



T.I.G.E.R. Newsletter

Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform

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Legislation prompts parents to create gifted advocacy group

In February of 2001, the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents (TOSS) introduced legislation designed to bulldoze state laws regulating gifted education. TOSS later withdrew its legislation, but another group – the Tennessee Association of Administrators of Special Education (TAASE) – is preparing to introduce similar legislation in January of 2002.

The legislation removes gifted education from special education, eliminates gifted students' educational rights in state law, and halts state funding for all gifted special classes. According to TOSS, the legislation gives local school systems the freedom to cut funding and services to gifted students and programs. The state's worsening budget crisis makes TAASE's legislation more attractive to cash-strapped school systems and legislators.

In response to the legislative threat to gifted education, parents recently formed the Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform, or TIGER. TIGER is a registered, nonprofit organization that seeks to improve gifted education in Tennessee. Parents from across the state have volunteered to help TIGER achieve its goals, but many more parents are needed.

TIGER's immediate goal is to stop the TAASE legislation. TIGER **strongly opposes this legislation** because it could effectively end gifted education in most school districts in Tennessee. TIGER is instructing parents to call or write their state legislators and the members of the education committees in the state legislature **immediately**. Parents should instruct legislators to "just say no" when asked by TAASE to sponsor or vote for this disastrous legislation.

December TIGER meeting builds support

The first meeting of the Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform (TIGER) attracted more than 70 people from Davidson, Rutherford, and Williamson counties. The meeting was held on December 15th at the Nashville Public Library in Green Hills. The main topic of the meeting was the recently proposed legislation. Handouts and meeting notes are available on the TIGER website (<http://www.giftedtn.go.to/>).

How to contact TIGER

If you want to find out more about TIGER, visit the TIGER website and subscribe to the TIGER Newsletter. The TIGER website contains advocacy instructions for parents and up-to-date information about current TIGER concerns.

Web: <http://www.giftedtn.go.to>
eMail: TIGERparents@yahoo.com
eFax: (208) 975-2911

If you would like to talk to someone on the TIGER board of directors, contact Michael Swanson at (615) 794-7740 or Dr. David Carleton at (615) 791-2596. There are several open positions on the board of directors; please call if you are interested.

Current board projects include (1) interviewing gifted education experts in preparation for hearings on the proposed legislation, (2) lobbying state legislators, (3) researching gifted education laws in other states, and (4) writing press releases and other public relations documents.

“Gifted students shouldn't take a back seat to anybody in the school system.”

– *Tennessean* 12/21/01

The *Tennessean* published a front-page article (12/16/01) and an editorial (12/21/01) about gifted education and the TAASE legislation. The *Tennessean* article explained the pros and cons of the legislation and the editorial solidly opposed the legislation. Go to the following links to read these articles.

<http://www.tennessean.com/local/archives/01/11/11397321.shtml>
<http://www.tennessean.com/opinion/archives/01/11/11523343.shtml>

PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO OTHER PARENTS

The Honorable (full name)
House of Representatives
The Tennessee General Assembly
Nashville, TN 37243

Sample Letter

Dear Mr./Ms. (last name):

I am writing as a concerned parent of an 8-year-old gifted child. It has come to my attention that the state's special education administrators will propose legislation that would strip gifted children of their IDEA rights.

I live in a small district with no gifted program. But some of my child's needs have been met through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). My child has progressed two years ahead of her classmates in math and seven years in reading. The special education teacher has helped the classroom teacher find advanced teaching materials because the classroom teacher has not had time to do so.

The proposed legislation would eliminate IEPs and special education consultation. I think the legislation would harm my child's education and I ask you to try to prevent its passage into law.

Sincerely,

The Honorable (full name)
Senate
The Tennessee General Assembly
Nashville, TN 37243

Sample Letter

Dear Senator (last name):

As a parent of a gifted child in the Tennessee public school system, I was shocked to learn that the state's special education administrators will propose legislation that would remove the mandate for gifted services and allow local school systems to cut programs.

My 10 year old child currently attends SEEK classes (X county's gifted program) twice each week. SEEK classes group gifted students together for a few hours so they can socialize with intellectual peers and work on advanced projects. Before my child attended SEEK, he was very frustrated in school and was socially isolated. SEEK has really helped restore my child's passion for learning.

This legislation appears to sacrifice the well being of gifted children for short-term budgetary concerns. Please oppose the proposed legislation that would threaten gifted programs.

Sincerely,

Who do I write or call?

To find the names, phone numbers and addresses for your representatives and senators in the state legislature, go to the General Assembly's website. (www.legislature.state.tn.us).

