House Resolution 2013-139

- Directed the LB&FC to study the status of education for gifted students in Pennsylvania public school districts.
Gifted Students

- Have an advanced capacity for processing information quickly, learning rapidly, and reasoning well.
- Are highly diverse with widely varying interests and strengths.
Gifted Students Identified in Pennsylvania

- The Pennsylvania Public School Code includes “gifted” students within the definition of “children with exceptionalities.” To be identified as “gifted,” a school age child must:
  - Demonstrate outstanding intellectual and creative ability and
  - Require specially designed instruction not ordinarily provided through a district’s regular or special education program.

- 4.3 percent of Pennsylvania’s public school students have been identified as gifted, in line with national expectations of between 3 and 5 percent of students.
Gifted Education in Pennsylvania

Additional Expenditures for Gifted Education

Pennsylvania public school districts annually expend:

- Over $110 million for gifted academic support services, equivalent to $1,600 per gifted student statewide—over and above districts’ expenditures for basic education for these students.

- Not possible to tell how much of this funding is from the state’s Basic Education appropriation, the state’s Special Education for Exceptional Children appropriation, or from local sources.
The majority of Pennsylvania public school districts have staff assigned to provide educational opportunities specifically for gifted students and offer a range of opportunities for enhanced and accelerated learning.

- In 2012-13, almost 85 percent of public schools had teachers assigned to gifted education, with 1 full-time equivalent teacher for every 67 gifted students statewide.
- Over 80 percent offered Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Nationwide, 60 percent of high schools offered such courses.
- Over 75 percent offered honors courses—secondary level planned courses designed to be advanced in content, process, and product.
- Over one-third provided opportunity for students to be dually enrolled in the school district and college programs.
- Approximately one-third offered International Baccalaureate programs.
- Approximately, one-quarter provided specific gifted courses limited to students who have been labeled gifted. Such courses are typically offered by larger districts with enrollment sufficient to support gifted specific classes. Only about 15 percent of Pennsylvania school districts have at least 5,000 enrolled students.
Students are gifted for more than a few hours a week.

- Many PA school districts are:
  - Revising their “regular” school program to provide enrichment opportunities for their entire student body, rather than a limited number of students.
  - Revising their “regular” curriculum to provide more rigorous and advanced classes to challenge all students of high ability throughout the day.
  - Introducing into their “regular” curriculum approaches used in gifted education to promote critical thinking and creativity.
  - Providing for subject accelerated classes in late elementary and middle school grades.
Gifted Students in Pennsylvania Typically Receive Enrichment Services, with Middle and High School Students More Likely to Have Opportunity for Accelerated Learning.

- According to parents responding to our survey:
  - 83 percent of their children in elementary grades received gifted services through part-time pull-out classes.
  - 61 percent of their children in middle school received gifted services through ability grouping or special classes of homogenous grouped students.
  - 71 percent of their children in high school received services through Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.
- Our survey findings are consistent with national reports on gifted education services at various grade levels.
More Than Half (53 Percent) of the Parents Responding to Our Survey Reported They Are Satisfied With the Gifted Education Services Their Children Now Receive, with 38 Percent Indicating They Are Not Satisfied.

- Both groups of parents would like to see their children spend more time in gifted services.
- Parents, and educators, however, have very different views about the gifted service models they prefer for their children.
  - Some prefer pull-out programs,
  - Others prefer accelerated learning and increased linkage of gifted services to the core curriculum.
Pennsylvania Is Similar to Most States in Several Ways:

- 1 of 30 states with a state mandate for gifted education for identification, services, or both
- 1 of 37 states without specific gifted education requirements that colleges and universities with teacher training programs must meet for state program approval
- 1 of 37 states with no annual requirement for specific gifted and talented staff development for teachers of gifted and talented students
Pennsylvania differs from most states in a few important ways.

