

EDUCATING HIGHLY CAPABLE STUDENTS



Various students at all levels of the Washington state K-12 system require special attention, among them the highly capable. The resource allocation for these students, however, is startlingly different. During the 2001-03 biennium, state lawmakers allocated \$12,840,000 to help fund programs for highly capable students, while programs for special needs students received \$839,908,000.¹ As a result, the majority of funding for highly capable students generally originates from sources other than state funding, typically local school board levies.

Funding permitting, a variety of methods exist to provide opportunity and motivation for highly capable students to excel. Leading educators differ on whether these students should be mainstreamed, separated from their peers, challenged within their own classrooms, advanced to higher grades, or a combination of approaches.

Some educators say that removing highly capable students from a classroom of similarly aged peers will adversely effect their social development. Others advocate pulling students out for special advanced classes or permitting grade advancement, reasoning that these children adapt easily, usually due to greater levels of maturity. Differences such as these indicate that state programs for the highly capable should be analyzed, evaluated, and discussed thoroughly to ensure that highly capable students are enabled to achieve at the highest level.

What constitutes a highly capable student?

Defining a highly capable student is difficult. State law leaves much of the responsibility for specific determination to local school districts. Districts offering such programs are required to create identification procedures in accordance with the following:

“School districts shall implement procedures for nomination, assessment and selection of their most highly capable students. Assessment shall be based upon a review of each student’s capability as shown by multiple criteria intended to reveal, from a wide variety of sources and data, each student’s unique needs and capabilities.”²

Most definitions for gifted and highly talented students come from other sources, usually researchers or organizations that study the development of programs for such students. Beverly Parke, a writer for KidSource Online states that “these students potentially differ from their classmates on three dimensions: (1) the pace at which they learn; (2) the depth of their understanding; and (3) the interest that they hold.” Parke continues, “gifted youngsters tend to get their work done quickly and may seek further assignments or direction.”³ She states that they usually ask more probing questions displaying a greater understanding of the material. In the cognitive realm, their interests tend to be much more mature than that of their peers.

An article by the Linda Kreger Council for Exceptional Children gives further insight into the definition of highly capable. It states that “gifted children develop cognitively at a much faster rate than they develop physically and emotionally...[and] tend to experience all of life with greater intensity, rendering them emotionally complex.” Because of their unique qualities, these students require “modifications in parenting, teaching and

counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”⁴ The article also outlines potential early indicators, including a fascination with books, unusual alertness in infancy, extraordinary memory, and enjoyment and speed of learning for example.

At the federal government level, both the House and the Senate are exploring bills regarding program funding for highly capable students. These bills define highly capable students as: “gifted and talented students [who] give evidence of high performance capability in specific academic fields, or in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, and require services and activities not ordinarily provided by a school in order to fully develop such capabilities.”⁵

Given the unique characteristics and special needs of highly capable students, it can be difficult for a child’s regular classroom teacher to provide the best education given the demands of the entire classroom. This raises the debate of whether or not to pull gifted students out of the classroom to ensure that they are being adequately educated.

Parke advocates that the student be challenged in the regular classroom by 1) developing a flexibly paced academic program that explores topics in detail, 2) working and learning under an independent study or investigation, and 3) making use of mentor programs. Parke also mentions the possibility of placing the student in “classes at another school or institution of higher learning.”⁶ Since no single definition for the highly capable student exists, no single method of educating this student exists either.

State statutes

The state’s mandate regarding education funding is to make “ample provision” for the education of all students. But since highly capable programs have not been included as part of “basic education,” the state has not been required to fund these programs on a statewide level. “Supplementary funds . . . may be provided by the state for this program . . . [with] funding on an excess cost basis based upon a per student amount not to exceed three percent of any district’s full-time equivalent enrollment.”⁷ Currently, the state legislature has chosen to set the percent funded at only two percent instead of three as the statute permits. With state funding at such a low level, local school districts are forced to find money for these programs through levies and other sources.