TIGER has posted a list of education committee members, including addresses and phone numbers, on the TIGER website (www.giftedtn.go.to). The proposed legislation is also posted.

When you contact members of the state legislature, be brief, polite, and to the point. Calling is most effective, snail mail letters are somewhat effective, and email is less effective.

The Honorable (full name)
House of Representatives
The Tennessee General Assembly
Nashville, TN 37243

Sample Letter

Dear Ms./Mr. (last name):

I am extremely upset that the state's special education administrators are proposing legislation that would eliminate the rights of gifted children in state law. I believe the proposed legislation would destroy our daughter's education.

Our daughter is now twelve years old and has a measured IQ above 160. She is doing well in the public school system, but this was not always the case. In second grade she was diagnosed with clinical depression. The psychologist indicated that the problem was school-related. It was clear that our child's intellectual and developmental needs could not be met entirely in the regular classroom.

Using IDEA laws, we persuaded the school to grade-skip our daughter in some subjects and to pay for a correspondence college course in physics. Without the "teeth" supplied by IDEA, the school would not have tried to meet our child's needs.

What are we to do if the state's legal protections for gifted children are removed, and we lose our individual education plan? Please vote "NO" if these bills are introduced.

Sincerely,



POSITION STATEMENT:

ON THE TAASE PROPOSAL TO REMOVE GIFTED EDUCATION FROM TENNESSEE'S SPECIAL EDUCATION LAWS

The Tennessee Association of Administrators of Special Education (TAASE) has indicated it will propose legislation in January 2002 to remove gifted education from the responsibility of special education. The stated objective is to force general education—i.e., regular classroom teachers—to be responsible for developing programs and services for academically gifted children. TIGER is strongly opposed to the proposal as it currently exists. The TAASE proposal would end existing programs and services for gifted children before any general education program for gifted education is even discussed. TIGER believes no changes should be made in current gifted programs until any new program is carefully planned, adopted into law, and funded.

Moving gifted education into general education with no program, no training, and no funding in place would be disastrous for academically gifted children. There would be no expectation that school districts identify gifted children, and, with no plan or program, no expectation that any services be provided to meet the needs of those children already identified as gifted. Few regular classroom teachers now have any training in gifted education—in either the challenging academic needs or unique social and emotional needs of gifted children. Moreover, as a practical matter, very few regular classroom teachers have the time to differentiate their instruction—in every subject, every day—for the several gifted children in their classrooms. General education classrooms are thus unprepared to meet the needs of academically gifted children, and the TAASE proposal would do nothing to change this.

It is a simple axiom that “the horse comes before the cart.” The TAASE proposal, however, would do the opposite. There should be no consideration of changing gifted education in Tennessee until and unless a new and meaningful program is implemented and operational.

Published 12/20/01

TIGER goals

The following goals were presented at the first TIGER meeting in December. The board of directors will modify these goals as the situation requires. It is expected that TIGER will incorporate some of these goals in legislation.

Short-Term Goals

- ✓ Prevent the TAASE legislation from being introduced in the Tennessee General Assembly this session
- ✓ Defeat the TAASE legislation if introduced
- ✓ Increase public awareness of the educational, social, and emotional needs of gifted children, especially the most at-risk gifted children who may not flourish in the regular classroom (e.g., underprivileged, minority, ESL, underachieving, twice exceptional, and highly gifted)
- ✓ Increase TIGER membership across the state

Medium-Term Goals

- ✓ Work with TAASE and other parties to draft thoughtful, research-based gifted legislation and policy that does not place gifted children and gifted programs at risk
- ✓ Restore funding for the Tennessee Governor's Schools
- ✓ Create a gifted teacher certification policy that will increase the number of regular education and special education teachers with formal training in gifted education
- ✓ Increase number of college gifted education courses, especially those designed for working teachers such as correspondence, on-line, and satellite-campus courses
- ✓ Help Tennessee school districts secure grants under the new ESEA legislation and from other sources that will fund the creation of gifted programs and teacher training
- ✓ Advocate for a full-time director of gifted education, with a graduate degree in gifted education, at the TN DOE

Long-Term Goals

- ✓ Help create a gifted research and education center at a Tennessee college or university
- ✓ Increase accountability for the academic progress of gifted students in the schools and promote publication of TVAAS scores disaggregated by ability and for gifted students
- ✓ Improve gifted identification to better identify and diagnose the needs of the most at-risk gifted students
- ✓ Increase the involvement of school counselors as "internal advocates" for gifted children
- ✓ Increase gifted students' access to college courses