



A MESSAGE FROM DR. SALLY WALKER

I would like to share information about gifted education with you so that you have an idea of what is happening in Illinois. For over 30 years, until 2003, Illinois was regarded as a national leader in serving the needs of gifted and talented children through categorical grant funding. However, that ended in the 2003 Spring legislative session when an end of session budget deal eliminated the Gifted Education article of the School Code and folded the Gifted Education funding into the general State aid, eliminating any financial incentives for school districts to offer special services for gifted children. The following states have gifted mandation and support gifted education: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Many of the 165,000 identified gifted children in Illinois who previously benefited from educational services appropriate to their needs no longer received them. Among those most affected are children who attend schools where every resource is targeted at raising the achievement of struggling students.

Gifted children in these schools languish in classrooms where stimulating education has been replaced by hours of drill and practice in preparation for standardized tests.

Most universities in Illinois do not have training on teaching gifted/ talented students. Only two universities have graduate training programs in gifted education, Northeastern IL and Northwestern Universities. At the undergraduate level there is relatively little information available about gifted children and appropriate classroom strategies.

Gifted students are as far from the mean as are the special needs students at the other end of the learning continuum. Their needs are just as different from the regular class as are special education students. There tends to be the misconception that gifted students will "make it on their own" or will do OK because they can meet the grade level standards. This is far from the truth. Gifted students if not challenged can become bored and become classroom problems or adapt to regular classroom expectations and never reach their potential. Boys tend to be regarded as more of a "problem" and girls tend to sit down, become quiet, and adapt. This is a generalization, but it applies to many gifted students. Dr. Sally Reis at the University of Connecticut has done research that shows that most gifted students know 50% of the content before they enter a grade. When they are asked to relearn information or do repetitive tasks they may sloop work together, develop poor study habits, or believe that all learning should be effortless.

It is my belief that ALL students deserve the right to learn something new every day. Every student has the right to be challenged with new information and to learn good study skills. The habits of mind that will serve them well in later life are resilience and persistence. They never will have the opportunity to learn these if the classroom is not responsive to their needs. They may become underachievers or learn to hate school (Mary Lou Streznewski).

Gifted students learn faster than the average student. It takes the gifted student 1-5 repetitions to learn new information. What takes a gifted child five repetitions will take an average student 25 repetitions to learn the same material (Dr. Karen Rogers). The gifted student needs a different depth, complexity, and pacing than does the average student in order to learn at a level comparable to their ability. We need their gifts and talents to keep us a leading nation. With No Child Left Behind we are teaching students to be good test takers, not good thinkers. As a nation we are more concerned with bringing the bottom up, rather than taking to top off. We no longer are leaders among nations in math and science. NO children should be left behind. Right now gifted children are being left out as their needs are severely neglected in many schools in our state.

The state of Illinois eliminated all wording of gifted from the Illinois School code and all funding for gifted education in 2003. We went from \$19+ million to \$0 in one swoop of the pen. In 2005 we had language restored to the school code, but there was no funding until this year. There is now a line item for \$5 million in the state budget. This is not enough money to support services in every district. We all are aware that what we value, we fund. Some districts do have gifted programs, but that is because the educators and parents support the programs from local funds. There is no funding from the state. We need folks to meet with their legislators to advocate for gifted and talented children and the programs these children so desperately need.

Gifted and talented children represent all races, ethnic groups, and income levels. They are located in all school districts in this State. We are doing gifted and talented children and their families, as well as our State, a great disservice by not addressing their special talents and gifts.

Thank you for any support you can give the gifted and talented students of Illinois.

Sincerely,

***Dr. Sally Y. Walker, Executive Director
Illinois Association for Gifted Children***