Individual school districts “employ and pay special instructors and . . . [can] operate such programs jointly with a public institution of higher learning” commonly known across the state as Running Start.⁸ Community colleges and universities throughout the state offer courses in which students may enroll to earn concurrent high school and college credit. Additionally, Washington state school districts may work cooperatively with community colleges in Idaho and Oregon to allow eleventh and twelfth grade students to enroll simultaneously, but without charging the student nonresident tuition fees.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is required to carry out a program for highly capable students that includes research assistance, distributing related information and “supplementary” state funds to local school districts, and providing staff development opportunities.⁹ Such related information consists of notifying state senior high schools and other public schools of public and private entities offering programs for college credit. This also includes such services as advanced placement classes found online. Through mandated research assistance, OSPI is to investigate various methods that could be used to address the unique needs of the highly capable student. OSPI has relegated this responsibility to the state-established Washington Commission on Student Learning.

Program implementation

Most of the authority for implementation of highly capable programs rests with local districts. School districts create their own plans, provide program development, and methods of program evaluation. Given that state dollars only fund a portion of these programs, school districts look to other funding sources such as federal grants and special levies. Keeping the authority to implement and design these programs at the local level is vital since it allows those close at hand to make the most informed decisions about how to solve problems and meet the specific needs of highly capable students in their area.

At the school level, senior high schools and any other public school containing a ninth-grade class must publish and distribute information that stipulates the entrance requirements for programs that lead to college credit. Such programs include Advanced Placement (AP) classes, Running Start, tech-prep, skill centers, college in high school, and the International Baccalaureate.¹⁰

Schools also must designate enrollment and completion of these programs on student transcripts.

Working together

Nurturing a gifted child can be difficult. Parents are the first educators of their children and have significant impact on a child’s development. The individualized attention and assessment provided by parental involvement is crucial for all students, including highly capable students. Parents play a critical role in guiding highly capable students through emotional challenges and in choosing the most effective learning environment with the greatest opportunities for achievement.

Ideally, parents and teachers should work side-by-side, developing methods to challenge and enrich the child’s education. Parents can assist teachers in finding supplemental material or by helping out in the classroom itself. By maintaining a good working relationship with a child’s teacher, parents can help ensure positive, intellectual development for their children.

An active parent can also help teachers decide if keeping the child in the regular classroom is best for the student. Tremendous diversity exists among the gifted population. Gifted students can become bored, causing behavior problems leading some parents to advocate advancing their child in a particular subject or an entire grade in an attempt to foster learning and dampen boredom. This may or may not be a good idea. Coordination between parents and teachers is critical and “the decision to allow a child to accelerate educationally is one that must be made for each child, taking into account his or her intellectual and emotional needs, and the services the school can provide.”¹¹

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Highly capable program funding

As previously stated, Washington state law permits funding at a maximum rate of up to three percent of a district’s full-time equivalent enrollment, though cur-

Sample Calculation

1. District's FTE enrollment average = 8,926.74
2. Multiply by 2% = 178.53
3. Multiply by \$328.10 allocation = \$58,575.69

rently the legislature has elected to fund two percent of a district's enrollment. State funding is calculated by each district and then distributed to the respective school. The formula is quite simple: the district's average full-time equivalent enrollment figure for the previous year is multiplied by two percent. This number is then multiplied by a legislatively designated per funded student allocation figure to determine the district's funding allocation. For the 2001-02 school year, this figure was \$328.10.¹²

In addition to the apportionment for district-created programs, the legislature also stipulates a portion of the money to be used for statewide gifted programs including the Centrum program¹³ and the Washington Imagination Network, formally Odyssey of the Mind.¹⁴ During the 2000-03 biennium, \$350,000 was allocated to Centrum while \$186,000 went to fund the Imagination Network.¹⁵

Common programs across Washington

Educating gifted students presents unique obstacles, as previously mentioned. Changes in regular school programs are necessary to keep these students challenged and learning to their capacity. "Pull-out" enrichment programs are frequently provided: honors classes; afterschool and summer programs; and mentor programs. In Washington state, common programs at the high school level include Advanced Placement (AP) courses, International Baccalaureate classes, and Running Start.

