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Some Progress Made in Monitoring Services for Gifted Students; Additional Steps Needed

at a glance

The Department of Education has taken some steps to better monitor whether school districts appropriately identify gifted students and provide services to these students. The department has modified its Automated Student Information System to collect information on how districts identify gifted students. Although it has not yet modified its course directory to identify the courses in which gifted students receive differentiated instruction, it is taking steps to do so. The department has formed a workgroup to examine this issue and expects that the workgroup will provide recommendations for modifying the directory in June 2010. Lack of this information limits the Legislature's ability to determine what benefits are being achieved through its investment in gifted programs.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Education in response to a 2008 OPPAGA report.^{1,2}

¹ Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

² *Florida's Gifted Student Population Grew Faster Than the Overall School Enrollment*, [OPPAGA Report No. 08-01](#), January 2008.

Background

Florida law defines gifted students as 'exceptional students' and guarantees their eligibility for enhanced services. Through the Guaranteed Allocation the Legislature provides school districts an additional \$1,900 a year for each gifted student that receives gifted services.

Districts use two methods to identify gifted students. Under the general identification requirements, students who score two standard deviations above the mean (generally an IQ of 130) on a test of intellectual ability and demonstrate the need for differentiated instruction are eligible to receive gifted services. Under the alternative identification method (often called Plan B) students are not required to demonstrate an IQ of two standard deviations above the mean if they meet criteria specified in an approved school district plan for increasing gifted program participation among underrepresented groups.³

Districts must provide gifted services that are appropriate to each student's needs as determined by their educational plan, but are not required to offer special gifted courses. In practice, school districts use a variety of approaches in serving gifted students. The most common approaches are (1) providing indirect services in which gifted-endorsed specialists consult with the gifted

³ Rule 6A-6.03019, *F.A.C.*

students and their teachers to ensure that the students' educational needs are met, and (2) providing direct services such as instruction from a gifted-endorsed teacher.⁴ Some districts operate special classrooms that bring gifted students together for instruction that is tailored to their needs. In other cases, gifted students in courses that are not designed as gifted courses may still receive differentiated instruction, if the regular classroom teacher holds a gifted endorsement and prepares differentiated work for the gifted students.

Our 2008 review on Florida's gifted student education program found districts generally did not maintain records on the methods they used to identify gifted students, which limited the Legislature's ability to ensure that the alternative identification method was being used as intended to identify and serve underrepresented populations. We also found that districts could not readily identify the services they provided to gifted students. This was a particular problem for programs serving high school gifted students. As a result, the Legislature could not determine what benefits had been achieved through its approximately \$73 million investment in high school gifted programs.

To address these problems, we recommended that the Department of Education require school districts to report the method they used to identify gifted students and revise the state course directory to enable districts to indicate the specific courses in which gifted students receive differentiated instruction.

⁴ Gifted services may be delivered by a teacher with a gifted endorsement or one who is in the process of earning an endorsement.

Current Status

While the department has made progress in implementing our recommendations, additional steps need to be taken. The department has added a data element to enable districts to report whether a student was identified as gifted under the general or alternative identification requirements. The department has not yet altered the course code directory to indicate which courses offer differentiated instruction but is taking steps to do so.

The department now collects information on the method used to identify gifted students. Beginning in the 2009-10 school year, districts must report the method they use to identify gifted students. The department has added a new data element for Gifted Eligibility to the Automated Student Information System to collect this information. This information will enable the department and the Legislature to determine if school districts are appropriately using alternative identification policies for identifying gifted students in underserved populations.

The department has not yet modified the course code directory to identify courses that offer differentiated instruction for gifted students, but is taking steps to do so. The department created a workgroup to examine this issue as part of its Working on Gifted Issues project. The workgroup is expected to present its recommendations in June 2010. According to the Department of Education, the workgroup will recommend that the Secondary Course Code Directory be revised to include a specialized number or suffix that can be added to advanced, honors, and advanced placement courses to indicate which school districts offer them as gifted courses. Addressing this issue will be critical in enabling the department and the Legislature to identify the services gifted students receive.

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