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Florida Gifted Network

URGENT CALL TO ACTION - March 26, 2010

WARNING! A terrible new Plan for gifted education in Florida puts gifted students, gifted teachers, and gifted programs at risk.

The Florida Department of Education is finalizing a new State Plan for Gifted Education. This Plan will “weave” gifted students into general education with the intention of eliminating gifted programs. If fully implemented, this Plan will significantly alter the definition of “gifted student,” further loosen state Exceptional Student Education (ESE) requirements (or pull gifted out of ESE altogether) and thus provide school districts with flexibility in the way they identify and serve – **or not serve** -- gifted students. (See [this article by FL’s education commissioner.](#))

Don’t let it happen. TAKE ACTION NOW.

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1. Take Action Today
2. *The Florida State Plan for Gifted Education:* What it is and what it does.
3. It has already happened in one Florida school district

1. TAKE ACTION TODAY

► QUICKLY CONTACT:

- **Charlie Crist, Governor**
850.488.7146 Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com
- **Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner of Education:**
850.245.0505, Commissioner@fldoe.org
- **Your own state legislators**
[Find your state House and Senate Member](#)

Call or send an email but remember that personal contact is the most effective. Always be polite and respectful. Provide your name and city. Stay on message. And be patient – the Governor and legislators are getting a large volume of calls and emails regarding education legislation. (Including: Senate bill 6, cuts to funding for AP/IB/AICE, class size amendment changes, state retirement fund changes.)

TELL THEM that the *Florida State Plan for Gifted Education* is unacceptable and puts gifted students at risk. Get their support for Florida's gifted students.

LET THEM KNOW that broadening the definition of "gifted student" is unwise at this time. In light of the current economic conditions, there is no additional funding available for the increase in the cost of the identification process or for providing services to an unmanageable increase in the number of eligible students.

SHARE WITH THEM that you expect the **state** to continue mandating and funding special education procedures along with *related services* and appropriately differentiated and accelerated instruction for gifted students in grades K - 12. To do otherwise puts gifted students at risk of not receiving an appropriate education and is a waste of taxpayer dollars. Removing state requirements means that parents will not be able to hold districts accountable for providing appropriate services for their gifted children.

URGE THEM to continue providing funding for gifted students within the *Exceptional Student Education Guaranteed Allocation* to include special education and related services for gifted students in grades K-12 for the current gifted service delivery models. Removing funding for the current models will mean many gifted students will be served in general education classrooms.

INFORM THEM of the harmful effects to gifted children when school districts are allowed to opt out of statutes and State Board of Education Rules having to do with gifted education.

► **PLEASE STAND READY** to take additional immediate actions as needed.

For further information and discussion on the future of gifted education in Florida:

[FGN Facebook fan page](#)

[FGN Forums](#)

www.floridagiftednet.org

Contact: FLgifted@gmail.com

2. Florida State Plan for Gifted Education

What it is:

A state-developed “plan” that threatens the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for gifted students and makes it more difficult for parents to hold districts responsible for providing appropriate services for their gifted children.

What it does:

- Broadens the definition of “gifted student” without increased state funding for the provision of services
 - Includes a large number of students who are performing well on grade-level assessments
 - Appears to exclude students who have the potential to perform at high levels but are not currently demonstrating achievement
(See a draft FL Dept of Ed [definition and eligibility criteria.](#))
- Puts at risk the provisions of Exceptional Student Education (special education) for gifted students
- Threatens funding for some of the current gifted service delivery models resulting in less state funding for districts to provide gifted services
- Shifts the burden of financial responsibility for the provision of *Related Services* (transportation to gifted centers, psychological services, counseling services, etc.) from the state to the districts
- Re-defines gifted education in Florida as services, not programs, with the services determined by available district/school resources (including classrooms and endorsed teachers)
- Removes the requirement for gifted endorsed teachers for some gifted service models
- Implements a new state acceleration policy with absolutely no requirement to provide gifted students with acceleration of any kind
- Leaves key decisions regarding the Educational Plan (EP) to school districts, including the timeline for review of progress toward goals and the members of the EP team
- Calls into question assessments done by private psychologists

3. It has already happened in one school district in Florida.

Is this a snapshot of the future for your school district?

Following is one parent's account of the demise of gifted services in the School District of **XXXX** County in Florida over the past two years.

District moved from gifted cluster sites with fulltime gifted classrooms and gifted-endorsed teachers to "gifted services" at each local school. Principals at each school could decide how much—or how little—they offered.

Lost busing services for gifted students (related services = transportation), even though all other ESE students retained busing services. Many gifted students returned to local schools, regardless of inferior programs, because their parents were unable to transport them to gifted services.

High achievers were "blended" in with gifted students in the classrooms at the cluster sites. District officials claim this was done in order to "respond to class size requirements in advance of the deadline."

One month into this school year, cluster-site elementary gifted classroom of 18 students split and blended due to overcrowding of general education classes, making a less than 50% gifted class at a gifted cluster site. As a result:

- The pace of the curriculum was slowed considerably, with repetition needed for the non-gifted "high achievers."
- Gifted students were made to do group projects with non-gifted students for group grades on the level they did three years ago.
- There is no differentiation.
- All district gifted children are now placed in "blended" classrooms-----no more gifted classrooms.

"I requested a meeting to revise my child's Education Plan (EP)," the mother says. The district told me that EPs are not like Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and cannot be individualized and are not specific, contrary to what the state currently says. Measurements listed on the district EPs are 'teacher observation' and 'informal assessment' with evaluation criteria '90%-100%' and 'progressing.' The goals and objectives are meaningless and vague, and not specific to my child. [editor's note: Losing the IEP for gifted in 2004 set us on this path.]

"I met with the new middle school principal of the 'gifted cluster site,' due to rumor he/she was planning a 'level playing field' for all students to qualify for Pre-AP based solely on FCAT scores. He/she described 'mainstreaming' and 'inclusion' for gifted students, stating high achievers 'help to keep the gifted students from going off on tangents,' etc. He/she also stated the gifted students would help to raise the bar for high achievers. And stated plans to disperse gifted students to roughly three per class. We were able to get the district to keep gifted students in Pre-AP at least (rather than regular general ed) and in groups of roughly 5 to 10 per class of 22.

"I attended a meeting at the middle school with a panel of gifted-endorsed teachers. Their solutions for differentiation included lone projects or gifted students teaching other students, and mentoring. This year differentiation for 5th grade includes extra work, sitting in the media center alone or acceleration through Florida Virtual School alone.

"There is no more district gifted program, no gifted services--even enrichment is blended. The district gifted program coordinator just made a lateral move from the district to a middle school. There appears to be no more gifted coordinator for my district."