Advanced Placement

Clifford Adelman, Senior Research Analyst for the U.S. Department of Education writes, "the best predictor of student success [in attaining a bachelor's degree] is the academic intensity of course work taken in high school." Adelman continues, "Advanced Placement course taking is more strongly correlated with bachelor's degree completion than it is with college access."¹⁶ This raises the question: Are attempts to equalize opportunities

for college access less effective in the long-term than programs like Advanced Placement?

What is Advanced Placement?

Advanced Placement (AP) is a national program sponsored by The College Board that offers students college-level courses and exams while still attending and receiving high school credit. The AP curriculum is determined by The College Board based on the curriculum of similar college classes. It is geared toward assisting the student in passing year-end AP exams. If a student scores sufficiently well on these exams – usually a three, four, or five out of a possible score of five – the college they attend will usually grant them specific credit for the given course, or general college credit applicable toward graduation. "There are 33 courses in 19 subjects, offered by 13,000 secondary schools around the world; in 2000, 1.2 million exams were taken by 750,000 students."¹⁷ Subject matter covered includes everything from biology to studio art, from French to U.S. History. The specific courses offered by particular high schools are determined by individual schools.

Many students enjoy the opportunity to interact with other highly motivated classmates in these especially challenging courses. The College Board states that "high school faculty find that AP courses enhance their students' confidence and academic interest as well as their school's reputation. College faculty report that AP students are far better prepared for serious academic work."¹⁸

Selection for Advanced Placement

Selection criteria for student participation in AP programs varies across the nation, state, and even districts. Individual schools make the decision given their close proximity to students and a deeper understanding of each student's abilities. The guidelines are developed over time, integrating teacher, administration, parent, and student input to stipulate expectations of student work in and out of the classroom.

Factors used to admit students commonly include grades, teacher recommendations, and parent/student requests. Some schools, though, allow nearly all students who apply to enroll, wishing to accommodate those students who seek the added challenge. Other schools are much more restrictive in selection, setting specific grade and course requirements to be met before admittance is granted.¹⁹

Advanced Placement for low-income students

Enrolling in AP courses costs very little for low-income students, but AP exams can be costly at seventy-seven dollars per exam. If a student scores well, this seventy-seven dollars can save thousands of dollars that would have to be paid to a given college for the same credits. To ensure that all students, including those from low-income families, have the ability to take such exams, the state offers grant money from the federal government to offset a portion of the cost. The school district and The College Board assist as well.

For the 2000-01 school year, the assistance offered was forty-three dollars through federal grant money managed by the Office of the Superintendent and twenty-two dollars through The College Board. Seven dollars in administrative fees are waived by the local school district, leaving just five dollars for the student to pay for each exam.²⁰ Eligibility for such financial assistance is determined based on a family income schedule or other data including low-income housing qualification information.

How is an Advanced Placement program started?

Components necessary for developing a solid AP program include among other things, well-trained teachers, administrative support, academic counseling, and adequate funding. Well-trained teachers are the most important element. A week-long summer training event is offered every year in our state, as well as one-day programs each fall and spring to update AP faculty on recent changes and information.

Administrative support is necessary to help deal with budget, student, and parental concerns. Counseling is included because academically gifted students need to be made aware of their educational and career options. Proper funding is needed for student and teacher texts and materials, as well as for the aforementioned teacher training to learn about curriculum changes and updates.

Also advisable for any school interested in developing a successful AP program are methods in which coordination takes place between feeder schools and AP teachers to help prepare future incoming students. Internet access is nearly essential to keep up with current curriculum and new educational resource information.

