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TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*
DATE: October 27, 2009
SUBJECT: Gifted and Talented Education Update

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the update is to provide an overview of gifted and talented programs in local school systems and to highlight state initiatives, including the Maryland Summer Centers for Gifted Students.

BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Effective October 1, 2003, the Maryland legislature revised the definition of gifted and talented students to include students “performing or showing the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with other students of a similar age, experience, or environment (§8-201).” The statute affirms that gifted and talented students are “found in youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (§8-202).” The Bridge to Excellence legislation requires each local school system to report in its Master Plan the system “goals, objectives and strategies regarding the performance of gifted and talented students (§5-401).” In February, 2009, the State Board of Education adopted regulations to establish a new certification area, Gifted and Talented Education Specialist (13A.12.03.12).

Since 1995, the State Superintendent has maintained the Maryland State Advisory Council for Gifted and Talented Education, a diverse group of stakeholders that meets quarterly with the mission to encourage and support the education of students that are identified as gifted and talented in accordance with the definition in the Annotated Code.

Maryland has been a leader in the development of summer programs for gifted and talented students since the first Summer Centers in 1967. The Centers have provided advanced-level, performance-based learning opportunities in the visual and performing arts, engineering, creative writing, history, mathematics, science, and technology for approximately 1,000 Maryland students annually in Grades 4-12. In 2009, the Maryland State legislature cut the Maryland Summer Centers budget by 10%, and due to the economic downturn, funding has been completely eliminated for 2010.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

For more than 50 years, Maryland has recognized gifted and talented students as a student group with unique educational needs. Decades of research document that gifted students think and learn differently. Maryland schools provide a continuum of services in gifted education that differ in program intensity as the student need increases. The *Primary Talent Development (PTD) Early Learning Program PreK -2* is one program that nurtures critical and creative thinking in *all* students. Developed by MSDE through a federal Jacob.K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education grant, the PTD program is now implemented in 13 school systems across the state. While all students require challenge and enrichment, gifted programs identify and develop demonstrated talents and expand expectations for high achievers.



Teachers of gifted students require specialized training in order to understand and apply the gifted education research and pedagogy. One-third of school systems employ school-based GT education resource teachers to work with students and teachers. In February, 2009, the State Board of Education adopted a new certification area, *Gifted and Talented Education Specialist*. This add-on endorsement at the master's level encourages teachers to pursue a specialty area which is documented to improve the achievement of all students. Currently there are three Maryland universities that are applying for a state approved program. Several school systems have formed partnerships with local universities to offer graduate programs in GT Education. The Maryland State Department of Education has developed several online courses for teachers, including *Smart Kids with Learning Difficulties*, which acknowledges that there are students who are "twice exceptional," gifted with learning disabilities.

Public advocacy for gifted students is vital, and the State Advisory Council for Gifted and Talented Education has for the past three years held a reception in Annapolis, *Celebrating Gifted Education in Maryland*. Legislators, community members, and educators are invited to participate as the Council recognizes outstanding educators and students in gifted programs across the state. The Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education (MCGATE) and the Maryland Educator of Gifted Students (MEGS) are two state organizations that support public awareness of the unique needs of gifted students.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) currently does not specify state standards for gifted and talented programs; however, MSDE provides school systems with the *Criteria for Excellence Gifted and Talented Program Guidelines* which are aligned with national standards. Maryland school systems use multiple criteria to identify students' remarkable gifts and talents, and many systems have focused initiatives to identify students from populations historically underrepresented in gifted and talented programs.

The staff of the 2009 Maryland Summer Centers continue efforts to increase the access, participation, and achievement of students from underrepresented populations, especially African Americans and Hispanics, in the Summer Centers program. These efforts have resulted in an ever-increasing participation rate of African American students at an all-time high of 23%. New gains were realized in the Hispanic participation rate reaching an all-time high of 4%. Thirty-five percent of the participants in the STEM Centers were female, another all-time high. Sixteen percent of all Summer Centers participants received financial assistance.

In an effort to maintain continuity of the Maryland Summer Centers program in 2010, funding is being sought from a variety of businesses and organizations.

ACTION:

For information and discussion only.