Professional Education Requirements

- Pennsylvania is one of 21 states without a specific gifted teaching certificate and/or endorsement required for professionals working in specialized gifted programs.
  - PAGE (Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education) is concerned that a gym teacher or any teacher with a free period in their schedule can be assigned with no training to work with gifted students.
  - The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s (PDE) Gifted Enrichment Program Staffing Policy requires teachers working in such programs to hold a Level I or Level II instructional certificate, which (unlike instructional certificates for those teaching in elementary and secondary programs) may be used for any grade level in the enrichment program, as such programs do not require teaching of core content. Additional certification requirements apply for any course other than enrichment for which a grade is given in an advanced content course. In such instances, an instructional certificate specific to the subject content and grade level is required.
  - State regulations also permit PDE to approve programs leading to a Professional Endorsement Certificate, which may be added to existing Level I and Level II certificates, but are not required to perform services in these areas.
Report Recommendations:

- PDE, PAGE, and School Board Associations should confer to determine if PDE’s existing Program Staffing Policy should be revised to limit certificate holders to those with certificates in core subject areas (e.g., English, Mathematics, Sciences, Music and Arts, etc.).

- PDE, PAGE, and school districts should determine if there is need and sufficient interest for PDE to developing a Professional Endorsement Certificate.

- PDE should proceed with plans to provide professional development for school leaders in the area of gifted education.

- PDE explore options for making available online no/low cost professional development offerings for professional educators working with gifted and talented students.
Most recently, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education following its review of state regulations for gifted education endorsed:

- The Department of Education establishing a voluntary Program Endorsement Certificate consistent with its existing regulations (Chapter 49 § 49.62b) related to Program Endorsement Certificates
- PDE should incorporate instruction in the needs of gifted learners as part of the programs offered to meet the continuing professional education requirements of school and system leaders per Act 2007-45
- PDE should utilize its Standards Aligned System (SAS) portal to offer training videos and resources for educators in meeting the needs of gifted students
- The State Board of Education should consider concerns related to preservice education and certificate requirements as part of its review of its regulations on Certification and Professional Development (Chapter 49)
Pennsylvania’s approach to serving gifted students mirrors those used to serve children with disabilities.

- Pennsylvania, for example, is:
  - 1 of only 11 states that engage in ChildFind, require individualized education plans, and provide for mediation, due process, and dispute resolution to address differences between parents and school districts.
  - 1 of only 6 states that require the evaluation of potentially gifted students based only a parent’s request.
- The State Board’s regulations require full-scale identification and evaluation processes that must be initiated upon a parent’s request. School districts report this results in unnecessary costs.
- Based on cost and other data from one large urban and one mid-size school district, PA school districts expend between $2,000 and $2,500 for each required multidisciplinary evaluation. Half of the evaluated students are not found to be gifted, and most of these have been referred for evaluation by their parents.
- Pennsylvania public school districts annually expend an estimated:
  - $50 million to evaluate students to determine if they are gifted; $25 million of which is for evaluations of students who are subsequently not identified as gifted.
  - Such costs do not consider the psychological harm to the child who is evaluated on multiple occasions and continually found to not meet the Commonwealth’s gifted definition.
Report Recommendation:

- **When the State Board elects to revise its regulations, it should:**
  - Seek input on ways to assure that potentially gifted students are identified and evaluated in an efficient manner. As part of the process, the Board should request the public and stakeholders to suggest criteria for a tiered approach to multidisciplinary evaluations, including criteria for when they are not to be completed.
  - Investigate other state regulatory requirements that may no longer be necessary, such as some of the detailed requirements for all Gifted Individualized Education Plans (GIEPs) and requirements that multidisciplinary evaluations be completed when there is a change in placement, such when a student and the student’s parents choose to cease participating in the gifted program.
  - Request suggested alternatives that will enhance gifted services.
The State Board, based on its review of its gifted regulations, sought input from stakeholders but received limited information. It is, therefore, recommended:

- PDE work with the State Board to gather information from school districts on their cost of evaluating students for gifted education.
- Information to be gathered should include:
  - The cost of evaluations
  - Frequency of parental requests for re-evaluations
  - Number of evaluations that do not result in students being identified as gifted
Other Report Recommendations

- PDE Continue with its initiatives to enhance gifted education services through professional development offerings and improved linkage between gifted education services and recommended state curriculum standards.

- Specifically, PDE should:
  - Proceed with plans to provide professional development to school leaders in the area of gifted education.
  - Explore options for making available online no/low cost professional development offerings for professional educators working with gifted and talented students that qualify for Act 48 hours.
  - Continue to develop and make available online core standard work plan extensions for use by teachers statewide in their work with gifted and talented students.
Questions/ Comments???????