Advantages offered by Advanced Placement enrollment

Some students and parents worry about taking an AP course, knowing they could receive a lower grade

than if they enrolled in a regular high school class. The trade-offs are usually worth the risk. According to The College Board, “an AP course gives you an opportunity to learn a subject in greater depth and helps you develop skills that will be critically important to successful study in college.”²¹ It can even help improve a student’s chances at being admitted into a competitive college, given that schools look favorably upon students who challenge themselves instead of sticking with the status quo.

Many students see the economic benefits offered by taking AP exams as a good investment. By taking AP courses and receiving proper preparation, students can pay a nominal fee now to receive college credit which would cost thousands more later. Many students understand that AP gives them a head start on the academic rigors of college and can actually help free up class schedule space.

Some students who are particularly driven and have the ability to take several AP courses and their subsequent tests, can actually receive enough credits to attain sophomore standing once enrolled in a particular college. In the State of Washington, institutions granting credit include among others, Gonzaga University, the University of Washington, Seattle Pacific University, South Puget Sound Community College, and Western Washington University.²²

Finally, exceptionally gifted and talented students who take several AP courses and the course exams, receiving both high grades and high test scores, may qualify for AP Scholars Awards. These are not monetary awards, but are honors that hold high distinction and are acknowledged in any AP report sent to prospective colleges.

International Baccalaureate

International Baccalaureate (IB) is a program similar to AP, offering curriculum specific for primary and elementary years, as well as the high school years. Students not only complete state and national education requirements, they can receive an IB diploma which is usually recognized by universities and other higher learning institutions across the world.

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IB is administered by the International Baccalaureate Organization based out of Geneva, Switzerland. The program began in 1924 when several international schools wanted to try to “establish a common curriculum and university entry credential.” It is intended to place significant emphasis “on the ideal of international citizenship, to the end that IB students may become critical and compassionate thinkers, lifelong learners and informed participants in local and world affairs.” IB wants students to be “conscious of the shared humanity that binds all people together while respecting the variety of cultures and attitudes that makes for the richness of life.”²³ Some educators and parents argue that this emphasis takes too much of the focus off basic education and is, therefore, not as effective as AP coursework.

Three International Baccalaureate programs

IB offers three academic programs beginning with the Primary Years Programme for students aged three to twelve. This program “focuses on the development of the whole child . . . [and] offers a framework that meets children’s several needs: academic, social, physical, emotional and cultural.”²⁴ As previously stated, the IB program is controversial because of its emphasis on elements beyond academics.

The Middle Years Programme is designed for students from age eleven to age sixteen. Though it follows well with the Primary Programme, it is not a prerequisite. Program curriculum includes studies in two languages, humanities, sciences, mathematics, arts, physical education, and technology. Students are also required to work on a personal project that “is intended to be the culmination of the student’s involvement.”²⁵

Finally, the Diploma Programme is offered to students ages sixteen to nineteen. It “is a demanding pre-university course of study that leads to examinations.” The grading system is criterion-referenced to standards set by IBO. Full completion of this program leads to a special IB diploma. The program is intended to “emphasize critical thinking, intercultural understanding and exposure to a variety of points of view.”²⁶

The Diploma Programme curriculum includes two languages; individuals and societies which includes history, business, and philosophy; experimental sciences including biology, chemistry, and physics; mathematics; and arts and electives. Additionally, students are required to take a course called the Theory of Knowledge which is intended to help students learn to question where knowledge comes from. Service projects are also part of the program along with an essay requirement of 4,000 words.

International Baccalaureate for low-income students

Just as for participation in the AP program, low-income students who qualify for enrollment in IB yet cannot afford the examination fees can apply for financial aid. Criteria for financial assistance is the same as with AP exam fees. The local school pays the test fee and then is reimbursed by OSPI through federal grant funding for 90 percent of the expenditure. The remaining amount is either to be paid by the student or the school program.

