am concerned with the language as it currently reads. This appears that such a district is absolved of all expectations, not just those affecting their practice. I wonder if such a broad response is wise? I also question the logic where two years of positive outputs grants a waiver but it takes three years to lose it. It would seem to me that the opposite would make more sense. It should take three years of positive outputs before a district has permission to deviate from expectations. If after two years their outputs have substantially fallen, for the sake of the students wouldn't it be time for the district to get back on track? As written the waivers have the potential to put gifted students at risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective in regards to one of our most underserved populations.