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# Accounting for Gifted Education: making a Case for Reporting and Transparency

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# POLICY BRIEF



## DAVID C. ANCHIN CENTER

Issue 2:1

*A statement of faith in the educators of today  
A commitment of excellence to the schools of tomorrow*

### **Accounting for Gifted Education: Making a Case for Reporting and Transparency**

Elizabeth Shaunessy, Ph.D. and Michael Matthews, Ph.D.

In a recent report, the National Association for Gifted Children and the Council of State Directors of Gifted Education concluded that “the success and long-term stability of gifted programs and services are tied to the degree to which states dedicate a reliable funding stream to districts to meet student needs” (pg. 17). Other authorities have reached similar findings: “ultimately, it is the role of state legislatures to establish what constitutes a ‘suitable’ or ‘thorough and efficient’ education for children within their borders, and to ensure that local school districts have access to the necessary resources to provide such an education” (Baker & McIntire, 2003, p. 173). The Florida legislature has recently investigated the state of gifted education in Florida, culminating in a report that chastises districts for their inability to provide accountability for funds disbursed by the legislature for the purposes of educating the gifted (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2008). Without the exact figures for these critical educational services, key stakeholders—including legislators, parents, advocates, and teachers—cannot determine the efficacy or impact of taxpayer money—an unenviable situation for schools, districts, the Florida Department of Education, the Florida Legislature, and most importantly, gifted learners.

While Federal law governs the provision of services for students with disabilities, no such national mandate exists for the gifted, leaving individual states to determine whether to articulate and fund gifted education. Florida currently is one of only a few states that recognizes that gifted learners, like other students who differ substantially from the general population, have needs that extend beyond the services provided by the standard school curriculum. Just as students in special education are required to have individual educational plans, gifted learners are required, in Florida, to have blueprints outlining the child’s area(s) of exceptional ability, the instructional goals and objectives to help the student develop these abilities, and the ancillary services to be provided beyond the general curriculum. This document—the educational plan (EP) - includes information about the child’s current level of performance and offers specific provisions about how the school will meet the student’s specific cognitive and affective needs.

Despite the many benefits of classification within ESE, fiscal support for gifted services is complicated by the manner in which program funding is channeled through district ESE programs. Currently there is not a specific mandate for districts and schools in Florida to report where (and in what manner) funds actually are expended (OPPAGA, 2008). Anecdotal accounts suggest that gifted education funding is not always expended directly on the education of gifted learners. A more transparent accountability system would require individual districts to account for how gifted funding is spent in each school providing evidence to taxpayers that the funds intended to support the specialized educational needs of the gifted are, in fact, allocated to programs and services specifically designed to meet the unique educational needs of these children.

Such a mandate for reporting expenditures is a crucial prerequisite for evaluating the economic impact of gifted education on the state of Florida. Public schools that offer healthy gifted programs attract employers to Florida, and they are an asset to the state in both the recruitment and training of a highly educated workforce—which is crucial to the development of a resilient and globally competitive state economy. In the present era of fiscal desperation, trimming state budgets may seem like a prudent and responsible decision. However, any financially-motivated decisions rendered without substantive, accurate information not only would run contrary to national policy about data-driven decisions, but also would hamstring the ethical responsibility of those who are charged with overseeing the care of all learners in our educational system. Until an accurate picture of the dollars spent on gifted education services for K-12 learners is determined, modifications to current funding mechanisms and formulas for these

services should not be modified. In keeping with Florida's long-standing legislative support for gifted education, funding should continue to be provided through the ESE Guaranteed Allocation, yet the manner in which these funds are used should be monitored more closely so that the full benefit of their impact on Florida students may be known.

#### References

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