Advantages of International Baccalaureate coursework

The advantages of enrollment are similar to that of AP courses. Students can receive college credit simultaneously with high school credit. “More than 1,000 universities from 47 countries list their policies for entry and IB diploma recognition.”²⁷

Running Start

Washington state, like many others, offers a program for students to enroll concurrently in college and high school courses. It is called Running Start and provides highly capable and gifted students a means to be challenged and prepared for future studies if they have accelerated beyond courses provided by their high school. This program is offered to students in the eleventh and twelfth grades, but selection of eligible students is unique to each local school. Some high schools allow nearly any student to participate who is admitted to the participating college and who can pass the entrance exams.

This program costs practically nothing for the student since these college courses replace their high school scheduled classes, usually one college class for every two high school courses. Students must provide their own transportation and books.

Exceptional students have the potential to graduate from both high school and community college with their AA degree simultaneously, allowing them to transfer to a university as a junior. For some students this provides significant financial incentives, helping them to pay for

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two years of college fees while aiding them in acquiring the knowledge needed to achieve success at the university level.

In addition to community colleges and universities, Running Start funding can also provide tuition costs for vocational programs at local skill centers. This allows meaningful options for students who are not pursuing a college degree, but who desire to learn a marketable skill.

Colleges and universities participating in Running Start are required to report program enrollments to a student's respective district, while the districts must report their overall Running Start enrollments to the State Superintendent (OSPI). Funds for this program come from basic education district allocations. OSPI distributes the money to given school districts who, in turn, transfer the money to the participating higher learning institutions.

Funding for students enrolled in the Running Start program is less than for regular high school students. Because fees covered by the state only include tuition and not other administrative expenses, Running Start non-vocational students were funded at a rate of \$3,573 in 1998-99 and at \$4,252 for vocational students.²⁸ Districts could only retain a maximum of seven percent of this money for their administrative costs, with the rest directed toward various institutions of enrollment. Some districts have determined that their actual costs exceed seven percent and have asked the legislature to revisit this issue.

Federal programs for the highly capable student

Congress passed the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1994 which authorizes the U.S. Department of Education to offer grants to various states, local education agencies, higher education institutions, and other public and private agencies to fund programs for highly capable students. Grant awards range from \$185,000 to \$215,000 per year for three years. Programs should "incorporate high-level content and performance standards in one or more of the core subject areas; utilize innovative teaching strategies; provide comprehensive ongoing professional development opportunities for staff; incorporate training for parents in ways to support their children's educational progress; and include a comprehensive project evaluation"²⁹

In addition to offering funding grants, this federal program is intended to offer informational and technical leadership and assistance. The program also helps fund research on the gifted and talented at the University of Connecticut at Storrs where the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented is located.

As previously mentioned both the U.S. House and Senate are considering further programs for the gifted and talented because there is no current federally-mandated requirement to serve the gifted and talented.³⁰ The pending bills would allocate \$160,000,000 to perpetuate grant funding for fiscal years 2002 through 2006 offered under the Javits program.

School district programs in Washington state

Program development and authority for the highly capable student in our state rests locally at the district and school level. In Seattle's public schools, about 1,000 highly capable students are served through the Accelerated Progress Program which teaches at a level that is generally two years above normal grade level. The district has decided to serve those who typically score within the top one percent on standardized tests when compared with other students across the nation. Students are admitted through a nomination process during kindergarten through seventh grade for the following year. There is no admission at the high school level. In contrast, the Port Townsend School District included the top three percent of its student population as eligible for its Reach enrichment programs. The definition clearly depends on the school district investigated.

Unfortunately, the lack of objective data on student performance makes it very difficult to determine the effectiveness of specific programs geared toward high achievers. We have highlighted two in-state programs, nonetheless, where test scores indicate high achieving students are well identified and challenged to reach their potential.

Olympia School District

The Olympia School District is well known for its extensive gifted programs. From elementary through high school level, the district provides programs to meet the diverse needs of various age groups, helping them to prepare for more rigorous coursework in future years.

