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Gelnett, Wanda B.

From: Schalles, Scott R.
Sent: Friday, October 05, 2007 10:04 AM
To: Gelnett, Wanda B.
Subject: FW: Gifted Education changes

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

2635

-----Original Message-----

From: Gina Morrison [mailto:gina.morrison@wilkes.edu]
Sent: Friday, October 05, 2007 10:02 AM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us; lbaker@pasen.gov; info@phyllismundy.com; Schalles, Scott R.; musto@pasenate.com; jyudichak@pa.house.net
Cc: Nicole Saporito
Subject: Gifted Education changes

Dear Governor Rendell and State Representatives:

I teach in the Teacher Education Program at Wilkes University, where we prepare teachers for their certification to teach in public schools. I am a resident of Forty Fort, but my daughter attends Chester Street Elementary School in Kingston because she has been identified as gifted. Thus, I am concerned about the proposed changes to Chapter 16 for both personal and professional reasons.

First, teachers are being stretched too thin. I see it every time I observe student teachers, their cooperative teachers, and their colleagues in local public schools. While I absolutely agree in principle with inclusion—that is, teaching students on the *appropriate* level in the *least restrictive* setting--the recent push toward *full inclusion* is unrealistic. I am very concerned with the high level of frustration that I see in the field because of it. To consider increasing class size and case load of teachers—particularly those teachers who teach gifted students--undermines the success of both teacher and student.

Gifted students, simply put, are not easy to handle. Ellen Winner writes in her book *Gifted Children* (1996) that gifted students often exhibit "...high energy levels, which not only allow them to concentrate intensely when they are challenged, but also can lead to hyperactivity when they are insufficiently stimulated" (p. 28). They think and learn differently from other students, they ask deep questions, and often become overwhelmed by broad, philosophical or moral issues that other children might not even consider. I can barely keep up with my 9-year old, and I am a trained educator. I cannot imagine having to manage the energies and intellectual curiosities of 20 such children, all of whom are certainly unique in their giftedness, let alone 27 or 28! Case loads must be kept low. Please do not support the changes that increase numbers for gifted teachers.

Also, I want to be sure that my daughter, like all students, receives "fape" *free and appropriate public education* for the entire time she is in public school. It is her right to receive the gifted education even after she leaves Chester Street, and currently, as I have only recently learned, the gifted students are not given any special education in middle school—not even, as I understand, "pull-out" programs. Even those "pull-out" programs, which Winner finds to be "weak solutions to the problems faced by the profoundly gifted" (p. 261), are better than none.

But the best solution of all would be to provide the current model she receives at Chester Street, being educated in the special classroom for gifted children. The research of James and Chen-Li Kulik of the University of Michigan (1991) show that gifted students educated separately in such classes do better than equally gifted students in heterogeneous classrooms. Apparently, gifted children educated separately do not become as arrogant as those in pull-out programs, either. Hollingsworth, who has written extensively on gifted children, found "...conceit was corrected, rather than fostered, by the experience of daily contact with a large number of equals." Although no completely perfect method of educating gifted children has yet been identified, please do not dismantle or undermine current efforts to nurture the potential of this population. Support efforts to recognize the different ways that giftedness manifests itself (rather than a strict adherence to the 130 IQ score) and to prepare for the ultimate success of the gifted child through graduation planning.

I ask you to tend to the needs of these creative, precocious, active, and driven children who challenge us greatly but hold so much promise for our future.

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Dr. Gina Zanolini Morrison
gina.morrison@wilkes.edu
Assistant Professor of Education
Wilkes University
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766
Office Phone: 570-408-4681
Home Phone: 570-283-8202

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