



T.I.G.E.R. Newsletter

Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform

Volume 1, Issue 2 • January 8, 2002

Action Alert!

Members of the Tennessee Association of Administrators of Special Education (TAASE) board of directors stated yesterday that they would attempt to introduce their legislation this week. TAASE is in contact with legislators who are in favor of the legislation and they are making slight adjustments to wording in an attempt to convince the commissioner of education, Faye Taylor, to support it. The commissioner is on record opposing the TAASE legislation.

Parents should **immediately** write letters and make phone calls to the members of the education committees in both houses of the Tennessee General Assembly, and their own legislators, **opposing the TAASE legislation**. Parents should also write the commissioner of education to support her stand against the legislation.

Go to page 3 more information.

TAASE's proposal

Since the mid-70's, Tennessee has included gifted students under the umbrella of special education by extending federal special education laws to include them. The federal law mandating services for special education students is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

TIGER strongly opposes the TAASE legislation.

Gifted students, as special education students, are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. Gifted students must be identified and they receive an individualized education plan and special services if needed. Special education law provides a grievance and appeals process for gifted students whose needs are not being met.

The Tennessee Association of Administrators of

Continued on page 2.

Do gifted children need special education provisions?

Excerpted from "The Education of Gifted Students in Arizona: A Guide to Arizona Statutes, Services, Promising Practices, and Resources," Arizona Department of Education, July 2001 .

A gifted child often learns reading, math or other skills three or more years before these same skills are introduced in the standard classroom. These children need challenging learning materials and activities uniquely chosen for their particular set of skills. Educators who are familiar with the learning characteristics of gifted children, and who have training

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in curriculum strategies to address academic needs of these children, are necessary to plan and monitor educational services.

The common assumption that gifted children do not need special educational services or will "get what they need on their own" is a serious error. Although gifted children have extraordinary ability to learn, they may be inexperienced in learning strategies such as how to use the library, how to do a particular task, or how to construct the kinds of questions that will produce the help these students need from adults. They must have teachers and other adults willing and able to act as advocates and guides in their search for essential materials and resources.

Gifted children are often described as having common characteristics such as high levels of verbal and reasoning ability, curiosity, idealism, perfectionism, creativity, etc. Checklists of these characteristics are available in education literature. These common characteristics are sometimes grouped into areas such as thinking (cognitive) characteristics; emotional and social (affective) characteristics; and physical sensing

Continued on page 2.

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TAASE's proposal (continued)

Special Education (TAASE) will attempt to introduce state legislation **this week** that

- eliminates all existing rights and protections in state law for gifted students,
- turns responsibility for gifted education over to general education and specifically prevents special education personnel from working with gifted students or consulting with teachers, and
- requires the state board of education and commissioner of education to create a new policy that would regulate and support gifted education **only** in the regular classroom (i.e., the new policy cannot fund or promote special classes, pull-outs, in-school or after-school special programs, dual enrollment, and special services.).

The proposed legislation does **not** provide any new funding and does **not** provide replacement laws, leaving gifted students without legal protections until – and if – a new plan is implemented.

The Tennessee Organization for School Superintendents (TOSS) introduced similar legislation last year as HB 1681 and HB 1708. Last year's legislation was also authored by TAASE.

TIGER strongly opposes the TAASE legislation and encourages parents to actively lobby their state legislators to defeat it.

Do gifted children need special education provisions? (continued)

and intuitive characteristics. Some experts mention the intensity or “overexcitabilities” of highly gifted children.

These varied and intense learning and social- emotional characteristics of gifted children result in the need for special education in school. It is important to realize that gifted children are as different from average children as special needs children at the other end of the

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normal distribution are different from average children. Both groups of exceptional students at the extremes of the normal development curve need program and curriculum modifications because they learn differently and at different paces. The extreme differences in learning characteristics between gifted individuals and their age peers offer persuasive justification for the provision of special education for these exceptional children

Text of the TOSS/TAASE Legislation

HOUSE BILL 1681 By M Maddox

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 10, relative to special education.
BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-10-102(1)(B), is amended by deleting the existing language and substituting the following: “Child with disabilities” includes the educable, trainable and profoundly retarded; the speech and/or language impaired; the deaf and hearing impaired; the blind and visually limited; the physically disabled and those with other health impairments including the homebound and hospitalized; the learning disabled including perceptually disabled and emotionally conflicted; the multiple-disabled; and any other child whose needs and ability cannot be served in a regular classroom setting.