Elementary school programs

At the elementary school level, Olympia School District instituted the Program for Academically Talented Students (PATS) to challenge children who have advanced skills in math, reading, and language arts. Students in grades two through five are selected based upon evidence of high cognitive ability, high academic achievement, and displayed learning characteristics often associated with high levels of creativity and problem solving skills. Program enrollment is based upon a nomination process in which parents can even be involved.

Middle school programs

At the middle school level, programs differ between schools to allow for greater effectiveness and individuality. At Jefferson Middle School, the REACH program is offered to students identified by the REACH instructor and school counselors, utilizing test scores and teacher recommendations. "Program goals reflect the use of critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, creative thinking skills, and research skills" in these classes specifically designed for the academically talented.³¹

At Washington Middle School, those students who score in the 80th local percentile or above on the district's own test qualify to participate in an enrichment program. Those who have previously participated in the program or students receiving certain recommendations are also eligible. Washington Middle School, much like Olympia High School, also allows students to "self-select," meaning that students can recommend themselves for the program by choosing to take on these challenging classes.

Enrichment includes two options, Student Interest Projects and Enrichment Clusters. Students choose to investigate some topic of interest in depth for one semester or for the entire year under Option 1. "Cluster Options meet from 2 days to 4 weeks, depending upon the grade level and project. Many involve in-depth study and preparation of a product (performance based) after the cluster unit has finished meeting."³² Some project examples from the past year include, an architecture unit for grade six, creating a classroom newsletter for grade seven, and a historical fiction writing seminar for grade eight.

High school programs

Capital High School offers students the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes through the International Baccalaureate program which could earn students a full IB diploma. During the 1999-00 school year, 26 of 30 candidates earned their diplomas.³³ Highly capable Capital students can also enroll in Running Start and

Contract Learning which allows students to develop independent study programs.

At Olympia High School, approximately 1,660 students are enrolled, while the number taking either honors or Advanced Placement courses is nearly one quarter of that total. During the 2000-01 school year, 451 students were enrolled in either one or more honors or Advanced Placement courses. Students took 206 tests with an eleventh grade test average of approximately 87 percent while the twelfth grade average was approximately 76 percent, superior scores for AP examinations. The AP U.S. History test score average was exceptionally high, a staggering 94 percent.³⁴

Selection criteria for honors and AP classes at Olympia High, is based upon teacher recommendation, though students can "self-select" enrollment upon approval of the AP Coordinator, if they decide they want the extra challenge offered through AP classes. AP courses offered include eleventh and twelfth grade English, Calculus B & C, U.S. History A & B, Psychology, Macroeconomics, Biology A & B, and Chemistry A & B. In addition, students can choose from several other honors and more advanced courses which will better prepare them for the subsequent AP exams including Honors physics, ninth and tenth grade Honors English, Honors Algebra 2A & 2B, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, and Honors World History.

Running Start is offered at Olympia High School through South Puget Sound Community College. Students may also develop independent study programs to further challenge themselves.

Ephrata School District

The Ephrata School District serves approximately 2,200 of the state's children. Though this district is relatively small, programs for the highly capable are still offered based on local needs. At Ephrata High School, students may enroll in accelerated courses. Accelerated English 11 requires passage of a departmental test. Its equivalent twelfth grade class includes placement test passage and administrative approval as a prerequisite for enrollment. Accelerated English 12 offers five college credits for this year-long course, so it can serve as a "partial fulfillment of most colleges' English composition requirements."³⁵ Five college credits can also be earned through English 101 and 102 courses open to students based on teachers' recommendations, test scores, and a sample essay. Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Physics, and Accelerated Biology are offered to students as well.

Students may dual enroll at both Ephrata High School and Big Bend Community College in Running Start classes. Certain courses serve to replace specific Ephrata High School graduation requirements as the credits earned count toward both college and high school completion. For example, students can take Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, or Sociology at BBCC to replace the credits necessary to fulfill their Civics and World Politics requirement. With the proper planning, a student may earn an associate's degree and high school diploma concurrently.

