



TIGER

Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform

BACKGROUND ON GIFTED EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE

What laws govern gifted education in Tennessee today?

Since the mid-70's, Tennessee has included gifted students under the umbrella of special education. The state law mandating identification and services for special education students is Tennessee Code Annotated Title 49, Chapter 10. The federal law mandating services for special education students is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Why did Tennessee include gifted students under the special education umbrella?

Children with learning disabilities are very different from gifted children. However, both groups are similar in one important respect: the regular classroom curriculum does not address their educational needs. 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 two ends of the spectrum require the presence of challenge --only at different levels.

Research shows that most regular classroom teachers do not modify the curriculum for gifted students, and as a result gifted students waste from half to all their time in the regular classroom. Many gifted children become bored and "mentally check out." Some gifted children develop more serious academic or emotional problems.

The public and many decision makers do not often understand the needs of gifted students. Sometimes accommodations for gifted students are seen as elitist. Gifted programs are usually the first programs eliminated during a budget crisis.

The original framers of special education law in Tennessee realized (1) that gifted and disabled students have "mirrored" educational needs that could be served by the same legal framework and (2) that gifted education needed a "safe haven" from ideological and budgetary swings.

How are gifted students identified and served in Tennessee?

Special education law mandates that potentially gifted students be given a comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation. Students that meet the criteria for special services receive an individualized education plan. Most gifted students receive differentiated instruction in the regular classroom. A few school districts use state and local money to fund gifted programs such as pullout or special classes. The mandate to serve gifted students in special education law provides an incentive for districts to create gifted programs.

How many gifted students are identified in Tennessee?

There are about 19,000 gifted students in Tennessee. Gifted students comprise about ten percent of the special education population and about two percent of all K-12 students.

Does Tennessee receive federal funds for gifted education?

Tennessee receives no federal funds for gifted education. However, school districts in Tennessee receive a portion of the state's funds allocated for special education students, averaging about \$220 per gifted student. The average expenditure for all special education students is more than \$2000.