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Gifted Education in Springboro: More Students Served At No Additional Cost

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The federal government has a definition for gifted students, which recognizes that gifted and talented children have special educational needs, however, the federal presence in gifted education is minimal. The federal government neither mandates services nor funds district gifted education programs. Without federal guidance or leadership, gifted programming decisions in the United States are made at the state and local levels.

Many school districts recognize that gifted and talented students have special needs but state laws regarding identification and services vary widely. This results in a vast disparity of services between districts and a feeling of uncertainty for gifted students and their families. In many states, including Ohio, the availability of any gifted education services depends on local school budgets, which in the current fiscal climate, places many programs in jeopardy.

The state of Ohio defines a student as gifted if, according to specific guidelines, they perform, or show potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience, or environment. Ohio requires that school districts offer the opportunity for students to be identified as gifted in the areas of superior cognitive abilities (overall, general intellect), specific academic areas (reading, mathematics, science and/or social studies), creative thinking, and visual and performing arts. According to the Ohio Department of Education, approximately 16 percent of the students in the state of Ohio are identified as being gifted in at least one area, with some students being identified in multiple areas.

Although gifted identification is required by law, the state of Ohio does not require that districts provide any special services for those identified. If districts choose to provide services for gifted students, they must comply with Ohio's operating standards for serving gifted students, which were revised in March of 2008. Districts providing gifted

services are eligible to apply for gifted funding units from the state. The gifted funding units supplement the cost of employing Gifted Intervention Specialists, who are specially trained to work with gifted students, as well as a Gifted Coordinator. While the state sets eligibility criteria for the application of units, it is unable to provide funding to all those who qualify. For example, according to the Ohio Department of Education, Springboro was eligible to receive 5.3 teacher units and 2.1 coordinator units for the 2008-09 school year. However, when the funding units were allocated by the state, Springboro only received 2 teacher units and 1 coordinator unit. With approximately 32 percent of the students in Springboro Community City Schools identified gifted in at least one area, the district recognized that 2 Gifted Intervention Specialists was not adequate to provide gifted services. Therefore, since 2006, Springboro has employed 4 Gifted Intervention Specialists, 2 of whom are state funded, and 1 gifted coordinator, who is state funded.

To ensure compliance with the March 2008 operating standards, Springboro modified its gifted services for the 2008-2009 school year. Students in grades 3-5 who scored a 128 or higher on their most recent InView assessment CSI (Cognitive Skills Index), *or* at or above the 96th percentile in reading or mathematics on their most recent Terra Nova assessment, are in self-contained classrooms. Each of these classes is co-taught by one of the district's 4 Gifted Intervention Specialists and a classroom teacher who received specialized professional development on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of gifted students. Students in grades 6-8 who are identified gifted are placed into enriched courses, along with high-achieving students, matching their identification areas. These courses are designed to move at a more rapid pace than the general courses, and also address the content at a greater level of depth and complexity. Again, to ensure compliance with the new gifted rule, all of the instructors received professional development on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of gifted students. At the high school level, honors and AP courses are recommended to high school students who are high achieving and/or identified as gifted.

By modifying its gifted services, Springboro is able to serve over 100 more gifted students this year, as compared to last, with no additional staff or cost to the district. Currently, Springboro is providing gifted services to over 600 students in grades 3-8. In grades 3-5, 94% of the students identified gifted in the areas reading or math are receiving direct gifted services. 97% of 6-8 grade students identified gifted in the academic areas of reading, mathematics, science, or social studies are receiving gifted services within their enriched courses.