Highly capable programs in other states

Most states operate programs in a similar fashion to Washington state, including Running Start and Advanced Placement, though some are innovative and distinct. We have highlighted two states where flexible programs have been developed for specialized local needs. But once again, a disclaimer must be issued since objective program evaluations are hard to come by. This section should be viewed as providing information, not endorsement.

California

In the State of California, "the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program provides challenging curriculum and instruction to gifted and talented students capable of achieving significantly beyond the level of their peers."³⁶ The money allocated to the GATE program is designed to fund a differentiated program for the highly capable student who has special needs. Originally founded in 1961 for those in the ninety-eighth percentile or above, enrollment criteria is now set by each district based on such categories as intellectual, creative, or leadership abilities.

Currently, 801 districts participate in the GATE program, serving about 360,000 gifted students for the 2000-01 school year. Funding is approved by the State Board of Education for up to three years. During the 2000-01 school year, about \$51.9 million were allocated statewide, divided among these 801 districts.³⁷ Funding is allocated per student unit and determined when the state budget allocation is divided by the statewide total number of units.

The GATE program is designed to help high schools begin AP, IB, and honors programs and to fund counseling for low-income students with high

potential to ensure they have access to proper college-prep courses.

In districts where only a few students are ready for accelerated learning, usually rural areas, GATE funding helps pay for distance learning programs "such as Stanford University's EPGY-Education Program for Gifted Youth, which offers college level courses on CD-Rom to middle and high-school age youth."³⁸ Other services include both programs integrated into the regular classroom and pull-out classes, using the model that works best for the local districts and students. The GATE program also offers extended day classes and Saturday learning seminars.

Texas

The State of Texas began the Advanced High School Program in 1999-2000 for students who wanted to participate in an accelerated academic program and desired recognition of their work to appear on their records. This program mandates completion of strict subject requirements beyond normal graduation demands including three science requirements instead of two, three and a half social studies credits rather than two and a half, three years of foreign language instead of no language requirement; and a required fine arts credit. Local districts have the authority to design these special classes.

Texas provides an Advanced Placement Incentive Program, offering financial rewards to schools with students achieving a score of three or greater on AP exams. Financial rewards are also offered to educators who are preparing to teach AP courses for the first time, helping to offset some of the costs associated with the program's establishment. For students, there is the possibility of reimbursement for a portion of the testing fee if a three or higher is received on the AP exam.

Correspondence course credit is offered through the University of Texas, Austin, Texas Tech University, and other public institutions with the approval of the Education Commissioner. Additionally, Texas offers credits for all grades by examination for six days each year. Dates of such test offerings must be publicized to the community and no charge can be levied for these tests. Grades

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1-5 require a 90 percent or higher score on criterion-referenced tests for the particular grade the child wishes to skip in language arts, math, science, and social studies. District representatives' recommendation and parental approval are also considered. For grades 6-12, a 90 percent or higher score must be earned on examinations in each applicable course in order to skip a particular course.

Other related topics

In recent years, educators have identified a specific group of highly capable students, those with learning disabilities. "Many people have difficulty comprehending that a child can be gifted and also have learning disabilities. As a result, children with special needs that result from both their high abilities and their learning problems are rarely identified and are often poorly served."³⁹

According to Linda Brody and Carol Mills, three groups of such students have been identified. The first group is recognized as gifted, but has trouble in school usually attributed to lack of motivation or laziness. The second group "includes students whose learning disabilities are severe enough that they have been identified as having learning disabilities but whose exceptional abilities have never been recognized or addressed."⁴⁰ Finally, the last group includes students whose exceptional abilities and learning problems mask each other, so the student is not identified as part of either group and is considered average.

This unique group of students pose significant challenges to current educational programs given the complexities associated with adequate teaching methods for these students.