SECTION 2. The Commissioner of Education, in conjunction with the state board of education, shall design and present to the select oversight committee on education a plan for accommodating the needs of intellectually gifted students in the regular academic classroom. This plan shall be presented to the select oversight committee on education not later than July 1, 2002.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

HOUSE BILL 1708 By R Davis

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 10, Part 1, relative to the education of disabled students.
BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-10-101, is amended by adding a new subsection (d) to read as follows: (d) Notwithstanding any statute, regulation, or policy to the contrary, the state of Tennessee shall provide special education services consistent with, and limited to, the requirements of federal law as detailed in Title 20, Part 1400 of the United States Code and Chapter 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

POSITION STATEMENT:

PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GUIDE
GIFTED EDUCATION REFORM

As an organization, TIGER is committed to the reform and strengthening of gifted education in Tennessee. We believe that educational equality and opportunity demand that we work as a community—families and schools together—to meet the unique needs of every child. Each and every child in Tennessee deserves an educational system that addresses their needs, that challenges them, that allows them to grow, to thrive, and to succeed. Too often, this simply isn't the case for academically gifted and talented children. Too often, they are not challenged. Too often, they feel isolated. Too often, they do not thrive.

Reform of gifted education should aim to build a system that reliably identifies academically gifted children throughout Tennessee, assesses their individual needs, and puts in place the means to meet those needs. Such reform should be guided by the following basic principles:

- 1) The existing system of gifted education in Tennessee, while imperfect, should not be ended unless a new and sound system of gifted education is adopted and implemented.
- 2) Reform should maintain the mandate that school districts identify academically gifted children and provide services to meet their needs.
- 3) Reform should maintain the existing due process rights of families.
- 4) Reform should provide strong mechanisms for identifying academically gifted children. This requires outreach to parents, early identification, and identification tools that are both valid and non-discriminatory.
- 5) Reform should recognize that there are differing levels of academic giftedness. Thus, no one set of services can meet the needs of every academically gifted child. Rather, educational services must be geared to meet the needs of each individual child.
- 6) Reform should recognize that academically gifted children often confront unique social-emotional issues, and that these needs must be addressed.
- 7) Reform should recognize the need to dramatically improve teacher training with regard to academic giftedness. A training standard should be established as a part of teacher licensure, and a system of certification in gifted education should be established.
- 8) Reform should recognize that some children are both academically gifted and have particular learning disabilities, and that special and gifted education must be integrated in these instances.
- 9) Reforms should be driven by the extensive research in education and psychology on what is needed and what works regarding academically gifted children. Methods of identification and services should be guided by best practices in the field rather than any preconceived notions.

Published 1/8/02

Who to call and write to oppose the TAASE legislation

Parents should write, call or fax the commissioner of education and support her decision to oppose the TAASE legislation. Thank her for taking a stand before it is introduced.

Faye Taylor
Commissioner
Department of Education
6th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower
Nashville, TN 37243-0375
(615) 741-2731 (voice)
(615) 532-4791 (fax)
ftaylor2@mail.state.tn.us (email)

The commissioner's web page is:

<http://www.state.tn.us/education/commish.htm>

Parents should also contact their legislators and the members of the education subcommittees in both houses of the Tennessee General Assembly.

House Education Committee

Les Winningham, Chairman	Eugene Davidson
Tommie Brown, Vice-Chairman	Robert D. Patton
Joe Towns, Jr., Secretary	Phillip Pinion
Larry Turner	W. C. Pleasant
Gene Caldwell	Zane Whitson
Barbara Cooper	David Shepard
Ronnie E. Davis	Dewayne Bunch
John Hood	Joe McCord
Ulysses Jones, Jr.	Jamie Hagood
Mark Maddox	Beth Harwell
Johnny Shaw	Richard Montgomery

Senate Education Committee

Randy McNally, Chairman
Rusty Crowe, Vice-Chairman
Charlotte Burks, Secretary
Ben Atchley
Bobby Carter
Roscoe Dixon
Ward Crutchfield
Jo Ann Graves
Larry Trail

All legislators receive mail at this address:

Tennessee General Assembly
Nashville, TN 37243

All legislators' offices may be reached by telephone at this number: 1-800-449-8366.

Legislator's email addresses are located at this URL:

<http://www.legislature.state.tn.us/>

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