



THE WASHINGTON COALITION
FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

18149 147 Avenue SE
Renton WA 98058

425-271-1357

wagifted@earthlink.net

A Position Statement on Adequate Funding for Highly Capable Programs

"...for highly capable students, access to accelerated learning and enhanced instruction is access to a basic education."

ESHB 2261, Sec. 708

Helping students learn and grow is a goal of every school. Implicit in that goal is an understanding of how to work with special populations of children. Gifted and talented education (known as Highly Capable Programs in Washington State) encompasses the expertise needed to properly identify and serve not only the students who demonstrate high achievement, but also those who have the ability to achieve at high levels. The term also covers the specific services and programs offered as well as the teacher training necessary to provide the academic guidance gifted students need in order to thrive. Gifted and talented education, then, is the system by which districts recognize and serve this special population of children. (National Association for Gifted Children).

In our state, basic education for Highly Capable students is a program that allows these students to continue to show measurable growth. A portion of the students any district serves are Highly Capable. Some of them are identified and programs provided; some are not identified and have no services available. Our intention with this statement is to provide information to assist you as you develop a proposal for a reliable and dependable funding mechanism to support basic education programs, including Highly Capable Programs.

The basic costs of educating a student are a classroom, a teacher, curriculum materials, and maintenance, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC). These basic education costs apply to all students. Since Highly Capable Programs are an integral part of basic education, these funds should be used to provide HCP program services for these students.

There are additional costs for educating a highly capable child including identification and curriculum materials. The Legislature provided funding for these additional costs based on 2.314% of FTE. The current biennial budget provides \$8,745,000 for FY 2012 and \$8,788,000 for FY 2013.

Districts may, and many do, expend additional funds to reach more students. Based on the most recent annual report, for the year 2008-2009, the Highly Capable Program grant of \$8,938,800 funded services for 24,428 students. Districts used local funds of \$34,532,205 to serve an additional 21,762 students. In total, districts spent \$43,471,005 in state and local dollars combined to provide highly capable program services to 46,190 students. Thus for each \$1 the state spent, districts spent up to \$5 of their own funds. State and local dollars combined to provide highly capable program services to 46,190 students. With an estimated one million students in Washington's K-12 schools, this equals 4.62% of FTEs rather than the 2.314% in the formula.

With the passage of HB 2261, the Legislature authorized the Funding Formula Technical Working Group to study the costs of basic education and supplemental allocations.

Based on information provided to it, the FFTWG determined that the 2.314% funding basis was too low and recommended that a research-driven study be commissioned to determine the appropriate percentage. The recommended study has not been authorized.

The FFTWG also recognized that the new formula might create allocations for small districts that are too little to provide any meaningful Highly Capable Program; thus a floor may need to be developed.

Subsequent legislation established the Highly Capable Program Technical Working Group which was composed of experts from higher education, classroom teachers, parents, and representative from state commissions for cultural, linguistic and racial minority groups, persons with disabilities and state Tribes. The HCPTWG submitted the report and recommendations to the Legislature. In studying the question of funding and identification, the Highly Capable Program Technical Working Group:

- Determined that the current enrollment limit of 2.314% is a constraint based more on funding than comprehensive identification of eligible students.
- Found that HCPSs comprise at least 5 % of total enrollment.
- Recommended that the "enrollment assumption be revised from 2.314% to 5% to mitigate the number of identified but unserved highly capable students" (HCPTWG Recommendations, page 24) and that the hours in the formula be increased to 5.

Current state funds alone do not provide an appropriate educational opportunity for all highly capable students in Washington state. The Quality Education Council reviewed the FFTWG and HCPTWG reports and has recommended to the Legislature that it base funding for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 on a minimum of 5% of FTE using the class size and hour recommendations of the QEC from the August 13, 2012 review of Prior Recommendations.

We support this recommendation and also request that:

- The Legislature provide funding equivalent to the total of state and local funds currently spent.
- A study be authorized to determine the appropriate percentage of FTE to be included in the funding formula.

If Washington is to continue to be a global leader in creativity and innovation, it is essential that we give our best and brightest young people the finest education we can.

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