Conclusion

Contrary to widespread belief, gifted individuals are rarely in positions or environments where they can simply 'make it on their own. These students frequently underachieve or strive for goals well below their potential. When this occurs, the state is no longer fulfilling its legal obligations to these students. Therefore, the development of highly capable programs by local officials is essential and must continue to ensure that these children receive a challenging basic education.

Recommendations

- *Retain local control while maintaining a commitment to utilizing best practices.* Fundamental to

the success of programs for the highly capable is maintaining local control, allowing those closest to each individual student to make important structural and academic decisions. District administrators and individual school teachers know the needs of their students and can develop far better programs to meet those needs than a state central planner.

- *Promote internet and distance learning.* The internet offers nearly limitless educational opportunities to gifted students to enroll in courses at other public schools across the state and across the nation. For high school students, especially those in smaller, rural districts, distance learning could be the key to adequately challenge highly capable students.
- *Promote Advanced Placement and Running Start.* Thousands of students have benefitted from AP and Running Start courses. Continuation of these programs is essential to the proper education of highly capable high school students. Elementary and middle schools need to work with high schools to develop Pre-AP curriculum to encourage and identify qualifying students. OSPI can assist by distributing adequate information regarding program possibilities, funding changes and alternatives, and current research regarding highly capable students.
- *Reevaluate the Washington Imagination Network and Centrum Funding.* The state needs to reevaluate current spending for the Washington Imagination Network (WIN) and Centrum funding. WIN and Centrum funding consumed more than half a million dollars from district programs for the highly capable during 2000-01. These additional funds had to be acquired through other sources (generally local levies). In the competition for scarce resources, funding for established, successful, and challenging programs like AP and Running Start should be a priority.
- *Reevaluate program spending.* Lawmakers and the courts have decided that the state must provide for the education of all children in Washington. Highly capable students are entitled to this opportunity as much as special education or learning assistance students, but funding parity does not exist.

Endnotes

1. Washington State Budget for the 2001-03 Biennium, Ch. 7, 2001 Wash. Laws 2nd Special Session, § 512, § 507.
2. RCW 28A.185.030.
3. Beverly N. Parke, "Challenging Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom," *KidSource Online*, <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/challenging_gifted_kids.html>.
4. Linda Kreger Council for Exceptional Children, "How Parents Can Support Gifted Children," *Puyallup School District*, <<http://www.puyallup.k12.wa.us/programs/quest/parent.html>>.
5. H.B. 490, 107th Cong. (2001); S.B. 421, 107th Cong. (2001).
6. Parke, "Challenging Gifted Students," <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/challenging_gifted_kids.html>.
7. RCW 28A.185.020.
8. RCW 28A.185.030.
9. RCW 28A.185.010.
10. RCW 28A.300.118.
11. Sharon J. Lynch, "Should Gifted Students Be Grade-Advanced?" (June 1994), ERIC, ED370295.
12. Washington State Budget for the 2001-03 Biennium, Ch. 7, 2001 Wash. Laws 2nd Special Session, § 512 (2).
13. *Centrum Arts and Creative Education*: During the 2000-01 school year, Centrum program offerings focused on art, poetry, drama, graphic design, dance, or music for high school students. Centrum is intended to promote creativity and team-building skills while learning from experienced artists, actors, and writers. <<http://www.centrum.org>>
14. *Washington Imagination Network*: The Washington Imagination Network is intended to be a team-building, problem-solving program to aid students in creative thinking. The program is designed to challenge students to create solutions to made-up problems under specific time constraints. Odyssey of the Mind still exists on the local level, but differs from the Washington Imagination Network in that it is no longer state funded. Odyssey challenges are usually competitions involving long-term projects in several different areas. Odyssey does require membership fee payment to participate formally in this national organization.
15. Washington State Budget for the 2001-03 Biennium, Ch. 7, 2001 Wash. Laws 2nd Special Session, §. 512 (3), (4).
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