

## PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS JEOPARDIZED

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**HOT NEWS:** Gifted education in Tennessee will join the regular curriculum, jeopardizing advanced programs currently provided by its special education status, under a proposal considered by state legislators this month.

**LOCAL ANGLE:** Dr. Lynnette Henderson, assistant professor of education at Austin Peay State University, says it is crucial for gifted students to receive specialized training: "Gifted children learn more rapidly with less need for practice and, therefore, may need to do less homework or have something of interest that offers learning opportunities when they have finished early."

"They need curricular adjustments that are responsive to their differences including pace, complexity, directiveness, breadth and interdisciplinary connections. These are too different from the group-focused-planning of the classroom teacher and too vital to be left to the sole discretion and management of the regular classroom teacher. Despite their best intentions, many classroom teachers have received little training in how to add these modifications to their extensive responsibilities. "

Henderson says denying gifted students special instruction may have severe consequences: "Lack of educational fit can lead to learned underachievement and habits of 'getting by.' For some children, it can cause emotional distress to the point of school phobia or depression. Also, without proper guidance, students may create an inflated sense of their own intellect, which can cause social difficulties, lack of true peers, lack of respect for teachers, cynicism and dropping out."

The Tennessee legislature can do its part to prevent this by not treating gifted programs as "an extra," says Henderson.

"A planned approach of 'if we ignore them maybe they will go away' is an unfortunate waste of gifted children's time and potential because for those children it may 'go away.'"

"Advocacy efforts at the national level by the National Association for Gifted Children have been expanding to include a federal initiative for gifted education. It would be a shame for Tennessee to move away from support for gifted education when the country is moving toward it."

**EXPERT PROFILE:** Henderson teaches courses in gifted, special and early childhood education at Austin Peay. Her major research interests include gifted education policy, practice and neurobiological basis.

For further comments or information, telephone Henderson at (931) 221-7536 or e-mail [hendersonl@apsu.edu](mailto:hendersonl@apsu.edu).

For information about Austin Peay's Local Angles or to locate additional experts, telephone Cristina Henley, communication specialist, at (931) 221-7868 or e-mail [henleyc@apsu.edu](mailto:henleyc@apsu.edu).

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